

A Peek Into Martee's Chicken Coop

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff
CARLISLE (Dauphin Co.) —
Martee Mentzer keeps about 1,000 chickens in her home.

To make room for the flock that keeps expanding, her husband Elmo converted the carport into another room — complete with carpet — to house her chickens and dubbed it the Chicken Coop.

Considered an expert on chickens, the diminutive Martee is in demand as a speaker at Farm Women, senior citizens, church, Lion's and other community groups.

People — even busloads — come from around the state to see Martee's chicken collection.

"Each piece has a story connected to it," Martee said of the chickens made from glass, peanut shells, wicker, brass, sea shells, taxidermy, counted crosstitch, and more in every imaginable object including a music box, rooster

alarm clock, lamp, vase, checker board, stamps. . . .

Martee said that her interest in chickens developed by accident in 1964. That year, she emceed the Pennsylvania Farm Women State banquet.

To lighten the atmosphere, Martee told the story about three hens that were exhibited at the Pennsylvania Farm Show. According to her, the hens wanted to date three roosters exhibited nearby. The day after their first date, the hens were discussing their dates.

The first hen reported that she had an enjoyable evening with a Rhode Island Red. The second hen said that things went so well on her date with a Plymouth Rock that they decided to go steady.

The third hen, a bit hesitant to talk, admitted that she had a date with a capon, but all he wanted to talk about was his operation.

Her joke brought the house down, and folks have been sending



To make room for all Martee's chickens, Elmo converted a former carport into Martee's Chicken Coop. Now hundreds of visitors come to see her chickens and — of course — give her another one to add to her collection.



Martee's collections are not limited to chickens. She also collects baskets and keeps heirloom dishes in this corner cupboard.

Martee chicken jokes and chickens ever since.

Martee said that the whole incident taught her an important lesson: "Be careful what you say or it can follow you."

But making the most of the situation, Martee compiled the jokes and facts about chickens and now has a collection of tidbits for her humorous chicken talks.

One person reported that "this chicken lady has more than fair knowledge of fowl."

Martee's talks are peppered with humor. She said that she developed a great sense of humor from her father, who constantly told jokes. Humor, she said, promotes good health. It eases muscle tension, reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, improves communication, and creates good will.

One day, her husband was flipping through her file of chicken jokes. He said, "You know, you have a lot of bum chicken jokes in here."

Martee disagreed. She said, "I put a bunch of them in the fireplace and the fire just roared."

Occasionally Martee will see a chicken that she likes and buy it. "My husband is a good guy to go shopping with. He always tells me, 'If you want it, get it,'" she said.

But most of the chicken collection are gifts.

"I don't go anywhere that some-

one doesn't give me a chicken," she said.

Martee grew up on a Cumberland County farm where she showed cattle and belonged to every 4-H club imaginable.

Martee said that she joined Farm Women in 1956 at her mother's insistence. True to her character, Martee immersed herself in doing her best and has served almost every local and county office. She served as the 1964 to 1966 state president and now as chairperson of the advisory committee. She is a member of Cumberland County Society 15.

Martee is the person who came up with the idea to hold a state Farm Women's Spring Rally. That was 30 years ago, and the organization has been holding an annual spring rally ever since. The first year it was held and this year — the 30th anniversary — Martee emceed the event.

The first year was the year she told her chicken joke that propelled her into becoming one of the largest chicken collectors in the world.

Although she and Elmo were in the same high school class, Martee said that he didn't pay attention to her until after they graduated and they met each other roller skating.

The happy marriage is on its 48th year. The Mentzlers have one married son and two grandchildren.

In addition to her chicken collection, Martee also collects baskets that hang from the rafters in the enclosed porch and the kitchen. She also has a collection of heirloom dishes stored in an antique corner cupboard.

The Mentzlers home overflows with Martee's projects — rug hooking, quilting, and crocheting.

She keeps scrapbooks to organize everything. This includes a scrapbook for each year of her involvement in Farm Women, and a scrapbook charting her employ-

ment as a secretary for 30 years at the nearby Army and War College, for which she received outstanding ratings with each of the nine

colonels under which she worked and was named federal employee of the year out of 20,000 employees. At her retirement, she received the Commander's Award, the highest award presented to a civilian. Martee was also the first woman to ever receive the award.

Martee, retired in 1980. Her husband retired from his job as school principal two years later.

But the couple say that they are busier than ever. In addition to the chicken talks and tours, the couple are active in the American Association of Retired Persons.

Martee, who often has no intention of becoming involved in leadership, will find herself again and again in leadership roles — ones that others who are aware of her reliability and competence continue to assign her. One example is when the AARP asked her to be secretary for the local chapter, she ended up being a state director overseeing 18 chapters, which took her to workshops as far away as California.

The Mentzlers are also active in the local Zion Lutheran Church, where Martee has been adult Sunday school superintendent, class president, and president of the Lutheran Church Women.

She and her husband vacation in Florida every year during January and February. The couple have gone on five cruises and traveled abroad. Their big hobby is attending dinner theaters and river boating in areas across the country.

Whenever people visit Martee's Chicken Coop, she also serves them a variety of beverages and her specialties — zucchini bread or baked apple crescent rolls.

Here is the recipe that Martee serves to guests who visit her Chicken Coop.

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Imagination knows no limits when it comes to chickens in all shapes, sizes, and forms.

HOMESTEAD NOTES