

Herr Family Produces Three State FFA Officers Is It In The Genes?

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HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) —
The influence of older siblings is widespread in many families. But in Tonya Herr's case, evidence of her siblings' influences has resulted in her being named Pennsylvania FFA president.

She is the third member of her family to achieve a state FFA office. Her brother Duane was south central vice president in 1985. Three years later, a sister Dawn became state secretary.

The family is thrilled that their

youngest sister of six children now carries the leadership torch for FFA.

Tonya said, "It all began when my brother was a state officer and held meetings with the other officers in our home. I used to serve refreshments to them. And I wanted to grow up to be like them."

Tonya has only the highest praise for the organization that taught her to talk both on a one to one level and on a group level, how to set goals and achieve them.

"I am a state officer 365 days a

year. 24 hours a day," Tonya said. "I might not be in a conference but FFA business is always running through my mind. There are letters to write, articles to do, plans to make."

Her goal for the organization during her leadership is to see each member become more active and for an increase in membership.

Of the three-day quest for a state position, Tonya said that she concentrated on the words, "I can. I can."

It wasn't a time to compare herself with the other 26 candidates or a time to feel inadequate or fearful of unknown responsibilities.

During the rounds of interviews, Tonya said, the candidates do not petition for any particular office. Instead it's up to the panel of judges to decide which offices the selected candidates would best fill.

Six rounds of judging were held during the three-day convention.

"I didn't receive any hints from my brother and sister, but I did prepare for some of the questions that we were told would be presented," she said.

She prepared a two to three minute introduction of herself, which was followed by a round of questioning.

During the third round, the committee judged the candidates on group dynamics. The candidates were divided into groups in which they needed to successfully build a plane company.

The fourth round required candidates to speak about national dues or international programs.

The fifth round dealt with world issues.

For the sixth round, 11 candidates were called back in for questioning. These 11 turned out to be the candidates selected for national office.

But it wasn't until the following day that the officers were announced before the general assembly of the state convention.

Darla admits to being in a bit of shock to hear that she was chosen as president. She said, "It did not matter to me what office I was selected to hold because I knew that we will all work together as a team."

As typical of the trend of the organization's membership, Tonya is not from the farm, nor does she pursue production agriculture.

Another surprise, Tonya is a graduate of a school that dropped the ag program the year she graduated.

Although Tonya lives in Dauphin County, she transferred to Annville-Cleona High School in Lebanon when the Lower Dauphin School depleted their ag program.

The year she graduated — 1995 — is the last year Annville-Cleona offered an agricultural program.

In fact the program was being phased out during her high school years, which resulted in a shuffle of teachers and five different FFA advisers during high school.

She isn't complaining about the lack of continuity and the difficulty of adapting to each of the teacher's different emphasis. Instead, she said, "I am the result of the strengths of all four advisers. I'm where I am today because of my background in FFA."

During high school, Tonya held chapter and county leadership positions. As a junior, Tonya was the chapter's vice president and the county sentinel. In her senior year, she was again chapter vice president and county president.



Is it in the genes? Darla Herr, Pennsylvania FFA president, is the third family member to hold a state FFA office. Her brother Duane was the 1985 south-central regional vice president and her sister Dawn who was 1988 state secretary.

As Tonya grapples with her new role and the challenges that face it, she said, "There is some way to get across to schools that agricultural education needs to be included in a school's curriculum."

While a bit uncertain on how to convince schools of the need for ag education, she continues to search for a way to promote ag education through FFA's presence in high schools.

Tonya has excelled in public speaking contests, with a special emphasis on conservation.

She attended the national FFA convention in both her junior and senior high school year.

Tonya and the other 10 officers have selected the theme "Triumphs of Tomorrow Start Today."

They hope to convince students of the necessity to start today to reach tomorrow's goals.

Each of the 11 state officers are assigned 17 chapters to visit during the next year. They hope to spark enthusiasm for the FFA program.

Tonya works for Zoo America Wildlife in Hershey. As the FFA president, Tonya will be unable to continue to work full time, but said that the company is agreeable in working with her schedule.

She plans to concentrate on FFA

responsibilities this year and then attend a two-year college to major in accounting and later to land a job with an agriculture business.

Somewhere along the line, she'd like to attain one year's work experience in Germany.

"That, too, is following her brother's example.

Tonya's dad, Robert Herr, was a former FFA member. While in high school, he concentrated on production agriculture, but is proud that his children have honed leadership skills through the program.

"If I were back in school, I think I'd get more involved," he said.

Robert and his wife Ruthanne have six children who range 18 to 36 in age.

While in school, Darla was also a member of Future Business Leaders of America and vice president of her church youth group.

"But my main emphasis has always been FFA," she said.

Although she isn't making the decision yet, Darla said that after this year is completed, she might run for a national FFA office.

Those winning words: "I can, I can," will continue to be instrumental in shaping a positive, confident attitude within Tonya as she leads the state FFA chapter.



Darla points to the certificates hanging on the wall of her parents home. Each certificate is an honorary certificate for being a parent of an FFA officer.



Although a member of the Little Duchman FFA Chapter in Lebanon, Darla lives in Dauphin County with her parents, Robert and Ruthanne Herr. She transferred to Annville-Cleona because Lower Dauphin phased out their FFA program. Ironically, Annville-Cleona High School also phased out their FFA program the year Darla graduated.



The words, "I can, I can," continually play in Darla's mind as she tackles new responsibilities as the president of the Pennsylvania FFA organization.