

Flying farmers honor their duchess

By JOANNE SPAHR
Pottstown, Pa. - The conditions were perfect for a picnic. The weather was clear and balmy, the cooks had excellent reputations, and the company was internationally renowned for its hospitality.

So, last Sunday, approximately 160 farmers couldn't resist the temptation to gather in a wooded picnic area near Limerick, Pa., to share in a covered dish luncheon held to honor one of their favorite compatriots.

And, since it was such a good day, they came from miles around - from as far west as Minnesota, as far north as Ontario, Canada, and as far south as Virginia - all to return the same night to the destinations from which they'd come.

As far-fetched as it may sound, for the 160 International Flying Farmer organization members and their families, the flights from the various states that day were the equivalents to "Sunday afternoon drives" for earthbound agriculturalists.

But, the real drawing card for the day was the person of honor - the International Flying Farmer Duchess Betty Jean Rothenberger, the first duchess ever to be chosen from the state of Pennsylvania.

Mrs. Rothenberger, who has reigned for nearly a year in this highest position of honored royalty in the organization, is the wife of Maynard Rothenberger, a dairy farmer and drug store owner and operator from Worcester, Pa. In March Rothenberger was chosen the Pennsylvania Flying Farmer of the year in Gettysburg.

During her reign as duchess of the international organization, which included the United States, Mexico, and Canada, Mrs. Rothenberger has traveled well over 50,000 miles, touching down in Vermont, Minnesota, New York, Ontario, Maryland, New York, Ohio, California, and Indiana, to name a few of the states she has visited.

According to Mrs. Rothenberger, her reign all began in 1976 when she was named the queen of the

Pennsylvania Chapter of Flying Farmers.

Then came a large and difficult decision as to whether she would run for the highest position for royalty in the organization - the international duchess. With the help and encouragement of her family, she decided to give it a try.

That competition took place in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and much to her amazement, she was chosen the international duchess.

"I often point out just how much of a family organization the Flying Farmers is," remarks Mrs. Rothenberger with a generous and gracious smile. "After all," she continues, "I'm a grandmother, and what other organization would let a grandmother reign as duchess?" Mrs. Rothenberger is a mother of five and a grandmother of one.

Her official work as duchess is to serve as the international hostess for the organization and to promote the "landit" program as well as just generally encourage women to become interested in aviation.

As hostess, she traveled to regional and chapter conventions to crown the new chapter queens (chapter organizations are state groups in the flying farmer structure). One of her first official visits was to the Ontario, Canada, Flying Farmers convention. From there, she moved on to New Jersey, Maryland, California, and Kansas conventions, to name a few.

And, wherever she went, she always encouraged the women present to obtain their own pilots' license or at least acquire a "landit" certificate. This certificate is earned after the individual completes a supervised solo flight and he or she lands the plane.

"A landit is the best insurance a pilot can have," says the duchess with vigor, "because this means his wife is able to land the plane in the case of an emergency."

Mrs. Rothenberger does not have her own pilot's license but she does have her certified landit certificate. During most of her 50,000 mile track record she ac-

complished this year, her husband has accompanied her on her travels.

"Fortunately for us, he's having a ball traveling," exclaimed Mrs. Rothen-

berger, "because it gives him more opportunity to fly." While many of their flights were in the small aircraft that they own in conjunction with other farmers, for longer distances, such as to California and back, they took commercial flights. Their own airplanes

are a Cessna Skylane and Cessna Skyhawk.

"As I've flown those 50,000 miles over the past year, I've really come to learn and appreciate what a beautiful world God has created," remarked the duchess at Sunday's "Duchess Day"

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When you get a group of flying farmers together, you can expect a few surprises like these parachutists who performed for the group of over 100 international flying farmers who gathered to honor Betty Jean Rothenberger at the Pottstown-Limerick airport last Sunday.

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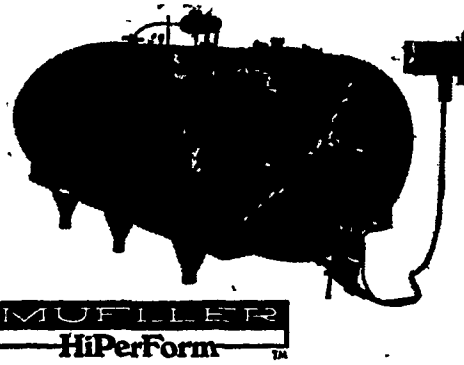
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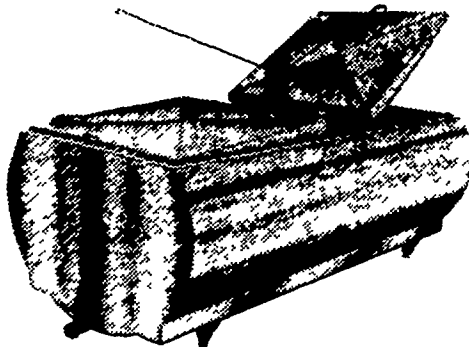
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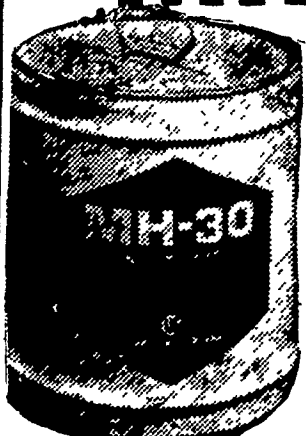
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