

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4912

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Betty Thompson, 405-522-6105, betty.thompson@ag.ok.gov

Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Carolyn Piguet

By: Kaylee Snow

VINITA – Our heritage is a love of the soil.

This phrase, engraved on the headstones of Carolyn Piguet’s parents, fuels her passion for agriculture.

One of her fondest childhood memories is watching the soil turn over as her dad plowed the fields. As the once buried soil resurfaced to the top, the field began its “restart.”

As a fifth-generation agriculturalist, Piguet considers it a family tradition, a part of life, a heritage.

Piguet grew up in Omega on the Kingfisher-Blaine County Line. Her parents, Delbert and Agnes Fisher, were wheat farmers and raised beef cattle. She graduated from Lomega High School with a class of 13 people.

She obtained a bachelor’s degree in biology from Southwestern Oklahoma State University and a master’s degree in counseling from Northeastern State University. She taught science, was an elementary school counselor, a testing coordinator and a principal before becoming the agricultural education instructor and FFA advisor at Vinita Public Schools in 2010. She is now one of only three Oklahoma agricultural education instructors to be Nationally Board Certified.

“The core bottom line of anything I’ve ever done, whether I’ve taught science or I did counseling or I did stuff with my kids, it’s always been somehow how it related back to that core of agriculture,” Piguet said.

The transition from science to agriculture was easy for Piguet because of her agricultural background and the fact that science is all about life cycles. What better way to show this than by teaching students about the process from farm to fork?

Piguet said teaching agriculture allows her to unite all of her passions. She considers herself happy, content and truly blessed through her position.

“I love agriculture,” she said, “and there’s not a better scenario in which to build leadership, build independence, build project gratification, than in agriculture. So it married a lot of my interests, and I’ve been blessed. Things have come together. The community has rallied. We have tremendous kids out of the program.”

Piguet’s favorite memory is when an older student was helping younger FFA members in the garden.

“He said, ‘I understand why you teach ... I can see these people growing, and I understand why this is such a cool thing for you.’ And I thought, that is so cool. No matter whatever I teach and whatever I do individually, if I can somehow instill that helping somebody ... makes you feel better as a better person, it doesn’t matter what subject area it is. That truly gives merit to whatever you’re doing,” Piguet said.

As her students grow as leaders, they begin to understand why Piguet loves to teach. She’s ecstatic to see some of her previous students pursuing careers in agricultural education and says it’s the “cream on top.”

“It’s just kind of indescribable,” Piguet said. “My thing on anything that I try to do, I want it to be long term. I want it to make a difference for a long time. I think it’s so important right now that we get people in this arena to keep agriculture moving forward.”

Everyone has a place

Piguet’s FFA chapter is involved in a diversity of projects. Aside from numerous career development teams, successful agriscience research and livestock projects, Vinita FFA members set themselves apart through their food truck, catering group and farmers market.

“We can find a niche to fit anybody’s interests,” Piguet said.

The chapter utilizes land provided by a community member to grow a chapter garden each year. Students bring their supervised agricultural experience projects to sell at the Vinita FFA Farmers Market Saturdays from March to September. Piguet said it teaches her students marketing skills, money management, record keeping, licensing, and how to build personal contacts. Last year, the market sold close to 500 pounds of tomatoes, 40-50 dozen eggs, three beef carcasses, and more than four pork carcasses, sold by the cut.

“What I’m trying to do is to really nurture that entrepreneurship and nurture that you can run your own business,” she said. “You can be resourceful.”

The Vinita FFA Food Truck, received through a grant Piguet submitted, allows her students to become involved in food production and customer service. They cook Vinita FFA-grown produce, which serves as a marketing tool. During the Saturday morning markets, students will serve breakfast to 150 people.

“Thinking out of the box is going to keep agriculture at the front end of things,” Piguet said. “If we go back to those scenarios where people have a bad stereotype of agriculture, it’s important that I teach kids to broaden their horizons and understand people and understand kind of where those things come from.”

The Vinita FFA Catering Group is a project Piguet carried over from her time as a principal for at-risk children. Students need to experience projects from start to finish, and food is a great way to do this, Piguet said. When she took over Vinita FFA, she continued the project, first at a small capacity. Now, the chapter caters around 20 weddings each year. Students take food handling classes and learn catering techniques through the group.

Piguet has students involved in vinyl-sign making, welding, wood projects, wildlife and more.

The chapter doesn’t make any money from the projects students bring in, but the money goes back to the students to encourage them to pursue state FFA degrees and proficiency awards.

“We spend some time breaking that stereotype that everybody has to have an animal or everybody has to be growing a crop because there are so many more things in agriculture besides just the production end of it,” she said. “That’s extremely important, and that is a component of it, but we try to find how you can match your interests up with something in that area.”

Family tradition

Aside from Piguet’s long family history of agriculturalists, other members of her family have also pursued the industry.

Both her siblings, Dennis Fisher and Marilyn Henderson, went on to work in agriculture.

Her husband, Jerry Piguet, traveled to cattle auctions and horse sales to offer temporary sale facilities through his agricultural marketing business. He grew up on a dairy farm and raised registered Limousin cattle.

Carolyn Piguet's daughter, Kelli Mitchell, 31, was a state FFA officer from 2005-2006. This became a driving force for Piguet's desire to later pursue a career in agricultural education in 2010.

"I learned so much about what the program really was ... and saw the benefit through the ag program and through developing leadership and connections," Piguet said.

Her son, Casey Piguet, 25, is a rancher and raises horses and cattle.

Piguet has two grandchildren, Cutter Piguet, 3, and Rio Kate Mitchell, 2, who will be sixth-generation agriculturalists if they choose to pursue the industry.

She could have retired six years ago, but she's hoping to continue teaching for at least 10 more years.

"I've got a whole list of stuff that I want to get done before that time," she said.

While most people at the end of their careers are looking forward to retirement, Piguet is just the opposite.

"I am very blessed and very thankful that I've got a position that I come to everyday that I enjoy, and there's something there for me that keeps it fresh and allows me to see some things that are being done," she said. "I just love agriculture. I love every component about it."

It's difficult for Piguet to imagine agriculture not being a part of her everyday life.

"Agriculture is a part of my heritage," she said. "It's going to be something that I'm going to promote. It is a true heritage and love of the soil and what can be promoted from that."

When asked what the industry means to her, Piguet said, "There is nothing that you could come across, to me, of any topic that is more who I am than agriculture."

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Editor's note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of industry professionals.

Photo Captions: Carolyn Piguet with her grandson, Cutter Piguet, at the Vinita Spring Livestock Show. She hopes to pass on her love for agriculture to her grandchildren.



Carolyn Piguet (far right) with her Vinita FFA students at the Oklahoma State FFA Convention.

