



National Vice President Elin Duckworth from Mesa, Arizona, looks over the greenhouse at Willow Street Vo-Tech School which she visited earlier this week.

Chic and charming in blue and gold

BY SALLY BAIR
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Chic and charming are not the two words most often used to describe members of the Future Farmers of America, but in the case of the national officer visiting Lancaster County this week, they are appropriate.

Elin Duckworth, 20, is the vice president of the Western Region of FFA, and area consisting of 15 western states, from Alaska to Hawaii to Texas. She hails from Mesa, Arizona, and brings to mind a wide range of adjectives, including articulate, poised, inspirational and pretty. But nothing is more important to her position than the enthusiasm for the FFA program that she brings with her.

"I'm totally committed to FFA," she states. "It's quite a commitment to make, but the riches I'll gain this year far surpass anything else." Elin, who is a second semester junior at the University of Arizona, has taken a leave of absence to fulfill her obligations to FFA.

Being only the third female national officer in FFA's history, has not caused Elin any problems. Of the five fellow officers she says, "They're great. They wouldn't be where they are if they couldn't accept girls."

She added that in her opinion FFA has made quite a change in the one decade in which girls have been allowed to become members. Although there are no national figures, Elin estimates that 20-30 percent of the entire membership is made up of girls.

She stated, "In FFA you are an individual and are not put in a category."

Calling herself a "servant to members," Elin says her most important goal as a national officer is to meet individual members. "I want to be in touch with as many members as I can. I think that is the goal of every officer. FFA members have a lot going for them."

An animated speaker, Elin says she likes to use motivational stories to inspire members.

"FFA makes possible a lot of rewards. You can obtain your goals with a positive attitude. I try to inspire them and tell them that they are important to each other and that they are an inspiration to everyone

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they meet. I also tell them that inside them they have the abilities. Any individual can achieve a goal if they stick to it."

She recalls that as a freshman in high school she made up her mind to become a national officer. But with a laugh, she adds, "I set my goals and had revisions sometimes."

In speaking to members of the Grassland FFA chapter on Monday afternoon, Elin emphasized that to be successful members need to invest time, along with effort and ambition.

"If you have the desire and the drive you can set goals and put forth the effort to achieve them." She later said that the only time she has failed is when she failed to have a positive attitude about herself.

Although she seems to speak with ease, Elin admits, "It always scares me. I think a speaker always gets a few butterflies before he speaks."

She says another goal she has set for herself is to "improve my speaking skills and become a better conversationalist."

Elin was keynote speaker for the winter FFA convention in Harrisburg, something she will do hundreds of times as a national officer.

She said, "You must totally believe in what you say. It must come from the heart. I want to help and inspire members, and sometimes parents and business leaders are in the audience and they are inspired too." The only training in public speaking she has had has been in FFA.

Asked about her expectations in becoming a national officer, Elin states, "It's been different than I expected. I think I expected it to miraculously transform me into a dynamic speaker, which it didn't do. I also thought I would lose touch with FFA."

While in Pennsylvania, Elin has a full schedule as she does almost every week of her "job." She will, of course, visit the Pennsylvania Farm Show and take part in

the FFA convention. But in Lancaster County she got the opportunity to do what she likes to do best: meet members.

Elin visited five schools, attended a Red Rose Chapter meeting and appeared on television in two days. She was impressed with the vo-ag departments she visited and "the in-depth teaching in specific career areas" they offered.

She said in Arizona the total program is stressed, with work in every area of agriculture. "It is different here. It is mind-boggling, the way there is development of that individual's career goals and skills, and the possibility of supplemental career goals," she said.

She described herself as being "really enthralled" about visiting Pennsylvania and Lancaster County. She is enjoying the opportunity to see three story houses and older homes, something which Arizona does not have.

For her brief stay in Lancaster County, Elin is being hosted by Pennsylvania FFA Princess Tammy Lefever, who happens to be from Willow Street. Tammy is a 1978 graduate of Lampeter-Strasburg High School and Willow Street Vo-Tech.

Elin and Tammy have formed a kind of mutual admiration society, because Elin says an FFA Princess in Arizona carries out minimal duties, and does not speak in public as Tammy does easily and effectively.

Tammy, on the other hand, says she has been delighted to escort Elin around the county and get to know this dynamic national officer better.

Elin said that people "out West" are very friendly and outgoing, and she had prepared herself for people "back East" not to be friendly. She has found that not to be the case. "They are very friendly here," she smiles.

Elin comes from an area which she describes as growing at the rate of 3,000 people a month. In Arizona she said you

find large metropolitan areas, then must travel 100 miles to the next populated area. She told FFA members that cactus and rattlesnakes thrive there, and the main agricultural products are cotton, alfalfa and dairy.

Elin said when she joined FFA she became very involved in vocational education. "Learning about agriculture intrigues me, and FFA offered so many incentive to achieve and further my ability. That's what kept me going this long." Elin has her American Farmer Degree, the highest degree of active membership.

Her first FFA project was a flower garden since she is from an urban area, and from there she went into landscaping, something which she said wasn't profitable for her.

From there she moved on to working in research for chemical companies, something she still does in the summer. She has a pest control advisor license in Arizona.

She is thinking about going to law school to specialize in agricultural law, but says she will make that decision based on the score of her law school entrance exams.

Asked if she has seen changes in FFA members in the six years that she has been involved, Elin answers, "They are a lot smarter than we were, and more prepared to really represent agriculture in the future. FFA is really increasing in excellence. Members have to improve each year, and they are very aware of what's going on. Their devotion to agriculture hasn't changed, or if anything, it is deeper than before."

Wearing her blue FFA jacket always distinguishes her when she is traveling, and often wins friends for her.

She said, "I meet interesting people who were once FFA members, and I come in contact with sponsors. She recalls in her first year in FFA, "I was really proud of my jacket, although then I wasn't really sure of what it represented."

Elin says she is optimistic about the future of agriculture in this country, while recognizing the problems which go along

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