

Flying Farmer Heads Lebanon County Farm Women

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) —

Almost 70 years old, married 50 years, the mother of 8, grandmother of 10, and a great grandmother should give Eileen Keller the license to slow down.

Instead, this Flying Farmer heads both the Pennsylvania Flying Farmers with its 102 members and the Lebanon County Farm Women Society with its 337 membership.

Since that doesn't keep her busy every minute, she volunteers at Hershey Medical Center, serves meals at the fairgrounds, cooks and waitresses for the Schaefferstown Fire Company, and oversees sewing duties for the Midway Church of the Brethren.

That, of course, doesn't cover everything Eileen does, but it does show that she puts her grandparents' advice to practice.

She said, "My grandparents always said, 'Don't be afraid to work.'"

Born in Maryland, Eileen was only 16 months old when her mother died. She was raised by her grandparents who moved to Lancaster County, and, when Eileen was 16 years old, to a farm in Lebanon County.

The farm was next door to the family who owned Keller Bros. Motor Co., which was the family of Eileen's husband-to-be Mark.

The couple married in 1945, and shortly thereafter, moved into a converted school house on Prescott Road where they continue to live.

World War II had just ended, and the adventure of flying captured Mark's attention. The GI program made it easy for him to take a flying and written test for a pilot's license. When Mark heard

about the Flying Farmers' Chapter that was being organized at State College, he flew to the meeting. The chapter met monthly and it wasn't long before the wives of the pilots decided to accompany their husbands to the meetings. Right from the beginning, family involvement became synonymous with Flying Farmers.

"Every month we'd gather on some farmer's airstrip on a Saturday. Sometimes, we'd (members) stay overnight. Local farmers would open up their homes and pack us in spare bedrooms, pull out cots or pile blankets on the floor," Eileen said.

The Kellers remember flying with as many as five of their children to these monthly events.

"I'd always keep my eyes open for a field in case we needed to make an emergency landing," Eileen said. Weather conditions did require them to make a landing in someone's backyard, but, Eileen said, "We never had any really close calls."

Although, Eileen never found time to pursue training for a pilot's license, she became a full-fledged member of the Flying Farmers and worked hard to promote the organization. She served as a past queen, which required her to serve as hostess and attend many of the conventions in other states. She has also held offices as secretary, vice president and two terms as president.

Back home, Mark worked for a Reading aviation company for 10 years and then for a Harrisburg aviation company for nine years.

"I was co-pilot for twin engine airplanes and logged more than 5,000 hours of flying time," he said.

In 1975, Mark returned to the

(Turn to Page B4)



Eileen's garden includes several stalks of sunflowers that she uses to feed the birds and squirrels on their farm.



At the International Flying Farmers' Convention held this summer, Eileen won this tractor.



Eileen and Mark Keller celebrated their 50th anniversary this year.

HOMESTEAD NOTES

Lebanon County Farm Women Hold Convention



New officers for the Society of Farm Women of Lebanon County are from left: Eileen Keller, president; Nancy Bennet, vice president; Susan Hawley, second vice president; Eunice Reist, secretary, and Ferne Hitz, treasurer.

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SCHAEFFERSTOWN (Lebanon Co.) — "You're an exceptional group of ladies who do many things quietly," Lois Bohn told the hundreds of women who attended the annual convention of the Society of Farm Women in Lebanon County.

In a recap of the many service projects completed by the 337 county members, Bohn said that the society's strength lies in the members who quietly go about helping others.

During the all-day convention held at the Schaefferstown Fire Hall, members elected new officers, honored 80- and 90-year-old members, and reviewed the society's accomplishments and treasury. Doug Allen, Channel 8 weather man, and Banjo Bob entertained the group.

In a humorous talk, Allen explained how weather patterns are determined and why weather reports sometimes go awry.

Presidents from other county groups also attended the convention. Naomi Bupp of York County reported that 20,000 Pennsylvania Farm Women Cookbooks have been sold. This year, profits from

cookbook sales provided six \$1,000 and six \$250 scholarships for children and grandchildren of Farm Women members.

Lebanon County has 337 members who are affiliated with the

(Turn to Page B5)



Television weatherman Doug Allen speaks at the convention.