
PIONEERS

2017 Pioneers Luncheon honors Pioneers & Supporters of the Montgomery County Agricultural Center and Fair with a special tribute to the Honey & Beeswax Department and The Gregory Family

Honey & Beeswax Department

The first show for the Honey & Beeswax Department at the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair was held in 1952 and was organized by Dr. George Abrams of the University of Maryland and Harold Kirby of the Maryland State Beekeepers Association. The goals of the Honey & Beeswax Department were to promote beekeeping, public education on the importance of honey bees to agriculture, and allow beekeepers to compare their products of the hive with the products of other competitors.

The first show had five categories for entries and now there are 31, including honey, comb honey, beeswax, educational exhibits, candles, arts and crafts, photography, children's art work, gadgets, gift arrangements, etc. At times a live observation hive was part of the honey show display. Now it is part of the exhibit at Old McDonald's Barn.

The first Honey & Beeswax show had six exhibitors with 15 entries. The largest show was in 1985 with 217 entries. This year the department has 59 exhibitors and 93 entries.

The Honey & Beeswax Department has been fortunate to have many dedicated people to lead and support it. Our superintendents have been Dr. Abrams (1952), Harold Kelly (1953-1961), Arthur Strang (1962-2003), David Bernard (2004-2010), and members of the Montgomery County Beekeepers Association (2011-2017). George Imirie, added as co-superintendent in 1993, also dedicated many hours to the promotion of beekeeping in Montgomery County and educating the public about the importance of honey bees. Many fair visitors fondly remember the open hive demonstrations that Mr. Imirie gave in the honey bee cage that he built in the early 1990's.

Now the Honey & Beeswax Department consists of the honey show with honey sales, educational exhibit with observation hive at Old McDonald's Barn, and open hive demonstrations in the bee gazebo located at the Farmer's Triangle.

Certainly times have changed since 1952, but the mission of the Honey & Beeswax Department has not. Our goal is to promote beekeeping, educate the public about the importance of honey bees to food production and the environment, and allow beekeepers to show off their products. We hope to a part of the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair forever.

(Most of this information was gleaned from the "Montgomery County Agricultural Center, Inc. The First 50 Years," by Roscoe N. Whipp, Ag. Center Pioneer.)

The Gregory Family

The Gregory family encompasses four generations of Montgomery County Ag Fair participants and volunteers. Back in the mid 1950's, Phil (also known as Buddy) Gregory took his wife-to-be, Jeannine on a first date to the fair. That was the beginning of a life long love of the Fair and the accumulation of countless volunteer hours. Phil served on the Board and as Chair of the Entertainment Committee. Following his father's example, Roy has served on the Fair Board, including a term as President and his daughter, Jordan has served on the Junior Board. Phil, his three children, Eydie (1977 Fair Queen), Jenny, and Roy (and his wife, Kim) and all five of his grandchildren, Corey, Annie, Jordan, Daniel, and Colson have been active 4-H members and/or volunteer leaders. The next generation, the Gregory's great-grandkids are eligible for 4-H this year, so the legacy continues.

A Little History

The Montgomery County Agricultural Center Inc. (MCAC) was formed as a privately operated 501(c) (3) non-profit organization on January 7, 1949, when a group of local farmers were elected as the first Board of Directors by the volunteer membership of the organization. The MCAC had recently purchased 64 acres of land adjacent to the railroad tracks from Herman Rabbitt, a successful farmer and landowner in Gaithersburg. On June 4th, 1949, hundreds of volunteers participated in after an old-fashioned barn raising and 12 outbuildings were constructed in one day. The site of the new Montgomery County Agricultural Center was created. Dedicated volunteers donated time, materials and talent to construct and continue operation of the Montgomery County Agricultural Fairgrounds. The Fairgrounds would not be what it is today if it were not for those visionary pioneers who were committed to agricultural education and family entertainment.

As is true today for the agricultural center, the volunteers were, and still are, necessary to the successful operation of the Fairgrounds, through continued contributions of materials and free labor for the construction of the new facilities, as well as upgrading the old. A network of more than 2,000 volunteers continue providing their time, making the agricultural center a vital part of the business community in Montgomery County. The nine day Montgomery County Agricultural Fair that is held in mid-August requires support from over 800 volunteers who assume the responsibility for organizing and producing the single largest annual event in Montgomery County.

Thank you to all our pioneers who have helped make the Fair what it is today!

The Pioneers Luncheon is sponsored by: Montgomery County Agricultural Center, Inc.

The Montgomery County Fair officially opened in 1949. It was made possible by many volunteers, contributors, families, and government officials who, over the years continue to make the Fair a place for youth and others to gather and show results of their work, to enjoy camaraderie and to educate others about agriculture.