

Wisconsin Farmers Union: Members recognized at convention

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WISCONSIN DELLS – Several Wisconsin Farmers Union members were honored with Builders Awards, one of the organization’s highest honors, at the 87th annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Feb. 2-4 in Wisconsin Dells. Recipients of the award were Michael and Nancy Slattery of Maribel, Anthony and Claire Statz of Prairie du Sac, and Dave and Lorelei Swanepoel of Glenwood City. The Builders Award recognizes a couple or individual’s outstanding commitment to building the Farmers Union organization through county involvement, leadership development and member recruitment.

“We are very proud to recognize these members’ enthusiasm and commitment to Farmers Union,” said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. “They have made considerable commitments in time and passion to the organization and each has a sincere commitment to the values of family farming.”

Michael and Nancy Slattery raise livestock, fruit, bees, cash crops and vegetables on their farm near Maribel in Manitowoc County. They are members of the Dodge/Fond du Lac/Sheboygan/Ozaukee Farmers Union. Michael grew up on a farm in southeast Iowa and learned farming in an extended family farming operation of livestock, grain and large gardens and orchards. Nancy grew up in the Fox Valley. The two met in Boston when she was program coordinator at a Newman center and he was finishing grad school. They spent time overseas in Japan, where Michael worked in finance, before starting a farm in Wisconsin in 1999. Together they have taken an active role in addressing local injustices and raising awareness of issues such as legal status of undocumented workers, regional poverty, and mental health issues in the county. Nancy helped to initiate an interfaith homeless

shelter for families where she works several nights monthly. Since joining WFU in 2009, Michael has been active in the grassroots policy process and was honored to serve on the board for five years. He chairs the Grain and Investment committees, manages Farmers Union's invested assets and frequently contributes researched analyses to the *Wisconsin Farmers Union News*. Farmers Union appointed him to the finance committee and the board of the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative. He is also active on the boards of the Glacial Lakes Conservancy, Citizen Action's Northeast Wisconsin Cooperative, and Call to Action.

Anthony and Claire Statz of Prairie du Sac joined Farmers Union in 1980 and were dedicated members of the Dane County Farmers Union, attending local meetings and volunteering as delegates to state conventions. Because of his father's illness, Tony began farming full-time at age 15, and purchased the family dairy farm in 1964. He married Claire in 1965, and they delayed their honeymoon to Niagara Falls until all the corn was planted. Their children, Cathy, Christine, Steve and Len, and four grandchildren have all been active in WFU. Tony was involved in the Knights of Columbus, serving as Grand Knight from 1986-1988, and was a national delegate for AMPI (Associated Milk Producers, Inc.) meetings. He served on the board of the Tri-County Farmers Co-op, including nine years as vice-president. Their Farmers Union legacy is steadfast involvement, instilling in their children and grandchildren a strong sense of social justice, care for others, and the importance of Farmers Union and co-ops in building a better world for all. Tony passed away suddenly, after a long illness, on December 20, 2017, shortly after learning he would be honored with the Builders Award.

Dave and Lorelei Swanepoel of Glenwood City were married in January of 1972 and that fall bought the farm where they would milk cows for 41 years. The Swanepoels joined Farmers Union in the early 1970s and have missed only one WFU State Convention since becoming involved. David is a Vietnam veteran; he came home to run the family farm when his father died in a farming accident. David and Lorelei's five children went to Farmers Union Camps at WFU Kamp Kenwood and received their Torchbearer awards - the highest honor bestowed in the Farmers Union youth program. Lorelei ran a local Farmers Union youth program with longtime friend Deb Rosen and was active in WFU women's events. The Swanepoels were also involved in many membership drives for the local St. Croix County Farmers Union unit. Dave has served on the board of county chapter for many years, holding the offices of president, vice president and now secretary-treasurer. He and Lorelei help run the St. Croix County Farmers Union cheese curd stand each

summer. They sold the dairy herd in 2013 and now focus on crop farming and enjoying their nine – soon to be 10 – grandchildren.

Membership Awards

Pam Gebert of the Taylor-Price Farmers Union received the Go-Getter Award at the convention. This award recognizes youth program recruitment efforts that help Wisconsin Farmers Union to involve more members and youth, increase volunteer engagement, and develop greater leadership.

Four Wisconsin Farmers Union chapters also received recognition for excelling in membership growth in 2017. They included the Chippewa, South Central, St. Croix and Wood-Portage-Waupaca chapters. These chapters will be recognized at the National Farmers Union Convention March 4-6 in Kansas City, Missouri.

“Active local, county and district units are vital to Farmers Union’s grassroots structure,” Von Ruden said. “It’s thrilling to see these chapters’ eagerness to bring farmers together and to speak up on the issues that matter to family farmers and our rural communities.”