

Scholarship to Benefit Homeschool Students Endowed at Penn State!

from Howard Richman

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In February, Penn State University announced that George and Ann Kemp of White Oak PA have endowed a scholarship for homeschooled students who attend the College of Agricultural Sciences at Penn State. This is one of the first scholarships dedicated to homeschoolers at a public university in the country-- and maybe the very first.

I talked to George Kemp on the phone to ask him why he chose homeschoolers for this scholarship. He shared that he and his wife had once tried homeschooling, but didn't stick with it because they were building their business at the time, and needed Ann to work. Later when they were doing missionary work in Korea and Alaska, and when they ran a Christian bookstore, they ran into other homeschoolers. They especially remembered Ron and Carol Southwick and their five children, before the Southwicks moved to Titusville PA to develop their ministry for the deaf (their son Micah was a PHAA 2000 grad). The Kemps were always impressed with how bright the homeschooling children were. They also understood the financial sacrifice that homeschooling families make when the wife stays home, and they wanted to offer concrete help.

The scholarship will benefit homeschoolers who go to Penn State, with a special focus on those in the Agricultural Sciences college, where George Kemp got his start. Many homeschoolers have already gone to Penn State in agricultural science. For example, Rita Biddle (formerly Rita Wise-Favinger) of Williamsburg PA graduated with a homeschool diploma accredited by PHAA in June 2000 and then started Penn State in January 2001 in the Department of Agricultural Education. She majored in ag science and minored in animal sciences and international agriculture, graduating on-time in December 2004. After that Rita served as an intern for four months at Shavers Creek Environmental Education Center in Center County doing environmental education, camps and school programs. Since then she has worked for two years for local dairy farmers, David and Terry Rice, a homeschooling family from Williamsburg.

Rita worked both on the farm as a laborer and also helped them to develop and market new raw milk cheese products. She went to farmers markets, health food stores, and spoke to various groups promoting their products, even leading a class session at the Penn State Altoona campus.

Now Rita is working with her parents organic vegetable and pastured-meats and poultry farm, doing marketing and promotion for them. Ironically, she didn't take any marketing courses at Penn State, though that was one of the main things she has now learned. She did tell me that she learned at Penn State how to be more comfortable with talking in front of groups and that Penn State gave her a bigger picture of how the world works, including how to reach people with agricultural products.

In her spare time, Rita teaches at a Montessori School and works with her inlaws, her husband Matt's parents, who have a farm-supply business and a dairy farm. She is helping them increase their sales through marketing of bagged feed. Once she has her own children, she thinks that she may homeschool them, but she hasn't yet convinced Matt.

It is not necessary to go to college to develop a career in agriculture. Ryan Ward of Kittanning graduated with a homeschool diploma accredited by PHAA in June 1999 and got a job right away with COBA-Select Sires, working as an artificial insemination technician breeding dairy and beef cattle in Indiana and Armstrong counties. He has been helping the COBA business to grow in the area and bred more cows last year than any other technician for the company.

At first Ryan planned to take the technician job as a short-term measure in order to make enough money to buy his own farm, but the pay was so good that he eventually decided to sell his own very small herd of dairy cattle. He told me that farming is a very difficult business. Feed prices go up, milk prices go down, and sometimes you have health issues in the herd. He would enjoy going to Penn State or Cornell to pursue a degree in veterinary medicine, but probably will not because he needs to continue to make income to support his wife and 10-month-old child. In the meantime he gets to visit about 20 farms a day and fields almost as many health questions, breeding questions, and nutritional questions as a veterinarian would in a day's work. He can tell the farmers that he meets what other farmers are doing when they have similar problems. It's a good job and he enjoys it.

This new Penn State University scholarship will benefit homeschool graduates like Rita and Matt. Our hats go off to the Kemp family for their generosity and foresight. Thank you from the homeschoolers of Pennsylvania for continuing to make Penn State one of the most homeschool-friendly public universities in the nation.