

# First Lady Enjoys Challenges

BY LOU ANN GOOD

LANCASTER — You've heard of the Ag in the Classroom program, a nationwide program to teach students about agricultural. But do you know the woman behind the Lancaster County program that reaches 4,000 students annually?

Behind the scenes Jane Eshelman busily coordinates schools, volunteers and materials as the educational director for the program. Although her name is not widely broadcast in the program's efforts, Jane is no ordinary volunteer.

She is a first lady. No, she doesn't live in the White House. But, she is the first lady to own a car dealership on the Eastern Seaboard. She is the first lady to become a school director in Penn Manor school district, and she is the first coordinator for the county Ag in the classroom program.

Married to Guy Eshelman, a beef and potato farmer, Jane sums up the pressures that face a two-career marriage by asking: "How did we both end up in businesses that are risky, require high overhead and a big investment?"

The answer to that question is simple. Her father owned the dealership, which she naturally became involved in as a bookkeeper, and she fell in love with a farmer.

When Jane, who had always lived in a town, first contemplated marrying a farmer. She was apprehensive. Today she reports, "It wasn't nearly the adjustment that I expected it would be. I didn't have time to get lonely because I continued working six days a week at the dealership."

That required 45 minutes twice daily in commuting time from their Lancaster farm to New Holland.

After five years of marriage, the Eshelmans had their first child, Guy Jr. who is now 27 and a doctor. After his birth Jane worked parttime, one day in the office and the other days she worked on bookkeeping from her home. She continued this pattern after Yvonne, 24; and Susie, 18; were born.

During her children's school years, Jane was asked to serve as treasurer of the school district. This position led into an eight year stint as school board director. Jane sums up her credentials as a mother with students, a property owner and interested in education as the best combination for a school board position. She said, "I wanted to give my children the best education for my tax dollars."

After completing her eight year term, Jane continues her position as a Republican Committeewoman. She said, "I don't consider

myself a politician." She does encourage others to vote and explains the ballot to others.

Jane became more and more involved in Peiffer Pontiac administration. When her father died suddenly in 1977, she was forced to make a decision regarding her father's dealership. She and her brother-in-law applied for the agency. Jane recalls, "My brother-in-law knew the mechanical end, and I, the administration end—that makes us a good combination."

But the responsibilities of farming 300 acres and operating a car dealership demand a competitive business sense. Jane said, "Farming always seems to be in a recession." But the '79 recession affected car dealerships much harder than farming. Many dealerships dissolved during that period, but, although a struggle, Peiffer Pontiac pulled through.

Perhaps because she had been affiliated with the school board, the PA Young Farmers Association asked Jane to coordinate the Ag in the Classroom program. Hesitant because she wasn't entirely sure what the new program entailed, Jane committed herself to a two year term because "I wanted to do it right and I knew it would take at least two years."

It's five years later and Jane still heads the program that she believes in one of the most active in the nation.

When she first assumed the responsibility in 1984, she received a two-day training period at the state level.

"Many of the ideas suggested at the state level I knew would not work in our district since I was familiar with the district's requirements," Jane recalled.

She outlined a program that she thought would work in the Penn Manor school district, designated as a pilot program, and she contacted the school board president and was told, "Jane, if you think it's a good program, go ahead and do it."

The program was mandated by the principal. The first year was a learning experience.

Jane said, "We gave teachers an evaluation sheet. Their response was positive but showed that teachers would have liked lesson plans to expand upon."

The following year, Jane had lesson plans developed. She also incorporated a workshop for teachers and a resource directory listing contact persons to assist in answering questions by phone or through presentations. Even teachers learn, Jane reports that one teacher previously thought potatoes grew on trees.

Jane has a committee that helps

organize the event that provides instruction in five school districts during the fall and nine during the spring session.

Although she delegates as much as possible, Jane admits the hardest part is finding agriculture persons who will present their story. The committee often cons their own family members into becoming involved in the program and Jane is no exception. Her husband has been very supportive of the program by visiting classrooms to explain vegetable growing.

Jane said the program needs committee volunteers who will contact five farmers to make presentations. It's a responsibility that can mostly be handled from the phone since the school is already set up. They especially need someone in the Elizabethtown area. If interested, contact Jane at 717 872-7507.

Jane teaches volunteers how to present their agricultural story. She said, "After a person participates one time, they enjoy it and continue their involvement."

A farmer's busy lifestyle that is so dependent upon the weather required some modifications to the program. The fall sessions now begin in November and ends in early April since that time is generally less demanding for farmers.

Each school hears five different topics that are tailor-made. Usually they include dairy, sheep, beef, poultry, and swine. Options include FFA presentations, flower farming, fruit growers, or horses.

"We use agricultural people from the district to present the topic," Jane said. Each presenter has a handout such as chips from Charles Chips, a box of chocolate milk from the presenter's dairy, a cow eraser or pork roll samples.

Jane and her committee also



Jane Eshelman is a woman on the move. She was the first female school board director at Penn Manor High School, the first woman car dealer on the eastern seaboard and the first to head the county Ag in the Classroom program.

participate in exhibits at the Farm Expo held at Lancaster Square, Park City Farm-City week and other agriculture education efforts.

Jane and her husband are part of the corporation (governing body) of the Lancaster Bible College and they are active at Calvary Church.

Of her many involvements, Jane said, "You need to like what you do or the work is pure drudgery. There are lots of rewards and sometimes real pain, but I feel we have been blessed of the Lord. We have a good life and our children bring us much joy."

She credits the farm for playing an important role in child development. "The farm demands that farmers be proficient at many things such as masonry, welding, and

management; children learn these skills. They learn to stick at a job until finished. Our children, who are all strongly academic, apply that same work ethic to studying."

Jane, herself, has never had college education, which she so strongly advocates. She said, "If I had had the opportunity, I might have earned a CPA or a law degree or maybe become an interior decorator. I can see myself doing all three. But who knows, how my life would have turned out then?"

She added, "All the positions I held I never sought. They just came my way. As a woman, I've never felt discriminated against. I've always managed to do what I wanted. It's a good life."

## Baskets, Baskets, Baskets

LANCASTER — Five Lancaster County basketmakers will participate in Baskets, Baskets, Baskets, an exhibition of Lancaster County basketmakers at The Market House Craft Center April 9 through May 26. Hours for the exhibit are 9 a.m. to noon, Monday through Friday.

Included in the exhibit:

Barbara Bonfanti, Lititz, who makes traditional reed baskets, Nantucket Lightship baskets and coiled pine needle baskets.

Karen Boyd lives in the Millersville area, and makes traditional styles of reed baskets.

Sue Keeney, Lancaster, who makes a traditional style melon basket with split flat reeds and a variation of melon basket made with grapevine. She uses both dyed and natural colors in her baskets.

Susan Kelleher from Mount Joy, makes traditional hand-split white oak baskets. She also uses other hand-gathered materials to make her coiled rye straw baskets and honeysuckle vine baskets. She demonstrates traditional basketry at Landis Valley Museum.

Sylvia Lehman, Elizabeth-



Karen Boyd (left) shows one of her reed baskets to a consumer.

town, creates original contemporary baskets constructed with vegetable-dyed reed and a variety of nontraditional fibers such as wool, feathers, beads and hand-made paper. Color and texture are interacting elements in her baskets.

The Market House Craft Center is located in the lower level of Southern Market Center at the corner of S. Queen and Vine Streets in downtown Lancaster. The entrance is down the steps on the Vine Street side. For more information, call 295-1500.



Paper work seems to accompany Jane's many volunteer and paid duties.



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