

Couple has 4-H family of friends

By PATTY GROSS
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Harry and Dot Briggs of Sinking Valley don't have a family as most know one. However after you get to know them, you realize they belong to a very large family of friends. Their rich life has taken years to mature, and, they aren't finished yet.

The Briggs' children are the many 4-H'ers they have helped since Dot became a local leader in 1937.

Dot and Harry have seen many members come and go through 4-H. "It's wonderful for us," said Dot. "It keeps you on your toes."

They admit working with young people is a hard job. The Briggses have learned alot about children, even though they have none of their own. "Kids have to be made to do things," offered Dot. "They want to do it, but they will just burn along until you make them work."

Dot has over 40 years in 4-H project work and Harry has volunteered for 30 or more in the 4-H Community Club. Two years ago they decided to try something new — work with adults instead of children.

As coordinators, Dot and Harry attempt to get new leaders and clubs organized in Blair County. "You don't realize how many people are involved in 4-H, but still a vast amount of people don't even

know Extension exists or what it can do for them," commented Dot.

She has high praise for Extension. "It's doesn't hand out anything, rather it is an educational facility. The object is to get you to think for yourself. You are taught to do your own thinking, which is very important."

Extension has the backing of this Sinking Valley woman because it appears to go along with her thinking. "Kids and adults must be taught how to make decisions, to have self discipline, self respect and respect for others and their possessions," added Dot.

She's thrilled at the plans which are currently underway to improve Extension programs and the work that is being done to approach and alert people about the programs.

Although there are over 1,000 4-H'ers in Dot's home county, she says there are many people still not involved. "There are not enough adults willing to give of their time," she reasoned. However she sympathizes with the difficulties that are around today which were not prevalent 45 years ago. "I find kids a challenge and stimulating, but they try you! You can't change people's lives if they don't want changed. You can only work with those that have open, receptive minds."

Four-H to Dot is not just limited



This "retired" Sinking Valley couple, Harry and Dot Briggs, enjoys seeing their vegetable and flower gardens grow larger each year.

Since selling their farm a year ago, Dot and Harry Briggs are enjoying the part of farming they never had time for over the past 40 years.

Blair County. She attends meetings in a six county area which includes Blair, Cambria, Somerset, Huntingdon and Fulton. They form, part of a state organization. From there, she moved on to take the job of chairman of the program planning committee for the state, which is working in the areas of ag, family living, 4-H and community resources.

A beautiful experience for Harry and Dot once evolved out of their 4-H work. As leaders of the 4-H Exchange Club, they have traveled to North Carolina, Wisconsin and Iowa. Plus they have learned the lifestyles of others, while visitors staying in their homes during exchange visits to Blair County.

"We're talking all about Extension, but church is our first love," smiled Dot, as she smoothly changed the subject. She is president of United Presbyterian Women at the First Presbyterian Church in Tyrone, while Harry is an elder.

Up until a year ago the Briggs were farmers. They sold their 134-acre farm and built a new home on a couple of acres they kept.

The story has been told before: "It got to be too much for us," stated a sad reminiscent Harry. "We couldn't get good help."

Farming had been a way of life for both of them since before 1936 when they took over the farm that was Dot's home.

In 1974 they sold the poultry portion of the farm and a year later the dairy cattle went on the sale block. Harry concentrated on crop production for the next six years.

Seventy-year-old Harry says he wouldn't have traded one year of his long, hard-working life on the farm. "We love to farm," he

smiled. He also enjoyed filling his days with work away from his farm, as he drove a milk truck for 21 years.

The common question posed is, what will fill all the spare time that they have on their hands? "I can't find time to fit all the things," Dot readily replied. "We're not retired. We're retreaded," she joked.

"I'm no joiner. If I'm going to belong to something there is a reason. I want to work." Work is what they do, but Dot and Harry take on the jobs because they enjoy the tasks.

The gardeners each year grow all their own plants. As fall approaches and much of their garden has seen better days, the couple is busy pampering a late plot of homegrown plants.

Flowers and bushes surround the year-old Briggs' house and garden. Harry and Dot do their own landscaping, which enables them to save money and develop hidden talents. They also are seeking more knowledge as they consult with local nurseries, Penn State Extension and garden magazines.

A small orchard of a dozen apples, peaches and pear trees is the

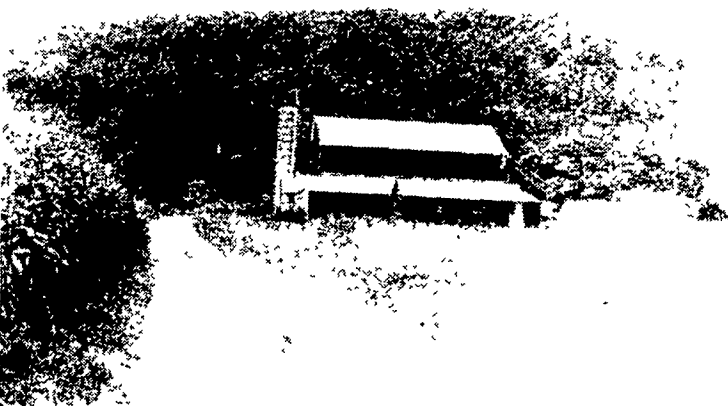
latest project for the couple. They hope to expand next year with grapes, cherries and apricots. To make use of limited space they plan to branch their fruit trees out on wire.

"This is only the beginning for the Briggses. In the spring of '37 they took on 4-H, because they enjoyed working with young people. "I also wanted to belong to 4-H as a child, but it was too far away," confessed Dot. Forty-six years later, they, along with 4-H are still branching out.

Their farming projects have reduced in size, but the quality is getting better, as are Harry and Dot. The former farmers still have some hens and roosters. Once a year they turn over the eggs to a Blair County poultry farm.

"We love anything that pertains to something living and growing," explained Dot. She plans to live and work a long time, because "I don't want to get old." She says that she is 39 and holding.

If leading an active and fulfilled life have anything to do with age, Harry and Dot are definitely getting younger and they are intent on spreading it around.



This Sinking Valley, Blair County farm, belonged to Harry and Dot Briggs up until a year ago. The couple gave over 40 years to the farm before selling. However they haven't retired. Their projects are growing bigger and better all the time.



Flowers add beauty to the vegetable garden of Harry and Dot. The former farmers don't plan to get old, but do want to spend most of

their time in 4-H work, church, and with their flowers, fruit trees, and garden.

Homestead Notes



After selling their farm, Dot and Harry Briggs built a new home near the farm. They were sure to include a cold storage cellar for Dot to store her vegetables, fruits and dried flowers.