

2019 Distinguished Service Ruby Lecture
"Extension's Transformational Journey....Are We Ready?"
Patricia Dawson ~ Oregon State University~ Gamma Chapter

Thank you, Lynette, for your kind introduction. I must say that it is an honor and humbling experience to be selected by my peers as the 2019 Distinguished Service Ruby recipient, particularly since it is sponsored by Epsilon Sigma Phi, an organization I truly love. This honor came as a total surprise. I wondered why my chapter hadn't included me in the awards ballot process this spring...they were tricky!

Recognition of this sort doesn't happen single handedly, it comes with the support of family and team members and I want to acknowledge those who have been at my side throughout my Extension Journey. First is my husband, Bill who has dealt with more than one late dinner, change in weekend plans and countless nights alone as I conducted work on behalf of the Cooperative Extension Service. Thank you Bill, I couldn't have done it without you.

We have with us today our son, Ty who is a Major in the Army based here at Ft Carson. We are looking forward to moving him back to Pendleton within the next several months. Our daughter, Monica and her husband Wes, and our awesome grandchildren, Seth and Claire are at

home in Washington. Seth is a freshman in high school and Claire is tackling her first year in Junior High...which is far more important than listening to Grandma.

No matter how crazy my schedule, I made it a point to be home for every birthday, holiday and anniversary even if I had to duck out early from a meeting or catch a red eye to get home in time you can't recapture those special family moments. Those of us in this room today know how much our family sacrifices for us as we perform our duties...and frankly we need to get a better handle on our staffing expectations as we move into the future.

I want to extend a special thank you to Lynette Black, Mike Knutz and Barbara Brody for preparing my nomination packet as well as all the additional work required to make today possible. I also thank the entire Gamma Chapter for their support of the nomination. If my colleagues could kindly stand. Thank You...it means so very much to have your support. While I can't name everyone, I do want to give a shout out to past National President, Duane Johnson. Duane not only hired me 36 years ago to join Oregon's Extension team but he also is the person who nudged me

to serve first on the NAE4-HA Board and later with ESP. Thank you Duane for your constant nudging, prodding and dedicated support.

Back home in Oregon are hundreds of talented partners and volunteers who worked side-by-side with me to develop and deliver Extension educational programs. Without a doubt, it would have been impossible to provide the level of service we accomplished without the team effort. I particularly want to acknowledge Joan Pfaff, who served as my administrative assistant for countless grant funded projects as well as behind the scene work with the Journal of Youth Development....thank you Joan for making me look good.

And last but not least, are a number of you in this room today or viewing online that have served with me on various committees, projects and boards. Thank you for your friendship, the expertise you shared, and your willingness to put up with my constant questions and blunt approach to getting the job done. Without a doubt, I left those meetings far richer with inspiration and the knowledge that we are in good hands ... it has been an honor to serve with you.

As I prepared my remarks for today's Ruby Lecture, I reflected on my 50+ years with Extension and how my various experiences influenced me. As a child, I had my heart set on being a Campfire Bluebird---after all, they had really cute outfits. But my parents informed me that Campfire wasn't an option...I was going to be in 4-H. We were new comers to Extension and I didn't have a clue what 4-H was nor do I recall selecting my first projects (clearly this was parent driven) but none the less, I became a member of the East End Livestock 4-H Club and was off and running.

How many of you would consider yourself champion level 4-H'ers???? Well, I was the keeper of the Red Ribbon cache! My first county fair is forever imprinted in my memory. My mother misunderstood and insisted that I wear everything I had constructed my first year for the fashion revue...so there I was in my best party dress and patent leather shoes wearing a brown kitchen print apron, pink floral head scarf, carrying my hand hemmed tea towel and red plaid pin cushion. Absolutely nothing matched...Not a good scene!

And I'm still trying to forget my first horse show. My Appaloosa horse "Spot" came down with colic on the first day of fair. Nothing doing I needed to complete the classes I had entered thus Buck, my father's

favorite roping horse was saddled up and I was reminded that as long as I held on, I would do fine. Now Buck had earned his name fair and square...need I say more.

Well, it was a rocky start, but I continued in the 4-H program for nine years and garnered wonderful lifelong experiences. Later as a 4-H agent my experiences as a 4-H'er helped me to serve my clientele with empathy as I truly had walked in their shoes. Rest assured- I offered plenty of fashion revue clinics.

As I reflected on my career in Extension there were many rewarding and challenging experiences, but two major projects rose to the top that tie in with today's theme.

First, is my engagement in the Journal of Youth Development which I was instrumental in developing alongside a great team of scholars including Rich Lerner from Tufts University, Joseph Donaldson, Elijah Wilson and numerous others from across the country. So why did I agree to help design and serve as JYD's Editor for 12 years when my plate was already overflowing? One of my concerns as a 4-H professional was that few in the world of youth development understood that our work was more

than camps and fairs. I felt it was important to advocate for our profession and showcase the scholarly work that is being accomplished....and on a selfish note, I wanted to see more 4-H professionals sitting at the decision making tables with valid research to back their work.

Today, JYD is the official journal of two of the largest professional associations for those working with and on behalf of young people, NAE4-HA and the National Afterschool Association. The journal fills a critical niche – a place for applied scholarship and practice-based work. In other words, relevant and useful studies about and for, those working with and on behalf of young people. It is easy to sit back and complain that no one understands who we are or what we do.... I encourage you to step up to the plate and advocate for the profession beyond Extension's walls.

A second project which is dear to my heart is the Attitudes for Success program which was designed to serve at-risk Latino and Native American youth in Umatilla and Morrow counties. 30 years ago, when the program was launched neither my neighboring agent, Bill Broderick or myself considered that the public would object. Afterall, our Latino population was twice the state average and rapidly increasing. We knew

that our Latino students were failing academically, and their families were struggling to understand how to navigate policies in their new communities.

Unfortunately, I encountered community pressure to drop the Attitudes for Success program from my plan of work. One went so far as to organize petition signing campaigns during county fair to have me relocated. As you can imagine, the advisory board meetings were heated. Bottom line was fear in learning how to interact with our new neighbors as well as concern from some that I wouldn't be able to provide continued high levels of service to the traditional 4-H club programming (Obviously these people didn't understand the Golden Rule of Extension....we don't drop programs....we just add).

So, my tasks were cut out for me to not only determine how to better serve our at-risk populations but also how I could ease community concerns. One of the first things I did was invite Jan... the petition chair to be my camp cabin roommate and we spent many a late night talking, sharing values and concerns. Jan and I went on to become good friends, she signed up to be a 4-H Volunteer and she was one of the first people I called when Bill and I got engaged.

Since inception, more than 10,000 at-risk youth have participated in Attitudes for Success with 98% indicating the program has helped them understand the importance of completing their high school education and securing a college education. And most important - our tracking records indicate 86% of the participants actually have gone on to pursue some form of higher education.

If I had given up when the first petition was launched I wonder if Abelardo would have gone on to become a pilot for a major airline, I wonder if San Juanita would have become a Psychiatrist or if Alejandra would have become an Executive Assistant for a major utility firm? Or instead, would they be earning minimum wages working at the local processing plant? We all know that change is not easy, but it is important to take a risk and step out of our comfort zone if we are to continue to serve our ever-changing community dynamics.

When I recently retired I had more than one person come to me and say "Hey Patricia...do you think your programs will continue? Do you think there will be changes? or even worse Do you think Extension is going to be around in the future?" Those questions gnawed on me for months, particularly after investing my life in Cooperative Extension Service.

Some might argue that Cooperative Extension has had a good century run but our future is doomed. I disagree. If you look at Extension's mission "to engage people with research-based knowledge and education that strengthens communities and economies, sustains natural resources, and promotes healthy families and individuals" you must agree that the needs for Extension are greater now than ever before. So how do we carry out our mission in the ever-changing landscape we encounter today?

An important start is to take a step back and reflect on Extension's past and how our founders laid the platform for our journey into the future. What an incredible man our founding father, Seaman Knapp was...frankly, I doubt he stood still for a moment. He was visionary, innovative and understood the importance of giving clientele the tools to succeed. Knapp focused on solving economic/productivity problems in the context of agricultural production. In the words of Dr. Knapp, "what a man hears he may doubt; what he sees, he may possibly doubt; but what he does himself, he cannot doubt."

Home demonstration work was considered a comprehensive system of education for rural homemakers described as "a method of work that

has so much action in it and because it reaches every fundamental of civilization so vitally that it should never crystalize."

Those early day agents were innovative, engaging and had grit. For example, when the influenza struck Richmond County, Georgia in 1918 the home demonstration agent converted the fair grounds into a hospital for several thousand people and enlisted local schoolteachers and other volunteers to become temporary health staff...all in less than 24 hours. Without a doubt her actions saved the lives of many. Could we do that today?

If you haven't taken the time to review our history, I would encourage you to do so – the stories are fascinating.... a great source is a reference titled "The Demonstration Work" published by our own Alpha Zeta Chapter of Texas.

Perhaps our past 100 years of rich history was preparing us for a new Golden Age of Extension. Just as our early day Extension educators journeyed into the unexpected so must we move forward addressing the ever changing, challenges of those we serve.

When I selected the title for today's presentation I reflected on the many changes I have witnessed during my career in Extension and what possibly is ahead of us. You know...why is it that when we talk about making changes in our personal life, we are usually excited? Yet, when we talk about change or transformation at work, we generally panic and are reluctant to change? Unfortunately, we are no longer the only game in town and others are passing us in the fast lane while many of us remain steadfast in our dated operation mode, reluctant to change.

We all know of counties that have lost Extension funding and state-wide programs that have been eliminated or downsized. Our legislators and local taxpayers have difficult decisions as they wrestle with a list of public needs that is far greater than funds available.

How do we continue to advance and address the needs of our clientele? How do we stay relevant in the eyes of the public and maintain financial support during these challenging times? While I don't believe there is a single, prescriptive path I do think embracing the over riding guiding principles and priorities or Grand Challenges showcased during our Centennial is an important component of our journey.

So Let's start by revisiting our Guiding Principles.

First is Extension's continued reliance on a strong foundation in research and its application to seek to create a better America.

Trusted, reliable, unbiased information must continue to be a Hallmark of our organization.

A second guiding principle is Extension's continued relevance and connection to the local community. Particularly important is our ability to deliver applicable education and develop relationships in the communities we serve as well as empowering local volunteers to deliver transformative programs in their communities. The charge for Extension to serve all audiences is more important now than ever before.

The last, but not least, guiding principle is Extension's commitment to innovative educational approaches, including the use of new and evolving digital technologies. We must continue to work to lower the barriers to adoption of research-based information by innovation in communication and program delivery.

Fair enough you might say...but how do we take those principles and for lack of better words, let the rubber meet the road? Our Centennial Celebrations proved to be a good opportunity to launch a system wide

facelift which was labeled as our “Grand Challenges” or our Niche for the future. Your state might have slightly tweaked these, but the overriding themes identified included:

- **agricultural and food security,**
- **urban programming,**
- **health and wellness,**
- **resource resilience, and**
- **community vitality.**

Let’s start with our Evolving Agricultural and Food Safety Practices

We must continue to lead the way in helping our producers provide abundant, safe, and nutritious food in the context of climate change, diminishing natural resources and expectation of better health outcomes. At the same time, these efforts must be economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially responsible.

There is a lot to do here...just look at the issues of our farmers in California and the sustainable groundwater management act or the dairymen of Oregon converting methane emissions from manure into electricity.

If we look at the Grand Challenge of Demographics we know that rural areas cover 97% of the nation's land yet contains less than 19% of America's population. We're growing grayer and more diverse. Without a doubt, we must have an impactful presence in our cities that meets the needs of the urban, the low income and more diverse audience. Don't get me wrong.... rural America is still important and needs our attention now, more than ever...but we must become effective in addressing the urban needs as well.

Extension's role in Addressing the Grand Challenge of our National Health Crisis is critical. The United States continues to spend more on health care than any other nation, yet our nation has some of the worst health outcomes. Extension can serve a critical role in helping to reverse the health crisis in America by helping our communities establish healthy practices in all stages of life.

And finally, the Challenge of Community Vitality

Extension has the ability to help engage a dynamic network able to mobilize people, resources, and ideas driven by the local needs, while supported by state, regional, and national framework.

So, as we navigate forward how are we prepared as an organization to address the nation's Grand Challenges as well as our own structural challenges? I don't have a crystal ball but I'm going to toss out a few ideas and encourage us to continue to discuss this week and as we move forward.

Let's start with Marketing Extension

Extension is a well-kept secret. Historically, the value and services provided by Extension were mostly spread by word-of-mouth. Who didn't know about and rely on services provided by our legacy programs...4-H, Home Economics and Agriculture in the 1950s?

Today, though, many people who could find value in Cooperative Extension's programs know little or nothing about the organization. Studies indicate urban populations have low or no awareness of Extension with limited use of our educational resources and participation in Extension programs. Without a doubt, the disparity in awareness of and support for Extension in cities affects our funding streams.

I can see why we create confusion and get lost in the shuffle....our state mission statements are different, we call ourselves different things....were known as Cooperative Extension, or Extension Service or

Outreach & Engagement and we're known as Educators, Extension Agents, County Agents, County Educators, Field Agents, and more. For grins...just google a few key project areas you are engaged in and see what pops first. Look at the definition of an Extension Agent on google as well.

We know our society thrives with technology...but how accessible is our information? Where and how do we deliver our information? If we want to remain strong throughout the Nation and reach newer audiences how we brand and market ourselves and our programs must be a discussion.

New marketing efforts to increase program visibility and our reach to larger constituencies can ultimately result in greater support for Extension.

Moving on.... let's consider the topic of supporting our

organization's professionals. We've grown adept at doing more with less and probably if offered as an Olympic competition we would all come home with the Gold Medal for multi-tasking. But seriously how can we be better prepared professionally as we move forward? As I was preparing for today's presentation, I ran across this statement...

"Of the more than 14,000 Extension workers in the US, many need additional training for most effective service. ...Very few have much

training that specifically equips them for their work.” Would you agree?

Well that statement was published in 1966 by H.C. Sanders a Director from Louisiana. Surely by now we could have come up with a solution, but we haven't.

Unfortunately, today we can't rely just on our subject matter expertise. Extension personnel must have the skills to work within a network of agencies and organizations that are already addressing some of the many factors contributing to complicated challenges. To work in this way requires competence in high-efficiency teamwork, problem solving, leading change, communication, relationship building, entrepreneurship, risk management and more. Providing staff development opportunities in these areas is critical yet seems to be more than what any single state can address considering our financial challenges. Perhaps these topics might tie in well with training modules developed at the national level by JCEP, ECOP or our own ESP. Another suggestion would be to divide and conquer by having each state contribute two or three predetermined training modules to a national data base.

As we add more young professionals to our team, we must provide a culture that embraces innovation and change. Developing collaborative work groups (both cross-county and cross-state) to address cutting edge topics in a timely manner, recognition for innovative work and mentorships will be important.

It seems that we often duplicate our work such as development of subject matter training modules...does every agent need to develop lessons on club management, ages & stages, sodium in the diet, canning techniques etc. or can we become more efficient in sharing of our work via an Extension Resource library?

And how about rethinking the impact our delivery systems have on our structure and staffing decisions. Must our position be tied to a geographic boundary? Statewide, it may be reasonable to consider a variety of geographic assignments. While our more rural areas may be county based perhaps regional extension centers may increase efficiencies and collaboration in our metropolitan areas. Or perhaps even, centralized public service centers where a variety of agencies are all housed to provide expedited service to those in need.

We need to get better at our work/life balance. Let's take advantage of technology for meetings and trainings rather than face-to face gatherings. Virtual collaboration, whether on a simple task or complex challenge is a necessity as the nature of our work becomes more globalized. And how about options to work from home, Flex Time or 4-day workweeks?

To address cutting edge issues let's consider a new type of position that is Project-driven and utilizes short term expertise hired to address a specific issue such as the Hot Shots program used in the Denver area.

We know a diverse staff is a must, yet in many areas it is a challenge to find potential staff with the required skill set. Let's expand internship experiences to help "grow" our own staff such as OSU's Promise Student program which introduces Latino students to Extension careers.

As we look at innovation we know that Extension is historically rooted in the spirit of innovation and we know that to be effective, Extension workers must think ahead of the crowd. However, current models, scholarly practices, and cultural characteristics tend to hold the system back by restricting time and opportunity for creative problem solving. It is important to allocate dedicated staff time and project funding for exploration and

creative endeavors. Performance incentives for innovative efforts regardless of success and focused time to share results with colleagues is vital if we are to unlock new opportunities for Extension.

Today we are competing with Alexa, Siri, Google and YouTube as our potential clientele seek immediate answers to their questions. Leveraging the power of the digital environment is vital for our existence. As educators, we must become more adept at using our mobile learning platform and at the same time determine how we maintain relationships while connecting with people via technology. Opportunities for engaging learners in new and creative ways must be expanded.

Teamwork is more vital now than ever before. Extension personnel must be prepared and willing to collaborate across program areas and within a network of agencies and organizations as strategic action teams to address the many factors contributing to our Grand Challenges. To be most effective we must fully leverage all components of our land-grant universities. Resources to aid us in collaborative work, facilitation skills and conflict management are also needed in our toolbox.

On our journey into the future Volunteers will remain a vital member of our team. From the beginning, volunteers have been an

important component of Cooperative Extension's success. As we move forward, we must continue to develop models that are effective in recruiting unpaid or volunteer staff, particularly in our urban areas. Just as we struggle with travel for trainings so do our volunteers. It is important that we capitalize on technology to conduct our trainings and meetings and consider a variety of types of volunteers such as short-term, episodic positions, subject matter volunteers as well as the traditional year-round positions.

We spend a lot of staff time and money to bring a volunteer on board. That investment must be kept in mind as we prepare the volunteer for a successful relationship with our organization. Resources such as subject matter lesson plans for beginning volunteers, mentors, online information portals, etc. designed to provide a positive volunteer experience are important, particularly as we reach out to our newer audiences that are not familiar with our program traditions. Treated right, we know that our volunteers can prove invaluable in sharing their stories with potential funders and of course their fellow taxpayers.

So, speaking of funding.... I don't think any of you would disagree that our Extension funding at all levels has been in decline for many years.

In light of diminished budgets, financial creativity and leveraging will be paramount to Extension's success. That might include fees for services, charges for on-line workshops, sponsored programs and unique partnerships.

When the public goes to the poll to vote for an extension service districts or tax increases do they understand the value of our services? Taxpayers want to know how Extension education has changed public economics, and impacted environmental and social conditions in addition to being informed of learning and behavior changes of our clients. Now, more than ever before how we tell our stories and share our impacts is a priority.

It has been a whirlwind trip with a few twists and turns as we have navigated Extension's past and prepared for the future. Today we are armed with strong guiding principles and system-wide program priorities to better serve all people in America...I am sure Seaman Knapp is pleased. As we move forward in our journey to transform Cooperative Extension to meet the challenges of the next century, I have faith that we have the best and the brightest in the driver's seat. Are we ready? Are we able? Can we do it? I would say absolutely YES.

Thank you for your dedication to our profession as Extension Educators. It has been an honor to work side by side with you and I truly appreciate the honor you have bestowed upon me today.