

Retirement Opens New Doors For Pat Sueck

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AIRVILLE (York County) — A new door swung open recently for Airville farm woman Pat Sueck when she was elected the new president of Penn's Agri-Women.

"I often think that you go through a doorway in your life and then start something new," believes Pat. The Agri-Women presidency is her newest challenge in a life brimming with family, career, and agriculture community service activities.

Born and raised in the Washington, D.C., area, Pat earned her registered nursing degree at St. Joseph's Hospital in Baltimore and remained on the staff for five years.

She met her husband, Elmer, a stone mason and bricklayer, when they were both in a wedding for friends. When he was taken to St. Joseph's after an automobile accident, their friendship grew; a year later, they were married.

"I was married two years and had four kids," chuckles Pat, displaying her ready sense of humor. Two were "homegrown" and two were her stepbrothers, who along with her widowed father came to live with the Suecks at the home they built in the Baltimore suburb of Kingsville.

After several years of watching the surrounding community swell with people and building development, the Suecks decided to pursue a long-held dream of Elmer's — to farm.

"My German mother-in-law passed on to Elmer her deep love of the land and of animals; he wanted to farm," relates Pat. "What did we have to lose?"

So as the oldest of the Suecks' five children was approaching high school age, they began exploring southern Pennsylvania for an appropriate piece of property.

"Land prices in Maryland were too high and we wanted to get beyond where we felt development would continue moving out. We wanted an isolated area with not too many neighbors," she remembers.

The search began, the Suecks scouring the southern York County countryside weekend after weekend. While stopped at an intersection and trying to figure out where they were one day, they were befriended by a local real estate agent who spotted their Maryland automobile license plate.

Months and dozens of property of inspections later, they drove around the corner of a winding rural road west of Airville and knew they had found "home."

But it wasn't home at the time, just a century-old, "add-on" house, with Tom's Run, a feeder stream to Muddy Creek, gurgling just yards from the side porch. And the door that opened into this new step of life needed to be torn down and replaced.

It took two years of hard weekend and vacation labor to tear down, gut out, add onto, and finish the house. With no water, no plumbing, no electricity, the living

was camp-style much of the time, even to bathing in the creek. Family and friends were welcomed, encouraged, to come lend a hand.

"But we never had second thoughts," Pat smiles of the country home that exudes warmth, friendliness, and a pig collection that echoes the swine herd the Suecks maintain.

After moving in 1971, Pat unknowingly swung open another door. She contacted the York Extension Office for information on beef cattle and soon had "plunged into" 4-H. All five of the Sueck children became horse owners and beef project animals soon grazed the pasture.

"I trucked horses and cattle; even learned to ride a horse," says Pat, admitting she was "scared to death" of them at first. Through accompanying her children to meetings, she became a leader for the horse club and the Airville Community Club and worked with 4-H County Council.

While she initially became involved with programs in which her children were participating, Pat's own organizational skills soon thrust her into leadership roles. As president of the Lower Chanceford Parent-Teacher Association, Pat attended training for PTA volunteers. She also took part in 4-H Leadership School in Washington, D.C.

With the children grown enough to be independent, Pat returned to her nursing career in 1975, in the position of afternoon-evening shift supervisor at Colonial Manor Nursing Home. But she remained active in community agricultural activities, especially with the York County Farmers' Association.

"I remember touring a dairy farm when I was just a kid, and was so impressed with the farm," Pat says of her enthusiastic support of the Farmers' Association's activities. "The farm tours are what I really started helping with, because I remembered how important that had been to me as a kid."

Active in the county's women's committee programs, Pat especially appreciated the fellowship and friends she made through that involvement. An opportunity to serve on the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association's (PFA) state women's committee came at the same time Pat decided to retire from nursing in the mid-1980s.

Now an eight-year veteran of PFA's women's committee, Pat works with programs in Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and York counties, serving as a sort of go-between for sharing information from grassroots to state and national levels. She also serves on the American Farm Bureau's national Rural Health Committee, a group of 10 members from across the country studying issues such as lack of adequate health care in isolated rural areas.

While active in PFA programs, Pat also joined Penn's and American Agri-Women, encouraged by neighbor fruit and grain producer Gail McPherson.

"The information sharing and



The Sueck family's pig production enterprise overflows into their cozy country home, where Pat houses her own "herd." Here she admires a few favorites from her collection.

the fellowship were both very important to me; they have so much to offer," Pat says of the networking and legislative efforts of PAW and AAW. But her already busy family and nursing schedule left little time to become active in Agri-Women.

"After I retired, I knew it was 'my time'," Pat relates. She began attending AAW's annual Washington Fly-In, where participants really "learn how the government works" by visiting agriculture-related agencies and hearing updates from key personnel.

Spurred by her numerous interests and activities, Pat became part of the two-year Rural Leadership Program conducted by Penn State. The program focuses on both leadership training and in-depth studies on the workings of government at all levels.

"It was a very intense program, mentally and physically, and very worthwhile. If I hadn't undergone that training through Rural Leadership, I probably would not have decided to run for office," she explains.

Pat had been active in legislative issues with PFA, following proposed legislation as it worked its way through the process at both the state and national levels.

"It upsets me to see legislation passed that affects so many people without it having been thoroughly researched and studied," Pat says of her political interest. "I feel it is time for the country to have people representing people; when our incumbent in the 94th Legislative District announced he would not run, I decided to try it."

Late in January, Pat made that decision, after many phone calls and encouragement from friends and supporters. Elmer, whom Pat calls a super, kind-hearted person, urged her from the start to "go for it."

York County Republican Headquarters gave her advice on what she needed to do as a candidate for the May primary. She filled out and filed the proper papers, then named as her campaign chairman fellow Agri-Woman member Gail McPherson.

The campaign began with nine candidates, narrowing to seven by the primary. Pat found it fascinating to visit with and speak to groups representing a gamut of is-

sues. She studied issues at length and focused her campaign on tax reform, reform of Act 195 dealing with teacher-strikes, and small business concerns.

"I learned that you must be your own person, do your best and be satisfied with the outcome," Pat reflects on her door-opening into the political arena. "It took a lot of energy."

Though she did not make it through the primary, Pat remains enthusiastic about public service and her candidacy run.

"I would do it again — and I may," she suggests.

While debating if and when she might re-enter the campaign trail, Pat continues her work with numerous agriculture and community organizations. She serves on the board of the York Conservation District, the York County Farmland Trust, and the Pennsylvania Foundation for Better Living which spearheads Ag In The Classroom teacher education.

Long active in the York Cooperative Extension program, Pat currently teaches the 16-week "New Way of Life" program, focusing on exercise, nutrition, and changing behavioral patterns.

Pat also is a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) for abused children, a program of the county's judicial system. Her role is to bond with the child she represents, and get to know the parents

and family situation, then represent the child's best interest in advising the court. She was accepted into the CASA program after reading about it, then going through a screening process and several months of training.

In her role for the next two years as the state's Agri-Women president, Pat intends to encourage new membership and increase communications with more frequent newsletters. She also hopes to continue and strengthen the support that Agri-Women has given to the Ag In The Classroom program since its infancy.

Their Ag Day celebration is one of Penn's Agri-Women's most visible activities, when a buffet of Pennsylvania-grown and processed foods is served in the Harrisburg Capitol for legislators and staff.

"I've always believed PAW is such an excellent source of knowledge and information about agricultural issues," Pat explains of organizations' key focus. "And the fellowship is wonderful."

"Most of the women involved are also active in so many other things; it makes for a good network of sharing."

For more information on programs and membership of Penn's Agri-Women, contact Pat Sueck, Penn's Agri-Women, R1, Box 43, Airville, PA 17302, or phone (717) 862-3486.



Her used copy machine has proven invaluable to Penn's Agri-Women president Pat Sueck in preparing materials for meetings and members.

Homestead Notes