

## Away From The Midway, A Fair Of The Heart

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EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Parades, food, amusement rides, and contests attract large crowds to county fairs. But the average visitor misses a lot of the behind-the-scenes happenings that weave interest into the lives of local residents.

Did you know that the first-place winner of the chocolate cake contest at Ephrata Fair had never tried the winning recipe before entering?

Did you know that several life-lessons develop among youth showing livestock in competition at the Fair?

Did you know that the livestock barns are also study halls for self-disciplined teen-agers who want to keep up their grades during the busy fair season?

Here's a "sort-of" behind the scenes capsule about several happenings at the Ephrata Fair held last week.

Jeff and Jerry Bollinger are twin sons of Ray and Sharon Bollinger of Ephrata. Fairgoers have watched these two identical twins and their younger brother Keith maneuver their sheep into the winner's circle for years. This season was no exception and a story about the twin brothers' capturing both champion and reserve breeding sheep trophies appeared in last week's issue of *Lancaster Farming*.

But it's the unpublished news that is making life-changing decisions in the twins lives.

Both are 19 years old. Both are engaged.

Both met their fiancées through FFA events.

It all started several years ago when Jeff met Andrea Noll, who is from Perry County, at an FFA state activity.

At first, there was some confusion for Andrea, who, not realizing Jeff was a twin, struck up a conversation with him. She had met him before, she said, at another event.

Jeff, who is accustomed to mistaken identity with his twin, acknowledged that it was probably his brother.

"Now, I would never mistake the two," Andrea said. "There are many different comparisons between them, and I can tell the differences immediately."

It was, Jeff said, Andrea's long blond hair that first caught his attention. But it is their common bond for the farm that causes their relationship to grow.

"We both want a farm. I plan to have sheep until I die," Jeff said.

"And I want to raise throughbred race horses," said Andrea, who already owns one.

Much of their dating life during the past two years has been spent at horse and sheep shows where they help each other with the showing.

A damper was put on the time they spent with each other when Andrea became the state FFA president last year.

"Last year, he sacrificed his life for me," Andrea said of the couple's inability to see much of each other while she traveled across the state fulfilling FFA duties.

Jeff is now in his second year at Penn State Berks Campus. His career goal is set on becoming an extension agent. This past summer, Jeff worked as an intern with Chet Hughes, livestock extension agent in Lancaster.

Several months ago, Jeff presented Andrea with an engagement diamond.

"But he never lets me forget that



Love sparked for these two couples through FFA activities. Twins Jeff, left, and Jerry have been showing sheep at the Ephrata Fair for years. This year Jeff clinched the top trophy in breeding sheep and his brother the reserve. With them are their fiancées, Andrea, right, and Chrissy. Chrissy is from Bradford County and Andrea is from Bradford County. When the couples first met, they found they had a lot to talk about because of the common bond of showing livestock and FFA membership. Photo by Lou Ann Good.



Homework can't wait for Amy Bollinger, right. The 15-year-old snatches some time in-between sheep showing to catch up on homework while her friend Lisa Pfautz offers some assistance. "My algebra teacher is 'Queen of Homework,'" said Amy who had problems finding a spot to use her solar-powered calculator. Photo by Lou Ann Good.

he could have spent all that money on sheep," Andrea said of what Jeff considers a supreme sacrifice.

Now, it is Andrea that is sacrificing her life, she said. She gave up college to work at a secretarial job in order to save money for marriage.

Until last week, the couple were planning on getting married next year. But they decided it is wiser financially to wait until Jeff graduates from college. After their marriage, Andrea plans to attend college for an ag-related degree.

Although twin brother Jerry had met Chrissy Acompora from Bradford County at an FFA event three years earlier, the couple did not begin dating until she moved into the area to attend Penn State Berks Campus. While working at McDonald's part time, Chrissy met Jerry when he came in with Jeff and Andrea.

"It was really us (Andrea and Jeff) that got them together," said Jeff, who now regrets it because, "I liked it better when he wasn't dating then he gave me money for college."

"All we talked about on our first date was FFA — we were both county officers — and livestock judging," Chrissy said.

The following week after their first date, Chrissy ended up in the

hospital for an emergency operation. A ruptured cyst resulted in a seriously ill Chrissy.

Jerry showed up every day at the hospital. According to Chrissy, Jerry aided in her recuperation by sneaking food into the hospital.

It was through this experience and their interest in agriculture that caused the relationship to bloom. Chrissy now wears a diamond.

The couple plans to marry in April. Chrissy suspended her college education to save money for the couple's wedding. She plans to resume college studies next fall. Jerry works full time for a cabinet shop.

Because Chrissy grew up on an 145-acre farm where they raise Black Angus cows, she showed cows. Since she met Jerry, she grew to love sheep. She plans to raise her own sheep and both will exhibit sheep next year.

Not every thing that goes on in the sheep pen is fun and games. Amy Bollinger can attest to that.

The 15-year-old from Manheim has been showing sheep at various county fairs for years. This year at Ephrata, she showed the reserve champion market lamb.

While some teachers may be a bit lenient with students competing in livestock showing, Amy said that her algebra teacher is "Queen

of Homework." After all the excitement of showing the champion reserve, Amy hit the books in the sheep pen. She was trapped at the Fair because the parade had not ended. With the sound of pounding drums in the distance and the accompaniment of nearby sheep bleats, Amy was finding it a bit difficult to concentrate on algebra formulas.

"But I need to work here because I have a solar powered calculator and it's too dark outside," Amy said.

Several blocks away from Tent City and the bleating sheep are the food displays.

Winner of the Blue Ribbon Apple Pie Contest was Eleanor Hartraft. The local win means that she is eligible to enter state competition at the Harrisburg Farm Show in January.

A seasoned baker of apple pies, Eleanor said that for the last six years her apple pie has made it to top three placings at the Ephrata Fair.

Her first place win was her old favorite standby recipe.

"Through the years, I've tried every prize-winning recipe, but my family always says that mine is best," Eleanor said.

She got up early to pick her own apples before baking the pie.

Since she grew up on an apple farm in Ephrata, she knows about everything there is to know about apples.

One thing, she stresses, is that cooks should always be open to trying different varieties of apples.

"There are so many delicious varieties," she said. She prefers Crispin apples for pies. For eating, she said Pipen are the best. "They are ugly looking," Eleanor said of the old variety.

Her brother, who took over the family orchard, always saves a tree for Eleanor to select her apples.

Eleanor said that she has been entering baking and flower competitions at Ephrata Fair for 45 years. This year alone, she won 25 ribbons for her entries. She's passing on the tradition to her grandchildren. This year, a granddaughter took a fourth place ribbon.

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First-place winner in the apple pie contest at Ephrata Fair is Eleanor Hartraft.