

Everything's a challenge - even retirement

BY SALLY BAIR
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"I've gained a lot above what I've given. There is another challenge every day." This is the way retiring Adams County Extension Home Economist Helen Tunison described her feelings as she leaves the Extension service this month after 26 years. "It's been a good place to learn and develop," she concludes.

While she was learning and developing, she was providing leadership and touching the lives of hundreds of people as she carried out the programs of the Extension service. Her role changed as the programs grew and expanded and she had to take on more administrative duties.

"When I first came here in 1957 I worked with local 4-H clubs very closely, and I knew every 4-H member." She expresses regret about changes in that program, stating, "The new goal seems to be on numbers, and leaders now do the work with the youngsters. Extension workers serve in a coordination capacity. The problem is that in a youth development program you have to know the youth. Maybe there will be a swing back."

She also worked more directly with the homemakers groups in the county, in 1957 when there were only eight or 10 groups. "I would visit them each month, but that gave way to leader training. I couldn't get to all their meetings now; there's not enough days in the year," she says.

There are now 31 of these groups,

with about 700 members, and there continues to be interest in starting new groups. Helen says the groups offer a way to meet neighbors and to assimilate into the neighborhood. "They are not only educational, but also offer fellowship."

Homemakers themselves have changed, and Helen remarks, "I think there is a baby boomlet and there are more people at home. There is a lot of interest in cooperative playgroups, and homemakers are more enlightened. They are not your ordinary parent. They want to get together."

There may be many mothers at home, but Helen also says that in Adams County, over 50 percent of the homemakers are employed outside the home. To accommodate them, programs are offered in the morning and in the evening. Helen states, "We have to have evening programs. We find that the people who come out in the evening are very eager to learn. After a full day at work, they value their time and they want top quality instruction. The only time we teach tailoring is in the evening. These women really stretch themselves."

To provide good instruction, Helen relies on 14 teachers who offer programs as varied as canning, upholstery, crocheting and quilting. These are all topics, for the most part, that Helen once taught herself. With increased demands, however, she now sticks to the coordinating and getting supplies.



Helen Tunison, home economist in Adams County for 26 years, shows a few of the mementoes given to her upon her retirement. Many of the gifts were handcrafted, and many were skills which she taught in the County.

"One thing that has not changed is that there are still a lot of evening meetings," Helen says with a laugh.

Helen finds there is a greater degree of cooperation with other agencies than when she first appeared on the scene. "So many others have interests in family living and home economics. Rather than overlap, we have chosen to cooperate." This cooperation has benefitted the community with programs designed to help families cope with problems and stresses. Helen remarks, "This is a new trend, and I think it is better than everybody building their own empires."

As an example, Helen says she has provided audiences for an educator hired by the Adams-Hanover Counseling Services. She is also helping provide programs to audiences on aging as well as to young mothers.

There is a greater interest in family programs, according to Helen, because "there is a national initiative for strengthening families and family stability. I think knowing about these services can help a family. There is a tremendous need for good information."

Her mailing list has now grown to 1128 and includes both men and women. Helen is justifiably proud

that she has had men serving on advisory committees.

She has been a leader in offering programs in solar energy and says, "Solar took time to understand, but it is something that needs to have more done. Innovators need help so they don't waste their money. The need unbiased help." Through tours and speakers, she tried to offer some of that help.

Helen approached the subject of solar energy as she did any other new topic. "I have tried to make use of the training offered and books. If I didn't know about a new subject, I soon learned through research. I tried to find the experts and keep up on the interest."

She adds, "Home furnishings were by big thing. I have had some very good, strong programs. We also have had a quality craft program of which we are quite proud." Helen says she has found that people are interested in what she calls "carry crafts" or things that can be taken with them. She feels the Bicentennial sparked an interest in crafts. "There was a big revival of interest and it has just continued."

At a recent retirement recognition, the homemakers groups in the county presented Helen with 31 quilt patches. The patches represent an assortment of skills and sewing techniques about which Helen says, "Most of these techniques we taught." There is crosstitch, embroidery, applique, machine applique and many others.

Foods have always been a subject of interest, but Helen says the emphasis is changing, with people cutting "calories, salt and sugar." There is also a renewed interest in ethnic cooking, but something that hasn't changed is the interest in bread baking. "People love it. They get a lot of satisfaction from it."

She says home canning is

gaining in interest as an alternative to freezing.

The Extension service is suffering from budget problems like many other agencies, and because of a hiring freeze, Helen's position will not be filled immediately. Helen says, "The personnel situation is very drastic. Because of the shortage of personnel there has been a lot of personnel burnout. If people think Extension is an important service then more money needs to go into it."

She sees television as a possible alternative in distributing information. "A lot of things could be done. North Carolina has used television and it has terrific services. Colleges could make money by video-taping the programs," she suggests.

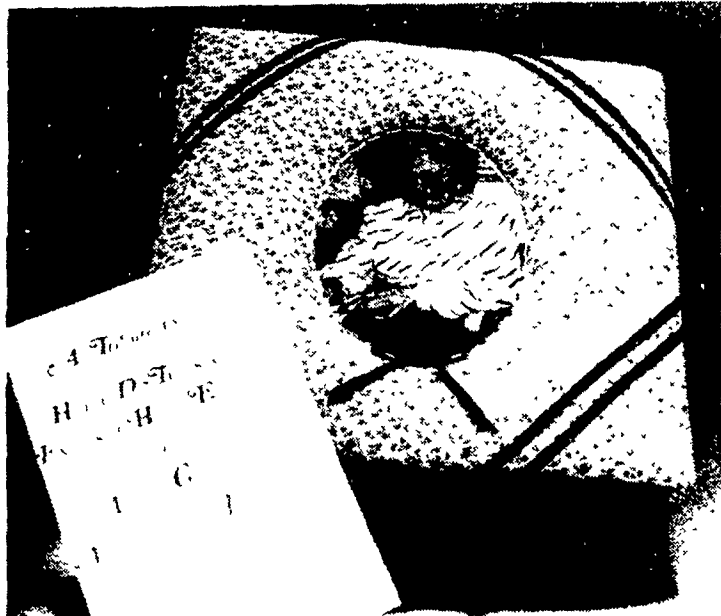
Another potential way of meeting future needs, as Helen sees it, is through "satellite offices." She explains, "I can see expansion. You could have a store front with instruction. Someone could be on hand a few days a week." This would take care of a problem which troubles Helen: the fact that their office is not centrally located to the people they serve.

When asked why she studied home economics, she recalled her Connecticut childhood where her father was a general farmer. She carried 4-H projects on her own because there was no club. She pointed out, "There were no counselors then. Anything you dreamed to do you could do."

What will she do in retirement? "I have a lot of unfinished projects lying around," Helen says. "I'm ready to get off a heavy schedule and the tension and the pressure."

With her husband Jack, she will continue to live on their 119-acre Watercross Farm near Fairfield in the home which was built in 1830. Their only daughter Luan lives in

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This memory book was given to Helen Tunison upon her retirement, and is filled with letters of appreciation from coworkers, former 4-H'ers and others whose lives were touched as she carried out her work in Adams County.



These are a few of the quilt patches presented to Helen at her retirement by the 31 homemakers groups. Each one was handmade to reflect the activities of the local group.

Homestead Notes