



Marie Kieffer sits at the desk she occupied for 34 years at the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service in Somerset County.

## Kieffer Ends 34-Year Career With Extension

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Somerset Co. Correspondent  
SOMERSET (Somerset Co.)—Marie Kieffer decluttered her desk at the Somerset County Cooperative Extension office for the last time.

"I worked at the same desk for 34 years, that's the reason I retired," said the 1961 Penn State graduate, whose new home will be her old home—near Hershey where she grew up.

For weeks she's been transporting accumulated books and fabrics, from one house to the other. "My mother has asked me three times, 'Is that all the fabric?'"

Kieffer began her long extension career one week after college graduation. She was the assistant extension home economist.

Later, she winged it alone some 15 months, until a replacement for the previous home economist was hired.

Homemaker groups were popular at the time and Kieffer taught clothing construction and personal development. As women gravitated to the work force these groups dwindled with the members shifting their personal priorities.

She'll tell you firmly there's nothing routine about working in extension. Yet, being a helpful resource is a necessity.

"One of the on-going responsibilities of an extension agent is to answer personal assistance calls. Sometimes folks drop into the office, call by phone or write a post card about a problem they have," Kieffer said.

Food preservation questions are always popping up, for instance, about blanching green beans or canning venison. Or unfailingly, "What do I do with all this zucchini?" Kieffer admits the club-like veggie was more prolific than were her ideas for its use.

She's assisted the desperate in removing clothing stains (discovered after the wash cycles had set them in, usually from filled snuff boxes and crayons left in the pockets).

Then there were the not-so-routine dilemmas. Like the live turtle a woman wanted to kill and remove from its shell. Did Kieffer know how it should be done, which parts of the reptile were edible and how to cook them?



Marie Kieffer has retired from the Somerset County Cooperative Extension Service after a 34 year-career there. With her is Bob Brown who succeeds her as director.

"I didn't even try to get an answer," Kieffer recalls, "I suggested that she call the Pennsylvania Game Commission."

And there was the donkey that needed a diaper to appear in an indoor Christmas pageant. The organizers were not going to bait disaster inside their church.

This provided scope for imagination, even prospects for a reasonable solution—after the beast's gender was established. Later, Kieffer heard glowing reports about the donkey's success and popularity with the audience.

"One of the things about this county extension, it is very active in radio. Radio is great for public relations, contact with the general public and with farmers," she said.

For three and almost a half decades, her twice-weekly broadcasts each lasted about 15 minutes.

Another medium for public contact was television. Kieffer first faced the camera two weeks into her job and realized additional training would increase her comfort level. She returned to school for a radio and TV course.

Somerset County 4-H, however, was the biggest time consumer of her career. Since her first trip in 1962, Kieffer has accompanied hundreds of 4-H kids on 16 trips through the Interstate 4-H Exchange Program.

Pueblo County, Colorado was Kieffer's first. Having never been

further west than Pittsburgh, it was exciting.

She recalls how the railroad agent authorized an unscheduled stop at Rockwood's previously closed station so the 35 4-Hers and five adult chaperones, en route to Chicago, could hop aboard.

North Dakota came next. "You don't know what 'waving fields of grain' are until you see North Dakota," she says reflectively.

In 1966, Colorado was again the destination, namely the Tri-River area. Unlike the previous two excursions, the return trip had its trials and tribulations.

Plans for the day were to ride rail as far as Denver, go west by bus over the awesome mountains, and fly back again, to Denver. But to everyone's dismay, the national airlines went on strike that very morning. Transportation everywhere was in chaos. Cause and effect syndrome kicked in just as the 4-Hers were starting toward home.

The host extension agent, by dividing his guests into two groups, managed to arrange their return to Denver on small local flights. In Denver they were reunited.

Trains were running four hours late, but finally, they boarded one bound for Chicago, only to have it stop for an emergency. A passenger had had a heart attack.

The homebound connection

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