

# Extension Homemakers: *Caring for home, family and community for a century*

by Brandon Beard

At the turn of the twentieth century, many women in rural areas — like Dubois County — were stay-at-home mothers who split most, and sometimes all, of their time between raising their children, caring for their farmer husbands, preparing countless meals for the whole family, and performing everyday household tasks to ensure a tranquil domesticity. These women were usually too busy taking care of their families to have social lives of their own or much interaction outside the home. And thus, in 1913, the Indiana Extension Homemakers Association was created in partnership with Purdue University through the federal Smith-Lever Act, the goal of which was to educate citizens on agriculture, home economics, and 4-H, along with other rural-focused subjects. Though initially referred to as Home Economics Clubs, the organization would then be known as Home Demonstrations Clubs during the 1950s, before finally settling on the name

Extension Homemakers in 1966.

The earliest days of the Extension Homemakers Association involved individuals from the Purdue University extension office in West Lafayette traveling throughout Indiana and instructing those interested on new and more efficient methods of housework. As the numbers of individuals involved in the Association increased, each county involved was assigned officers to work with local group members, who would then share new methods and information with the other members in their respective group meetings.

These meetings were not only educational for the women who attended — they offered a much-needed social time for members who might not otherwise have the time or opportunity to talk with people outside of their own households (the women would, of course, often bring their own children, who would play together while their mothers exchanged ideas on recipes, sewing, etc.). Pretty soon, Extension Homemakers became so popular

that clubs sprung up in bigger cities, while maintaining strong memberships in rural communities as well.

The Ferdinand chapter of the Extension Homemakers Association was officially organized on May 16, 1966. According to charter member and St. Henry resident Mary Alice Jochem, two women from the Jasper chapter met with several ladies at the Ferdinand Legion to suggest organizing an Extension Homemakers club in Ferdinand. And so it was. The initial membership of the Ferdinand Extension Homemakers consisted of 32 women. Jochem, who was busy raising children and running a flower shop out of her home, joined the group and has remained active in it ever since.

As times have changed and the world seems to move at a much faster pace than it did half a century ago, and certainly more women are working outside the home than during the early days of the Extension Homemakers' existence, Jochem opines it's more difficult to draw in new members. The Ferdinand chapter currently has 15 members, seven of whom were there from the very beginning of its inception 52 years ago. And a total of

86 members make up the seven clubs based in Dubois County.

"Now our meetings are more of a friendship thing and getting together to spend time with one another," Jochem says of the Ferdinand chapter. "We've all known each other for a very long time."

But the Extension Homemakers still play a vital role in the community. The Ferdinand chapter, for example, provides Dubois County 4-H with cookies and drinks on the organization's Achievement night, donates money to worthy local causes and individuals and less fortunate families, and several members also volunteer their time working at Scenic Hills' Bingo night. The group's biggest fundraiser each year is the booth at Christkindlmarkt where they sell crafts and baked goods.

The Extension Homemakers Association, over 100 years later, continues to provide members with opportunities to learn, grow, and make a difference in the world. And Dubois County is certainly all the better for it.

For more information about the Indiana Extension Homemakers Association, visit [www.ieha-families.org](http://www.ieha-families.org).

## Celebrating 100 years

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leadership and civic engagement, community and organizational planning, economic and business development, local government education, and creating quality places.

4-H Youth Development

A dedicated network of Extension educators, parents, local leaders and volunteer staff, makes Indiana 4-H one of the most valued youth programs in the state. Purdue Extension youth educators develop individual talents, life skills and leadership abilities among Indiana's young people through the traditional venue of 4-H clubs and county fairs, but also through field-tested school enrichment materials and local-led community programs.

The current Dubois County Extension Board includes:

Bonnie Bowlin, Samuel Ebenkamp, Tammy Lampert, James Mcfaul, Angie Sanchez - Hostetter, Jason Schmitt, Vicki Summerlot, Bill Potter, Dan Collignon, Neil Elkins, Janet Meyer, Brittany Massey, Ryan Grammar, and Dr. Jamie Pund.

Staff members manning the Purdue Extension Service office in Jasper (besides Eck and Dougan) are:

Lauren Haase, Program Assistant; Diane Lechner, Office Manager; Martha Lopez, NEP Assistant; Paula Street, Office Assis-

tant; Jennifer Monarch McGuire, Extension Educator-4-H Youth Development; and Ashlee Sudbury, NEP Community Wellness Coordinator.

Dubois County Purdue Extension Service began in 1917 and the organization is still going strong today in this, it's 100th year. To celebrate, the public is invited to attend a buffet breakfast on Saturday, November 10 starting at 9 a.m. in the Jasper High School Community Room. The breakfast, provided by Catering by Meyer, will include sausage, potatoes, eggs, biscuits, fruit, coffee and water for \$5 payable at the door (please RSVP by November 2, 4 p.m. to 812-482-1782 or <http://bit.ly/DuboisRSVP>).

The highlight of the morning, however, will be a presentation entitled The Story of Dubois County Agriculture presented by Lee Bilderback, an educator at Cedar Crest Intermediate School and a powerful speaker.

Farmer? Housewife? Engineer? Teacher? Pharmacist? Journalist? Whatever your profession it's a safe bet you've benefited in some fashion from the work of the Dubois County Purdue Extension Service and everyone is invited to the party celebrating 100 years of success.



From Dubois County Purdue Extension records of 1934: *The above group of County Home Economic leaders under the capable direction of Miss Frieda Stoll of Purdue and Mrs. Ira Blesch of Holland, County Chairman, conducted a well rounded out Home Economic Program in 1934.*

*Two new clubs were organized for the year, making a total of ten clubs with a membership of 337 enrolled. Twenty-six county leaders met with the Purdue Specialist four times during the year. One hundred two county meetings were attended by 2,760 individuals. The project of clothing was given the major portion of the time and attention. The improved practices, accessories, hats made, garments remodeled and new garments made was estimated to have saved all who participated a total of \$2,961.50.*