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BLUE LETTER

December 2020
No. 3824



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

As 2020 comes to a close, I encourage all employees to consider our accomplishments for the year. Most notably, we migrated to a working remotely status in a matter of a few days and managed to continue to provide Arkansans with many, if not most, of our programs and services for the remainder of the year. We are all in debt to our IT and Communications folks for their assistance with these efforts. We were able to keep our county offices mostly open, which was appreciated by most communities. My thanks to all the county employees who were on our “front line.” County programs are where the rubber meets the road, and you have my gratitude and support.

This year also included a switch to a new and complex, but in the end, better financial and work process management software. The entire Division made this jump, and we should all thank Financial Services, IT, Human Resources, and numerous transition team members who made this process successful. Along with

these big wins we have so many small wins that it’s hard to count. Having said that, our AIMS reporting is complete, and I am happy to say with the added pressure of educational efforts for COVID-19, our numbers overall were good and reflect an active, engaged and relevant extension service. Finally, our budget remains intact for the most part going into FY22. We should all be thankful for this as many of my administrative peers around the country will struggle with tough decisions this coming year.



Many of our most effective programs were highlighted at our 2020 annual Extension Employees Conference. I want to again thank all the winners and all of you who attended (virtually) and interacted on that day. It felt good to honor our deserving colleagues that day for sure. If you missed that event, I encourage you to watch the recording and send your congratulations to the winners. I will also say this — I am glad I was

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Extension Service Honors Excellence, Innovation Among Peers

On Monday, December 7, Extension held the first virtual Extension Employee Conference (formerly known as the State Faculty Conference). The conference is an annual event to come together to highlight programs and celebrate our accomplishments.

This year was no different except for the virtual format. The four presentations were highlights of educational efforts that have taken advantage of the current public health situation. They were proof that change is often the catalyst for growth.

We acknowledged state, regional, and national awards that employees received from professional associations and organizations. Recognition was given to those who have worked on the transition to Workday and to those who have worked for Extension for five, 10, 15, etc., years. A list of Length of Service awards can be found starting on page 6.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Five extension employees received scholarship awards to assist them in furthering their education and professional skills.

Terrika Edwards, administrative specialist II for the Pulaski County extension office received the Lynn R. Russell Endowed Award of Professional Excellence. Edwards is working toward a Master of Public Health at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

The Mildred and Liz Childs Professional Development Fund Scholarship was given to Mary Beth Groce, Faulkner County extension agent – family and consumer sciences. The scholarship enabled Groce to attend the 2020 Conway Area Leadership Institute.

Cooperative Extension Retiree Scholarships were presented to three employees this year.

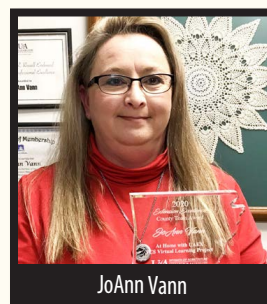
- **Melanie Berman**, program director for the Arkansas Procurement Technical Assistance Center received a scholarship to attend a project management professional exam prep course.

- Mississippi County 4-H Agent **Elizabeth Easley** received a scholarship to continue her education. She is pursuing a Master of Education in Human Resources and Workforce Development at the University of Arkansas.
- **JoAnn Vann**, County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Sciences, Clark County (Ouachita District). She is attending the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and working towards a Master of Science degree in Agriculture and Extension Education.

EXTENSION EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Faculty and staff found innovative ways to reach Arkansans throughout 2020's pandemic — from creating virtual learning opportunities to social media outreach to using technology. Bob Scott, director of the Cooperative Extension Service, commended this year's winners, who were nominated and selected by their peers.

“This year we saw innovative approaches by individual employees and team efforts led by faculty and staff at the Cooperative Extension Service,” Scott said. “All of them have found innovative ways to serve Arkansans through programs and services during a year of unprecedented challenges.”



JoAnn Vann

The County Team Award was awarded to **At Home with UAEX Virtual Learning Project**. The project is a statewide effort by Family and Consumer Science agents to conduct virtual learning in lieu of face-to-face meetings. The project mission is to provide educational opportunities to all clients while

increasing the visibility of Extension. Agents responded to the need for alternative learning methods created by the social distancing requirements of the COVID19 pandemic quickly by launching the first platform on 3/20/20 just two days after Extension began working remotely. The project now includes At Home with UAEX pages on the UAEX

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Rachel Chaney

Kristal Draper

Amy Monk

website, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and newsletters in electronic and print only formats. The complete team consist of 26 members with a total of 48 Extension personnel statewide contributing to content creation.



Shea Michelle Wilson

The core family and consumer science agents are Rachel Chaney, Yell County; Katie Cullum, White County; Kristal Draper, Hot Spring County; Carla Due, Miller County; Heather Jackson, Pike County; Amy Monk, Montgomery County; JoAnn Vann, Clark County; and Shea Wilson, Prairie County.

Communications Rapid Response to COVID-19 team

was presented with the State Team Award. Members include Chris Meux and Julie Thompson, designers; Ricky Blair and Kerry Rodtnick, videographers; Emily Davis and Oliver Williams, publication specialists; Ryan McGeeney, content specialist; Tracy Courage, director of communications-extension; and Mary Hightower, chief communications officer.



Tracy Courage

The Communications team created more than 350 social media posts formatted for multiple platforms (in multiple languages), three informational videos, and 439 news stories to present a cohesive and informative COVID-19 campaign. Every program area has asked for help in adapting to new methods of reaching clients. Social media



Chris Meux

graphics, profile or cover photos, virtual backgrounds and digital ads were created during the last six months to meet these needs. Communications videographers held video production and software virtual trainings (100+ hours) on how to shoot and edit video for virtual presentations and hosted weekly video production drop-in Zoom sessions.

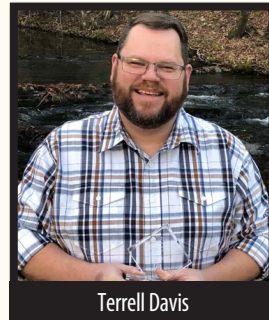
From virtual events to social media campaigns to online training, the Communications team provided crucial support to every part of the organization at both the state and county level.

The Early Career Award - Classified Employee is **Andrea Price**, associate for administration in Community, Professional and Economic Development. The nominator stated, “When I read about the Early Career Award, the first name that came to mind was Andrea Price.” Andrea supports some of CPED’s most visible and impactful programs such as UADA Virtual Town Hall Meeting, Virtual Support Staff Conference, Breakthrough Solutions and LeadAR. She is highly respected by her peers and recognized for her professionalism, responsiveness to others, and commitment to internal and external clientele. She knows how to meet people’s needs and treats others with a great deal of respect.



Andrea Price

Terrell Davis, Pike County, Staff Chair was awarded the Early Career Award - County Extension Faculty. From 2015 to 2020, the ANR program contacts grew from 5,000 to 54,000 due largely to Terrell’s social media presence. He makes sure all social media posts are backed by research and directs viewers back to UACES factsheets and websites. In June 2020, he began a new weekly podcast titled “The Pike Co Extension Minute.” The podcast is aired on two local radio stations for a combined estimated audience of 5,000 per week. His demonstrations throughout the county include beef, forages, poultry, small ruminants, and home horticulture. Terrell, a lifelong resident of Pike County, is a true champion of Extension. It shows through his work and the number of people he has impacted through technology, cost-savings, use of best management practices, IPM in forages, demonstrations, etc. He is fearless when it comes to trying new things.



Terrell Davis

Early Career Award - State Extension Faculty was presented to **Matt Fryer**, soil health instructor in Agriculture and Natural Resources. Matt has statewide responsibilities for improving farm productivity and profitability by helping producers implement soil and water conservation practices related to soil health. Through his leadership, Extension has established 20 county-based soil health demonstrations. These three-year demonstrations are in partnership with county

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agents and local NRCS field personnel. Matt provides leadership in soil health for the Cotton Research Verification program and the Arkansas Discovery Farm program. He has produced refereed journal articles, research series papers, conducted seven agent

trainings, moderated North Dakota State's Soil Health Nexus and was featured in four instructional videos, including one on proper soil sampling methods that has had over 6800 viewers. Bill Robertson and Matt were invited by the Soil Health Institute to produce 6 videos. His efforts have quickly elevated Extension's status as a national leader in soil health education.

The Early Career Award - Program Technician/Associate went to **Emily Smith**, program associate in Community, Professional and Economic Development (CPED). Since joining Extension in December 2018, Emily has quickly made a positive and significant mark with everything she has been involved in, including the LeadAR program, True Colors and Breakthrough Solutions. Emily was instrumental in developing a new partnership with KUAR to offer monthly 1-minute educational spots on public radio. Emily launched an outreach program to educate the public on the 2020 Census. She created a resource toolkit including social media content, newsletter articles, presentation slides, a display board, fact sheets and FAQs, train-the-trainer materials for use with volunteer groups, and COVID-19 related information. A direct quote from the nominator, "Emily is undoubtedly a rising star for CPED and the Division of Agriculture. We are fortunate to have her on our team."

Karen Watts DiCicco, digital and information technology innovation manager was awarded the Early Career Award - Project/Program Administrator. Karen's ability to include the latest technology innovations has put Extension at the forefront of innovative ag programming. Karen helped lead the web development team on a much-needed

redesign project for DD50, a web-based software application used by farmers throughout the state. The application has been key to Arkansas's rice production process for the past 20 years and was in desperate need of reprogramming to today's coding standards. This project is key to involving local producers with Extension best practices for rice production. She integrated new weather tracking data systems to send recommendations and text alerts to farmers soon as the information is available. These types of client-driven projects and Karen's innovation in technology coincides with Extension's history of assisting clients statewide.



Karen Watts DiCicco

Mary Poling, coordinator of interactive communications in information technology, was named extension's 2020 Employee of the Year. Poling played a pivotal role in helping employees take programs and presentations online through



Mary Poling

Zoom. Mary has assisted many employees with transitioning to a virtual format with relative ease. One nominator wrote, "Her past work and training with employees helped many of us prepare for current times, because we would have needed several additional Mary's otherwise." Mary's can-do attitude, attention to detail, and knowledge of the virtual world of training/meetings exemplifies excellence within Extension. With all the

challenges faced this past year, Mary Poling has been key to our successful navigation through this different world of Extension education. ■

Accomplishments and Lessons Learned (cont.)

not on the selection committees because I understand there were also some very deserving nominees who were not chosen. Thank you to all who served and thank you to my team that managed to pull together a nice event in a short time, after we made the decision to go all online.

As it stands right now, we will return still in phase II guidelines after the New Year. That means more masks, social

distancing and limited meeting size. I am hopeful that the new vaccines now being distributed will help push down the occurrence of new COVID cases in 2021 and the Cooperative Extension Service can get to whatever our new normal looks like. I will enter the holiday season and 2021 in hopes that COVID-19 will quickly become a distant memory.

Please stay safe over the holidays, and I'll see you next year! ■

Good News 2020!

Merit Payment for Division Employees

To say that 2020 has been difficult and strange is an understatement! COVID has changed the way we operate and socialize as well as tremendously impacted the state's financial situation and our personal finances.

However, even with these challenging times, the Division administration team has decided, as it did last year, to continue investing in our greatest asset: you.

We are making it a priority to provide a one-time, lump sum payment for full-time Division employees with the Dec. 23 paycheck. Based on your 2019 performance evaluations, the merit payment will provide a one-time 2% payment for all full-time Division employees. Eligible Division employees include those employed in an appointed position (with at least 20% appointment) who were employed as of the dates listed. The payment will be calculated on the employee's salary as of Nov. 5, 2020.

Eligible non-classified employees include current graduate assistants and those hired in a full-time position on or prior to Jan. 2, 2020, with no formal disciplinary actions or an unsatisfactory performance review on file during the 2019 performance evaluation period.

Eligible classified employees include those hired in a full-time position on or prior to July 1, 2019, with no formal disciplinary actions or an unsatisfactory performance review on file during the 2019 performance evaluation period.

We truly appreciate all that you do for the Division of Agriculture and the people of Arkansas. We hope this will help make your holiday season brighter and remind you of how much we truly value you. ■

Tech Corner

Hot off the Press

Checkout the newest help guide on "What do I need to do for Accessibility"
<https://division.uaex.edu/employees/information-technology/web-accessibility/>

SAVE THE DATES – 2021 MONTHLY TECH TRAININGS & OFFICE HOURS

- OU User Group: first Tuesday, 9:30-10:30 AM
- Tech Tuesdays: second Tuesday, 9:00-10:00 AM
- Social Skills: third Thursday, 9:00-10:00 AM
- Hump Day Hacks: fourth Wednesday, 2:00-3:00 PM

Congrats Length of Service Award Winners!

Five Years of Service:

Heather Akins, Randolph County
 Rachel Bearden, Hot Spring County
 Randy Black, Montgomery County
 Ida Brewer, Sponsored Programs
 Denise Brown, Finance Department
 Jennifer Caraway, Miller County
 Tyler Caston, Stone County
 Tara Clayton, Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences
 Debra Clevenger, Washington County
 Terrell Davis, Pike County
 Kristal Draper, Hot Spring County
 Ginger Ellison, Montgomery County
 Amanda Free, Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences
 Frey Freyaldenhoven, Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences
 Kayla Gill, 4-H Youth Development
 Victor Hernandez, Facilities Management
 Bob Hilton, Information Technology
 Robert Hoyle, Entomology & Plant Pathology
 Shaura Ivy, Drew County
 Chelsey Kimbrough, Animal Science
 Sandra Kirk, Hempstead County
 Taylor Knox, 4-H Youth Development
 Kim Krummel, Washington County
 Armenta Lockhart, Community, Professional & Economic Development
 Cathy Love, Benton County
 Linda McCargo, Animal Science
 Lauren McGarrh, Union County
 D.J. Moody, Vines 4-H Center
 Graham Peterson, Facilities Management
 Mary Poling, Information Technology
 Pam Pugh, Poinsett County
 Lee Riley, Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences
 Nytalya Salter, Human Resources
 Jan Sampson, Office of Chief Operating Officer
 Phyllis Scurlock, 4-H Youth Development
 Gretchen Skinner, Information Technology
 Courtney Spinks, Entomology & Plant Pathology
 Mike Vowell, Printing Services
 Heidi Ward, Animal Science
 Breana Watkins, Ag & Natural Resources



Ten Years of Service:

Sam Boyster, Office of Chief Operating Officer
 Cherie Bradley, White County
 Eric DeVries, 4-H Youth Development
 Gay Flaherty, Pike County
 Yolanda Harden, Sponsored Programs
 Ashley Henderson, Family & Consumer Sciences
 Christy Kelsey, Entomology & Plant Pathology
 Kathy Reece, Yell County
 Al Rosendale, Office of Senior AVP
 Mark Russell, Animal Science
 Amy Tallent, Prairie County
 Keri Weatherford, Ouachita County
 Pearl Webb, Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences



Fifteen Years of Service:

Barbara Batiste, Office of Inclusion, Access, & Compliance
 Herb Ginn, Crawford County
 Robert Goodson, Phillips County
 Kerijo Halpine, Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences
 Jerry Jo Hamm, Madison County
 Amy Heck, White County
 Alicia Huguen, Conway County
 Sherry Kaufman, Conway County
 Jerri Lephiew, Columbia County
 Trudy McManus, Benton County
 Robbie Rye, Pope County
 Steven Stone, Lincoln County
 Julie Treat, Horticulture
 Kevin VanPelt, Conway County



Twenty Years of Service:

Diane Clement, Cleveland County
 Kelley Cochran, Delta District Office
 Cecilia Harberson, Howard County
 John Hopkins, Entomology & Plant Pathology (Retired 11/30/2020)
 Chris Meux, Communications
 Katie Reddick, Pulaski County
 Stewart Runsick, Clay County



Twenty-five Years of Service:

Janet Beck, Cross County
 Rebekah Beene, Clark County
 Jerry Clemons, Delta District Office
 Danny Griffin, Van Buren County
 Roxana Jones, Little River County
 Claude Kennedy, Lonnn Mann Cotton Research Station
 Kimberly Magee, Community, Professional & Economic Development
 Sherri Sanders, White County



Thirty Years of Service:

Amy Hedges, Office of Senior AVP
 Laura Hendrix, Family & Consumer Sciences
 Sharon Reynolds, Ozark District Office



Thirty-five Years of Service:

Rebecca Bridges, Information Technology
 John Gavin, Bradley County
 Steve Hall, Information Technology
 Gus Lorenz, Entomology & Plant Pathology
 Kelly Thomason, Calhoun County
 Rick Wimberley, Cross County



Forty Years of Service:

Susan James, Information Technology
 Debra Schneider, Crawford County
 (Retired 8/31/2020)
 Branon Thiesse, Craighead County
 Sharon Treat, Phillips County ■



Grants and Contracts

PROJECT TITLE	AWARD AMOUNT	PI	GRANTING AGENCY
Produce Safety Rule YR4	246,750	Amanda Gail Philyaw Perez	Arkansas Department of Agriculture
Practices to Increase the Efficiency and Sustainability of Blackberry Production in Arkansas	78,000	Amanda L McWhirt	Arkansas Department of Agriculture
Poinsett County 4H - America's Farmers Grow Communities	2,500	Craig Allen	Bayer Fund
Enhanced Pest Control Systems for Mid-South Soybean	16,578	Terry Spurlock	Board of Supervisors of Louisiana State Prime Recipient and Agricultural and Mechanical College on behalf of the LSU Agricultural Center
Effect of Cultural Strategies and Application Technologies on Weed Control in Flooded and Furrow-Irrigated Rice	125,000	Thomas R. Butts	Mississippi State University
SCN Coalition: Reinforcing and Maintaining Local Effort and Sustainable Yields	17,000	Travis Faske	University of Kentucky Research Foundation
TOTAL AWARDS FOR NOVEMBER 2020: \$485,828			

Personnel Changes



Welcome aboard:

- **Sally Dugger** - Administrative Specialist III, Entomology & Plant Pathology, Lonoke, Lonoke County
- **Tabitha Hudspeth** - Project/Program Specialist, Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences, Little Rock
- **Danielle Johnson** - Administrative Specialist III, Horticulture, Little Rock
- **Cassandra Redden** - Administrative Specialist II, Texarkana, Miller County
- **Misty Douzart** - Administrative Specialist III, Marshall, Searcy County
- **Alicia Hogan** - Administrative Specialist III, Rice Research & Extension Center, Stuttgart
- **Amanda Stark** - Administrative Specialist III, DeValls Bluff, Prairie County
- **Betty Kirkpatrick Wingfield** - 4-H Program Assistant, Hope, Hempstead County
- **Lauren Crow** - Program Assistant, Hope, Fayetteville, Washington County
- **Aurelie Poncet** - Assistant Professor, Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences, Fayetteville

Farewell to:

- **Lillie Marie Teel** - Administrative Support Supervisor, Sebastian County
- **John Hopkins** - Professor - Entomology, Entomology & Plant Pathology, Little Rock