

## Marcia Paterson Coordinates Ag Program And FFA

# Milton Hershey School Stresses Ag Involvement For All

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HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) —

Open the door to the Milton Hershey School agriculture department and the screech of a cockatiel splits the air. Muffled sounds of silkies, rabbits, mice, gerbils, and ferrets ruffling in their nests can be heard in between the cockatiel's screeches and student pleas of "Mrs. Paterson, look at this."

The students — some intent and some with noses wrinkled in disgust at the pungent smell of formaldehyde — are dissecting pigs during an agriculture biology class.

It's Marcia Paterson's first year on the job as coordinator for agriculture and environmental education at the school. And, it's the first year for implementing the FFA program. The school officially received charter membership in February.

But, it isn't the first time that Paterson has started an FFA program from the beginning.

Her enthusiasm for the FFA program is one honed during her years of growing up in Chicago and longing to be involved in agriculture.

"I always wanted to work with plants and animals, but there were no outlets to do that in the city school while I was growing up," Paterson said.

Determination landed some part-time jobs for her. She helped a veterinarian, and during the summer months, traveled overseas to work in citrus groves and dairy farms in Israel.

Paterson then earned a degree in animal science and horticulture at the University of Illinois and later a master's degree in agricultural education.

It wasn't until her college years that Paterson first heard about the FFA program.

Estatic to hear how FFA was enabling students to take an active role in agriculture, Paterson returned to Chicago where she helped other teachers implement the Chicago High School for Agricultural Students. She watched many of her students go on to agriculture-related careers and one of them become the current national FFA president.

During her 10 years at the Chicago school, Paterson's enthu-

siasm for teaching agriculture has never dwindled. Now, she brings a vibrancy and contagious enthusiasm for the FFA program to the Milton Hershey School.

"FFA helps focus on what students are interested in and their strengths," she said.

She is thrilled that part of the legacy that Milton Hershey passed on to the school is the deed of trust that states that every student should have appreciation and be involved in agriculture and gardening.

About 300 students are enrolled in 4-H and 100 students are chartered FFA members.

"The school's goal is that every student — even non-FFA students — should have the opportunity to be involved in at least two agricultural-based projects each year," Paterson said. "FFA students are involved in many more."

The school not only verbally supports the agricultural program but also provides abundant resources to carry out projects and are creative in their approach.

Some of the student's homes are designated as FFA homes. In these, the house parents help students work on agriculture projects during off-school hours, such as restoring a pond on the grounds.

Also, Paterson coordinates agricultural projects with other teachers. One of the big FFA projects now underway is making a miniature golf course inside one of the barns on the grounds. The barn was completely gutted.

Students designed the course and built it to scale before tackling the real project. They built and painted the platform holes, and are now installing them. The old windows in the barn were removed and reglazed by students before re-installation. Some of the students designed score cards through the communications course. Others chose the golf clubs, picnic tables, or helped with pouring concrete.

Instead of numbers for the different holes, names have been assigned. Students chose a roadway theme and have named the holes with such descriptive names as dead end, U-turn, detour, cattle crossing, and narrow bridge.

"The project involves team planning and is only possible because every one works

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In addition to teaching 300 students enrolled in agriculture classes, Marcia Paterson, center, coordinates projects among other teachers and the 1,200 students so that every student has the opportunity to be involved in at least two agriculture-based projects throughout the year.



Marcia Paterson, right, watches as students built and paint the hole platforms for the miniature golf course.

## HOMESTEAD NOTES



Each student does his or her part to make the indoor miniature golf project a success.



A large FFA project is turning this barn into an indoor miniature golf course. The barn on the school's grounds was used as a dairy until it was phased out about five years ago.