

University of Arkansas,
United States Department
of Agriculture, and County
Governments Cooperating

No. 2

February 2016

Retiree Spotlight

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**DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION**
University of Arkansas System

Mertens Turned Love of Gardening Into Extension Career

Before Tom Mertens went to work at Extension, he spent 30 years doing “windshield time,” selling after-market automotive parts as a traveling salesman.

One day in the year 2000, he found himself without a job while living in Pulaski County. A friend recommended he chase a passion, gardening, and pursue a Master Gardener title. He thought it sounded like fun.

Back then, one of the requirements was to log 20 hours of volunteer work answering phone calls from folks who had gardening questions. Mertens loved fielding questions from the public, and that volunteer gig led to a job at Extension. The horticulture assistant was retiring from the Pulaski County Extension office and they offered Mertens the vacated spot in June 2001.

“Mostly what I did was answer questions from the public about all types of flora and fauna problems,” he said. “There were a lot of problems with insects.”

Mertens recalled one woman called and described what’s known as a “writing spider” and she wouldn’t be satisfied

until he came out to get rid of it. He captured the nonpoisonous spider and took it to his house, where it has propagated.

“I recently counted 20 on my two acres,” he said.

Mertens and his wife of 50 years, Sara, live in Carlisle. He retired from Extension in August 2009



Tom Mertens

after nearly a decade and was a Master Gardener for 10 years.

While working for Extension, the Mertens spent time as collectors. They have a nice collection of Ball and Mason jars, glass and porcelain insulators and beer coasters. They also collect vintage postcards, mostly dating from 1890-1915.

In the years covered by those postcards, the telephone and automobile industries were in their infancy and the average person never traveled more than 50 miles from home, Mertens said.

“A picture postcard became a window to the world,” he said.

Mertens said his most valuable postcard is one of an A-model Ford pickup next to a model of an aeromotor windmill pump. He said the value of a postcard is based on its subject matter, condition and rarity.

The Mertens have been postcard dealers (meaning they traveled to postcard shows to buy, sell and trade), but they’ve slowed down a bit.

Instead, Tom Mertens likes to tend his garden – he’s got garlic “running out of his ears” – and indulge his love of learning, about whatever topic is at hand, through research.

“Most days we go to the Carlisle Senior Center for lunch with our Methodist friends and to the doctor,” he joked.

To reconnect with Tom Mertens, contact him at 4200 Highway 70 East, Carlisle, Arkansas 72024-9131, 501-606-6734, tmertens555@gmail.com.

– *Shannon Magsam*

Cheryl Maxwell Had a Varied Career With Extension

When Cheryl Maxwell was a child, her mother was in a home demonstration club, so she was introduced to the Cooperative Extension Service early.

Maxwell became a 4-H'er and even lived in the 4-H House when she was a student at the University of Arkansas, where she met her husband, Richard. His dad had been a county Extension agent, so he understood the life.

With so many Extension influences, it wasn't any wonder that Maxwell graduated from college in 1967 and immediately went to work for the organization, taking a job as an assistant Extension home economist in Phillips County. After about six months, she went to DeWitt as a county Extension agent and she married her college sweetheart while there.

In 1969, Maxwell moved with her husband to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, where he was stationed in the Army. After he left for Vietnam, she came back to Arkansas and went to work for Extension in her home county, Union. She primarily worked with the youth and enjoyed the job.

When her husband returned from Vietnam, Maxwell resigned and the two went to graduate school. After they both earned degrees, Maxwell worked as a dietitian and also spent 24 years at the Arkansas Dairy Council.

Maxwell returned to Extension in the mid-1990s as a county Extension agent - family and consumer sciences in Fordyce.

Over the years, Maxwell vacationed in New Mexico and fell in love with the state. She decided to seek a job there and was an Extension home economist for two counties - Rio Arriba and Taos - for two years.

When her mother became frail, Maxwell took an Arkansas Extension job in Hot Spring County and then retired after a dozen years as a county Extension agent - family and consumer sciences in October 2013.

Although Maxwell and her husband never had children, they are very close to her sister's children. Her sister passed away when the two kids were young.

Maxwell also helped nurture many children in her time at Extension. While she was in Hot Spring County, she developed a day camp called Clover College. It was one of the highlights of her career. Also, while she was there, Maxwell was chosen to be a team leader as an agent specializing in food preservation for a national project. She and six others were hand picked from Arkansas for training and then did a series of workshops around the state and in their individual counties.



Cheryl Maxwell

Maxwell and her husband live in north Louisiana since retiring. She was able to finally become a Master Gardener (a long-time goal) and now she's on the board of the local farmer's market in Ruston, Louisiana.

Maxwell was instrumental in the farmer's market receiving a \$47,000 grant, and now she's helping to implement the funds.

When she's not working on farmer's market details, Maxwell likes to travel with her husband and fellow Master Gardener girlfriends (their latest adventure was to the Master Gardener seminar in Baton Rouge).

To reconnect with Cheryl Maxwell, contact her at 318-202-3014, 809 Robert Street, Ruston, Louisiana 71270.

- Shannon Magsam

Honorary and Memorial Gifts

The following honorary and memorial gifts were received to support professional development opportunities for faculty and staff of the Cooperative Extension Service. This list covers honorary and memorial gifts deposited Jan. 1-31, 2016.

■ Cooperative Extension Service Retiree Scholarship

Carol Sanders

In memory of Lionel Barton

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Honorary or memorial donations may be forwarded

to the Development Office, Cooperative Extension Service, 2301 South University Avenue, Little Rock, Arkansas 72204. To ensure that 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.

P. Allen Smith to Speak at 25th Anniversary Flower and Garden Show

Gardening and lifestyle guru P. Allen Smith will be part of the speaker lineup at the 25th anniversary Arkansas Flower and Garden Show on Feb. 26-28 at the Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock.

Smith will be speaking on “Connect: Health, Home and Happiness” at 1 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 27, at the Wally Allen Ballroom on the third floor of the Statehouse Convention Center. His presentation is included with the regular admission price to the show.

“We’re excited to have P. Allen Smith speaking at this milestone show,” said Krista Quinn, executive director of the Arkansas Flower and Garden Show. “Smith spoke at our first show and now he’s come full circle, joining us again for anniversary No. 25.”

This year’s show speakers include Billy Goodnick, author and landscape architect for the city of Santa Barbara, Extension horticulture specialist, author and columnist Janet Carson of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, and Jon Zawislak, Extension apiculturist, whose beekeeping short courses fill up almost as soon as they’re offered.

To see the complete schedule of events, visit <http://argardenshow.org/show-info/schedule-of-events/>.

March Birthdays

Peter Faison, March 1	Sue Seevers, March 14
Lynn Whitlock, March 1	Dorene Wills, March 16
Carolyn Hester, March 2	Doris Markle, March 17
Janet Hill, March 3	Nina Boston, March 19
Glenda McLaughlin Rushing, March 5	Larry Pitman, March 19
Danny McCarter, March 8	Danny Walker, March 21
Ann Brown, March 9	Charlie Parsons, March 23
Ethelyn McKinney, March 9	John Robinson, March 24
Alene Bates, March 10	Helen Morris, March 26
Bobbie Floyd, March 10	Thomas Moody, March 27
Bonita Mueller, March 10	Debbie Henry, March 28
Dorothy Rodgers, March 12	Patsy Hall, March 29
John Baker, Jr., March 13	Eddie Hubbell, March 29
Danny Allen, March 14	Karen Fite, March 31

From the Editorial Board



The 2016 Galaxy Conference is Wednesday, March 16, through Friday, March 18, at the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute on Petit Jean Mountain.

The retiree luncheon will be Thursday, March 17, at 12 noon. Dr. Tony Windham, associate vice president for Agriculture-Extension, will once again pay for the retiree and one guest to attend. Pre-registration is required for meal purposes.

Prior to the luncheon, AARP-Arkansas is sponsoring a retirees’ reception in the President’s Lodge for socializing and light refreshments beginning at 10 a.m. At 1:30 p.m., AARP-Arkansas will conduct a workshop, “How to Fight Fraud,” that retirees are invited to attend. AARP-Arkansas will also have a display at the conference.

To register for the luncheon, contact Bobby Hall’s office at 501-671-2284 or email bhall@uaex.edu. Please include your guest’s name when registering.

Retirees who plan to attend the full conference will be required to register online and pay accordingly. To register as a full-time guest, go to <https://www.regonline.com/galaxy2016>. Be sure to use “Retired” as a discount code, which reduces your fee by \$15.00 for a total of \$125.00. For assistance with online registration, contact Bobby Hall.

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