Gross "Rises Up" with SAE Grant Gift

A ten-year, $100,000 commitment to the Wisconsin FFA Foundation Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) Grant program soon will be opening doors of opportunity for students statewide. The Foundation is currently accepting applications for the 2019 SAE grants, and those seeking start-up grants will be pleasantly surprised when additional grant dollars are awarded in December.

Paul Gross, of London, Ohio, was a Wisconsin FFA State Vice President in 1989-90, serving from Section 10’s Johnson Creek chapter. Gross says he chose to support the Start-Up SAE Grant because he believes in taking chances and entrepreneurship, especially as a self-defined “serial entrepreneur.”

“The biggest mistake most people make in life is not making a decision for fear of making a mistake,” this FFA benefactor says. “Success cannot be achieved without strategic decision making and decisions always involve risk.”

Gross’ gift will provide highly sought-after funds to support Wisconsin FFA members as they look to begin projects and make decisions themselves. In 2018, 12 percent of applications for Start-Up SAE grants were filled ($5,200 of the $46,500 requested), thanks to long-standing Start-Up SAE Grant donors the Andis Foundation, Bluescope Buildings and Sartori, who continue to value an investment in the program.

The FFA Impact

“I’m just a simple farm boy from Wisconsin,” Gross says. “Aside from my parents, I attribute the foundation for my current personal and business success to the lessons, leadership and values that FFA taught and instilled in me.”

Though his father never graduated high school, Gross credits his dad for teaching him that nothing in the world couldn’t be accomplished through hard work, dedication and a commitment to community. He began his first business while still in high school: buying and selling hay, straw and raising cattle. Gross also owned his beef herd as part of his FFA project, which today is known as an SAE.

At UW-Platteville, he took on a new business venture, this time in the auto glass industry. Gross dropped out of school to continue building the company, which he eventually grew into the second largest windshield

Cont. on inside ...
The Foundation’s Star Mission Partners’ generous gifts have supported a new, integrated website for Wisconsin’s Agricultural Education Partners. Simply go to wisconsinaged.org to find all your favorite organizations in one spot: the Wisconsin Association of FFA, Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators (WAAE), Wisconsin FFA Alumni Association and of course, Wisconsin FFA Foundation.

The “Explore” page also offers a variety of reference and resource materials on agricultural careers, links to Wisconsin’s college programs and insight into the agricultural education three-circle model: classroom, FFA and SAE.

A major benefit of the new site is the ability for the state’s agricultural educators, who also serve as chapter FFA advisors, and their students/members to access information easily. They regularly need to register and prepare for conferences, submit award applications, and locate other event and scholarship/grant/award opportunities.

The Wisconsin FFA Alumni Association and Foundation pages complete the circle of information for the state’s many agricultural education advocates and benefactors. “We are pleased that the new site visually showcases the energy and excitement of our students in Wisconsin Ag Ed/FFA,” says Nicole Nelson, executive director for WAAE. “We are thankful for all the people and organizations who support their efforts, including the Star Mission Partners for enabling this project.”

Continued from Page 1.

Gross was inducted into the Blue and Gold Society in June.

SAE Start-Up Grant. He used the funds in a number of ways: one was to buy a new breed of pigeons (German Beauty Homer) and to find more ways to successfully raise the squabs.

Messmer’s geese flock also has seen improvements in fertility and hatch rates because of the increased pasture he made through a purchase of fencing with grant funds.

He spends time sharing his project with area youth, and says that he used funds to buy visual aids for these demonstrations. “This grant has allowed me to do things that would have otherwise been impossible,” Messmer explains. “I am able to better demonstrate various pigeon breeds to youth, separate sick or judge birds, but also provide them correct nutrition.”

A legacy gift such as Gross’ allows members to create opportunities just like Messmer’s. Gross says his hope is that FFA inspires many more future leaders through his Start-Up SAE Grant gift, “and that those students will benefit from FFA as much as I did.”

Continued from Page 1.

repair company in the country. Today he owns and operates two large, successful retirement communities and an insurance claim management company, as well as raises cattle with his family on several thousand acres in Ohio.

“I can enthusiastically share that I learned more valuable life and business lessons from my FFA experience than I ever did from any college professor,” Gross says, acknowledging Ralph Hemling, Ed Bielinski and Kevin Keith as big influencers in his life. “The FFA represented responsibility and lessons from the real world. It shaped my life in ways that still have a material impact today.”

Paying it Forward

Gross says those considering a legacy gift to Wisconsin FFA should reflect on the impact FFA has made on them. “How would your life be different if we didn’t have the benefit of that influence?” he asks, and adds: “Then pay it forward.”

Trever Messmer, from the Lake Mills FFA, was awarded a 2018 Start-Up SAE Grant. He used the funds in a number of ways: one was to buy a new breed of pigeons (German Beauty Homer) and to find more ways to successfully raise the squabs.

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Lake Mills FFA member Trevor Messmer received a 2018 Start-Up SAE Grant and used the funds to enhance his pigeon/goose project.
**Ag Instructor News...**

Wisconsin ag teachers will be heading to Anaheim, Calif., this December to join their peers for the National Association of Agricultural Educators 2019 Convention.

Two individuals and one program will be honored for their exceptional professional accomplishments: Glenda Crook, Outstanding Service Citation; Troy Talford, Teacher Mentor Award; and Chippewa Valley Technical College Horticulture Program, Outstanding Postsecondary Program.

Talford (Sauk Prairie), pictured above, says that his mentoring philosophy focuses on three tiers: 1. Learn from great mentors, 2. Disseminate knowledge, and 3. Reach out to a larger audience.

"I have been blessed to have several teachers who helped make sure my experience was a positive one, and in turn I have tried to do the same for others," he says.

Crook (Columbus), at right, has served on both state and national boards. Currently, she is leading the SAE for All charge in Wisconsin with Jeff Hicken, but also focused on sharing the initiative on a national level through workshops, podcasts and developing lesson plans.

"I know when I was a beginning ag teacher, I really appreciated the resources the veteran teachers were so willing to share with me to help me be successful in my classroom," she says. "It feels really good to be able to return the favor."

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**Donor Spotlight: CentralStar Cooperative**

CentralStar Cooperative Inc. (formerly NorthStar and East Central/Select Sires) has a long-standing history of supporting FFA, says Kelly Bristle, director of Member Relations and Promotions. In May of this year, the two cooperatives merged, to now offer a combined 150 years of experience in the dairy and beef industries. Its service area covers all of Wisconsin and Michigan, as well as north of Hwy. 50 in Indiana.

"The majority of CentralStar’s 400-plus employees grew up on farms, and were active in either 4-H and/or FFA," she says. “Today, many support local FFA chapters and alumni throughout our three-state area.”

CentralStar is a Convention Partner of the Wisconsin FFA Foundation, sponsoring an event which brought together nearly 4,000 people this past June.

Bristle says this FFA partnership is just one way the company feels it can give back to the ag industry, its customers and members.

"The opportunities students experience through involvement in FFA, along with the skills learned, help prepare them for a successful future," she adds.

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**Honors & Memorials**

- In Honor of Charles Adami – NCFC Education Foundation
- In Memory of Donald Armitage – Jane Thiel
- In Memory of Donald Armitage – Jeanine Pittman
- In Memory of Donald Armitage – Mark Landmark
- In Memory of Donald Armitage – Ronald C. Berman
- In Memory of Donald Armitage – Wesley & Jean Armitage
- In Memory of Dick Erstad – John & Darlene Arneson
- In Memory of Joyce Lemke – Tom & Donna Odeen
- In Memory of Pamela Neitzke – Tom and Steph Schultz
- In Memory of Bethany Rieth – Wisconsin Association of FFA

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**What will be your legacy to Wisconsin FFA?**

You can make a lasting gift to Wisconsin FFA in a matter of minutes.

To make a gift today, simply return the enclosed envelope.

Or, to learn more about other giving options, contact John Hromyak, Executive Director, at jhromyak@wisconsinffafoundation.org or via phone at 608-831-5058 x3.
Thank you,
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- Wisconsin Farm Bureau Foundation

Introducing the 2019-20 Wisconsin FFA State Officer Team
Front Row, L to R: Section 2 Vice President Lindsey Augustine, Ellsworth FFA; President Collin Weltzien, Arcadia FFA; Reporter Lydia Williams, Shawano FFA; and Sentinel Emily Sheehan, Parkview FFA.

Middle Row, L to R: Treasurer Curtis Weltzien, Arcadia FFA; Parliamentarian Joe Schlies, Denmark FFA; Section 10 Vice President Michelle Stangler, Watertown FFA; and Section 7 Vice President Daniel Clark, Spencer FFA.

Back Row, L to R: Section 4 Vice President Grace Morrissey, Shullsburg FFA; Section 1 Vice President Ryan Erickson, Barron FFA; and Secretary Jared Mack, Sauk Prairie FFA.

The 40th WI FFA Alumni Convention
When: January 31 - February 2, 2020
Where: Milwaukee Marriott West
Register at: wisconsinaged.org/events
Highlights:
- Keynote Speaker and Workshops
- Silent and Live Auctions
- SongBlast Dueling Guitars
- Annual Business Meeting and Banquet
- State FFA Officer Team “Reflections” program
- Tour and fish dinner @ Milwaukee Vincent H.S. Ag Dept.

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