

2002-2003 National Officer Journals

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Photo Albums

[Japan - Jan. 27 - Feb. 5, 2003](#)

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Where I'll be this week:

Indiana

October 17

The leaves are starting to turn, there's a chill in the night air, football season is in full swing and the 2003 National FFA Convention is right around the corner! I'm sitting in the airport for the last time this year. As the song says, "Another turning point. A fork stuck in the road... it's something unpredictable, but in the end is right. I hope you had the time of your life!"

This year has never taken me far from thoughts of home and especially the family and friends that welcome me home with loving arms. Whether I was half-way around the world in Japan, out where the wind blows sweeping across the plains in Oklahoma, in the hills of West Virginia, or within the view of the majestic Rocky Mountains in Colorado, I was thankful for all of the support and encouragement from home. Each destination was a new adventure as I was blessed with the opportunity to represent the Buckeye state the Eastern Region, and the 464,157 members of the National FFA Organization this year. To my parents, teachers, mentors, friends, and supporters, THANK YOU! Your legacy of support and encouragement lifted me up during the year.

I look forward to sharing the celebration of the 2003 National FFA Convention with all of you! It's difficult to describe the joy that fills me as I look through photographs of the year and the memories run through my mind. It's been an incredible journey leading me back home.

October 10

On Monday evening I was off for my final activity with FFA members prior to National FFA Convention, the Virginia Ag Ed Society Leadership Conference. My roommate from SPC, a past state officer and co-chairman for the event, Laura Grove, met me at the airport. Over dinner we caught up on the events of the past three years. As Dr. John Hillison, coordinator of the event said, "Agricultural Education is one close-knit family." Tuesday morning began with a radio interview. Virginia FFA State President, Josh Stephens and I shared some key messages about our organization and the tremendous amount of history that is housed in Blacksburg. On the Hoakie campus, in the Historical Room, is the original oak table that the four men responsible for our organization, Magill, Newman, Sanders, and Groseclose, sat around when they started the Future Farmers of Virginia. Following our interview, I met each of the conference participants during the photo shoot and registration. More than 600 greenhands had traveled to Blacksburg to take part in the leadership and personal growth workshops on campus. I had a great visit and enjoyed talking with State Executive Secretary, Mr. Seibel, on the way to the airport. So many FFA members are excited about convention! Me too!

October 3

On Sunday, I was on the road again, for my final Business and Industry trip to Nashville, Tennessee, for the Tractor Supply Company Annual Vendor Conference. Mr. Jerry Brase and Mrs. Gina Cochran welcomed me back to the city again and we spent the next couple of days focusing on a part of TSC's mission: have fun! Jana Jaura from the National FFA Foundation met me at the airport on Sunday night and we traveled to Franklin, Tennessee. On Monday morning, I embarked on my first ever golf

outing. Our team did very well, finishing only 8 over par on 18 holes. It was such a beautiful morning and a relaxing sport. Thanks to the help of my three coaches, by the end of the day my swing was very much improved. The remainder of Monday and Tuesday were spent in meetings and all led up to the banquet on Tuesday night. On behalf of our entire team, I presented our team's gift to two of the FFA's MVPs: Mr. Jerry Brase, our current Foundation Sponsors' Board Chairman, and Mrs. Gina Cochran.

On the road again, heading home to prepare for the upcoming Virginia Ag Ed Society Leadership Conference.

September 26

What a couple of days in Naples, Florida! On Sunday I flew from Indianapolis to Ft. Myers, Florida, where I met Foundation staff member, Jan Ferris. Jan and I spent the next few days at the CropLife America Annual Meeting. I've been amazed the entire year by how many people support our organization and I enjoyed meeting some more supporters during this gathering. I even saw last year's Central Region Vice President, Amber Haugland, who was invited back to the meeting to serve as the auctioneer for their fundraiser. Amber and I enjoyed our morning trip to the airport, as she headed back to school in Nebraska and I headed to Columbus, Ohio. My sister and Abby Yocham, Ohio FFA State Vice President, picked me up at the airport and I enjoyed spending the rest of the week in Columbus. Dinner with friends, staying in the dorm, and the Buckeyes victory at the game on Saturday made my time on campus was so much fun!

September 19

I arrived in Hartford, Connecticut late Friday night and traveled to West Springfield, Massachusetts. As we got closer to the hotel and passed the fair grounds I began to remember my first trip to the Big 'E'. As a junior in high school I traveled with my chapter's poultry judging team to compete at the Eastern States Exposition, a large regional fair that draws in people from the 15 states in the eastern region. On Saturday morning I arrived at the fair and prepared for the day. Following the Big 'E' FFA Stars photo shoot, I attended the Stars Luncheon with the honorees, their parents and chapter advisors. That afternoon was a once and a lifetime event. I had never pictured myself performing in a circus, but that afternoon I did just that, as I proudly announced the results at the Big 'E' FFA Stars Ceremony in the Circus Tent. FFA Day at the Big 'E' was off to a great start and it would get even better before the day was done. At the Best Western in West Springfield, over 600 FFA members and guests gathered for the Big 'E' FFA Banquet. So many FFA members had competed today in career development events and they were awarded for their accomplishments that evening. Dr. Bill Annis and his co-workers, along with the three FFA interns: Shane Jacques of Rhode Island, Jennifer Wilson from New Jersey, and Melanie Sanborn of New Hampshire, did an amazing job and their efforts have helped to develop the living legacy of our organization.

On Sunday, I traveled with Mr. Jim Ogden and his wife Carol from Ohio, our CDE Coordinators, to the airport. Both of them have been supporting and encouraging FFA members in Ohio and at the Big 'E' for years and we're so thankful for their support! After I arrived in Indianapolis to prepare for National Convention, Lindsey Calhoun, Ohio FFA State President, picked me up from the airport in the corn car. I joined her, Crystal Matthews from Missouri, and my teammates for lunch. It's always great to spend time with good friends.

Convention planning went well! At the end of the week our team took a road trip to Louisville and the memories came flooding back. It seemed like just yesterday we were gathered for our first training just after the final gavel tapped at the 75 th National FFA Convention. While we were in Louisville, we spent a night doing some staging research at a production of *My Fair Lady*. As we rode back to Indianapolis, each of us was getting closer and closer to finishing our retiring addresses. With our final drafts finished, each of us headed to the airport on Sunday morning.

September 12

On Sunday night, I headed to Kirksville, Missouri to begin my week in Area III. Now I was told as I researched this area that FFA members in Area III love to hunt and fish, but I was pleasantly surprised to learn that they also enjoy something else...a lot of Area III FFA members love...to... MUSHROOM HUNT!!! I was so excited to find so many members who not only know what mushroom hunting is but who also enjoy it themselves. On Monday, I visited FFA members at Atlanta, Bucklin, and Novinger. Tuesday began in Putnam County and then I had the opportunity to visit Newtown-Harris. Following that visit I traveled to Milan where I rode to the FFA Time Capsule Ceremony in Columbia with Mr. Sayre and members of the Milan FFA. We had a great trip; it actually reminded me of the many road trips that I've had with my FFA advisor Mr. Mark Hoffman. In Columbia, the state officers coordinated the closing of a time capsule commemorating the 75 years of Missouri FFA. In attendance were Dr. Larry Case, now National FFA Advisor, and many other key individuals who have contributed to the legacy of the Missouri FFA. Following the ceremony, I rode back up north with the members of the Knox County FFA in the school bus. That evening I enjoyed some great pizza with the chapter officers and their advisor, Mrs. Baker. Knox County was my first school visit

on Wednesday morning and then I visited Lewis County and Clark County before driving with Mr. Lemmon, Mr. Stott and the members of the Clark County FFA chapter to Queen City for the Area III Leadership Conference. Over 400 members from the area gathered in Queen City, watched the skit put on by their area officer team, heard an inspirational message from one of their very own Area III members, State President Gina Eckler, and attended many motivational workshops. Thursday's visits included Northwestern, Brunswick (the pecan capital of the world), Keytesville, and Glasgow. Mr. Chambers, Fayette FFA chapter advisor, picked me up from Glasgow and I spent the evening at the Fayette chapter meeting and BBQ! Mr. Chambers, his wife, daughter and son made me feel very welcome and I enjoyed playing with his children before the festivities began; it reminded me of playing with my five young cousins. The following morning I presented a workshop at Fayette after participating in the chapter photo, and then traveled to Westran and Moberly. I really enjoyed my week in Missouri as I traveled throughout Area III.

Well, I'm off to the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield, Massachusetts!

September 5

I spent Labor Day relaxing with family and friends before boarding the plane to Indianapolis. After enjoying the six-hour drive to Green Bay with Foundation staff member Jason Givan (the trip was beginning to look pretty familiar by now), we met JJ in Wisconsin. Over the next three days, JJ, Jason and I visited Schreiber, Schneider, Gehl, Beda Rutter and International Truck and Engine. Then I headed back to Ohio to prepare for my upcoming week in Missouri. That weekend I enjoyed the Ohio State vs. Washington game in Ohio Stadium with my best friend Greg. And the Buckeyes...WON!

August 22

On Tuesday morning, Seth, JJ and I left with Foundation member Jason Givan to drive to Chicago where we had the opportunity to visit Westfalia-Surge. That evening we took a trip to Navy Pier where we explored the Ferris wheel and then dined at Bubba Gump Shrimp Company. We are all huge fans of the movie *Forrest Gump* and this restaurant was modeled after the events in the movie. I couldn't believe the blue and red license plates at our table with the words Run Forrest Run and Stop Forrest Stop that were used to signal the waiters and waitresses. And the dessert selections were on a card attached to a ping-pong paddle in the center of the table. The food was delicious, too!

On Wednesday morning we met with one of our Foundation Sponsors' Board members, Mr. Tom Hedge from Kraft, two of the interns in Kraft's FFA Internship Program and some of the employees from Kraft Foods North America. Following our morning meeting many of us drove up to Green Bay, Wisconsin, to visit with FFA members. I rode with two employees from Kraft's Churney Plant, Mr. Kevin Bacon and Ms. Michelle Smith. We spent the next three hours sharing about FFA, Kraft, the upcoming National Convention and the success of the internship program. We met with FFA members from East, West, and Preble High Schools at Schneider, the transportation company. Our next stop was to Foth and VanDyke where Seth, JJ and I presented a workshop. The employees from Schreiber, Foth and VanDyke, and Kraft along with the FFA members and their advisors enjoyed spending an evening sharing about leadership and career success. Now you can't be in Green Bay and not stop by the Packers stadium. Mr. Joe Metzger and Mr. Tom Hedge took us on a tour of Lambeau Stadium and we all donned our cheeseheads for the picture in front of the stadium. On Thursday, we enjoyed breakfast with Mr. Metzger and Mr. Hedge and then headed to Osh Kosh, Wisconsin to meet with the folks of Beemis/Curwood. Following our visit, we headed back to Indianapolis, but first we stopped by the Sears Tower (JJ and Seth's first time) and then ate some authentic Chicago-style pizza.

August 18

In the morning we were up and ready to go in our official dress for our Business and Industry visit with Toyota. We met with the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, FFA members from Georgetown and Toyota employees in the morning before touring the Georgetown Plant, Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky. Ever since I first toured a manufacturing facility in Iowa at the John Deere plant my sophomore year I've been fascinated by manufacturing lines and how the machinery and vehicles we see every day are produced. Following our visit in Georgetown, we drove to Erlanger, Kentucky and enjoyed lunch with Helen's co-workers, the Community Relations group at the Toyota Motor Manufacturing North America headquarters. Following lunch, we met with the managers and thanked them for their support of FFA. For those of you who experienced a "Standing 'O'" in a workshop with a member of our team this year, picture successful executives sharing in that same tradition! No matter what our age, we all love to have fun. That afternoon we left Toyota and traveled to California, Kentucky and spent time with a group of amazing young ladies. As we participated in a scavenger hunt, learned about their interests and played some of our favorite games, we had so much fun! That evening, I drove with Seth as JJ followed and we headed back to Indianapolis to prepare for our next activities.

August 17

I love the Ohio State Fair! This year marked the 150 th OSF, the 75 th Anniversary of Ohio FFA, and

the Bicentennial of Ohio. I was glad that Joel and JJ could share in this celebration as we spent the morning at the fair. My sister served as an FFA representative to the Junior Fair Board this year, and we were able to walk around the fair to see the Butter Cow, quilt display, Junior Fair Board Headquarters, and Agriculture and Horticulture Building before I helped her prepare for the Ohio Fair's Queen Contest. Just after the contest began, Joel, JJ and I had to leave the fair and drive south on I-71 to Georgetown, Kentucky. We were hosted by two staunch supporters of the FFA, Helen and Allison from Toyota that evening for some amazing pizza at Joe Bologna's on UK's campus. Allison, a former state officer from the great state of Louisiana, had just spent the summer interning with Toyota through an FFA internship program. Helen shared with us the history of the restaurant and we learned more about the University of Kentucky's campus as we toured the campus after dinner. After dinner, we also met up with Seth and Dustin and heard about their pit crew experiences, as they stood in the hotel lobby in their authentic attire that they wore as members of Ward Burton's crew.

August 16

At 5:30 am on Saturday, we all left Lansing, Michigan, and heading to Brooklyn, Michigan, home of the Michigan International Speedway. This was my first NASCAR experience and I wasn't sure what to expect. Over the next few hours Mr. Carl Peters, with Lincoln Electric, offered us a tour of the Busch Races and Winston Cup garages, pit row and informed all of us about the dynamics of the sport. Afterward we joined the folks from the FFA Center at our hospitality tent and spent the afternoon prior to the race with FFA members, state officers, and supporters of our organization. We heard from guest speakers including: Randy LaJoie, driver of the #7 Kleenex Chevrolet car and two-time NASCAR Busch Series Champion, and Sam Pardon, head fabricator/welder for Ward Burton's #22 Winston Cup Caterpillar Dodge. As the race was set to begin, our team headed off to watch the Victory Lane presentation and the beginnings of the race. Of course, Seth and Dustin had the best view of the race, as they took part as members of the pit crew on Saturday and were scheduled to return on Sunday to do the same. Joel, JJ and I watched for a while and then jumped in the van and headed down to Columbus, Ohio for the Ohio State Fair.

August 15

Spending a week with my family and friends in Ohio was wonderful. Then on the 9th, I headed to Indianapolis to begin planning for the 2003 National FFA Convention with my teammates. On Wednesday, I tuned in over the Internet to listen to the Ohio State Fair Sale of Champions, which was taking place in Columbus. In this, the 75th year of FFA in Ohio, the sale had an additional air of excitement.

The team and I had been working hard on convention preparations, when we realized that in just 70 days the convention will be here. I can't wait to see what each state submits in their box to be placed in the 75th Anniversary time capsule, see members that I met during this year and also the laser light shows! One afternoon, we traveled to Dow and met with Mr. Ted McKinney, an amazing supporter of the FFA and a past member himself. We really enjoyed learning about Mr. McKinney's experiences in our organization and sharing about the upcoming convention. On Friday afternoon, Joel, Tim and I loaded up in one vehicle, while Dustin, JJ, and Seth were in another and all six of us headed up to Lansing, Michigan, for FFA Day at the Races. That evening, I was excited to see Ryan Curtis, a fellow Buckeye and current Ohio State Officer, who was up in Michigan for the races too. Well I'm off to get some rest before the big day tomorrow. Take care!

August 3

After an exciting week at the State Presidents' Conference, Joel and I started to drive to Pennsylvania for our final NLCSO. The night before the conference began we joined the West Virginia State Officers for dinner. It was so exciting to see how their team had already come together and it had only been a few weeks since I left from their state convention. As the conference began, Joel and I met the officer teams from North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. As the week went on, I became an honorary member of the Wolf Pack, went for ice cream with the New Jersey officers, and worked on my British accent with the help of the Pennsylvania officers. The Pennsylvania team did a great job at the conference banquet and we all enjoyed hearing from the guest speaker, Mr. Gary Swan, a past National Officer, and resident of New York. The week we spent in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, is one that I'll always remember. From the well-planned reflections, to the flag raising ceremonies and purpose dissertations, Joel and I caught a glimpse of the amazing experiences that are in store for FFA members in these seven states as the officers continue their year of service.

July 27, 2003

My teammates and I joined 102 state FFA officers in Washington D.C., for the State Presidents' Conference. The highlights of the week included meeting President George W. Bush and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman. The officers began work on the delegate process that will take place at the 2003 National FFA Convention, discussing the key issues facing the organization while also gathering their thoughts for the time capsule that will be opened at the 100th anniversary of our organization.

FFA members from across the country, leaders of the future of FFA and the agricultural industry, gathered in our nation's capital celebrating the FFA's 75-year legacy. As proud Americans we visited Arlington National Cemetery, FDR Memorial, Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Wall, paying tribute to those whose struggles have afforded us the freedom that we enjoy today. "Success means we go to sleep at night knowing that our talents and abilities were used in a way that served others." We're all thankful that so many gave their lives in service to our nation, a nation that enjoys that cheapest, safest, most abundant food supply in the world.

July 20, 2003

How good it was to finally be reunited with our entire team in Indianapolis! All six of us enjoyed catching up with each other and serving with the board members at our July Board Meeting in downtown Indianapolis. After the final gavel was tapped, soon it was time to depart for West Virginia.

The most beautiful plane ride that I've yet experienced during my year took place during my journey from Cleveland, Ohio, to Charleston, West Virginia, for state convention. I found myself flying through the beautiful blankets of white, puffy clouds as the sun set in the evening sky. Breathtaking!

At the airport I was greeted in "authentic West Virginia" manner by the current and past state presidents, Charlie Bennett and Nathan Taylor. The 2002-2003 State Officer Team put on an amazing 75th Annual West Virginia State FFA Convention. The State Officer Special included their own versions of "American Idol" and "The Bachelor." It kicked-off the week and there was so much more, all "live from Cedar Lakes at the 75th West Virginia State FFA Convention." Dr. Stacy Gartin inspired the fifteen state officer candidates and seven members of the nominating committee during Wednesday's dinner. Afterwards, I was honored to participate in flag lowering. Mr. Harvey Alston, a fellow Ohioan, shared the formula for success with the convention participants. "To be HAPPY, follow your heart, keep a positive attitude, take pride in your accomplishments, embrace people regardless of differences, and realize that you do have the ability to be great!"

The West Virginia FFA Association is filled with members who do just that! Whether we were celebrating at the 75th birthday party, observing the finalists in the quiz bowl, parliamentary procedure, and prepared public speaking career development events showcasing their talents, or even celebrating the success of the proficiency and national chapter award winners, more than 600 members and guests were witnessing student success firsthand. All too soon, I was off to prepare for the State Presidents' Conference.

July 13, 2003

This trip was different though, this time Jill was traveling with me. At the airport, we started our trip to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Our day in the city included dinner, shopping, and a truly unique experience. That evening we enjoyed Rodger's and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* at Discoveryland, an outdoor amphitheatre just outside of Tulsa. In the morning we joined Mr. Kent Boggs, Oklahoma FFA state executive secretary, traveling to Camp Tulakogee for the third week of the Oklahoma FFA Alumni Leadership Camp.

Jill and I put our role-playing skills into action as camp began. While we kept the same names, we joined the other campers at registration, enrolling as a junior and senior from the Ponca City FFA Chapter, which is located about an hour north of Stillwater. Even though my sister and I were the only ones "from Ponca City" and even first-time campers, we were quickly included as members of two different small groups. As I met FFA members from across the state, we easily talked about common interests such as showing hogs, twirling the flag in the marching band, and the national FFA convention. I was challenged though when asked, "Do you know...?", and there were always the comments that sounded like "You look a lot like a national officer." and "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" I suppose my accent and the recent article in the New Horizons didn't help my cover any, but it was so much fun being a camper in disguise for a day. The following morning my cover was blown as I was introduced for a workshop.

The week was high energy and the campers were filled with enthusiasm. From the very first session when state president, Kelly Barnes, encouraged all to "soak it up and spread it out" the Oklahoma FFA members did just that enjoying guest speaker and creator of the term YOGOWYPI, Mr. Bill Codes, hypnotist Dr. Al Snyder, and motivational speaker/chalk artist Mr. Sam Glenn. Forming friendships and developing trust within their small groups during the ropes course and Water Olympics. Sharing in Oklahoma camp traditions including the song "Love, Liberty, & Disco", Hot Spots-a time for ten members to introduce themselves to the entire camp, and powers such as the Power Clap, Power Smile, and of course the Power OSU. Now every time I hear OSU, not only will I think of my beloved Buckeyes, but the Cowboys come to mind as well. Later in the week, three FFA members shared about their trip to WLC and I know those who participated in the conference this summer could have joined them as they introduced the Authentic Leader chant to the rest of camp.

Every morning and evening around the flag pole, in the amphitheatre every night for vespers, and as

we sat in the meeting hall for reflections, the state officers shared inspiring messages and their values: family, faith, and agriculture. This is why we have an organization, why it succeeds. FFA members represent the best of this nation, they embody the values they profess to believe in, and there are so many who dedicate themselves to ensuring the success of these students. Oklahoma FFA members set off on "Highway FFA: Destination Success" this week. The state officers' final song dedication included the words, "I hope you had the time of your life." Both Jill and I did!

July 6, 2003

A view of the mountains and I was hooked! Majesty, beauty and grace...a sparkling example of God's work. I can't capture it all in words, but the photos came pretty close.

The National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO) began on Sunday as officers from Utah, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Ohio gathered in Colorado Springs, Colo. On Monday, we loaded up for the 19-mile drive up Pike's Peak. In the Ohio van, we enjoyed off-road adventures with Mr. Gratz, Jeremiah's altitude updates, and plenty of Buckeye conversation. Even in June, we were able to have a snowball fight at the summit. During the drive down the mountain in the Arizona van, it happened...I saw my first marmot!

On Tuesday, after a morning of hard work, I traveled with the Colorado officers to the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame where I learned how to rope from B.J. and Adrianna. After enjoying dinner with the Utah state officers, most of us spent the evening talking and splashing about during the pool party. The banquet committee helped us begin celebrating the first half of the conference on Wednesday. Then in the evening we were off for a chuck wagon dinner at the Flying W Ranch. As I sat at the picnic table watching the sunset and listening to the show, it struck me once again how blessed we are to be a part of an organization that gathers students from across the country together, united for a common purpose. After reflections, I learned a new dance to Cotton-Eyed Joe from Coulter, a New Mexico state officer. Thursday wrapped up the conference and I enjoyed having lunch with the Colorado state officer team. As I drove to the airport with the view of the mountains, I thought back to the beginning of the week.

Now when I think of Colorado Springs, not only will I remember the beautiful mountains, but I'll always think of the moments shared with these state officers.

Where did you celebrate the 4th of July? I spent my day at home! The morning began at my aunt and uncle's house with my five cousins. After a great cookout, we jumped in the pool. Later we all moved back to our house where the rest of the day included a family volleyball and baseball game before the fireworks began. All too soon the day was over and it was time to hit the road again.

June 22, 2003

What a week in the home of the Corn Huskers! Joel and I joined state officers from Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Missouri in Aurora, Neb., at The Leadership Center. The time that we spent with the officers was inspiring! Each has so many talents and a sincere desire to serve their state associations during their year. Presenting workshops, defending their purpose statement, climbing a rather challenging ladder, eating delicious watermelon, showcasing their talent (including an exciting version of the Beach Boys' hit "Kokomo" that sounded a lot like "NLCSO"), and sharing fun and fellowship were just some of the activities of the week. I can't wait to see how each team will continue to shine during the year as they are "Carrying the Light" at camps, conferences, legislative breakfasts, chapter visits and then their own state conventions. It is our hope that your year be blessed with many more memories and friendships as you share who you are and your enthusiasm with others! As I watched your group discussions, sat with you to talk, watched powerful flag raisings and reflections, and saw you encourage each other with special notes during the week, I felt privileged to be able to share this experience with you. FFA members, get ready because these state officers are ready to Shine On!

June 15

The 75th Anniversary Illinois Association FFA State Convention was spectacular! The celebration began in downtown Springfield as 2,000+ FFA members proudly sporting the blue and gold jacket marched to the Prairie Capital Convention Center. As I looked in front of me during the parade I could see the state creed speaking finalists proudly carrying the flags, followed by the talented state convention band, and then the state officers. From on top of a hill, I peered to the back of the parade line-up and two blocks back, members were still joining the parade. Wow! Each session had more enthusiasm as success was recognized and the Illinois Association FFA thanked all those whose support has allowed them to thrive during the past 75 years. Whether I was in one of three workshops, hanging out at the dance with over 1,200 FFA members, attending the luncheons, sitting with the section presidents, spending time with the visiting state officers from Michigan, relaxing in the convention center with members, testing my trivia knowledge at the Hillsboro FFA Chapter's booth, or sitting in the hot box with the major state officer candidates, I had a great time and I'll take

these memories with me. The title of State President, Jay Kelly's retiring address accurately forecasted the future of this highly successful association, "The Best is Yet to Come!" Members across the nation continue to demonstrate their joy in reflecting on the historic moments of the FFA, celebrating the present and looking forward to the future together!

June 8

The state officers and members of the Louisiana FFA Association welcomed me to their 74th State FFA Convention with "Southern Hospitality-Louisiana Style!" In Alexandria, I enjoyed attending each session, meeting FFA members from Areas 1-4, hearing the state officer's retiring addresses, and listening to the talented Dr. Rick Rigsby tell of the lessons learned from a mother and a father. And I tasted the cuisine, too! I can now proudly say that I've eaten alligator! I can't wait to hear the state-speaking winners at national convention after seeing them present their winning speeches on the state convention stage. We all watched and shared in the laughter as hypnotist Mr. Roger LeBas performed with twenty members gladly volunteering to be hypnotized. As the convention came to a close, the newly elected state president, Matthew Babcock, said it well when he said, "Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened." I'm still smiling today!

Off to the East Coast! On Saturday, I attended the Connecticut State FFA Convention at Nonnewaug High School hosted by the Woodbury FFA Chapter. The state officers did a wonderful job decorating the auditorium and really setting up their theme, "Lights, Camera, Action!" The tour of the high school amazed me! Last year, the Woodbury FFA qualified to compete in 10 CDE's at the national level. As I toured the high school, it was easy to see the pride the members have in their chapter's success and the appreciation they share for the opportunities they've been afforded. Another highlight was looking at the chapter scrapbooks and learning about chapter activities, including a Dog Wash! After my workshop and lunch, it was on to the gymnasium to view the State Booths and see how each had done in the annual competition. (I learned about Connecticut agriculture first hand from the students who are its future.) I look forward to seeing many of the members and advisors at the Big 'E' in September!

June 1, 2003

On Monday, I returned to Ohio, visiting the western part of the state for a Business and Industry Visit. During the afternoon, I visited with executives of North American Nutrition Companies, Inc. (Akey Feeds) in Lewisburg and enjoyed hearing them share their favorite FFA experiences, including parliamentary procedure contests. Even years after they put away their blue corduroy jacket, they still fondly remember their years in the FFA and credit much of their future success to their FFA involvement. I am always inspired by the support of our corporate sponsors. They are so vital to this organization. After lunch, I traveled with Dr. Armstrong and National FFA Foundation staff member, Jana Jaure, to Miami Valley Career and Technology Center (MVCTC) to visit with FFA members and leadership officers from the other Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs). It's always great to be back in Ohio! As we pulled into the driveway of the campus, memories came flooding back. After being elected to state office, my teammates and I facilitated our first workshops at MVCTC. I can remember touring the campus with the chapter officers including Matt Schmitmeyer who recently became the 2002 National Agri-Entrepreneurship Proficiency Winner. What an honor to be invited back! I'll be heading down to Louisiana for their convention the first part of June.

May 18

"Your Ticket to Achieve" was the theme of the 73rd Washington FFA State Convention. Having never traveled to the Northwest corner of the U.S., I was awed by the beauty and majesty of the state of Washington. Climbing up the hills of the Washington State University campus I developed what is fondly known as "cougar calves." I really enjoyed getting to know the state officers, FFA members and the visiting state officers from Virginia, California, Idaho, Nevada and Oregon. I had the opportunity to help with the Ag Communications CDE, presented two workshops and enjoyed the awesome sessions. Washington has amazing talent! I'm looking forward to seeing many of the Washington FFA members at National Convention. Congratulations, Washington FFA on 73 years of achievement!

May 12

Aggieland here I come. I'm in Texas with my teammates getting ready for a test run of our NLCSO curriculum here at the Texas A & M University. The flu bug has kept me down for a couple days but the weather is bright and sunny and I'm looking forward to experiencing the spirit of Aggieland.

May 4

On February 9, 1929, 60 delegates from 52 vocational agricultural departments around Ohio founded the Ohio FFA Association on the campus of the Ohio State University. Then, there were seven chapters and less than 200 members. Now, in the 75th year of our association, Ohio is home to 317

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chapters and 21, 868 members. Joel and I enjoyed the Blue and Gold Benefit Banquet and first general session on Thursday night. We witnessed the opening of the time capsule, which had remained sealed for 25 years. My parents reminisced as members of their class in high school had submitted a letter to the current chapter officers encouraging them to continue to make a positive difference in the lives of others. This gathering of the people whose leadership and commitment to excellence have grown this organization over the past 75 years was an inspiration to everyone in attendance. From the talent show to the announcement of the new state officer team, the Ohio convention was filled with excitement and Blue and Gold pride.

As we celebrated One Mission: Student Success we were reminded of our advisors, school administrators, community members, agriculturists, educators, members of the alumni, foundation staff, and parents who have provided us with the opportunities that we've been afforded. Their dedication and commitment to helping us grow and develop has forever changed our lives. Individuals whose pride in the organization is lifelong, leaders who believed the best in each of us. As we look to the future? The current and future leaders of our organization look to those who've made such a contribution to their success and the success of the Ohio FFA. Real leaders who have something to give and they give it freely. There's a bright future to look forward to because there have been 75 years of:

- Students realizing their exciting promise
- Life-changing leadership from advisors
- Support at the local, state and national levels
- Service in local communities
- And Corporate and Individual sponsors who've invested in the future of youth.

Congratulations Ohio FFA! Let's continue the celebration.

April 27

I'm returning to the Buckeye State, and the Northmor FFA. Mr. Parrott has been a mentor to me throughout my FFA career and I was excited to return to their chapter for the annual banquet. My sister Jill traveled with me to bring greetings on behalf of the Ohio FFA Association as State Sentinel. Their chapter's dedication to community service was evident as 18 members were recognized for their service throughout the year in the PALS program. They partner with the Big Brother/Big Sister community organization to provide support and mentoring to younger students. The chapter even raised more than \$1,500 with a bowl-a-thon to support this program. I am looking forward to seeing Mr. Parrott and members of the Northmor FFA at the Ohio FFA Convention in May. Northmor FFA, you make Ohio proud!

What do you get when you assemble more than 350 members and guests, all avid Ohio State Buckeye fans and FFA supporters? The Hillsdale FFA banquet. Yes, I'm home for our chapter banquet! The banquet was typical buckeye style complete with the O-H-I-O *Hang on Sloopy* chant as we recognized the dedication and support of our advisors, Mr. Mark Hoffman and Miss Lindsay Bowen, both Scarlet and Gray grads. It was awesome, the slide show, the year in review, the delicious buffet and leadership of our chapter officers made my welcome home complete. I was able to catch up with old friends and those people near and dear to me. I was reminded of my high school days, as the awards were presented and hard work was recognized, and as always I was so proud to be part of the Hillsdale FFA. And in just one week we will all travel to Columbus for the 75th Ohio FFA Convention. Go Bucks!

April 13, 2003

What a great convention! Learning how to jitterbug, listening to six amazing retiring addresses, participating in guest speaker Matt Lohr's skit (The Sinking of the Titanic), getting to know the staff, spending late nights with the 19 state officer candidates, meeting members from "east river" and "west river", speaking with state officers from the past 75 years, dancing the night away with over 1,000 FFA members, and sharing in the excitement as South Dakota FFA members, parents, and guests celebrated at their 75th Anniversary State FFA Convention. As you can tell, I'm having an awesome time here in South Dakota and the theme certainly fits the high level of activity, "Live Right Now!" On Thursday, I'll be traveling to New Hampshire.

The "Granite State" FFA Association gathers in North Conway, New Hampshire. I had the opportunity to enjoy a beautiful drive from the airport through the mountains. The convention showcased FFA members, advisors and supporters who had all "Stepped Up To Success!" I had lunch with members of the Pinkerton Academy, took in the talent show and even witnessed the milk chugging challenge

before I had to head back to Indy. Congrats to the "Granite State" FFA Association for a very successful 73rd State Convention.

March 30

This week has been great as I spent time at home in Ohio, had lunch with friends, enjoyed meals with family, evening talks with Grandma, and even ice skating with my best friend. And the week just continued to get better!

A year's worth of accomplishments, travel, forming friendships and learning culminated in the celebration of a chapter FFA banquet. It was an honor to be invited to attend the Clear Fork FFA Annual Chapter Banquet on Thursday. It seems like not long ago, my classmates and I were learning in ag class how to properly administer medication to livestock from our student teacher Mr. Adam Staley. With bananas as our subjects we gave the fruit subcutaneous and inter-muscular injections. Now he's the advisor of the Clear Fork FFA. My sister, Jill, who is the Ohio FFA State Sentinel, traveled to Clear Fork with me. The video slide show had with photos of the chapter's trip to the Denver stock show, Jill's chapter visit earlier in the fall, and even pictures of chapter members with Dustin Clark during FFA Week, as well as highlights of so many other activities and events from the year. And the talent, WOW! The Buckeye Country Cloggers were AMAZING! I can't wait to see them perform again at Ohio's State FFA Convention in May!

It's a warm and sunny 67 degrees here in Ashland, Ohio, but the forecast for this weekend looks cold and there may even be some...snow. Have a great weekend!

March 16, 2003

Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Canada! Our second week of Business and Industry Tours with FFA Foundation Staff Member Mrs. Jan Ferris was so much fun! Visiting GMAC, Chevy, Ford, Ford Fund, Daimler/Chrysler, Dodge, IMC Global, Case IH, CNH Capitol, CNH Global, and Syngenta Flowers allowed us to learn more about our sponsors and thank them for their support. After visiting GMAC and Chevy, Seth and I doubled our international experience and made our first trip across the border to visit Canada. During the week, we also enjoyed eating some of the famous Kringle (a Danish pastry with delicious icing) in Racine, Wisconsin. Each of the sponsors, who had attended National FFA Convention, the largest youth gathering in the nation, remarked about how impressive the convention is and how much they enjoy exhibiting at the career show. We appreciate all of their support. The week flew by and soon Seth and I were on our way back to Indianapolis for Spring Training.

March 9, 2003

JJ, Dustin, Seth and I had the opportunity to share about our experiences during our first week of Business & Industry Tours as we drove to Cassopolis, Michigan for our team retreat on Saturday. We met Tim and Joel at the Edward Lowe Foundation as we settled in for a week of team bonding and preparations for state conventions. The facilities were incredible! We stayed in renovated boxcars, enjoyed relaxing on the couches by the warm fireplace, having meals together in the dining hall, playing in the snow, doing a scavenger hunt and celebrating with ice cream sundaes in the old-fashioned soda shop. I'll always remember our team's Sunday morning praise worship as Tim and Seth played the guitar and how much fun it was to reflect on our memories from the past four months. On Monday, JJ, Dustin, Joel and I spent the morning visiting the Cassopolis FFA Chapter, while Tim attended the Michigan State Convention and Seth was in Hawaii for their convention. I was very impressed by the Cassopolis FFA Chapter, especially their 7th and 8th grade Conduct of Meeting Team. As we visited, we had fun practicing parli pro and learning how to dance the "Gator". Congratulations to all of the members of Cassopolis who competed at State Convention, especially the 1st Place Conduct of Meetings team, WAY TO GO! After an energizing week, we drove back to Indy to prepare for our second week of Business and Industry Tours.

March 2, 2003

Well, I was expecting some warm temperatures and sunny weather for our trip to Texas, but we arrived to find Texas experiencing the worst ice storm in its history. As we braved the icy roads, Seth and I spent an incredible week with FFA Foundation Staff members Angie White and Jason Givan. In Texas, we enjoyed visiting sponsors Gufaston, RaboBank, the American Quarter Horse Association, and Texas Cattle Feeders. We also had the opportunity to spend the evening with Mr. Tom McDonald, Environmental Affairs Manager of ContiBeef, his daughter Whitney, local community members and the members of the Hartley and Dalhart FFA Chapters. After spending the evening meeting the chapter members, advisors, and community members, Mr. McDonald and Whitney took us on a tour of the feedlot. The sheer size of the facility and its production capabilities were very impressive. Before leaving Amarillo, Seth and I visited the famous Cadillac Ranch. It was quite a sight to see! Then we were off to Arkansas, the Natural State. In the morning we visited our sponsors at Tyson. I felt right at home! After visiting Wal-Mart's corporate headquarters, we were off to the airport, heading back to Indianapolis.

Feb. 28, 2003

Our team was blessed with the opportunity to spend three days in Nashville, Tennessee, with our hosts from the Tractor Supply Company: Mr. Gerry Brase, who is also the Chairman of the National FFA Foundation Sponsors Board, and Mrs. Gina Cochran. The weekend was filled with a whirlwind of activities including eating fried chicken and drinking sweet tea at the Loveless Café, touring the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, then off to Ryman Auditorium where we saw past national officer, Leslie Small, in the lobby and saw John Michael Montgomery performing his sound check. Mr. and Mrs. Brase treated us to dinner at their home, where we enjoyed spending the evening playing pool and visiting with them. We had lunch on the General Jackson, toured Gaylord Opryland Resort where the American Farm Bureau Federation was holding a Leadership Development Conference, and spent the evening with the Tennessee State Officers at Jillian's. What an incredible weekend!

As I was walking through Opry Mills, I ran into Pamela, a friend I had met at WLC during the summer of my junior year. Now she's proudly serving as a state officer, it's amazing how quickly time goes by. The Tennessee officers and our team had so much fun as we played air hockey, raced our Nascar cars, shot some baskets, and played skeet ball. Seth is certainly going to have a great time at their State FFA Convention! On Monday, we learned more about Tractor Supply Company as we toured their headquarters and saw just how strongly they believe in the National FFA Organization. We are all so thankful for the support of all of our sponsors who make it possible for us to enjoy so many opportunities as members of the FFA! What a great way to kick-off our first week of Business & Industry tours! Seth Heinert and I are now off to Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas.

Feb 23, 2003

National FFA Week! Walking off the airplane in Arizona I was shocked to see palm trees right outside the airport, this was certainly going to be the warmest week I'd ever had in February. Brian Hogue and Patrick Bray, Arizona State Officers, greeted me at the airport and the week began.

On Monday evening the Bray family hosted the Arizona State Officer Team (Brian, Ginnie, Jamie, Holly, Ray, Patrick and Mike) and me for a delicious Mexican dinner. On Tuesday, Brian, Arizona State President, and I traveled to the Flowing Wells FFA Chapter. We toured the chapter's hydroponic tomato greenhouse with Krystal. It was amazing to see the fruits growing on plants that stretched from floor to ceiling throughout the greenhouse. As we looked at the lamb projects being raised at the high school, I met 7-year-old Torri Ellis, the sister of Meghan Ellis an FFA member at Flowing Wells. Torri is so excited to join FFA! After enjoying a great breakfast prepared by the Leadership Class and doing some workshops with the ag classes, Brian and I were off to Amphitheatre High School. What a warm welcome! I really enjoyed spending the afternoon with the three officer teams at Amphi and learning more about their FFA Week festivities and their extensive work with their livestock projects. They had produced a chapter calendar with photos of every member with one of their SAE projects featured each month. The mayor of Tucson issued a proclamation about the celebration of FFA as a result of the Amphitheatre FFA Chapter's efforts. Later, Brian and I met Mrs. Denise Reis, Executive Director of the Arizona FFA Foundation, and had the opportunity to visit some sponsors of the Arizona FFA Association with her. We toured the United Dairymen of Arizona, visited Wells Fargo, and toured Accomazzo Farms, with past Arizona State Officer, Mr. Wade Accomazzo. That evening we traveled to Millennium High School for a district barbecue. Chapter Advisors, Mr. Clark and Mr. Zimmerman hosted an incredible event and afterward we saw the newborn calf that had been born during that evening's presentation.

On Wednesday morning, we met Mr. Tyler Grandil, Arizona State Executive Secretary, and Mr. Neil Schneider with the Arizona Farm Bureau for a media interview. After a great discussion about the FFA and Arizona agriculture, Brian and I drove to the Yavapai CDE Day at Chino Valley. More than 600 students were participating in CDEs including Job Interview, General Livestock, Marketing, Agricultural Communications and many others. We spent that evening at the Chandler FFA Chapter's barbecue where we enjoyed a great cookout, heard an inspirational message from the high school principal, and then concluded the evening with a very fun game night. I love Pictionary! That evening we drove to Yuma, the Winter Salad Bowl Capital of the United States.

On Thursday, the Cibola FFA Chapter Officer Team took us to breakfast and shared about the activities of their chapter. Following a speech at Cibola High School, Brian and I drove just across town to visit the Kofa FFA Chapter. Lunch at The Crossing with the Kofa FFA Members was so much fun as they told us about all of their preparations for Friday's Farm Fair for local third and eighth graders. They had planned a day combining a program like Food for America with eighth grade recruitment. Brian and I returned to the high school with the chapter officers after lunch and I had the opportunity to visit with the Ag Mechanics class. Then it was off to join the Yuma FFA members in their Food for America project at the local elementary school. Sydney Stewart, Yuma FFA member, and I worked with a class of third graders who were very knowledgeable about the Food Guide Pyramid. The highlight of the afternoon for the third graders was seeing the Nigerian Dwarf Goats and the Himalayan Rabbit that the chapter members had brought. Later that afternoon, Brian and I had a chance to learn first hand about celery and lemon production when we met up with sophomore Kyle Kuechel, a member of the Kofa FFA. Kyle was nice enough to take us on a tour of his family's celery

and lemon operation. Before heading out to explore the lemon orchards, we stopped by to pick up Kyle's classmate, Mike Easterday. He showed us his veal calf, his SAE project. Brian, Mike, and I jumped into Kyle's pick-up truck and headed back the dirt roads of the farm through the lemon orchard learning about tree pruning, lemon harvesting, and the wind machine that keeps cold air from settling on the fruit.

Before heading to the Antelope FFA's barbecue, Brian took me on a tour of the McElhaney Cattle feed lot. I had never seen such a large-scale operation. Approximately 120,000 head of cattle all in one location! At Antelope High School they're celebrating the 50th year of their school in this the 75th year of the FFA. I really enjoyed spending the evening with all of the members in attendance as we enjoyed some great barbecue chicken and baked beans. That night, Brian and I traveled to his home chapter the Wilcox FFA.

In the morning, I was honored to attend the VIP breakfast that chapter advisor, Mr. Foster, and the Wilcox FFA Chapter Officers had planned. As I sat with the members of the Ag Issues team during breakfast it was very impressive to hear about all of the work and research they had done to prepare their presentation on immigration laws. All too quickly, it was time to leave and hurry back to Phoenix to board the airplane. Mr. Grandil and Brian worked very hard to develop an awesome schedule. The Arizona FFA members, advisors, parents, community members, and school administrators went out of their way to make me feel welcome. I was so inspired by their enthusiasm and their commitment to success. In this, the 75th th year of our organization, the future looks bright, because as I saw in Arizona, FFA members, advisors, and all of our partners believe in the power of the organization and are ensuring its success each and every day!

Feb. 9, 2003

After State Staff In-service, I headed home to Ashland, Ohio, and enjoyed six days with my family and friends. On Wednesday, I returned to my junior high school and had the opportunity to speak with my brother's sixth grade class about our team's trip to Japan. We ate some Pocky (Japanese chocolate covered pretzel-like sticks), learned about Japanese currency, language and agriculture. I enjoyed sharing our team's experiences with the class as they excitedly discovered another culture. On Thursday, I traveled with my Grandpa to the airport to catch a flight back to Indy. It certainly is a blessing to be able to spend some one-on-one time with loved ones. On Friday, Valentine's Day, the staff of Elanco Animal Health welcomed our team and provided us with additional training for our upcoming Business and Industry Tours. Mr. Bruce Bye had set-up an exciting schedule, providing an opportunity for us to learn more about the company, share key messages of the FFA, and also thank them for their support of the Ag Issues Career Development Event. Right now, I'm sitting here in Indy preparing for FFA Week. I'm so excited to fly to Arizona on Monday!

Feb. 2, 2003

Ohayoo Gozaimasu! Pronounced: "Ohio guzaymus!" (Good Morning!) I thought I would share my favorite Japanese phrase as our team recently returned from eight incredible days in Japan!

A twelve-hour flight brought us to Tokyo where we were greeted by our tour guide and interpreter, Hiro. After a good night's sleep, we traveled by subway to the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Richard Battaglia, agricultural attaché, and many others from the Foreign Agricultural Services, the international branch of USDA, informed us about Japanese agriculture and the economy of Japan. We learned about the current issues including the affect of avian influenza and BSE on Japanese consumption of poultry and beef. We were also very interested to learn that Japanese consumers are demanding point-of-purchase tracability on meat, which is resulting in the computerized history of the product being available in local grocery stores.

My twentieth birthday was spent visiting the Tsukiji Fish Market where we saw the auction of frozen Blue Fin Tuna' the largest fish that I had ever seen! We saw whale meat, live eel, flounder, squid, octapi, and many other sea creatures. That afternoon we visited Mitsui & Co., LTD, general trading company and 25-year sponsor of the national officer trip to Japan. We karoked with the young executives of Mitsui that night, singing a mixture of American and Japanese songs. I will always remember joining hands and singing John Lennon's *Imagine*... youth from two diverse countries realizing that we are all very much alike.

We rode the bullet train, which reaches speeds of 180 mph, to Kyoto, the historic capital of Japan. Our tour of Japanese agribusinesses continued at Yanmar Agricultural Machinery Manufacturing Co., Ltd. Their Kinomoto Plant produces tractors ranging in size from 18-110HP. Yanmar also produces components for use in John Deere Tractors. Their newest plant, the Biwa Plant, deals with the production of diesel engines with special attention being given to meeting international emissions standards.

We were very excited to visit two Japanese farms during the trip. The first farmer produced chives and Korean lettuce hydroponically. Since my SAE included Job Placement at a local greenhouse, I was

very excited to tour these greenhouses. The production and harvesting of the lettuce was very similar to my local FFA chapter's hydroponic lettuce, but instead of setting the plugs into plastic trays, this farmer was placing the plugs into Styrofoam sheets that floated on top of the water. The second farmer was growing greenhouse strawberries. Additionally, he farmed about 50 acres of rice with his wife and he explained that this was about the maximum amount of acreage that two people could farm successfully in Japan. After sampling the strawberries, we were hooked, these Japanese berries were the most delicious any of us had ever tasted.

Although there are many differences between our two countries, agriculturists are continually finding new and innovative ways to produce food for a global society and there is so much we can learn, together.

January 20, 2003

My year is going very well and certainly is exciting! Starting January 1, our team returned to Indy for training and preparations for our Greenhand Experience Weeks. Then from Jan. 6-10, Dustin and I spent the week in Minnesota. It was an amazing trip! We visited fourteen of Minnesota's finest chapters, went ice fishing with Long Prairie FFA members, saw the Mall of America with our friends Mark and Jill, and toured the AMPI (Associated Milk Producers Incorporated) butter plant with the New Ulm chapter officers. During the week, we traveled with the Minnesota State Executive Secretary, Mr. Ertl, and State Advisor, Mr. Larsen, as well as seven state officers. We loved hearing all about the state officers' year so far and how much they are looking forward to attending chapter banquets and putting on their state FFA convention. The students we had the opportunity to work with were so enthusiastic about FFA and dedicated to serving their schools and communities. Members of the Tracy FFA chapter told us about participating in an annual Corn Drive for Camp Courage, a camp for those with disabilities. They collect monetary donations as well as corn to raise funds for the camp. Then they take the corn to the local grain elevator and donate those earnings as well. The New London Spicer FFA gave us a tour of the Habitat for Humanity house that they have been building themselves. Minnesota FFA members are learning to do as they help their communities through some exceptional projects!

After that inspiring week, the entire team returned to Indy for more advanced training and I've just spent the last few days at home with my family. I'll fly out to Washington, D.C. tomorrow for the Board of Directors meeting and then on to Japan for our ten-day international experience. We'll return to Indy for the State Staff In Service and then head home for a week before heading to our FFA Week states. I'll be spending FFA Week in Arizona, site of the winning Ohio State Buckeye National Championship Game! I can't wait!

Jan. 6, 2003

When New Years rolls around, I always take a trip down memory lane. Do you remember that one special moment when you first thought about a dream or a goal that seems almost surreal? I had that experience as a freshman, competing on the Parliamentary Procedure Team. Mr. Dan Schroer, one of the judges, suggested to me that I might consider running for a national office someday. He knew first hand, having served as a national officer, what an incredible opportunity he was suggesting. He was the first person to mention the possibility of running for national office to me and for the past six years I have been blessed with his support and encouragement.

10-9-8-...3-2-1 Happy New Year! I really enjoy taking this time to reflect on the past year. I am so blessed with the love and support of family and friends. As I look back on the past year, I am overwhelmed with feelings of thankfulness for the many blessings I have received.

This past year while a student at The Ohio State University, I had the opportunity to serve as an Ohio FFA Association Intern. As a part of my internship, I had the chance to help with our state officer interview process. It was amazing to see so many members with the desire to serve others in this way. Attending my chapter's banquet and reuniting with my state officer team at state convention brought back so many memories.

Later in the summer, I received a call from our executive secretary, Mr. Steve Gratz, during one of my brother's baseball games. I still remember running to tell my mom the news. I would have the opportunity to represent Ohio as our candidate for National FFA office. Mr. Gratz is one of those people that encourages, challenges, inspires, and finds joy in helping others achieve their greatest potential. And I am very grateful for his presence in my life.

The next few months were filled with preparations, studying and meetings. So many people have gone out of their way to help me learn and grow while constantly providing encouragement and support. Friends, professors, and many others at Ohio State were always there to help me prepare and share in the experience. I am so thankful for my roommate, Rachel, who is always willing to have those late night talks about any and everything. From our awesome Buckeye football games in the Shoe to late night runs for coffee in between study sessions, Sarah, Mindy, Mikal, John, Cole, Adam,

Rachel, Carl, Marlene, Heather, and Lucy, I love you guys! Ohio is blessed with amazing FFA members and two very special past national officers, Joe Shultz and Katy Poth. Both helped me with my preparations and shared their passion and joy with me, but I am only now beginning to understand how incredible this opportunity to serve will be. I learned a great amount from Ohio's director of agriculture, Fred Dailey as well as the president of the Ohio Farm Bureau, Mr. Jack Fisher. Mr. Will Waidelich shared about career clusters, Dr. Carl Zulauf about foreign trade, and Dr. Robert Birkenholz helped explain current trends in agricultural education. Dr. L.H. Newcomb challenged me as I worked with him on an independent study. He stretched my mind and helped me create a vision for the future of agricultural education and the FFA. I enjoyed spending a day at my county fair with Dale Minyo, farm broadcaster with ABN, as he conducted interviews and shared about his experiences as State FFA President and since as an avid supporter of our organization. Kelly Koren, Dr. Ray Miller, Tonya Sharp, Dr. Sherrie Whaley, Dr. James Connors, Dr. Susie Whittington, and many of you that I have not mentioned by name, please know this Buckeye is never far from home, Go Bucks!

Then before I knew it, the end of October was here. As I sat with the other candidates during the tenth session of the National FFA Convention, I had a chance to reflect on the events of the week and everything that had happened to get me to this point. I remember looking up at my ag teacher, Mr. Mark Hoffman. He helped me understand many aspects of the agricultural industry. He is an amazing example of the many ag teachers who go above and beyond to help their students. They take an interest in us and help us to discover our strengths. . Their belief in us and our abilities helps motivate us to challenge ourselves and make the most of every experience. We learn one of the greatest lessons of life from our ag teachers, helping others succeed is one of the greatest jobs in the world no matter where or how.

Then it happened. . . the chair of the nominating committee announced . . . "from Ohio. . ." OK, uh, wow, get going, they just said your name! I only remember a huge hug from Elio, then one from Dustin and Joel, then joining us on stage came JJ, Seth and Tim. Looking over toward the Ohio booth where my chapter was sitting, they were all there! Everyone I loved, everyone who helped me get here! Rushing back stage and than on stage with our national officers, Dane, Robin, Elio, Abby, Amber and Barrett. I have never felt such excitement as together, more than 50,000 FFA members stood together to show our pride in America, as we closed the 75th National FFA Convention. The excitement of that moment continues as our team prepares to serve.

As I sit and reflect on the past year, I also think about our organization, 75 years strong! Walking through the National FFA Center I was inspired by all those who have come before and the thought of all those who are yet to come as our organization continues to grow. We learn so much from each passing year and have so much to look forward to. This past year was one filled with joy, compassion, enthusiasm, friendship, purpose, love, support, encouragement and thankfulness. So many people have shared a part of themselves and gone out of their way to help me and so many others. To my friends, professors, and many others, thank you! I will be away from campus, but I will keep you all close in thought as I travel. . As we all celebrate the New Year and continue our celebration of the diamond anniversary of the National FFA Organization, it is my prayer that you will be blessed, that His spirit of love and peace will bless you in this beautiful season and all through the New Year. I look forward to sharing the coming year with you as together [we are the FFA!](#)

Dec. 15, 2002

Happy holidays everyone! This is my favorite time of year and I can't wait to play in the snow and then warm up with a steaming cup of hot chocolate. The holiday season is always amazing. I love decorating the Christmas tree, baking cookies with my sister, mom, and grandma, and spending time with loved ones. I am so thankful for the love and support of family and friends.

My teammates and I are in Indianapolis at the National FFA Center. We all arrived in Indiana on the first of December. It has been amazing here at the center as we've come to know the staff and learn more about the operations of our organization. We were warmly welcomed and are amazed at how close all of us have become in just a few weeks. In the evenings, our team has had the opportunity to grow closer as we went laser tagging, experienced Christmas at the Zoo, had long talks and explored Indianapolis during a camera scavenger hunt. Just this past weekend, we took a road trip to my hometown, Ashland, Ohio. My mom's home cooking was amazing and I was very glad the team was able to spend time with my family. On our way back to Indianapolis, we stopped by the Ohio FFA Center to visit with Mr. Gratz (Ohio's Executive Secretary), the state officers and their parents during the annual holiday party. Then we had dinner with three of my best friends, Rachel, Sarah and John. They showed the guys some of the OSU campus. It was great to be home!

It was exciting to get a glimpse of my travel schedule for the year. In January, before our team attends the board of directors meeting and travels to Japan, Dustin and I will be visiting Minnesota for our Greenhand Experience. We're hoping for some snow! I hope you have a happy holiday! Blessings for a joyous Christmas.

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