

Fund-raiser Finds Niche In FFA Foundation

BY SUZANNE KEENE

PAOLI — As a teenager growing up on a Florida farm, Mary Jo Cancelmo envied her male classmates who were able to join the Future Farmers of America.

"I always wanted to be in FFA, but when I was in high school, FFA was only for boys," she recalls. "The girls had the option of belonging to the Future Homemakers of America," she said, noting that it was an option she enthusiastically selected. She served as a state FHA officer and worked with the state FFA president to develop leadership training sessions.

But although she was able to rub shoulders with FFA, "I was never able to be really involved in it," she says.

Now that she is an adult and heads the fundraising division of a cancelmo co. in Paoli, Mary Jo has finally found a way to "belong" to FFA.

Mary Jo is chairman of the sponsoring committee of the FFA Foundation, Inc., the official FFA fundraising body for Pennsylvania.

One business day of each week, Mary Jo pounds the pavement for FFA, calling on businesses to solicit funds for an organization she believes in.

"Wednesdays are my Foundation days," Mary Jo says. On Wednesdays, she visits businesses that may be interested in helping fund FFA. Last year, the committee raised about \$12,000. This year, she would like to raise that figure to \$25,000. And, she adds with characteristic optimism, "I think that's on the pessimistic side."

"It's new. It's a baby. It's just getting off the ground," Mary Jo says of the Foundation.

When the Foundation began in 1983 its organizers started from the ground floor. "We started from nothing," Mary Jo remembers.

She began by making a list of ag related businesses to visit and is now working on making personal contact within each of those companies.

After the initial meeting, Mary Jo hopes the companies will decide to renew their contributions each year. She would like to see state officers visit contributing businesses to offer a personal thank you.

Some of the contributions are in dollars and others are "in kind," Mary Jo explained. An example of an "in kind" donation is a printing company that donates printing for programs or brochures.

Monies raised through the Foundation are used to fund awards, contests, scholarships,



Mary Jo Cancelmo suggests FFA'ers consider Pennsylvania maple syrup as a fundraising possibility. A number of chapters will be selling the syrup in jugs bearing the national FFA emblem and the Pennsylvania ag product insignia.

judging teams and leadership activities. Businesses can contribute to a general fund, or can specify where they want their dollars to go.

In the future, Mary Jo would like to see the Foundation pick up some of the expenses FFA'ers now bear themselves, including state officers' jackets and handbooks.

Another of the Foundation's goals, Mary Jo said, is to offer scholarship money to state officers who take a year off of college to fulfill their officer duties.

"It's the hope of the foundation that someday we'll have enough money to offer these state officers some kind of scholarship for that year they took off," she said.

As a businesswoman Mary Jo believes she is an effective agent for FFA. When people see a business person taking time out from her own busy schedule for FFA, they may take a harder look at the organization's merit, she said.

While she is visiting on behalf of FFA, Mary Jo takes the opportunity to talk about Pennsylvania products, another of her special crusades.

When she called on Taste Baking Company for a donation, she asked how many of the

ingredients used in their products are Pennsylvania grown. The company representative admitted he did not know the answer but said, "We're going to make a conscious effort to get the bulk of our products from Pennsylvania," Mary Jo related.

"It's fun to talk about it and make them aware of it," she said.

For now Mary Jo works alone, but she hopes to develop a network of volunteers across the state to join her fundraising efforts. "I would like to have a layperson in every county," she said.

While she seeks donations from businesses, she believes funds should come from grassroots contributions too. "I don't think we should rely totally on big business for our funds," Mary Jo says with conviction.

A specialist in fundraising, Mary Jo helps individual chapters find ways to make money while learning valuable marketing skills. As part of her business, she visits chapters to suggest products they could sell as fundraisers. One of her newest suggestions is Pennsylvania maple syrup bottled in plastic jugs bearing the national FFA emblem and the Pennsylvania ag product insignia.

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Grassland FFA members Jim Shirk and Tammy Martin take a closer look at a jug of Pennsylvania maple syrup displayed by Mary Jo Cancelmo. As head of the fundraising division of a cancelmo co. and chairman of the sponsoring committee of the FFA Foundation, Inc., Mary Jo encourages FFA'ers to choose Pennsylvania products for their fundraising activities.

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