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Sherry Funderburg: Decades of Service

At the age of 16, Sherry Funderburg began her career with the Cooperative Extension Service at the Little Rock State Office.

“The summer of 1976, Albert Squires hired me and my twin sister, Mary Broach, as student workers during our senior year of high school,” Funderburg said. “It was a program where the student attended school in the morning and worked in the afternoon. I was assigned to Kenneth Bates’ office, who was the director of extension at the time.”

Funderburg said Inez Hennigan and Shirley Hesselschwerdt, secretaries to the director and associate director, had a significant influence on her first year of employment.

After graduating high school in 1977, Funderburg was hired for a position in the purchasing department of the extension business office and continued in that role until 1984.

“That year computers were being introduced into the offices, and Jerry McIntyre was very instrumental in the placement of that equipment in the counties. He transferred to the computer department to assist with the installation and training, and I moved into his position.”

Funderburg worked as the purchasing agent until 1993, when her daughter Jessica started kindergarten. She then worked part-time until 1999, when she moved to a full-time position in the payroll department as a payroll services specialist.

“In 2011, when my daughter married, I decided to make a change,” Funderburg said. “I was hired by Sharon Reynolds as the Ozark District administrative assistant. After Sharon retired, I worked for Kevin Lawson as his assistant until my retirement on June 30, 2023 — 47 years after I began with extension. The last 12 years of my career were probably the most rewarding because of my friendships with each and every employee in the Ozark District.”

In her retirement, Funderburg said she’s enjoying spending time with her husband Dewane, who retired in 2019. The couple made several camping trips around the state in July and even went on a two-week vacation in Alaska.



Sherry and her husband Dewane visit Alaska.

“We have made up a lot of lost time with the smartest little 6-year-old ever, our grandson Marshall,” Funderburg said. “I enjoy pick-up duty twice a week from school, and we go on lots of adventures.”

Funderburg serves on the board of the Cooperative Extension Service Federal Credit Union and said she uses her monthly visits to the Little Rock State Office to catch up with her former coworkers and friends.

“We seem to just pick up where we left off on the last visit,” she said. “I sure miss them, but I keep telling them to save their money because this retirement gig is pretty sweet.”

After nearly five decades at extension, Funderburg said her favorite part was helping county agents and staff do their jobs and improve the lives and communities of Arkansans.

“Extension has always been a good fit for my personality,” she said. “Also, I always had the best supervisors in the world. I never had a bad one, from the beginning with Albert Squires to the last one with Kevin Lawson. Why would I stay 47 years if I wasn’t happy!” ■

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Ryburn family donates 1940s veterans quilt to Cleveland County

A 1940s quilt embroidered with the names of more than 900 Cleveland County World War II veterans has quietly been passed down through generations of Artie Ryburn's family — and now it has once again changed ownership. Its new home is the Cleveland County courthouse, where it will be permanently displayed.

The quilt is a gift from Pamela Ryburn Pruett, a Mississippi County Extension family and consumer science agent with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. Pruett's grandmother, Artie Elizabeth Hamilton Ryburn, helped hand-stitch the red, white and blue cotton quilt.

"It has been a prized possession in our family for many years," Pruett said. "We thought it only right that it return home to Cleveland County for the families of these servicemen to enjoy."

The Cleveland County Service Men's Quilt was unveiled Nov. 11 — on Veterans Day — inside the courthouse in downtown Rison where more than 50 residents gathered to see the quilt's unveiling and to celebrate Veterans Day.

The late Artie Ryburn and her husband, Albert Alexander Ryburn, were Cleveland County natives, and Artie was a member of the Mount Carmel Home Demonstration Club — the precursor to today's Extension Homemakers Clubs. She was among the group of women who made the quilt in 1944 as a home demonstration club project to raise money for war bond effort.

The 9-by-9-foot quilt has 36 squares, and each square includes the names of 24 servicemen embroidered with red or blue thread. More names are embroidered in white on the quilt's red side panels. Gold stars were stitched by the names of those who died in combat, and silver stars indicate acts of valor.

"The quilt was raffled in 1945 to raise money, and my grandmother won the raffle," Pruett said.

When she died, the quilt passed to her son, Doyle Ryburn, who served in the Army on the European front and whose name is on the quilt. His wife, Marilyn, then passed it on to Pruett.

"My grandmother wanted the quilt to stay in our family,"



Pamela Ryburn Pruett and her family gather by the Service Men's Quilt that Pruett's grandmother helped make in 1944. From left to right, back row: Luke Pruett, Tim Scholes, Kim Ryburn Ferguson, Thomas Pruett, Pam Ryburn Pruett, Lauren Mitchell, Penny Ryburn Scholes, Liam Pruett, Ken Pruett, Alicia Baldwin, Sara Mitchell, Pat Ryburn. Front: April Pruett and Elliot Pruett

Pruett said. "Our family wanted to do something very special to honor its story and the many veterans who served their country. We want their families to be able to enjoy it too."

Pruett, who works with Extension Homemakers Clubs in Mississippi County, reached out to Karen Bell Fox, a member of Cleveland County Extension Homemakers Council. Fox and the EHC club worked with the county officials and the Cleveland County Historical Society to secure a place inside the courthouse to display the quilt.

Home demonstration clubs, like the one Artie Ryburn was a part of, were an important outreach of the Cooperative Extension Service, which started in the early 20th century as an experiment in adult education. The home demonstration agents taught farm women improved methods for accomplishing their household responsibilities and encouraged them to better their families' living conditions through home improvements and labor-saving devices.

"During the war, there was a need to teach families how to can and preserve food, how to care for families, how to stretch a budget, even how to make a mattress," Fox said. "Extension Homemakers have a rich history in Arkansas, and our mission continues to be education, leadership and community service." ■

Governor pardons two turkeys during Turkey Week

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders pardoned “Hank” and “Davie” during a Turkey Week Celebration Nov. 17 at the Governor’s Mansion in Little Rock. The event, coordinated by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, recognizes the value that turkey producers bring to the state’s agricultural industry.

“We want to continue to support, grow and do all we can to increase the agriculture industry here in Arkansas,” Sanders told a group of more than 100 industry officials, legislators, members of Arkansas 4-H and Future Farmers of America and other guests.

This year’s lucky turkeys were raised by Jackson Barber, 15, of Cabot, who has provided the turkeys for the governor’s pardon for three years now. Barber, son of Tom and Scharidi Barber, is part of FFA and Arkansas 4-H.

While it was Barber’s third turkey pardon in Arkansas, it was Sanders’ first as governor, and she called the pardons a “fun and nonpartisan way to encourage Americans to give thanks.”

Sanders said she was pardoning Davie and Hanks “so they can enjoy a peaceful Thanksgiving.”

“We don’t want to see them anywhere other than right here,” she said. ■



Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders pardons two turkeys ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. The two turkeys were raised by Jackson Barber, 15, of Cabot (left).

Division of Agriculture invests in high tunnel research, resources



Taunya Ernst, High Tunnel and Urban Agriculture Instructor for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Utah native Taunya Ernst is using her multi-state experience with high tunnels to help Arkansas producers adjust a traditionally cold-climate tool for warmer areas as the new high tunnel and urban agriculture instructor for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Although high tunnels are typically used in colder climates to extend growing seasons, growers in Arkansas and across the Southeast have adopted them for shade and weather. However, because high tunnels are relatively new to warmer climates, there is a shortage of resources for high tunnel usage in the Mid-South.

This lack of resources became more apparent as Arkansas growers increasingly took advantage of the Natural Resources Conservation Service high tunnel cost-share program.

Ernst’s extension instructor position was created through a Natural Resources Conservation Service Technical Assistance Grant to Division of Agriculture’s Amanda McWhirt, horticulture production specialist, and Aaron Cato, horticulture integrated pest management specialist.

“We are excited to have a position dedicated to supporting growers statewide with technical assistance on high tunnels, particularly as the number of high tunnels increases in Arkansas,” McWhirt said. “Taunya has vast experience growing multiple annual and perennial crops in high tunnels, developing extension materials and she brings a unique expertise due to her work for a commercial indoor-farming company.”

Read more [here](#). ■

January Birthdays

Kelly Gage - Jan. 1	Steve Culp - Jan. 11	Shirley Cleek - Jan. 18	Nina Coffee - Jan. 25
Betty Harrison - Jan. 3	Scott Stiles - Jan. 11	Martha Ray Sartor - Jan. 18	Jacquelyn McCray - Jan. 26
Doris Thomas - Jan. 5	VeEtta Simmons - Jan. 12	Douglas Petty - Jan. 19	Judy Belle - Jan. 26
Earlene Brecheen - Jan. 6	Beth Phelps - Jan. 12	Jerry Williams - Jan. 20	Allen Davis - Jan. 26
Sammy Lee Cline - Jan. 7	Ricky Thompson - Jan. 14	Becky Bridges - Jan. 21	LaVetta Perkins - Jan. 27
Alva Siler - Jan. 8	Kimberly Wiedower - Jan. 14	Cora Nash - Jan. 22	Shirlye Hopkins - Jan. 28
Mona Norris - Jan. 8	Bill Robertson - Jan. 16	Ramona Gordon - Jan. 23	Margy Cannon - Jan. 28
Keith Martin - Jan. 9	Shirley Bennett - Jan. 17	Donna Rinke - Jan. 23	Gary Huitink - Jan. 29
Terrie Treadway - Jan. 9	Robert Seay - Jan. 17	Laura LaRue - Jan. 24	Rebekah Beene - Jan. 29

Protect against COVID-19, flu and RSV during holidays



As families and friends gather to celebrate the holidays, it's important to protect against COVID-19 and the flu by getting updated booster shots for both illnesses. For older adults and infants, RSV also poses a dangerous health risk.

"There are three important things we can do to help keep ourselves and our families safe during holiday gatherings," said Bryan Mader, extension health specialist and assistant professor. "First, encourage friends and family who you will be seeing around the holidays to get their flu shots and their updated COVID-19 booster if they have not done so already. While we have seen a reduction in COVID-19 cases over the last several months, we are seeing an uptick in the number of flu cases and other respiratory diseases like RSV, which makes the flu and COVID-19 vaccines all that much more important."

Mader said that secondly, if one is not fully vaccinated, has a weakened immune system or plans to be around friends or family members who have weakened immune systems, he or she should consider wearing a mask when not eating, or holding gatherings outdoors to reduce close contact with others.

"Third, and probably the easiest, wash your hands regularly," Mader said. "We all became professional hand washers during COVID-19, and continuing this practice can help defend against flu, COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses."

As difficult as it might be to miss getting together with family and friends, Mader said that "if you are sick, you should stay home and plan to make alternative arrangements, such as virtual gatherings, or rescheduling in-person holiday events until recovered." ■



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