

**2009 National Distinguished Ruby Award Lecture
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"Making a Difference"

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Professionally, it doesn't get any better than this! I was thrilled to get the call from Ellen Burton that I had been selected the 2009 Distinguished Ruby Award winner. I knew that my Kansas colleagues had nominated me, and I was so very appreciative of their support for this tremendous recognition. But I thought it would end there, that I would be here in Fargo, learning from someone else at this lecture.

The Ruby award is the highlight of my Extension career, and I want to express my thanks to the wonderful Extension professionals of Epsilon Sigma Phi. I thank all of you for your support through my years of service to The Cooperative Extension Professional's Organization, Epsilon Sigma Phi.

I also want to thank, and recognize my colleagues from K-State Research and Extension, and the Alpha Rho Chapter of Epsilon Sigma Phi for their nomination, and for their presence here today. Would my Kansas colleagues please stand so that those at this luncheon can join me in recognizing and thanking a great group of Extension professionals that make a difference in the lives of Kansans each and every day?

It was at our recent National ESP meeting in Charleston that I ran into former ESP Southern Region Vice-President Dr. Sally Soileau. A few months after that meeting, Sally and I started visiting by phone, and ultimately, I made the decision that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with this extra special Extension professional from Louisiana. We announced our engagement last year at the Galaxy conference, and were married on February 28 of this year. Please allow me to introduce an outstanding Extension professional and Epsilon Sigma Phi member from Louisiana, my wife, Sally Lindquist. She is making such a wonderful difference in my life.

I am sincerely humbled in receiving this prestigious award. The list of previous winner's reads like a Who's Who of the Cooperative Extension Service. I hold each of them in such high esteem and have been privileged to know, interact with, and learn from many of them. They have indeed, made a difference, for the Extension system and for me personally.

There was a bit of trepidation that crept into my mind, once the euphoria of Ellen's call wore off. I knew from my experience with Epsilon Sigma Phi that I would be giving the Distinguished Ruby Lecture at the national meeting this year. Dick Wooten, 2005

Distinguished Ruby winner and a former Extension colleague in Kansas, called to congratulate me, and in the course of the conversation, teasingly reminded me, there was an expectation for the Ruby Lecture to be somewhat profound.

I don't know if this speech will be particularly profound, but I have titled the talk, "Making a Difference" and perhaps you will be led to think about those that have made a difference in your life, or how you are making a difference to someone in your life outside of Extension, or how your work as an Extension professional is making a difference in the lives of those you serve.

I want to give you some thoughts about my philosophy regarding Extension work, and how Extension professionals have, and may continue to make a difference in the lives of the people we serve. As agents of change, we have the challenge to engage others with our research-based information and issue-based programming, and to help individuals and communities to make informed decisions to improve their quality of life and economic viability.

But first, I would like to share a little about my story and some of the people and experiences that have made a difference in my life. I grew up on a diversified livestock and crop farm, the oldest of seven children. My father started as a tenant farmer, and we moved farming operations six times before settling into a farm south of Waterville, Kansas when I was in the 4th grade. One of the schools I attended was an eight grade, one-room country school. I took my two children to see this school a few years ago, so that they would believe my tales of walking a couple of miles "uphill" to and from school, through rain, sleet and snow, everyday.

I do want to acknowledge my children, Molly and Matthew, who each have made, and continue to make a tremendous difference in my life. Molly is in her second year of medical school at the University of Kansas, in Kansas City, and Matt is in his final year as a business marketing major, at Kansas State University. Both are busy with their classes, and unable to attend today.

I had early life experiences of no running water in the home, an outhouse out back, and Saturday night baths in a tub on the sidewalk to get ready for Sunday morning church. My first "work experience" came as a five year old when my Dad had me drive the pickup, while he fed cattle from the back. As a seven year old I was driving the tractor, and doing other chores with the dairy cows and the pigs. I couldn't wait until I got my driver's license at 14, so I could haul a load of wheat to town, but by then, I had been driving all kinds of farm vehicles in the fields and on the local country roads for years. Sometimes we learn a lot from those experiences we've had, even though it would have been better for us to not have had those experiences.

I left the fields early to come home to do the evening milking, and went to school many a morning with the smell of cows embedded in my clothing. When someone would get sick, Dad would say, "the cows don't care if you're sick, they still need to be milked twice a day." We worked hard and seldom left the farm except for school, church and 4-H

meetings, and took just one, two-day vacation trip in my 17 years on the farm. I didn't always appreciate the hard work and long hours of the farm at the time, but I learned so much about decision-making, problem-solving, responsibility and work ethic.

My father gave each child in our family a calf when we turned nine years old, and explained that it was a way of paying us for our labor on the farm. When we sold the yearling steer, he took us to town and opened a checking account for us, giving us sole responsibility for managing the account. He recommended we reinvest the proceeds in the farm, but did not dictate this. This was my first experience with creating opportunity, but not dictating action. It is what one does with those opportunities that make a difference in one's life. I chose to reinvest in additional livestock, and as a result of building my beef, dairy and swine herds, was able to put myself through college. I thank my father for making a difference.

My mother made sure we got to church on Sunday and taught the love of music to us kids. Those trips to church would often deteriorate into yelling, pushing and shoving between the six boys in the back seat. So Mom would break out in song, usually a familiar hymn, and would get us to join in. She taught us harmony, and soon my brothers and I were singing special numbers for church.

I saw the K-State Singers perform at a farm organization dinner when I was in the 7th grade. It was the select song and dance group of Kansas State University, and I dreamed that I would be in the group one day. It was my sole motivation for going to college, other than getting out of twice a day milking chores. The K-State Singers took this farm boy that had hardly left the farm, to singing venues around the country, and a three month USO tour of eight countries in Asia as a 21 year old. Since then, I performed many years with the Lindquist brothers, I cantor for my church, and sing with the Little Apple Barbershop Chorus and the Manhattan Music Machine Quartet. My mother taught me a love for music and developing the ability to sing has provided me a lifelong hobby. I thank my mother for making a difference.

My mother made sure our family had the valuable learning and life skill development that happens in the 4-H program. I had been a 4-H member in a community club while in the 3rd grade, but there was no club organized near our new farm location to serve the Waterville community. By the time I reached middle school, my mother had worked with the county Extension agents to organize the Busy Beavers 4-H club. She was the community leader, and I became the first club president. So many abilities were developed through that club experience. Learning to prepare and deliver a presentation before the club, participating in community service projects, planning the agendas and providing leadership for club meetings, and planning the committee work that was necessary between meetings are just some of the 4-H learning experiences that have made a difference throughout my life.

Perhaps the greatest gift of the 4-H program though, has come from the 4-H motto, which has instilled in me a willingness, and perhaps even an eagerness, to embrace change.

To "Make the Best Better" is something that we call on everyday, or should, in our personal as well as our professional lives. I thank my 4-H experiences and the 4-H Youth Development programs of Extension for making a difference.

My first Extension job came about because of a college advisor taking an interest in me and having a concern about my career choice. I had majored in Ag Education, but didn't know what I wanted to do. I accepted a job with a farm lending agency, but my advisor thought that I should be in a more "people-oriented" line of work. Without my knowledge, my advisor called the Kansas Extension recruiter upon finding out about the local Extension agriculture agent job opening. I was talked into an interview, and have had a wonderful career in Extension. I can't imagine having a better or a more rewarding professional experience in any other line of work. I want to thank Professor Howard Bradley for making a difference by taking a personal interest in his students and their choices.

I really can't reminisce about Extension experiences that have made a difference in my life without mentioning Epsilon Sigma Phi. You see, I believe strongly in the value of organizational citizenship, and the role that our professional associations in Extension play in helping us, as Extension professionals, to network with our peers, develop professionally, and provide opportunities to give back to the Extension system in which we are employed.

I represented the Alpha Rho Chapter at the 1992 National ESP meeting in New Orleans, where National President and former Ruby winner, Pat Buchanan, led the organization through a transformation from professional fraternity to the Extension Professionals' organization we are today. I am so glad that I was able to experience Pat's leadership. We have all benefitted from Pat and other ESP leaders' vision for Epsilon Sigma Phi to become a premier professional development organization that has made a difference in the lives of thousands of Extension professionals.

In 1998, Kansas colleagues Doug Jardine and Fran Richmond conspired to talk me into running for the position of national 2nd vice president, a position that would lead to the position of National President of Epsilon Sigma Phi. I agreed out of professional courtesy to represent Kansas as a candidate.

I must tell you about an "attitude of professionalism" that Doug Jardine conducts himself with as an Extension plant pathologist. Doug has been active on several national ESP committees and is a regular attendee at national Epsilon Sigma Phi meetings. He says it this way, "I am an Extension Professional who happens to be a Plant Pathologist." Don't you wish all those who served in Extension positions thought of themselves and approached their work in this way, first as an Extension professional, then in their disciplinary role? Thank you Doug for your professionalism and the way you make a difference to your Extension colleagues and to your clientele.

Well, I somehow was elected at that 1998 meeting in Atlanta. I met and was able to work with wonderful Extension professionals from around the country. Those leaders of

Epsilon Sigma Phi became my mentors, and I have such great admiration for each one of them, including our retired and retiring Executive Directors, Judy Carlson and Linda Cook. Many of you are here today, and I hope you all know how much you mean to me, and how much I appreciate all you have done for the Cooperative Extension system, and for Epsilon Sigma Phi because of your leadership and service.

At Epsilon Sigma Phi national meetings, we get the opportunity to engage and learn from colleagues around the country, and have opportunities to develop those professional skills that are necessary for success as an Extension professional. ECOP's committee on Personnel and Organizational Development developed a list of core competencies for Extension professionals a few years ago. I was privileged to be serving on PODC at that time, and am proud to say that we have adopted those core competencies in Kansas as areas for professional improvement for all Extension professionals. Those competencies include community and social action processes, diversity, educational programming methods, engagement, information delivery, interpersonal relations, knowledge of the organization, leadership, organizational management, professionalism and subject matter knowledge.

In Kansas, we have adopted the recommendation from the ECOP document "A Vision for the 21st Century," that employees spend at least 10 percent of their time in training and professional development that enhance their competencies. The development of subject matter knowledge is critical if we are going to be relevant to our audiences. But our ultimate success, and the key to making a difference, is dependent on how well we master those other core competencies, or "the art" of being an Extension professional.

Leadership is one of those core competencies, and there are many ways our system encourages and supports leadership development. I was fortunate to participate in the 3rd class of the National Extension Leadership Development program, and learned wonderful lessons that have served me well through the last two decades of my professional work. There are regional NELD programs that are offering similar leadership development experiences, and I hope each of your states participate in providing opportunities for professional growth through experiences in these programs.

The University of Wisconsin and Jerry Apps led our program, and Jerry challenged our thinking on a number of issues. I recall that in his *Leadership for An Emerging Age*, Jerry discussed paradoxes, and how thinking must change from "either/or" to "both/and," that sometimes we need to do things that may seem to be in conflict with each other. We've all read about or participated in the discussions: State and local tax funding or alternative revenue generation; traditional programs or new audiences, commercial agriculture emphasis or family life programming. If we focus all of our human and financial resources on today's issue, how do we address tomorrow's issue? I think you get the point.

Charles Handy, in *The Age of Unreason*, wrote that we will increasingly face the unexpected. Change is not incremental as it once was. Technology has greatly

accelerated change by radically altering access to new information, and the speed in which it can be obtained.

Newt Gingrich, responding to the *Global Trends 2025* report in the July-August 2009 issue of *The Futurist* magazine, provided a point to reference what the decades ahead might look like. He said, "There will be more growth in scientific knowledge in the next 25 years than occurred during the past 100 years. We are exceeding, by four to seven times, the rate of change of the past 25 years. This means that, even by conservative estimate, in the next 25 years we will experience the scale of change experienced between 1909 and 2009."

So what does that have to do with Extension? If we are going to be an organization making a difference in 25 years, we must embrace "both/and." We must continue to address priority issues of our traditional audiences, while developing awareness, and an ability to respond to new issues of new clientele. These issues present themselves in ways that are not always predictable, so we must develop flexibility through alternative revenue streams and different staffing arrangements, to address issues that will require the expertise of new partners in changing areas of subject-matter.

One way we can better meet the needs of our clientele is to embrace and further develop the utilization of eXtension. Here we can gain access to subject matter expertise that we can't afford to employ in our own organizations. Extension professionals can participate in this new educational strategy by joining communities of practice to learn from and contribute to the educational content of eXtension.

One step we have taken in Kansas to increase our relevancy and our ability to truly make a difference to our audiences is the creation of teams of professionals with similar areas of expertise. We call our teams program focus teams, and all agents and specialists participate. Each agent is asked to choose one primary area of program focus in making their program focus team selection. We know that our citizens need access to more in-depth subject matter knowledge, and that this may not be possible when a generalist Extension professional has to divide time between several Extension program areas. A specialist and an agent co-chair each team. The teams are organized across departments and their work is issue oriented.

The teams are responsible for listening to customers, planning, implementing, and evaluating educational programs, and they are to identify and address professional development needs of our Extension professionals. These teams must respond to ever changing issues and clientele needs. Participants can join or leave as their programming issues dictate. Through the work of the program focus teams, we are making a difference by strengthening the grassroots impact of our Extension programs.

This time of discontinuous change creates the need for "unlearning" in Extension. We must be able to change structures and practices, remove barriers and allow our organization to morph in ways that leads to relevance, public value, and sustainability.

In other words, we have to allow our Extension organizations to change, so that we can continue to make a difference.

As we look for ways to increase relevancy, and as we have to make very difficult staffing decisions because of the current economic situation and declining public dollars for Extension organizations, it is important to continually ask the question, "Why were Land Grant Universities created and what is our unique mission?" Scott Peters in his *Creation of the Extension Service* tells us that the earliest intent of the land-grant university and of Extension was rooted in the ideals of education of, for, and by the people, producing things of lasting importance to our communities and society.

Charles R. Van Hise, then President of the University of Wisconsin, declared to be "never content until the beneficent influence of the University reaches every family in the state." We need to ask today, "Extension still living up to the ideals of our founders?" Are we addressing key issues of families, of youth, and communities, as well as those engaged in agricultural pursuits? Again, what is the unique mission of our Extension organizations?

Our Associate Director in Kansas, Daryl Buchholz, likes to quote from *The Extension Worker's Code* written in Kansas by T.J. Talbert in 1922. It is full of common-sense wisdom. One passage refers to studying and serving the people. "Study the people and their problems, and when you are able to know them they will know you. If you do not have their support and cooperation there is something wrong. Find the reason and if you are at fault, endeavor to correct the error. Develop the spirit of helpfulness and try to be of the greatest possible service to all those with whom you come in contact."

As T.J. Talbert reminded in 1922, I think it is important to not forget the need to be close to the people as we strive to become more effective and efficient in our efforts to achieve relevancy. The community presence we have traditionally had in Extension is critically important to maintain as we make economically and programmatically driven organizational structure and staffing changes. Let's find a way to keep our local presence, or our efforts to achieve public value and sustainability will be difficult at best, or not possible at all.

We can best help people help themselves by being there with them. Relationships that result from proximity and involvement take time, and it is only after those relationships are well established that we can achieve significant knowledge and behavioral change resulting in public value.

Finally, I want to say something about organizational leadership in Extension. Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, talks about organizational qualities and the qualities of leadership necessary for an organization to be great. He talks of getting the right people on the bus, and the right people in the right seats, before we decide where we need to drive the bus. He talks of employees owning their job, and of each staff member becoming accountable to the whole organization, and to his or her customers. He writes about "status quo" being the enemy of organizational sustainability, and of the need to

"constantly strive for improvement." There we go back to the 4-H motto, "To Make the Best Better." 4-H got it right a long time ago.

So we all have an obligation to be engaged in the constant effort to go from "good to great," to "to make the best better." Leaders can help achieve positive organizational change by creating and communicating a vision, and being steadfast in supporting and encouraging pursuit of the vision. They can best lead by delegating responsibility and allowing Extension professionals to make decisions and take action in the quest for organizational improvement.

Teddy Roosevelt said "the best executive is one who has enough good sense to pick good people to do what needs to be done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it." Leaders cannot support mediocrity if they expect excellence. They must convey an expectation of "making the best better," and those employees not willing accept the organizational responsibility for improvement" well, maybe they need to be on another bus.

Earlier I mentioned an article from *The Futurist*. This is a magazine that is provided members of the World Future Society. I am a member and have enjoyed reading the magazine for forecasts, trends and ideas about the future, and have attended a few of the Society's annual meetings. I mention this because I think that to give us the best chance to make a difference in our professional careers we must develop ideas and be exposed to thinking that comes from outside our immediate professional world. I encourage you to participate in professional development from outside of Extension that appeals to you, something that will challenge and stimulate your thinking and expose you to new opportunities to make a difference to those you serve.

Once again, I want to thank all of you for this recognition as the 2009 Ruby Award winner. I have attempted, through this discussion of life experiences, to relate how family members and others have made a difference in my life, and how Extension professionals, and our Extension organizations, are making a difference in the lives of those we reach with our programs. I encourage everyone in Extension to adopt an attitude of "making the best better" so the Cooperative Extension Service can continue to make a difference into the future.

It is because I think "making a difference" is what it is all about. It is why we are here. It is why we are doing the work we do. Let me close with the last couple of lines from the Epsilon Sigma Phi Creed: "I believe in my own work, and in the opportunity I have to make my life useful to humanity. Because I believe these things, I am an Extension Professional."

Thank you all for making a difference every day as Extension professionals.