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At 103, retired home economist Lois Perkins is an expert in how to live at home

Lois Perkins is a dynamo.

At 103 years old – 104 in January – you’ll still need to make an appointment in advance if you want to visit with her. She doesn’t sit still long, to be sure.

When we first spoke, Perkins was coming in from a church picnic and didn’t have time to chat. She thought maybe after church on Sunday might be a good time, so that’s what we did.

Perkins has been part of Arkansas Extension since she was a child in the 1920s. She was a 4-H student and particularly loved making her own clothes. So it was no surprise when she wanted to work for Extension right out of college. She married her husband, John, in the late 1930s and started working for Extension in Pine Bluff in 1941. After finishing out a year there, she moved to McGehee, accepting a job as an Extension Home Demonstration Economist for what was then called Negro Work.

She was in McGehee for 23 years, working with 4-H students and homemakers, before moving to Ashley County, where she retired as an Extension home economist.

Perkins and her husband, who was killed in 2001 when a tornado came through and ravaged his hometown of Wilmot, never had children of their own. However, Perkins had plenty of 4-H kids to guide and mentor.

She appreciated how children are malleable, open to making changes and learning. But she also taught plenty of old dogs new tricks. In working with homemakers throughout her career, she taught them to make do with what they had. She said the 40s and 50s were marked – at least in the rural areas where she traveled – with a strong desire among the people she worked with to “improve.”

“Do what you can do for yourself,” she said.

It’s a philosophy she still abides by. Perkins is a font of wisdom about all things related to “living at home.” To her, that means many things, including growing and preserving your own food, sewing your own clothes, even keeping your own chickens.

Perkins admonishes that you shouldn’t just grow flowers, but be sure to plant something useful like a row or two of okra, maybe some mustard greens for healthy meals. She says a home garden is essential and indeed she has one of her own, which she tends daily.

After she retired in 1973, Perkins and her husband didn’t set their sights on traveling or collecting possessions. They dug in even further to the idea of home living, raising fruit trees, fruit vines, sheep, hogs and cattle.

“We tried to be economical,” she said. “Coming up, my mother taught me to do all these things.”

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Lois Perkins

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John Tyson adds \$1 million gift during dedication ceremony for the new 54,000 square-foot building named for his father.

Regional retiree meetings held in McGehee and Clarksville

Regional retiree meetings were held Oct. 25 at Hoot's BBQ in McGehee and Oct. 27 at the Fruit Research Station in Clarksville. Pictured below are some of the participants.

The retiree board wishes to thank the following individuals, businesses and organizations for donating items for door prizes for the meetings.

Apple Spice Junction – gift cards

Chicken Express (Arkadelphia) – gift cards


Cracker Barrel Old Country Store (North Little Rock) – gift cards

Gadwall's Grill (Sherwood) – gift cards

McAlister's – gift cards

Richard DeSpain – prints

Starbucks (Russellville) – coffee and mug

UA Department of Food Science – apple butter and muscadine juice 



Jimmie and JoAnn Bowling, Howard and Inez Young, Massie and Marie Silva (Clarksville).



Bill Dodgen and Bobby Malone (Clarksville).



Joe and Judy Vestal, Rick Cartwright, Vickie Huddleston, Marvin and Frances Wall (McGehee)



Kim Wiedower, Brenda and Bruce Vick and Sheila Brandt (Clarksville).

New retiree

Susan Watkins, distinguished professor in Poultry Science, retired Oct. 31, 2017. Susan was employed for 21 years in her role as an Extension Poultry Science faculty member. 

Who you gonna call?

Below is updated information about who to call when you have questions about or need help with your retiree benefits.


- **UMR** (retirees under 65)
1-888-438.6015. Contact information is on back of your insurance ID card.
- **UnitedHealthCare Medicare Advantage** (retirees over age 65)
1-800-457-8506. Contact information on back of card.
- **BCBS Dental** (federal and UA retirees)
1-844-662-2281
www.uasdental.blueadvantagearkansas.com
- **The Standard Life Insurance**
1-855-839-9885, www.standard.com
- **TIAA-CREF**
1-800-842-2776, www.tiaa-cref.org
- **Fidelity Investments**
1-800-343-0860, www.fidelity.com
- **APERS**
1-800-682-7377, www.apers.org
- **Federal OPM**
1-888-767-6738, Boyers, Pennsylvania...call at 7:00 am CST
- **CES Human Resources**
1-501-671-2219, Donna Rothberg or Del Johnson 

Retiree scholarship donation

The following gift was received to support professional development opportunities for faculty and staff of the Cooperative Extension Service. This list covers scholarship donations deposited Oct. 1-31, 2017.

■ Cooperative Extension Service Retiree Scholarship

James Peachey

Honorary or memorial donations may also be made to the scholarship fund and 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. 

To our Extension retirees

We trust this issue finds you in good spirits and ready or getting ready for colder weather. November is a transition month, with Arkansas' climate trying to make up its mind as to whether to freeze you some days or heat stroke you others. But within the month are those clear, crisp days when you feel refreshed and so glad to live in this beautiful place. I think there are at least four or five days like that every year.

I thank all the retirees who have attended the regional meetings the past month or so. It truly was great to see the Extension family members that we don't see or talk to each day and catch up a bit. On Nov. 14 in Little Rock, we finished the meetings with about 70 retirees, mostly from the central Arkansas area, but some driving in from quite a distance. I really appreciate Brian Helms, Verna Waddell, Amy Hedges and other staff that I forget for making these regional meetings such a success. If you missed out on these, we do plan to have an annual retiree conference in March of 2018, details to follow at a later date.

I hope you read closely the article in this issue about Lois Perkins, a remarkable testament to living well, to advancing the Extension mission to improve lives and to making do with what you have. At 103 years young and counting, she is a gift, and I know that she will continue to teach others what is real and true and important. And these things are what I was reminded of again in the retiree meetings this fall, by so many of you – what is true, what is important, what is real – your legacy in Extension lives on.

– Rick Cartwright



December Birthdays

Becky O'Neal Mulhollen, December 1	Brenda Yusko, December 18
Dena Malone, December 2	Mary Askew, December 19
George Morris, December 2	Agnes Dean, December 21
Linda C. Thompson, December 6	Suzanne Smith Hirrel, December 21
Barbara Bennett King, December 8	Maureen Rose, December 21
Toy Helen Ginn Siler, December 8	Gayla Brewer Taylor, December 22
Richard DeSpain, December 9	Dennis Gardisser, December 24
Albert Squires, December 9	Merle Gross, December 24
Margaret Alexander, December 10	Audrey Hairston, December 24
Joyce Pugh Bowlin, December 10	Cheryl Maxwell, December 24
Shirley Lewis, December 11	Mitch Crow, December 26
Ann Behnke, December 12	Margaret Goodson, December 26
Claude Clement, Jr., December 12	Sandra Smith, December 27
Millie Ann Henson, December 13	Denise Roulhac, December 28
Donna Graham, December 14	Saundria Ash, December 28
Jerry Markham, December 14	Betty Jean Brannan, December 29
Charles Hodges, December 15	Thomas Leslie, December 29
Dennis Holzhauser, December 16	Gordon Barnes, December 31

Tyson family adds \$1 million gift during dedication of landmark ag research building

Alongside Garland Avenue, on the highest point overlooking the Arkansas Agricultural Research and Extension Center, the Don Tyson Center for Agricultural Sciences promises to be the new standard for agricultural research and education in Arkansas.


Construction of the new building was stimulated by a \$5 million gift from Tyson Foods and the Tyson family to the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

On Nov. 16, during a dedication ceremony for the new 54,000 square-foot building, John Tyson, Don Tyson's son and chairman of Tyson Foods, pledged an additional \$1 million toward the expense of furnishing new laboratories in the center.

Tyson said he learned during conversations just before the dedication that there was still a need to equip some of the labs in the research wing of the building. He pledged the \$1 million from the Tyson family and said he hoped other donors would join him in contributing toward the important work that will be done there.

"This is an unexpected addition to their generosity," said Mark Cochran, vice president of agriculture for the University of Arkansas System. "We've got about 40 percent of our lab space that still needs to be finished, so this will help us fill out those laboratories, so we can get more scientists and more graduate students into that research wing."

The two-story building's two wings provide modern laboratories and workspace for Division of Agriculture scientists and graduate students, ample meeting space for extension and education programs and administrative offices for the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, which has been based in Fayetteville for more than 125 years.

"We're very fortunate to have the relationship we have with the Tyson family and Tyson Foods," Cochran said. "They've been longstanding benefactors of our programs within the Division of Agriculture and Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences." 



The Don Tyson Center for Agricultural Science, exterior northeastern and eastern views of the building.



Barbara Tyson cuts a ribbon inside Waldrip Hall at the dedication of the Don Tyson Center for Agricultural Sciences Nov. 16, 2017.

Perkins (cont.)

Perkins still makes her own clothes and her own meals several times a day.

It's impressive, said her friend Henryetter Curtis, who was visiting Perkins at her home recently.

"When she speaks of living at home, that's what she does," Curtis said. "She's an exceptional lady. She is very determined, and the Lord has blessed her with strength."

The two women met at church many years ago. Curtis expressed awe that her friend still drives herself to church, prepares her own meals – and even cooks food for other folks at church. She has five nieces and two nephews who visit, although they don't live in Arkansas. Her sister lives in Denver.

"When you come into her home, she's cooking for people," Curtis said.

Perkins doesn't seem fazed by the praise. She's just happy to be able to do all the things she wants to do, and live the way she was raised to live: humbly and with what she has on hand.

Perkins is heartened by the idea that home living is experiencing a resurgence among young people, including crocheting, keeping chickens and other homesteading activities.

However, she warned, "It's not an easy thing to live at home."

– Shannon Magsam 

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Yes, I want to support the fundraising initiative in support of the Cooperative Extension Service Retiree Scholarship.

Enclosed is my gift of \$_____. My gift is in honor / in memory of _____.

Name/Address for notification of honorary and memorial gifts: _____

Please make check payable to the **UA Foundation** and mail to Martha Thorpe, Communications Dept., 2301 South University Avenue, Little Rock, AR 72204-4940.