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Believing in the mission: Poling gives a lifetime of service to Extension

Richard Poling is an Ohio State University alumnus times three. Very proud of his alma mater, he did like any good Buckeye would do and emphasized THE Ohio State was the proper way to say the institution's name. His own son is now a student at Oklahoma State University, which is also commonly referred to as OSU. To differentiate the two colleges, Poling refers to his alma mater as TOSU to minimize any confusion there might be.

Poling graduated with his bachelor's degree in wildlife management in 1974 and went straight into graduate school. Two years later he graduated with a master's in agriculture economics. He had never been in 4-H growing up or really had much interaction with Extension before his graduate program.

The first time he was introduced to Extension was by working on a project under his advisor who had an Extension appointment. He became familiar with the mission of the organization and worked with several agents in Wooster, Ohio. Soon, a position for a community and natural resource development county agent opened, and Poling was hired for the job.

The Ohio native worked in that position for three years before the 4-H agent in his county retired.

"The remaining agents in the county decided we would divide up all of the 4-H activities until we got a new 4-H agent," Poling said. "My lot fell that I got summer camp and county fair. I got two of the biggest responsibilities of a 4-H agent, but I really enjoyed working with young people and club leaders."

After discovering a hidden passion for working with 4-H members and leaders, Poling applied for the next 4-H agent position that became available. He worked for eight years, and



the opportunity arose for him to get his PhD in ag and extension education. Graduating from Ohio State in 1990, he went on a journey that would eventually land him in Arkansas.

"My first job was at Clemson from 1990 to 1996 as an extension evaluation specialist," Poling said. "Then I got a job at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville as an extension evaluation specialist from 1996 to 2002. One day I got a call from Arkansas."

Poling was recruited by a former coworker to come to the Natural State in 2002. He worked as a program development specialist until 2017 when he retired. In the four years since he has been retired, he has kept very busy with various projects.

"I was the co-editor of the Journal of Human Sciences and

Save the date!

The **2021 Extension Retiree Luncheon** is July 1 at the C. A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center, Ferndale. "Reminisce and Reconnect" Reception begins at 10am. Program begins at 11am with lunch to follow. This year's program includes recognition of the 2021 CES Retiree Scholarship recipients, an update from Dr. Bob Scott, extension director, and a presentation from Jon Zawislak, Extension apiculture instructor.

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Extension,” Poling said. “I worked with one of my colleagues from Mississippi State, and we reviewed a lot of articles.”

He has also remained active in several professional

organizations including the Arkansas Association of Extension 4-H Agents and the National Association of Extension Program and Staff Development Professionals.

“It’s nice to keep up with former coworkers, both current employees and retirees,” Poling said. “I like going to conferences just to get new ideas and find out what’s going on with people. I also enjoy it when some of the new people come up to me and ask for suggestions.”

Being a true sports fan, Poling connects with his son over the subject. He has recently gotten involved with fantasy leagues competing against his son and others.

“I’m a huge sports nut. My son has gotten me involved in a fantasy hockey league and a fantasy college football league with him and some of his buddies from Oklahoma State,” Poling said. “My goal is to show up the young whippersnappers.”

Poling convinced his wife to get a puppy about a year ago, and they have had their hands full since. The shelter rescue named Maggie has kept them on their toes to say the least.

“My job was to train her because we got her just before everything shut down with COVID,” Poling said. “My neighbor

will come over and help me out, and that’s been pretty fun.”

After 40 years in Extension, Poling said that there was a secret to him sticking around so long.

“People. I did it for the people I worked with,” Poling said. “Whether it was working directly with clientele or with county agents, I enjoyed helping them.”

He said he would always have a soft spot in his heart for the kids he directly impacted during his time as a county 4-H agent.


“Seeing them grow up and crossing your fingers that they become successful people, and then getting to watch them become exactly that is what it’s all about,” Poling said. “I think knowing that I might have had just a small part in their journey to being contributing citizens and adults is such a rewarding feeling.”

Arguably, the best thing that came out of his time with Extension is his marriage.

“My wife was a 4-H agent in Illinois at the time that I was a 4-H agent in Ohio,” Poling said. “There was a meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, and we were sitting there at the end of the night. Everyone was getting ready to leave, and I asked her to dance.”

After sharing a dance in Omaha, they met again in Washington D.C. at the national leadership conference. They hit things off, and according to Poling, “The rest is history.”

Poling offered advice for anyone interested in working for Extension.

“You have to really believe in the mission,” Poling said. “It’s much easier to do a job when you believe in the mission behind it. I always loved hearing back from the people I helped and how it made a difference in their lives.” 

Variety being tested in Arkansas is yielding some ‘berry’ big results

There’s no trophy, but an informal competition between two Arkansas agricultural research stations does come with a little bit of bragging rights for the biggest berry.

The competition, now a few years old, comes in two flavors: strawberry and blackberry.

It pits the Vegetable Research Station at Kibler against the Fruit Research Station at Clarksville. The two stations host variety and production trials as part of their land grant mission within the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, the research arm of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. Variety trials help researchers determine which fruits might perform best under different conditions for farmers in Arkansas.

While the work is serious, a little friendly competition never hurts.

“One of my program associates, Lesley Smith, worked at the fruit station several years ago. The fruit station program associate, Taunya Ernst, had a competition for who could pick the largest blackberry,” said Stephen Eaton, director of the Vegetable Research Station. “When we started to grow strawberries, Lesley and Taunya started a competition between the two stations on who had the biggest strawberry.

“The prize has been for bragging rights. However, if someone wants to come up with a traveling trophy, it might get serious,” Eaton said with a laugh.

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Berries, cont.

Who won?

This year, Eaton fired the first volley, [tweeting a short video May 11 about his station's biggest berry](#). The chunky berry weighed in at 93.35 grams or 3.29 ounces.

“Even though we won last year’s competition, the Vegetable Station will concede the biggest berry this year to the Fruit Station,” Eaton said.

With strawberry harvest finishing on May 27, Jackie Lee, director of the Fruit Research Station, said the biggest berry clocked in at 95.8 grams, or about 3.38 ounces.

By comparison, individual strawberry fruits usually weigh in the 17-to-25 gram, or 0.6-to-0.88 ounce range over the season, Lee said.

Fronteras berries

At the heart of the competition is the research being done by the horticulture scientists to determine which berries can perform best under Arkansas’ growing conditions. Among the factors they take into account are resistance to disease, growth management and shipping quality, as well as consumer-friendly

characteristics such as color, flavor and size.

Both of the biggest strawberries from each station were the Fronteras variety.

“Fronteras is new to Arkansas over the last few years,” said Amanda McWhirt, extension specialist-horticulture crops for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

“It is known to have very large and uniform fruit and good flavor.”

McWhirt said that the researchers had 12 strawberry varieties planted at Kibler and six at Clarksville.

“It doesn’t surprise me that Fronteras was the biggest at both stations! It makes some giant berries,” she said. “Not everyone grows it, but it is being tried by growers more and more.” 



BERRY BIG — The Fronteras variety strawberry that won this year’s informal competition between research stations.

To our Extension retirees



Man, it’s hot. I just put that in as a filler and then after 3-4 days of heat I decided I would just leave it in. Heat or not, the Extension service is in full swing this June! After months of Zoom and online content delivery, the reports are coming in from the districts that agents are back out, renewing contacts, rekindling various clubs and programs, preparing for our in-person/virtual

events, and planning summer activities. It is good to see all this. I have said it several times, but starting my turn as director during the pandemic, with many working remotely in our office and limited meetings with counties or in-person at all has been weird. This feels more like what it should be.

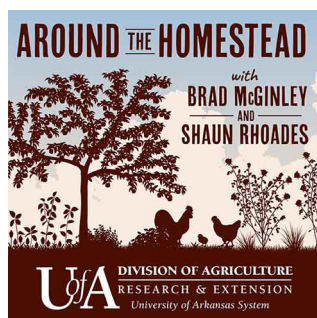
Even though we are glad to be back out in the “field”, we continue to develop quality online content. I do not think this will ever change as folks now have an expectation to go online and find it. If you have not heard it yet, be sure to check out [“Around the Homestead”](#) – a podcast devel-

oped by Brad McGinley and Shaun Rhodes. I can relate for sure to the first three episodes. I am committed to this new outreach tool and am in the process of investing in our communications program so that we can continue our focus on this area into the future. I just see it now as another means by which to reach our stakeholders and whether we wanted to or not, we are all now more adept at using digital media technologies.

Like many of you, I am looking forward to the 2021 Extension Retiree Luncheon at the C.A. Vines 4-H Center on July 1. If you have not heard Dr. Zawislak talk about bees, you are in for a treat. The Vines Center is ready to go for this event, and I look forward to seeing some old friends and making new ones while we “Reminisce and Reconnect”.

Finally, it pains me to let you know that the Cooperative Extension Service is saying goodbye to Mr. Sam Boyster this month. Sam began his career in Extension in 2010 as director of information technology and is ending his time with us as chief operations officer. He has been an invaluable member of our administrative team in all his roles, and he will be missed. Having said that, you all should join me in welcoming Sam to our Extension retirees’ group!

Get out and enjoy the summer – well maybe in the morning while it’s cool! 



July Birthdays

Jim Lee Wallace - July 1
Michael Hedges - July 1
Wanda Pemberton - July 3
John Gunter - July 3
James Jefferson - July 3
Sheryll Gregory - July 3
Brent Milligan - July 3
Randy Chlapecka - July 3
Shirley Hesselschwerdt - July 4
Veda Thompson - July 4
Mike Klumpp - July 4
Louise Williams - July 4
Jane Mowry - July 5
Joe Moore - July 5
Debbie Still - July 6
Millie Collins - July 7
Andy Vangilder - July 7
Betty Archer - July 8
Carolyn Lewis - July 8

Quinton Hornsby - July 8
Jim Bemis - July 10
Liz Childs - July 10
Linda Tanner - July 10
Thomas Vaughns - July 12
Carolyn Burns - July 12
Sung Lim - July 13
Dolores McBride - July 14
Gloria Taylor - July 15
Wally Goddard - July 15
Candace Carrie - July 15
Patsy Stephens - July 16
Nora Terry - July 16
Bobby Johnson - July 16
James E. Aikman - July 17
Susan Pickle - July 17
Debbie Archer - July 17
Ora Lee Yates - July 17
Joyce Whittington - July 19

Leon Ferguson - July 20
LeAnna Hicks - July 20
J. B. Williams - July 21
John Boyd - July 21
Helen Glass - July 22
Gail Kizer - July 22
Relda Washburn - July 24
Virginia Cottrell - July 24
David Foster - July 25
Earl Vories - July 25
Tony Windham - July 26
Debra Schneider - July 27
Mark Keaton - July 27
Ruben Johnson - July 27
Wanda Shelby - July 28
Tommy Thompson - July 29
Madlyn Mason - July 30
Edwin Colburn - July 31

Welcome new retirees!

Nancy Clark, Family & Consumer Science – LRSO

Nancy began her career with the LRSO Family & Consumer Science Department in January 2017 and retired on June 1, 2021. She was an Administrative Specialist III at retirement. Nancy retired with 4 years of service.

Cecilia Harberson, Howard County

Cecilia began her career with the Howard County Office in April 2000 and retired on May 15, 2021. She was an Administrative Specialist III at retirement. Cecilia retired with 21 years of service.

Linda Simpson, Benton County

Linda began her career with the Benton County Office in May 2009 and retired on May 15, 2021. Linda was an Urban Stormwater Program Assistant at retirement. Linda had 12 years of service.

Peter G. Faison passes

Peter G. Faison, age 97, of Little Rock, passed away on May 11, 2021. Peter retired from Extension in 1990 as an Extension Farm Records and Tax Management Specialist. Peter became 33rd degree Mason and pat General Conference Grand Most Worthy Joshua. He was a member of Bullock Chapel Temple C.M.E Church. Funeral services were held on May 29 with burial in Elmlawn Cemetery.

Scholarship donations

The following gifts were recently received to support professional development opportunities for faculty and staff of the Cooperative Extension Service.

Extension Service Retiree Scholarship Fund

James Barrentine

Frank Plafcan

John Payne

In memory of WC Young

JB Williams

Honorary or memorial donations should be forwarded to the Development Office, ATTN: Brian Helms, Cooperative Extension Service, 2301 South University Ave., Little Rock, AR 72204. If joint recognition is desired, please indicate. To ensure proper notification is sent, please also include in whose honor or memory the gift is made and the mailing address of the person to receive the notification.

Harvey Gordon passes

Harvey Gordon, age 67, of Starkville, Mississippi. Harvey passed away on May 27, 2021. Harvey worked with Arkansas and Mississippi Extension for more than 40 years before retiring. Funeral services were held June 5 at Emmuel Baptist Church with burial in New Prairie Grove Cemetery.