

Oregon FFA

Oregon FFA installs new state leaders

Nearly 1,500 members travel for convention

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

REDMOND, Ore. — The newest members of the Oregon FFA state officer team realized, shortly after their election Monday, that each of them had one simple thing in common when deciding to run for a position of leadership.

Each was inspired by a key figure along the way.

Take Andrew Gmirkin, who was chosen by delegates as the 2018-19 Oregon FFA state president. Gmirkin, of Eagle Point, Ore., does not come from a traditional agricultural background — his mom is a librarian, and his dad makes jewelry. He initially felt out of place joining FFA, until one of his chapter officers assured him that it does not matter whether he was raised on a farm or ranch.

“You can do anything in this organization you set your mind to,” Gmirkin said. “Now we’re here.”

Or there’s Mackenzie Price, of Sutherlin, Ore., who was elected state treasurer. As a freshman in high school, Price said she struggled with feelings of self-worth. It wasn’t until she attended a leadership camp that others helped her to realize her potential.

“I didn’t understand everything I was capable of,” Price said.

Together, the group made a commitment to be the same kind of people who help their peers feel confident to achieve their goals.

Devin Thacker, the newly elected state FFA secretary from Canby, Ore., said a big part of it is to just be yourself.

“That is honestly the best advice I’ve ever gotten,” Thacker said.

Elections took place Monday morning during the delegate business session, kicking off the final day of the 2018 Oregon FFA state convention held at the Deschutes Fair & Expo Center in Redmond, Ore. Nearly 1,500 FFA members — or “blue jackets,” as they call themselves — from 102 local chapters attended the convention to compete in career development events, at-



George Plaven/Capital Press

The 2018-19 Oregon FFA state officer team assembles for the final gavel of the state convention, held in Redmond, Ore. From left are Andrew Gmirkin, president; Dylan Westfall, vice president; Devin Thacker, secretary; Mackenzie Price, treasurer; Sundee Speelman, reporter; and Holly Silvey, sentinel.



George Plaven/Capital Press

Dylan Westfall, of Hermiston, delivers a speech shortly before state officer elections Monday during the 2018 Oregon FFA State Convention in Redmond.

tend workshops and network with colleagues.

In addition to Gmirkin, Price and Thacker, the state officer team includes Dylan Westfall, of Hermiston, as vice president; Sundee Speelman, of Adrian, as reporter;

and Holly Silvey, of Bend, as sentinel. They will spend much of the next year, post-graduation, teaching and hosting workshops at schools across the state.

Kourtney Lehman, who served as Oregon FFA president last year, said the experience gave her the independence and leadership skills necessary for college, while also shaping her perspectives on life.

“It was amazing,” Lehman said. “It really pushes us as people to be responsible, to be better.”

Lehman, of Baker City, Ore., plans to attend Oregon State University in the fall and will major in agricultural business management with a minor in either marketing or communications.

The state convention, March 23-26, featured a full schedule of events and competitions as students aimed to represent themselves and their schools at the National FFA Convention & Expo this fall in Indianapolis. FFA offers career development in areas such as job interviews, agricultural issues and parliamentary procedure, designed to enhance students’ critical thinking, speaking and presentation.

Several workshops also intro-

duced the kids to future opportunities in the working world. The OSU Teach Ag Club hosted “Day in the Life of an Ag Teacher,” while the Oregon Department of Agriculture and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service ran down careers available in their agencies to assist farmers and ranchers.

But the convention wasn’t all serious business. It afforded members plenty of opportunities to cut loose, dance and laugh with their friends. The final session almost had the feel of a rock concert, as state officers charged onto the stage beneath a tunnel of outstretched arms, music pumping and lights flashing.

The closing address went to Lee Wesenberg, the outgoing state reporter from Sutherlin. He boiled down the keys to success into six main points: personal philosophy, being your own hero, having intellect, conquering your reality and achieving excellence.

Spelled out, the acronym is P.H.I.R.E.

“Success isn’t about winning or losing. Success doesn’t even have a scoreboard,” Wesenberg said. “In the end, we must seek the impossible.”

FFA workshop highlights careers at ODA Agency responsible for breadth of programs

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

There are plenty of opportunities to work in agriculture beyond the farm or ranch.

That was the message of a workshop hosted by the Oregon Department of Agriculture during the 2018 Oregon FFA State Convention in Redmond.

Ben Krahn, livestock water quality specialist for the agency’s Confined Animal Feeding Operations program, gave a crash course on the vast inner workings of ODA, everything from foreign marketing and animal safety to helping neighbors resolve disputes.

Outreach to Oregon students is part of ODA’s latest five-year strategic plan — what officials call the “agriculture is cool” objective.

One thing ODA does not do is make laws, Krahn was quick to clarify. He described the department as servants of the Oregon Legislature, which in turn works for the public.

“We massage things to figure out what is in the best interest of everybody,” Krahn said.

In terms of helping to bring food from the farm to the table, Krahn said ODA not only works abroad by taking trade missions to countries such as China, but at home as well through programs such as the Buy Oregon initiative or Farm-to-School Network.

“In Oregon, we grow a crazy amount of food, and a crazy amount of products,” said Krahn, referring to the state’s more than 200 types of crops. “We help to market those products.”

Fostering co-existence between farms and neighbors is another major issue, Krahn said, and though it can be challenging to solve differences, it can also be fun and enlightening.

The agency also has responsibility for protecting natural resources through things like water quality and animal safety. Jobs are available with ODA doing things like brand inspections, health certificates and bio-security, Krahn said.

FFA members use downtime to test skills at state convention



George Plaven/Capital Press

Ethan Akers, left, and Zachary Ferguson, of the Heppner High School FFA chapter, practice welding patterns using crackers and spray cheese as part of an activity hosted by Blue Mountain Community College at the 2018 Oregon FFA State Convention in Redmond.

Blue Mountain Community College hosts event

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

Beau Dittmore had never before saddled a horse, but he was willing to give it a try Sunday morning at the 2018 Oregon FFA State Convention.

Granted, it wasn’t an actual horse, but rather a white plastic barrel fastened to a metal stepladder. Still, Dittmore learned the proper way to cinch a saddle around the makeshift steed while Anne Livingston, advisor to the Blue Mountain Community College Collegiate FFA, provided basic instructions.

“It was nerve-wracking,” Dittmore admitted when he was finished. “If it was a real horse, it probably would have bucked.”

Dittmore, a freshman at Culver High School in Central Oregon, was on hand to support fellow members of his FFA chapter at the state convention, held this year at the Deschutes Fair & Expo Center in Redmond.

BMCC Collegiate FFA, from Pendleton, Ore., was also on hand, bringing along a variety of hands-on activities for the high schoolers to try when they weren’t competing in an event, or waiting for the next workshop to begin.

Livingston, who is also director of marketing for the college, said the activities were meant to give kids something to do during their downtime, as well as introduce them to agricultural programs offered at BMCC.

“Nobody likes to walk up and talk to someone they don’t know,” she said. “But if they have a little something interactive, they’ll do that. That inspires the conversation.”

Apart from the saddle exercise, FFA members could test their skills in soil judging, practice welding patterns with crackers and spray cheese, or fly a tiny drone around an obstacle course marked by winding orange ribbon and blue and yellow balloons.

“It’s so fun to work with these kids,” Livingston said.

The event was originally envisioned to be a competition between BMCC and other collegiate FFA teams, but Livingston said the scheduling did not work out because many schools were on spring break.

Six students from BMCC willingly gave up the first five days of their own spring break to participate in the Oregon FFA State Convention, Livingston said. They hoped to show their high school counterparts that attending college is more than just sitting in a room with four white walls listening to lectures.

“Hands-on is huge,” Livingston said. “BMCC has relevant stuff.”

“Tough, durable, easy to put up. It’s the best product I could find and I’m going to build my whole farm out of it. And, being American made, you know this fence will last.”

- Denny Flynn,
Charleston, Arkansas
Member, ProRodeo Hall of Fame

@ **BEKAERT**
better together

Fencing for Life
Quality Construction • Made in the USA • Trusted Expertise