



Years of involvement in Grange activities are captured in this pictorial account of the Wetzel family.

## Wetzel Finds Purpose For Living

**LOU ANN GOOD**  
Lancaster Farming Staff  
KUTZTOWN (Berks Co.) —  
"Every one on this earth is here for some purpose, and this is mine," Jeff Wetzel said of his involvement with the National Grange.

On his own time, Wetzel crisscrosses the U.S., holding workshops, seminars, and conferences at community and regional granges. As the national youth director, he travels 120,000 miles in his work with 600-800 young Grange members from 10-14 years of age.

Wetzel's enthusiasm for the Grange infiltrates every area of his life.

"The Grange is America's best kept secret," said Wetzel.

Although the Grange was founded in 1867 and has more than 300,000 members nationally, he finds many people are unfamiliar with the Grange or think that it is a secret organization.

According to Wetzel, the English word "grange" meant "community" or the "overseer property of the master."

Originally called the Patrons of Husbandry, it was the first farm organization in the U.S. The founders saw the need for broader education and self-development among farmers and the need to band together to put farming on par with other industries.

From the beginning, the Grange allowed women the right to vote and hold office within the organi-

zation. It was founded on family values and was a window of opportunity for the family.

"It's the one organization next to the church in which the whole family may participate."

Wetzel himself, he said, became a member when he was only 5 years old.

"My grandfather was a charter member and my parents have been members for more than 50 years," Wetzel said.

Wetzel rose through the ranks in leadership at the local, state, and national levels. He has extensive scrapbooks chronologically picturing that involvement. Almost every Grange honor possible has been bestowed on Wetzel.

His wife Cindy and he were chosen Pennsylvania Outstanding Young Grange Couple in 1986-87. The Wetzels then competed for the national title and were selected as the National Grange Young Couple of the Year.

In 1985, he was appointed State Junior Grange director. He organized eight new granges within a two year period, which resulted in him being named as the most outstanding junior director.

The Wetzels children, Allison, 20, and Jaimee, 18, often participate in grange activities with their parents. The family has won national placing for their musical vocals.

Public speaking is Wetzel's forte. "I'm a motivator. It's a God-given talent honed through my

years with the Grange," Wetzel said.

Over the years, the Grange has adapted to changing times and the needs of the community.

Wetzel himself had the words "illegal drugs" inserted in the resolutions that young members make in abstaining from alcohol and harmful substances.

The Grange promotes deaf awareness and offers assistance, much as the Lion's Club is known for helping the blind.

Today, the Grange continues to be a strong lobbyist for farmers and owns an 11-story building that is six blocks from the White House.

"It's the only house in that area that isn't owned by the government," Wetzel said.

The opportunities available for children are much the same as 4-H. The difference is that Grange has activities for all ages so that family can participate together rather than being fragmented into going in separate directions.

"Anyone can join. They don't need to live on a farm," Wetzel said.

To spread knowledge of the Grange, Wetzel organized a poster contest open to all public school students. The winners and their parents were then invited to an awards banquet.

"Thirty five non-grange members attended and 10 of those became members," Wetzel reported.

"For many years, the Grange stressed too much fun and not enough education in their children's program," Wetzel said.

His philosophy is to stress education, and fun will come with it.

Five youth members who assist Wetzel are selected annually. They attend an orientation in Washington D.C. for one week. They are assigned, one at a time, to travel with Wetzel to promote the organization.

Wetzel and the youth representatives are not reimbursed for time, but travel expenses come from donations from the 4,000 Granges across the U.S.

It has been Wetzel's desire to give 100 percent in his responsibility as Grange youth director. "But I don't want to spread myself too thin. I could not do what I'm doing

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Jeff and Cindy Wetzel with daughters Allison, 20, and Jaimee, 18.

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