

FFA state vice president encourages others to join in activities.

BY SALLY BAIR
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MYERSTOWN — FFA Week offers local chapters a chance to showcase the opportunities available through the Future Farmers of America. Charles Kline, the son of Norman and Verna Kline, Myerstown, took some time to reflect on the opportunities he has been afforded through FFA.

Kline says, "I have always liked FFA; I tried to go to everything." A member of the Eastern Lebanon County FFA chapter for five years, he is now serving as state vice-president, a job which he finds both challenging and rewarding.

The 11 state officers set a goal for themselves to have each of the over 200 chapters in the state visited by an officer through the year. Charles is doing his share, and is enjoying the opportunity to interact with other FFA members.

Kline says his main message is "to encourage participation in FFA activities and contests. If you do participate, you will have a new experience everyday."

He pointed out, "FFA gives you a start earlier in life to have goals to reach. Many ninth graders don't have many goals but grades and report cards. In FFA there are smaller scale goals to reach, and it gives you an earlier start." He feels strongly that setting goals is important in anyone's life, and gives his personal example of placing fourth in ninth grade in the creed contest, and then not doing well the next year. Kline says he learned that you have to keep working toward your goals.

When he travels as a state officer, Kline carries with him a business-like briefcase. He says lightly, "If the answer isn't in my head, it's in my briefcase."

One of the biggest benefits he has derived from FFA has been public speaking. "The general experience

you go through helps you to be in front of the public." Kline started out in the creed contest, but remembered that it was not his first experience giving a speech. His first public speaking experience came when he was 10 years old and gave a speech for a Women's Christian Temperance Union contest.

When he was 13 he traveled to Wichita Kansas to give a speech for WCTU, and spoke before 500 people. Perhaps that was his start, because he said it became easy for him to do speeches for the extemporaneous contests in FFA.

Kline added that the shop experience also helps at home. "Even though you learn to do some things that you don't perform on a dairy farm, it helps you out later."

He said the variety of contests and activities makes FFA special. "It is not just production agriculture. If you are not talented in one area, you can find another one. It is the unique strength of FFA that we have the variety of contests that we have. It gives the organization more opportunity to get stronger." He noted that on the national level there is "really a lot of opportunity" for members.

For Kline, joining FFA was the natural thing to do because he had older brothers who were in the organization. One brother, John, had been a regional Star Farmer and had traveled to Europe through winning the proficiency award. That was incentive enough. "I had the encouragement at home, so I didn't need others. The rest of my family was in FFA, and I knew I wanted to get the most out of it I could."

For others, however, joining the organization is not so natural. In fact, Charles said there is even a misinterpretation by some guidance counselors who believe that academic students cannot be in FFA. "We need to educate the



Since he will travel to at least 18 chapters during the year, Charles must get directions and information, and spends a lot of time on the phone making arrangements.

guidance counselors and the faculty to let them know that vo-ag can be an important part of academics." Kline added, "It offers more experience than any other class."

Many chapters are initiating FFA "clubs" in middle schools to start the recruitment process there. "The middle school students start to get interested and involved," he said. In his own chapter they work with middle school students and have the students visit a farm, plant flowers or do some other activity which will introduce them to the concept of vocational agriculture. Kline said the national organization is helping with these recruitment efforts by offering packets of information about FFA.

Kline said he does not see numbers increasing, but hopes to keep the numbers steady and not decreasing. Declining farm numbers takes its toll in fewer available farm kids. There are presently 10,000 members throughout the state. Although a few new chapters start up, it is not easy in a time of budget cutting. He said he believes it is important for chapters to get administrators involved in the program so they can see first hand the value of FFA.

Parents are another vital link in achieving success as an FFA member. Kline says, "Parents are an important part of FFA and a student's involvement. His own parents have supported him when he must be away from home for FFA activities, and he appreciates that support. He is the youngest of seven children.

Kline also recognizes the support of his FFA advisor Gerald Strickler for helping him fill out records and applications, and generally supporting him over the years.

Although most FFA members are farm kids, Kline points out that in some areas, notably the W.B. Saul school, not one member lives on a farm. In fact, the state president, Julie Hess, is not involved in production agriculture. Kline notes, "There is a place for others outside of agriculture."

Kline has particularly enjoyed getting to know the other state officers, whom he says are like "brothers and sisters" to him. They meet about once a month with the FFA Executive Secretary William Erickson at Elizabethtown. During these times they set goals and evaluate the job they're doing.

"We're your team" is the idea they want FFA members to think



about. They want all members to think of them as being members too. One of his favorite times as a state officer was during a leadership meeting at the Pocono Environmental Education Center. "We got involved with the kids. It was the best time we had and where we had the biggest impact," he stated.

This leadership team would also like to increase participation in the proficiency awards program to have applications in each of the 29 areas. In addition they hope to increase the number of awards in the Building Our American Communities program. Kline said, "The application has been simplified." He added, "It is good public relations to see FFA chapters working in their communities. It's good to be visible."

For Kline there is no question about his choice of vocation—he will be a dairyman with his brothers. His FFA projects were all involved with dairy, and he now owns 20 head of registered cows, having begun with three head in ninth grade. He shares in equipment and crop farming with three brothers, and together they farm about 600 acres, and milk 70 cows.

His projects continue to help him as he works on the farm. He points out, "The need for records has

increased drastically, and FFA is a good way to start keeping records. It really helps you in management." He admitted that sometimes "it seems like you're just filling out records for an award," but it sometimes really important to have good records.

While Kline acknowledges that times are rough for farmers, he feels confident that he can make it because of the support of his family. "The only way you can get into farming is with the kind of help my father gave my brothers and will give me. He is now semi-retired."

Having graduated in 1985, Kline still has several years left as an FFA member, and he continues to set goals. One, of course, is the dream of every FFA member and that is to participate in the American Farmer contest and strive to be named the top farmer in the country.

It is the other skills, however, which will stay with him throughout his lifetime—the ability to talk with groups, to meet new people and new challenges. For Charles Kline, FFA is a part of all that he does now, and it will remain a part of all he achieves as he becomes a full member of the agricultural community.

Homestead Notes



From three head that he started with as a freshman, Charles has expanded his herd to number 20. He farms on his father's farm along with three of his brothers who preceded him in FFA at Eastern Lebanon County High School.

