

Volunteer Helps Set Up 4-H Program In Poland

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QUARRYVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — Connie Rutt grew up in 4-H, met her husband through 4-H, and has been a 4-H leader ever since she was too old to be a member.

It's no surprise that Connie wants to see people in other countries have the opportunity to participate in 4-H.

And, it is no surprise that Connie was selected to be the first 4-H volunteer to accompany a Penn State agricultural team to Poland.

The team's purpose was to teach free enterprise, marketing, and 4-H and youth development programs.

Connie is pleased that Poland has decided to focus on setting up 4-H youth programs.

"It's exciting because this is the first generation in Poland that can decide what they want to do," Connie said. "The future of Poland lies in its youth."

Connie said that according to Megatrends 2000, which projects world trends, Poland could be a major economic influence by the 21st Century. To do so would require economic, political, and social reforms, but Poland's efforts so far are considered successful.

In their determination to make the free market enterprise work, inflation has dropped from as high as 250 percent to 3.4 percent a month and interest rates have dropped from 78 percent last year to 49 percent.

Despite these optimistic trends, Poland has a long way to go before the transition from government to private control will be made. Many of the same people who ran the Communist system are now trying to run the free-market version. It is believed that Poland will suffer much financial hardship before a successful transition takes place, but Poland is familiar with hardships.

The country was destroyed in World War I and II and throughout its history as neighboring countries overran them. Most recently it had been oppressed by Communist rule.

"The interesting thing is that each time the country was demolished, they rebuilt it exactly as it had been," Connie said. "When you stand in Warsaw, it's difficult to believe that the buildings are basically new because the architectural style is ancient. There is not

much color or landscaping."

While the older generation seems conditioned to stay to themselves and the teachers a bit skeptical, the students themselves were eager to learn about western-style co-ops. They especially enjoyed brainstorming — a new concept and a deviation from the lecture-style teaching that dominates the schools.

To teach the free enterprise system to students, Connie used slides of her family farm to explain sole proprietorship. Connie and her husband, Ken, have a 400-acre dairy farm, where they milk 100 registered Holsteins. A 22-year-old son, Philip, is in charge of the dairy herd. The Rutts have a daughter, Lori, 23, and another son Matthew, 18.

Funding for the Poland trip did not come from Penn State Extension but from private companies, mostly Polish-American businesses that want to help their mother country in the transition from dictatorship to free enterprise.

The team worked in two agricultural technical schools, each for a week at a time. Top students, who ranged from 14 to 20 years old, were hand picked to participate in the all-day training. At one school, 20 participated and at the other 30 were part of the training.

"The biggest problem was making sure that the interpreters understood what we were saying since translation can't be done word for word but by concepts," Connie said.

At first, the participants had a difficult time grasping the concept of western-style cooperatives since the word automatically is equated with a cooperative farm run by the Communists.

The Penn State team see cooperatives as the answer to the marketing and processing of agricultural products in Poland. Because families own only a couple of cows, it is not feasible for them to invest in milking parlors or tanks. Much of the milk is wasted and it is not used for drinking since refrigeration methods are antiquated.

Connie also taught parliamentary procedure to the students.

"On the final day, the staff made up questions from business reform to parliamentary procedure and the students had to explain their answers. They expounded on the answers and it was really neat to



To explain sole proprietorship to the Polish students, Connie used slides of the dairy farm that she and her husband, Ken, operate in Quarryville.



These agricultural representatives taught free enterprise during their three-week visit to Poland. From left, William Harshman, vo/ag teacher; Zoann Parker, 4-H youth extension agent; Connie Rutt, 4-H volunteer; Dr. Donald Evans, Penn State assistant dean; Dr. Stanislaus Czuba, governor of Sklerniwoice Province; Marie Holownia, director of ag education for Poland; Dr. Lou Moore, PSU economist; and Lee Hayes, 4-H member and PSU student.

see how much they understood," Connie said.

She was also impressed that the students seem future oriented and when asked what they would do with a million dollars, most had a business in mind that they would like to begin or an idea to help charitable organizations.

As part of the farewell, the students put on a folk dance and made potato pancakes for the U.S. team. Students made Connie promise to teach 4-H'ers in Lancaster to make potato pancakes.

By the time the team left Poland, leaders and officers had set up an agenda to establish a 4-H program.

Connie said that there is a possibility that the extension will work by satellite to help ODR agents (similar to extension agents) set up a 4-H program. She also hopes that she will be able to return and help strengthen the program. While there, she challenged the older students to be the first volunteers in the 4-H program. Connie explained that volunteering is a different concept since the Communist government formerly oversaw every organization.

The heritage of the Polish people

excels in crafts such as embroidery, woodcarving, and paper cutting.

Connie, whose life seems to be centered around working with youth, is in charge of the Solanco Community Club, with 43 members in the sewing club.

"We even have several boys in the club," Connie said.

The club meets at the high school after school is dismissed so that members can use the sewing machines. Connie also sets up several machines in the spacious dining room of her farmhouse for the members to use.

"During the month of June, there isn't a day that kids aren't here sewing," Connie said. She has the satisfaction of seeing many of her students advance to regional competition.

Recently, she secured a federal grant to purchase six sewing

machines for the club — a big help in finding machines for those whose parents don't own one.

Connie is a board member with the county extension and represents Lancaster County on the regional and state boards. The Rutts are active members of the Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren where they have been long-term youth advisors. For the past nine years, Connie has been in charge of costuming for the Solanco High School plays. At present, she needs to prepare costumes for 70 students who are staging Fiddler On The Roof.

Visiting foreign countries is not new to Connie who, with her husband, had been to Europe several times and to Africa. For the past 18 months, the Rutt's daughter has been working in Mexico and plans to work in Russia for another term under the Eastern Mennonite Mission Board.



Connie Rutt pages through photos as she tells about Poland and the students who were eager to learn about the 4-H program.

Homestead Notes