

# 'Family' Extends Beyond Farm, Into The Workings Of A City

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Upper Bern Township is a large family farm. "Quite a few of us work together there," he noted. They include wife Donna and children Jennifer, Michael, and Mark. Also, John's brother Terry and wife Kim and their children, Derrick and Laura, also work on the farm.

Hix was given a tour of City Hall, what "used to be a high school," he said, and remodeled. Originally he thought that the exchange would simply be a meeting where both would learn what each other did for a living. Hix realized later on, however, that he would actually "micromanage" the workings of city government for a day.

Hix quipped about the "hospitality" shown to a working member of society. He met the police chief and was "processed" in the system. They took Hix's mug shot, fingerprinted him, and put him in a prison cell, just to learn some of the not-so-satisfying aspects of the work that goes on downtown. On the better side, John did learn one thing: "Our neck of Berks County is one of the best kept secrets in Berks County," he said. "The only one who knows it's there is the tax collector."

For Hix, seeing the big birthday cake in the city hall rotunda, in honor of the 250th anniversary of Reading, was a site to see. He noticed also the posters of the different ethnic cultures in the city. He also had a chance to tour the buildings soon to be demolished to make way for the new Civic Center.

At the meeting, Hix learned about the podium where people get up to address city council. The topic at this meeting was about vicious dogs. But in his part of the county, a vicious dog "is a dog in serious trouble himself," he said.

Hix was born in Upper Bern Township, the second of nine children of Rae and Glenna Hix. He is a graduate of Hamburg High School. Hix has been on the dairy farm for 33 years. They farm 700 acres, owning 428 acres which includes corn silage, corn for grain, alfalfa for forage, and double-crop barley. They have 460 milking Holsteins and 250 replacement heifers.

Hix noted, "I would encourage anyone who is asked to do exchange (to do so)," he said. "There are an awful lot of fine people other there, and Paul (Hoh) is one of them."

At the banquet, Kathy Scogna, a local author and historian, presented snippets of her book, "The Ford at the Schuylkill: From Lenapehoking to Frontier Outpost." With illustrations, the book details the early history of Reading and Berks County. The book recounted the "frontier" past of Reading, beginning with the extensive work of Conrad Weiser, a frontiersman, who helped immigrants settle there.

Where before the area was inhabited by the Lenape, archaeologists and historians, through extensive work with artifacts, could piece together life in the city since its inception in 1751. In 1752, when Berks County came into existence, farmers, blacksmiths, tannery workers, bookbinders, winemakers, and others soon realized that "there wouldn't be a Reading without Berks and a Berks without a Reading," said Scogna.

Bit by bit, from logs in the woods near the river, buildings emerged. The churches were the "center of intellectual life in the community," she said. Conrad Weiser was instrumental in helping to establish the many churches in the city. At one time he served



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on the boards of directors for 30 churches, she said.

Everyone was a farmer. Many had to plant by the signs of the moon. Sheep were in lots. Wool was spun into cloth. "Every child in Reading learned to spin a wheel," said Scogna. The city itself had orchards and vineyards.

In the mid-1700s, Reading was the home of microbreweries. In 1773, there was one license for every nine residents.

Berks County went through a "ginseng" frenzy in the 1700s. Ginseng was one of the first cash crops in the county. "That shows we have always had innovative farmers here," she said.

Shopkeepers depended on goods and produce from the weekly supplies from local farmers.

April Frantz, director of historic preservation for the county, spoke about life in Reading and the county from the 1800s into the next century. The Industrial Revolution swept the city, and with the advent of the trolley lines in the 1800s, caused a movement of people to the suburbs. Hat factories and brick kilns made up a lot of the business, which also included breweries and bakeries (pretzel and cracker manufacturers). Much of the material was obtained from Berks County and surrounding areas, including a lot of wheat and other items.

Linette Candies, founded in 1927, eventually moved to Womelsdorf to expand the operation. Luden's, which eventually became a part of Hershey's Foods, began in 1881 and employs 400 people. Berks Packing, which began in 1933, employs 160 people.

Even a small company such as Faller's Pretzels, begun in 1913, employs five people, but still maintains a thriving business in the city.

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The second Public Relations in Agriculture Award went to the Dave and Kathleen Kline family, Sinking Spring. Dave, of East Side Dave fame and the Mountain Folk Radio Show, in back at right is GM of WEEU Radio and a member of Gougler'sville Grange. Kline was also honored for his dedication to the wide-ranging promotion of agriculture in the county. On hand to accept the award was Dave and his family, including Kathleen, his wife, back left, and children, front, Sasha, 7; and second row, Hilary, 9; and Dane, 12.



Paul Hoh, in back at right, president of the Reading City Council, spoke directly of his experiences as the 15th Annual Farm-City Banquet exchangee. In front is his wife, Kate. Also on the exchange was John Hix, manager and president of Skyline Acres, Inc., near Shartlesville in Upper Bern Township, left, with wife Donna.



Winner of the Tressie Caton Woman in Agriculture Award was Judy Schwank, extension horticultural agent and Berks County extension director, right. Schwank was credited with establishing the Master Gardener Program in the county, helping with the start-up of the Kutztown Produce Auction, and for other long-ranging horticultural services in the county. At left is William Hughes, vice president, agri-finance, First Union National Bank.