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DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
RESEARCH & EXTENSION

University of Arkansas System

January 2025

No. 1

## 4-H clubs deliver holiday cheer; community service a year-round effort

Arkansas 4-H members learn early on the value of service to their communities. During the holidays, their efforts shine especially bright.

Across the state, 4-H members are finding creative ways to spread holiday cheer.

In Mena, Christmas came early for 68 senior citizens through Polk County Extension's Santas for Seniors project. About 20 Polk County 4-H members and volunteers delivered food and gifts last week to nursing home residents and elderly individuals in need.

"I love doing community service because I get to help people, and I get to have fun with friends," said Kylee Horn, 10, who was busily packing food bags for assisted living residents at PeachTree Mena.

The Polk County extension office, part of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, has hosted the countywide project since 2012. Over the past month, dozens of Polk County residents stopped by the extension office to pick up paper Santas, each of which listed a recipient's age, gender and wish list. Purchased gifts were returned to the extension office for delivery. The recipients — mainly older individuals who lack family —

had modest requests, including clothing, blankets, socks and slippers, pajamas, tissues, snacks and heaters. One recipient asked for a Keurig coffee maker, while another

requested a cell phone. Both had their wishes fulfilled.

"Their wish list is not a guarantee, but many folks who shop will get those higher-priced items," said Polk County 4-H agent Claire Williamson, who coordinates the project. "Many of the residents were nominated and have no idea they're getting anything. We'll be delivering to all four corners of Polk County." Read more [here](#).



Polk County 4-H members pack food bags to deliver as part of the county's Santas for Seniors community service project.

## Save the Date!

The **2025 Spring Retiree Meeting** is Monday, March 31!  
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. | C. A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center  
No. 1 4-H Way, Little Rock, AR 72223

### THE INSIDE STORIES

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## New director of Delta District brings decades of experience to Cooperative Extension Service

As the new director of the Delta District for the Cooperative Extension Service, JJ Jones brings decades of experience in agriculture, natural resources and economics to the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Prior to joining the Division of Agriculture, Jones worked as an agriculture and natural resources program leader and ag economics specialist for the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service for 20 years. He began his career as an area specialist in farm management at the University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service in 1994, where he worked for 10 years.

"JJ Jones comes to us after many years of service to Cooperative Extension in both Oklahoma and Tennessee," said John Anderson, director of the Cooperative Extension Service for the Division of Agriculture. "Working from county and area



positions in extension, JJ has built a strong national reputation for quality work. He is a nationally recognized authority on the economics of small ruminant production.

"He is also well respected among his peers, as clearly demonstrated by his leadership in the National Association of County Agricultural Agents," Anderson said. "JJ has great experience in working across programmatic lines and in linking the resources of the land-grant system to county-level programming. I think he is ideally equipped to step into district administration, and I am excited to see what we can accomplish together as he takes on this role."

Jones received a bachelor's degree in animal science and a master's degree in agricultural economics, both from Oklahoma State University. In his new role as director of the Delta District, Jones will oversee extension staff and programs in the eastern swath of Arkansas.

Read more [here](#).



## Vines Center nabs 5 'Best of Biz' awards

The C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center is still the fan favorite for special events, company retreats, team building and business conferences. For the seventh consecutive year, the center has won five Best of Biz titles.

The awards are given annually by Arkansas Business, and winners are selected based on votes from the public. The awards were announced in December. The Vines Center has won these categories each year since 2018.

In the Employee Outing category, the Vines Center finished ahead of Goat Lab Brewery and Topgolf.

"It's an honor to be recognized for these awards, and it says a lot about our team members at the Vines Center who work very hard to make sure our guests receive a great experience in every way," said John Thomas, managing director for the Arkansas 4-H Foundation. "The added bonus is that every business group that uses the Vines Center is helping to support the 4-H youth who come here from all over the state for camps and other activities. It's a win-win for everyone."

Read more [here](#).

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Arkansas Business 2024

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## New extension associate district directors



### Kris Boulton

has been named the Ouachita associate district director.

She joins administration after serving 13 years in the Saline County

Extension office as an FCS agent and most recently as Saline County staff chair. Previously Boulton worked in Clark and Van Buren counties.

She started her extension career as a 4-H summer intern in the summer of 1999. In her pre-extension life, Boulton was a licensed private investigator.

Boulton earned a BSE in education, family and consumer sciences at Henderson State and has a master's in human environmental sciences from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.



### Brad Runsick

has been appointed the Ozark associate district director. He comes to the Little Rock State Office from Baxter County where he served as staff chair.

Runsick joined the extension service in 2008 as an agent in Searcy County before moving to the same position in Fulton County.

Runsick is the current past president of the Arkansas County Ag Agents Association. He earned a bachelor's in ag business from Arkansas Tech and a master's in Agriculture, Food and Life Sciences with a plant pathology focus from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville.



### Pia Woods

joins the district administration team as associate district director for the Delta after six years as Jefferson County staff chair.

Woods has done extension work for 28 years, joining as 4-H program assistant in the sister 1890 program.

She was named extension's first female African-American staff chair with her appointment in 2019.

Woods has a bachelor's degree in human development and family studies from UA-Pine Bluff and a master's degree in human resource workforce development education from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville.

## Extension offers tips for tax filing

Tax filing season officially began Monday when the IRS began accepting paper and electronic tax returns.

The agency expects more than 140 million individual tax returns to be filed by Tax Day, April 15. More than half of all tax returns are expected to be filed this year with the help of a tax professional.

Dr. Laura Hendrix, associate professor for personal finance with the Division of Agriculture, offers tips for filing for filers looking to save money on tax preparation.

**Get faster refunds by** filing electronically and using direct deposit.

### **Avoid fees for advance refunds**

— Tax preparers may charge extra for advance refunds. Advance refunds are short-term loans that come with fees in



addition to the charges for tax preparation. Some tax preparers may offer pre-paid cards or set up accounts that could come with even more fees or out-of-network ATM fees.

**File for free** using the one of the free tax preparation options.

**Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)** and **Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE)** sites do free tax prep in person. For locations, check here <https://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep/>

**AARP Tax Aid** provides free assistance in several in-person locations in Arkansas and online for filers who had AGI (Adjusted Gross Income) of \$84,000 or less. <https://secure.aarp.org/applications/VMISLocator/searchTaxAideLocations.action>

**MilTAX** — Service members and their families, including retired and National Guard can file for free with MilTAX. <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/financial-legal/taxes/miltax-military-tax-services>

Locate the closest Taxpayer Assistance Center to you at <https://apps.irs.gov/app/office-locator/>.

## February Birthdays

Melody Curtis - Feb. 1	Edward Rhodes Jr. - Feb. 4	Joy Buffalo - Feb. 10	Larry Holeman - Feb. 22
Michael McClintock - Feb. 1	Fran Tomerlin - Feb. 5	Steve Rodery - Feb. 11	Gerald Van Brunt - Feb. 23
Phillip Sims - Feb. 1	Mark Phillips - Feb. 5	Yvonne McCool - Feb. 11	Rebecca Thomas - Feb. 23
Leo Espinoza - Feb. 1	Sheila Brandt - Feb. 5	Ann Ward - Feb. 12	Doyne Potts - Feb. 24
Bobby Huey - Feb. 2	Belinda Miller - Feb. 6	Keith Lusby - Feb. 13	Robert Felsman - Feb. 24
Booker Clemons Jr. - Feb. 2	Dora Dinnan - Feb. 7	Sharon Lillard - Feb. 15	Jeri Vangilder - Feb. 24
Charlotte Chitwood - Feb. 2	Beverly Hines - Feb. 7	Brian Helms - Feb. 16	Charles Johnston - Feb. 26
Brenda Waldrum - Feb. 2	Marie Corbin - Feb. 9	Paula Seago - Feb. 18	Clara Garrett - Feb. 26
Bob Reynolds - Feb. 3	Catherine Koch - Feb. 9	Lynda Lee - Feb. 20	James Geisler - Feb. 27
Larry Sandage - Feb. 3	Allan Beuerman - Feb. 9	Delores Sowerbrower - Feb. 21	Larry Keaton - Feb. 27
Carol Patterson - Feb. 4	Ella Geisler - Feb. 10	George Davis Jr. - Feb. 22	Linda Simpson - Feb. 27
Beverly Henderson-Vincent - Feb. 4	Jimmie Gooch - Feb. 10	Denise Murdoch - Feb. 22	Carole Scaramuzza - Feb. 28

## Message from the director



One thing about January, it sure does get over with in a hurry. I am sitting down to write this month's article on the last Monday of the month. In other words, the month is basically over, and I haven't yet figured out what I want to say about it. To those of you out there who still haven't taken your Christmas lights down, I

get it. It's hard to keep up with January.

If, like me, you have been running a little behind, let's take a minute to catch up together. As of Jan. 6, our CES administrative team is complete. Shane Gadberry – well known to us for his years as a beef cattle specialist in animal science – has assumed his responsibilities as Agriculture and Natural Resource (ANR) program leader. J.J. Jones is on board as our new Delta District director. J.J. comes to us from Oklahoma Cooperative Extension, where he served many years as an area specialist as well as in district administration. And finally, our new Associate District directors started in their new roles at the beginning of the month: Pia Woods (Delta), Kris Boulton (Ouachita), and Brad Runsick (Ozark). This is an energetic and engaged group, and they have some great ideas for moving our mission forward. I am excited to see what we can accomplish together.

Departments have picked up where they left off at the end of last year in terms of interviewing and hiring. Extension faculty positions have recently been offered in Entomology

and Plant Pathology (ENPL), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), and Biological and Agricultural Engineering (BAEG). Speaking of hiring, internship positions are now open across multiple departments in CES. I am a huge proponent of our internship programs. It takes a lot of work to provide students with a quality internship experience — something that is more than just a line on the resume but that actually helps them develop a vision for what their careers can be. The county agents and extension faculty who supervise our interns go above and beyond to make sure those interns have a meaningful career development experience. If you know of a college student, particularly a rising junior or senior, looking for a worthwhile internship, let them know about Arkansas CES internships.

Finally, January is the season for meetings. Production meetings are well underway and will continue through early March. Many of our extension personnel and stakeholders are also involved in national and even international conferences and events this winter. As I write this, I know we have multiple personnel – along with our 4-H state officer team – at Farm Bureau's national convention in San Antonio. Several others will attend the International Production and Processing Expo (IPPE) in Atlanta this week. The pace of educational meetings and conferences at the local, state and national level will be fast and furious for several more weeks. Meeting season is a lot of work, but it offers us wonderful opportunities to highlight the amazing work and the outstanding people of Arkansas CES.