

new horizons

The magazine of the National FFA Organization

January/February 1999

swing dancing
FINDS A GROOVE

swinging SHOVELS
INSTEAD OF BATS AT
YANKEE STADIUM

FFA ROAD TRIP
swings
THROUGH THE
HEART OF TEXAS

A 16-HOUR
swing THROUGH THE
NATIONAL FFA CONVENTION

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January/February 1999

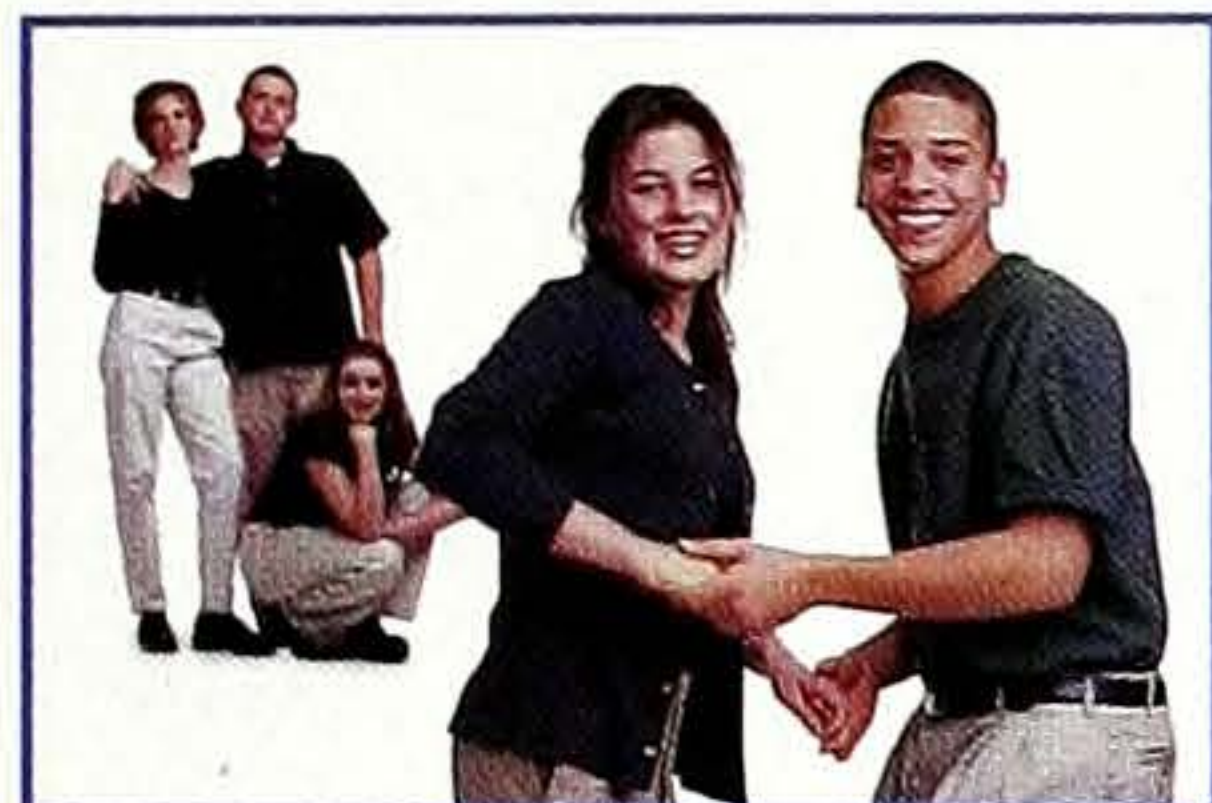
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**12 Swing Shift**

It's been gone for decades, but swing dancing is back. Thanks to the Gap khakis commercials featuring swing dancing couples and the emergence of pop-swing bands Big Bad Voodoo Daddy and the Brian Setzer Orchestra, young people are crowding the dance halls.

**17 Party of Four**

Experience the 1998 National FFA Convention with Courtney Pitts, Jonathan Collier, Angie Neal and John Holley—all members of the Nettleton FFA Chapter in Mississippi. They kindly agreed to let our camera follow them for an entire day at the national convention.

**24 Pride of the Yankees**

It takes great players to win a World Series, but it takes great groundskeepers like Dan Cunningham to build a reliable field on which they can play. See how Dan and his crew go about their jobs and learn about careers in sports and golf turf management.

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FFA Mission Statement

FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

Agricultural Education Mission

The mission of agricultural education is to prepare and support individuals for careers, build awareness and develop leadership for the food, fiber and natural resources systems.

On the cover: Jonathan Hampton and Gina Puleo, FFA members from Illinois, swing dancing at the 1998 National FFA Convention. Photo by Shane Morgan.



one on one with

Lisa Ahrens

We saw you swing dancing at a national FFA convention dance. Where did you learn the fancy footwork?

I was a state vice president a couple years ago, and I learned the steps from a couple of South Dakota state officers. One of them even taught me some flips. It is so much fun.

What went through your mind just before you were announced as the new national FFA president?

It was a feeling of calmness, knowing that throughout the selection process I was just myself. Yet there was also some nervousness and excitement, so everything kind of balanced out in my head. Elected or not, I wanted the best team to be put together to serve FFA members.

How would you describe your approach to life?

Take advantage of the opportunities that are presented to you. I almost didn't take advantage of FFA, having come close to not joining as a freshman. When I did join, I decided I was going to take advantage of every FFA opportunity. Another thing I always try to do is to be the best that I can be. If you can say that something is "good enough" then you could have done a better job. I always strive for excellence.

Describe Iowa agriculture.

We feel that we're in the heart of agriculture. I love Iowa agriculture because the people in Iowa are so passionate about it, and they love what they are doing. For them, it's not just a way of making a living—it's a way of life.

What's the best part of being in college?

The people you meet. I have met some of my best friends from my college experiences. I also enjoy the agronomy and ag business classes in my degree program.

What is your dream job?

I have two dream jobs. When I graduate, I would like to work for Pioneer Hi-Bred. Eventually, I'd love to own and operate my own agronomy consulting business.

What is your hometown of Osage like?

Osage is a beautiful little town, kind of nestled in the heart of agriculture. We have about 3,400 people, and we're proud of our three stoplights in Osage. We're also known as the City of Maples, so if you come in the fall, it's absolutely gorgeous as you drive down Main Street and see the maples turning colors. ★

VITALS

Hometown: Osage, Iowa

Age: 20

Chapter: Osage

Advisor: Myron Friesen

SAE: corn and soybean production and placement at Ahrens Pioneer Seed Education: Sophomore at Iowa State University

Major: Agronomy and agriculture business

My favorite singer: Garth Brooks

Last movie seen: Hope Floats

Car: Chevy Lumina (with personalized license: "FFA 4ME")

Favorite food: Grandma's cinnamon rolls

TIMELINE

Age

- 14** • joined FFA
- lost district conduct of meetings CDE
- 15** • first place (team and individual) in state ag sales CDE
- sixth place team in national ag sales CDE
- named to Osage Welding Hall of Fame
- 16** • lost class officer election
- named to Iowa all-state band
- second place in state job interview CDE
- 17** • won state individual ag sales competition
- 18** • elected state FFA vice president
- began studies at Iowa State University
- 19** • appointed to Iowa Board of Regents by governor
- elected state FFA president
- 20** • elected national FFA president



National president: Lisa Ahrens

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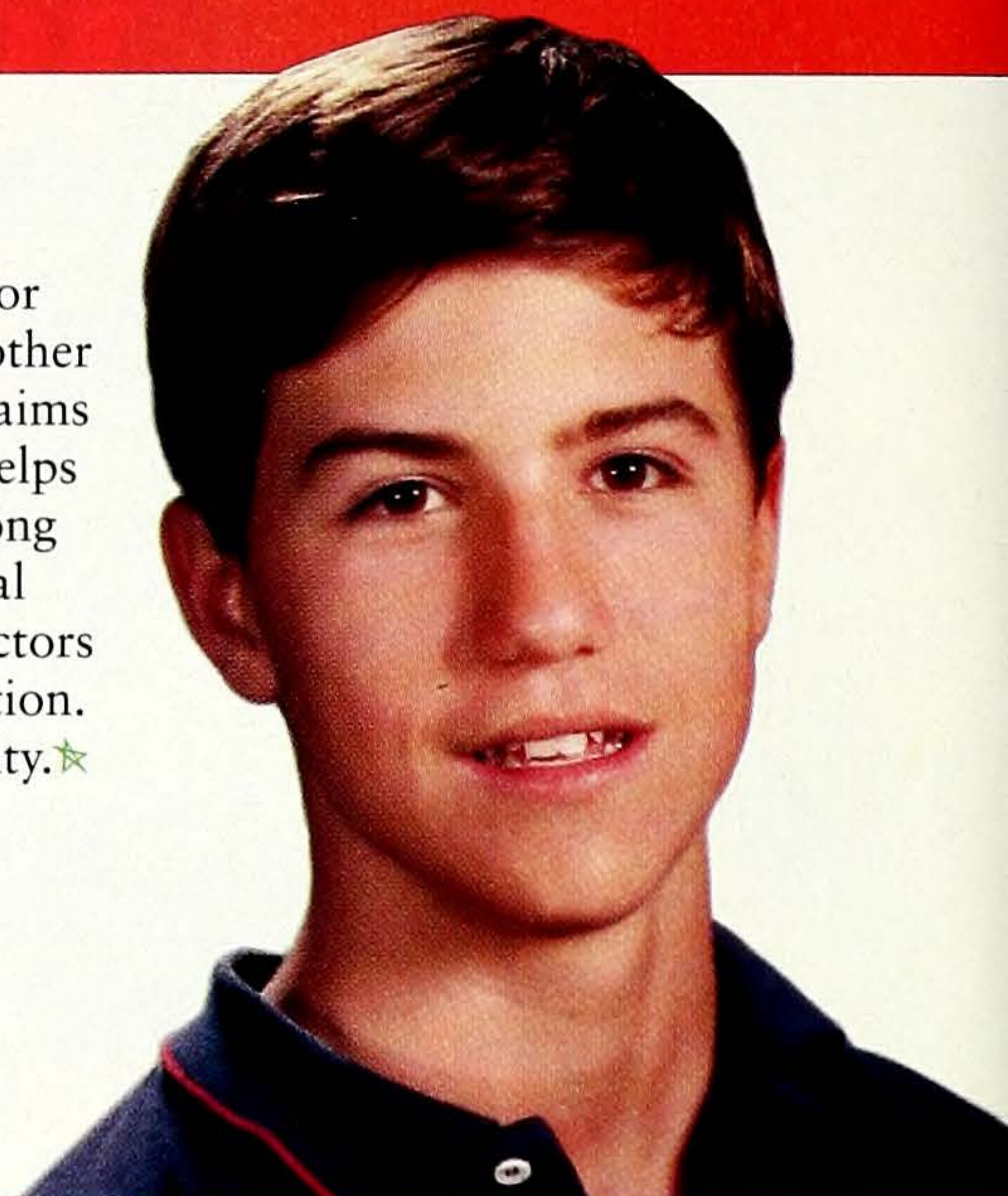
SOUTH CAROLINA

calling all stars

FFA members selected as "FFA Stars" will receive \$500 from 1-800-COLLECT which can be applied to the costs of participating in the Washington Leadership Conference or an FFA International Experience. You can nominate yourself or any FFA member. Write us a note and tell us why you think you or your nominee is an "FFA Star." See page 28 for more details. ★

Matthew Burns

Whether he's volunteering his time with Habitat for Humanity, or putting the finishing touches on another honor roll semester, 16-year-old Matthew always aims high. As the Pendleton FFA Chapter reporter, he helps keep the chapter's Food for America program strong and is a member of the state champion agricultural issues team. Matthew is also on the board of directors of the South Carolina Junior Cattleman's Association. He plans to study agriculture at Clemson University. ★



NORTH DAKOTA

NEVADA

PUERTO RICO

TEXAS



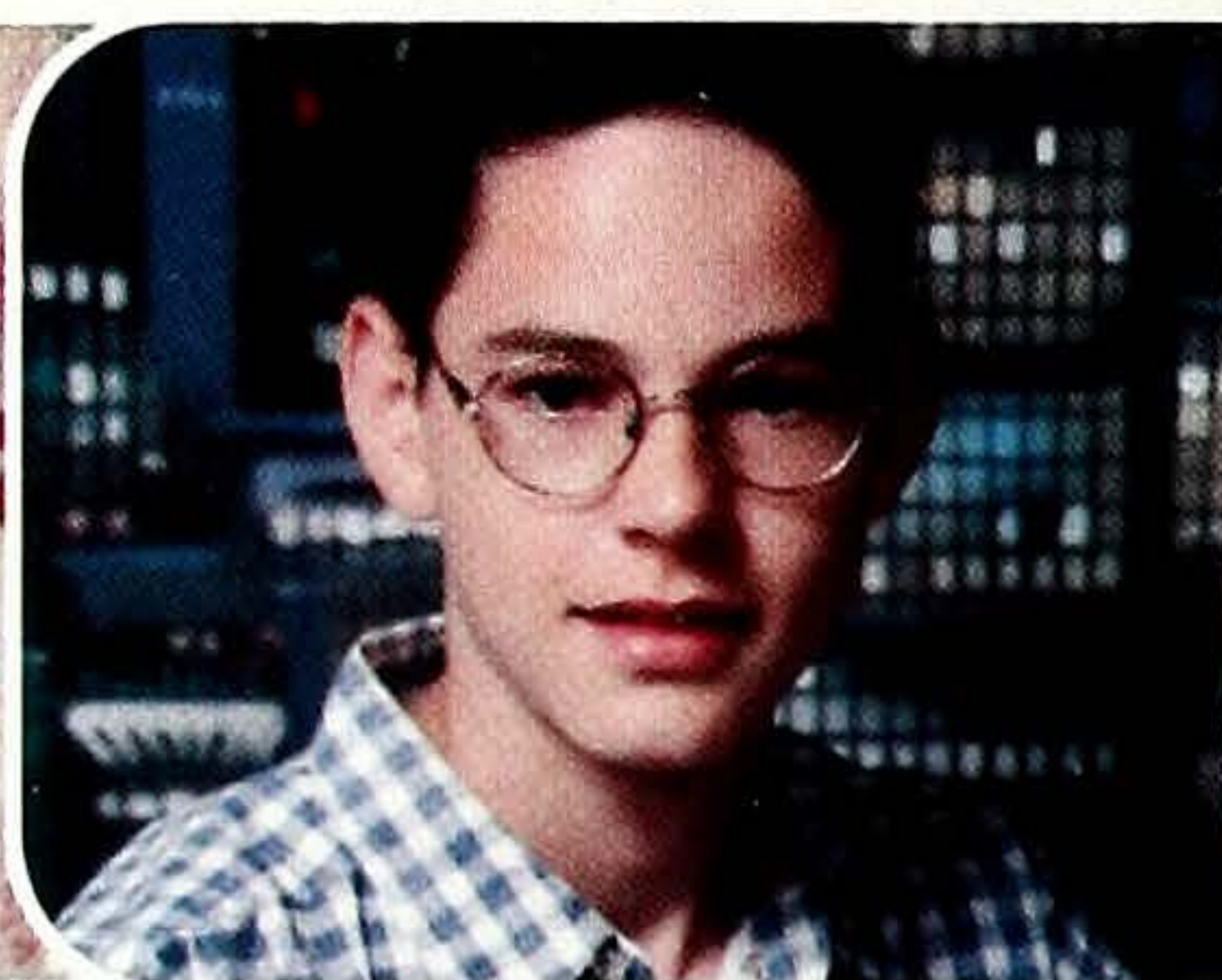
KariAnn Love Seeger

Her advisor describes her as motivated, dedicated and determined. After serving as chapter vice president for two years, this 18-year-old Turtle Lake-Mercer FFA Chapter member is now the state's northwest region vice president and a freshman at North Dakota State University. In addition to her SAE work in nursery operations, fruit and vegetable production and emerging agricultural technology, KariAnn is now pursuing the American FFA Degree. ★



Ilda Cruz

Ilda is an active fourth-year member of the Smith Valley FFA Chapter. When she isn't busy with her home development and crop production SAE projects, Ilda earns money by maintaining a half-acre vegetable garden and picking garlic in the summer months. She was recently awarded a Howard Hughes scholarship and worked as an intern at the University of Nevada-Reno medical school. ★



Jesus Colon

This 17-year-old, who hopes to someday be a lawyer, enjoys working on the Saltos FFA Chapter's hydroponics system and helping his father on the farm. His first language is Spanish, but Jesus recently put his English to the test by competing in the state prepared public speaking competition. After taking second place, Jesus topped off the experience by meeting national FFA vice president Amber Miller. Says Jesus: "I've had the best experiences in FFA—I love it." ★



Ashley McCann

Even though this 17-year-old Fruitvale FFA Chapter member devotes much of her time to athletics, student council and FFA, she is among the top four academic students in her class. As chapter star farmer, president and district vice president, Ashley raises a heifer and spends much of her time organizing chapter events. Says Cassie Griffin, her friend and chapter reporter: "She is not in FFA to see what it can do for her, but to see what she can do for the FFA." ★

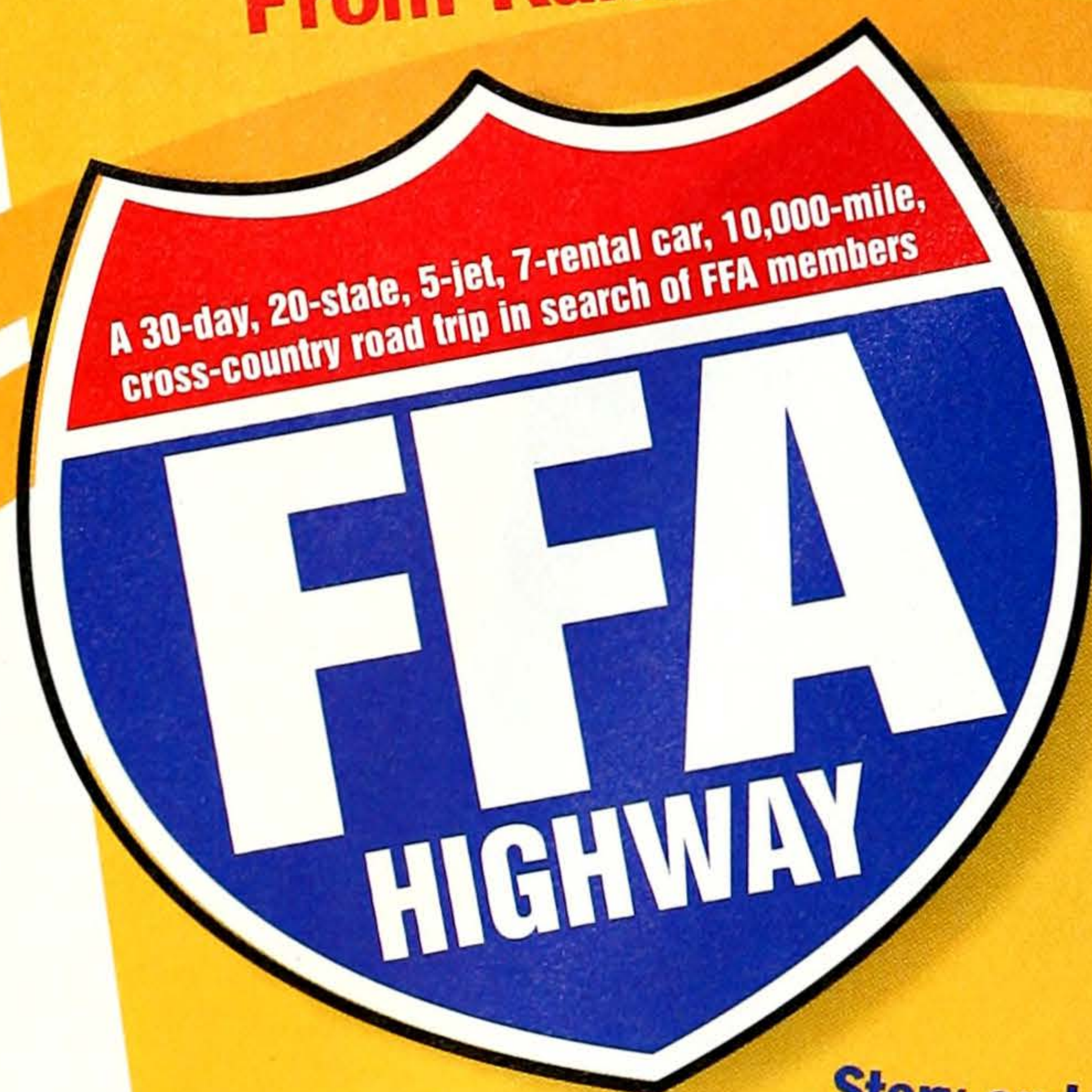


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Part Three:
From Kansas to Texas



2 Formoso, KS

Story and Photos
by Erich Gaukel

Seventeen-year-old Darla Strnad drives her pickup on the Kansas county highways like she's been at it since she was six years old. As she and I headed east on state highway 36, from Mankato (where we had just eaten lunch with her mom) to her family's farm in Formoso, Darla showed me the sights and told me about the two cows she would soon be showing. As we drove, she pointed to the wheat fields and explained that if you can still see green on the shaft of the wheat, it's not yet ready to cut. The northern Kansas harvest was still a week or two away, which explains why her older brothers, who run their own custom cutting operation, were just finishing off the Oklahoma crop and would soon be back in Kansas (read more about her brothers Troy and Terrill later in this story).

1 Smith Center, KS

The 48 contiguous United States occupy nearly three million square miles. The geographic center of this huge landmass is just outside of Smith Center, Kansas, home of an FFA chapter that works hard in its community. The Smith Center members build live animal traps for the state wildlife department; they build flower boxes for downtown businesses; and they landscape the school grounds. I met up with the Smith Center FFA members, friends and alumni at the park marking their unique geographic location. The occasion was the chapter's summer barbecue, which had everything a good barbecue should have: hot weather, great food, a pickup pull competition, a tire toss, and, last—but certainly not least—a throw-your-advisor-in-the-pond event.



This road trip
brought to you by
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continued on page 8



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[†]Depending on model. Always use seat belts. Remember a backseat is the safest place for children.



Troy Strnad (second from left) and Terrill Strnad (far right) and their crew finishing up the Oklahoma wheat crop.

3 Renfrow, Ok

There's always a sense of excitement when the harvest begins—the air is filled with chaff, the combines glow in the evening fields, and the grain elevators are busier than Grand Central Station. Along the wheat belt in the summer months, custom cutting crews crawl along county highways from Texas to North Dakota. Twenty-nine-year-old Troy and 27-year-old Terrill Strnad, owners of Strnad Brothers Harvesting, had just finished their last cutting job in Oklahoma when I hooked up with them. They started their company 11 years ago. Today, they employ a crew of around 10 and maintain a caravan of semis, combines, pickups, grain tanks and a revamped city transit bus called "Speed," where they sleep and eat. Terrill says the whole experience isn't too different from being in the army—the work is hard, you sleep on bunks and the crew members don't have to pay for room or board.

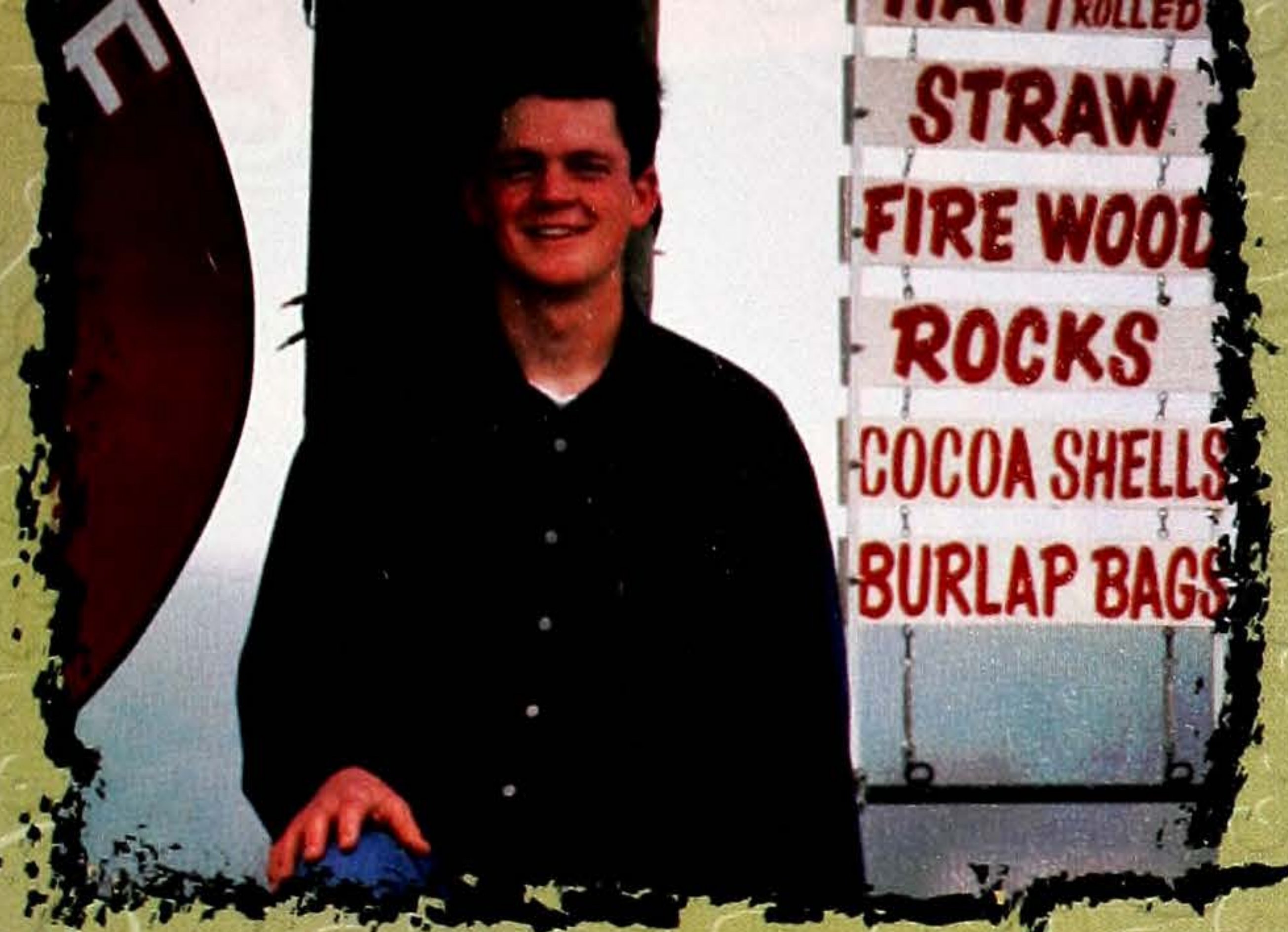


Amarillo, TX The Cadillac Ranch

If you ever pass through Amarillo, Texas, don't miss the Cadillac Ranch, a sculpture celebrating the tailfin Cadillacs of the 1950s and 1960s. Nose down in the middle of a wheat field on the west end of town, the Cadillacs are frequently repainted (they were yellow when I happened to drop by) and visitors are welcome to bring spray paint and leave their mark. A collective of local artists known as Ant Farm created the Cadillac Ranch in 1974; Stanley Marsh, the wealthy and eccentric Texan who lives in Amarillo, funded the project.



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Charles Pearce, 1995 National Agri-Entrepreneur

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Annthie Kramer, 1998 National Agri-Entrepreneur



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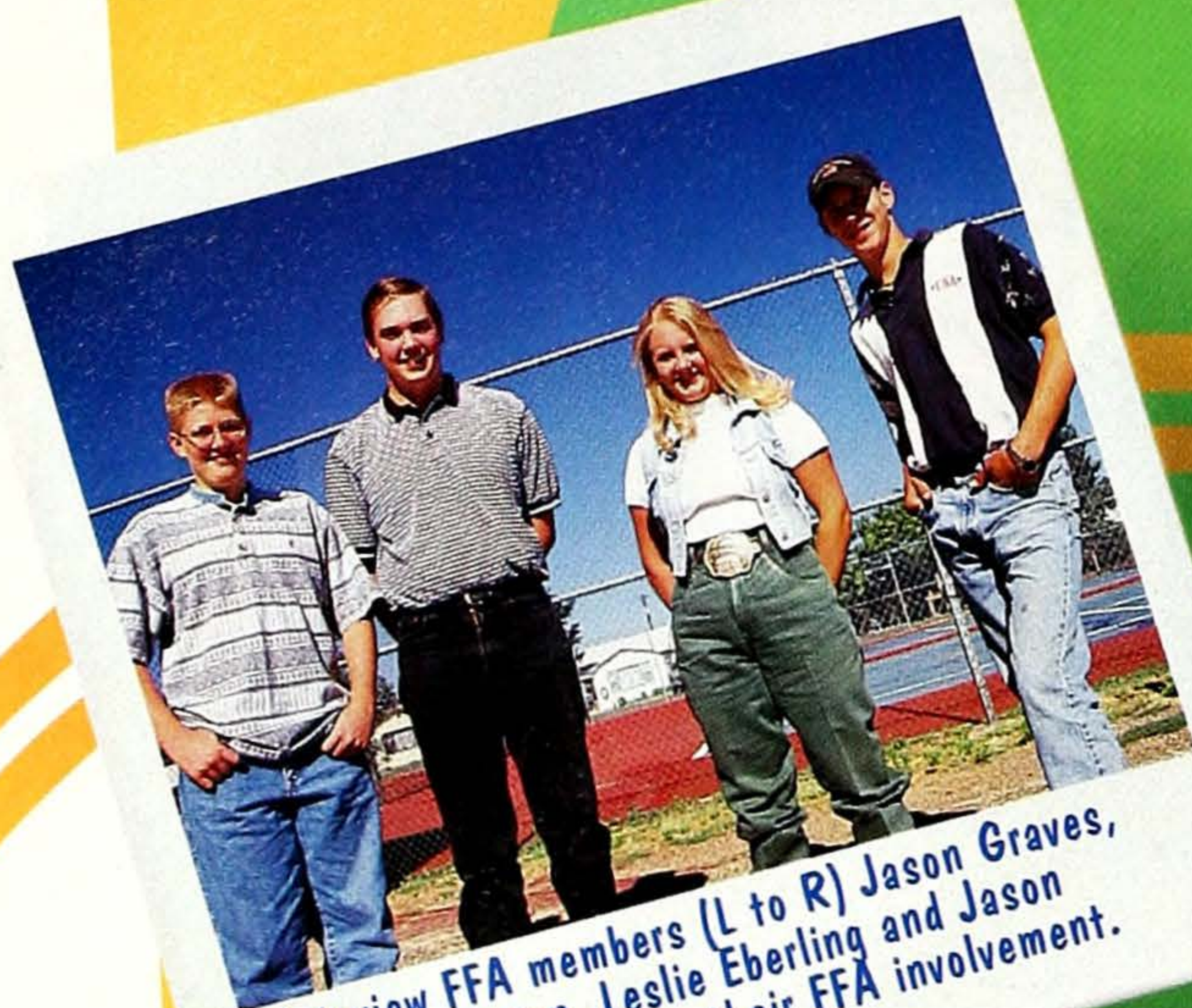
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Shequilla Pruitt, 1997 National Agri-Entrepreneur

4 Plainview, TX

Jason Derington's voice can be heard throughout the Texas panhandle and parts of eastern New Mexico on KKYN AM 1090. His show, called Ag Youth Update, showcases the Plainview FFA Chapter and local agriculture. Jason, who also helps run the chapter website, usually prepares a script and then tapes the show at the KKYN studio. The station then plays the tape on the air twice a day. The show is a perfect fit at KKYN because it strengthens the station's coverage of agriculture. When I visited Jason, he had arranged an interview with James "Pete" Laney, the Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives, who is among the most powerful people in Texas. Jason and I drove down to Speaker Laney's district office a few miles away in the town of Hale Center. Jason got the interview in one take, so we stayed a little longer and visited with Speaker, who told us he was proud to have been an FFA member himself.

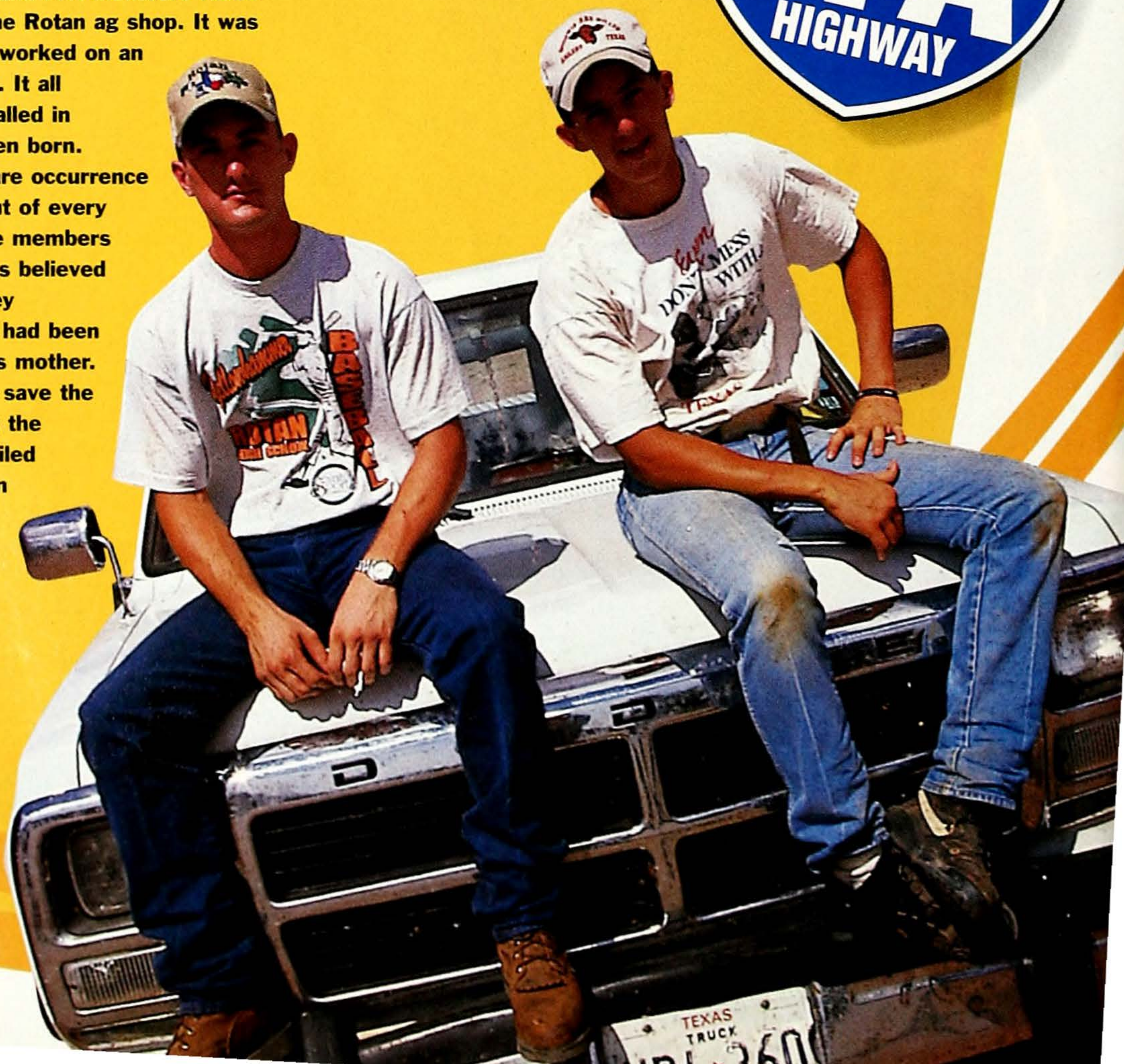


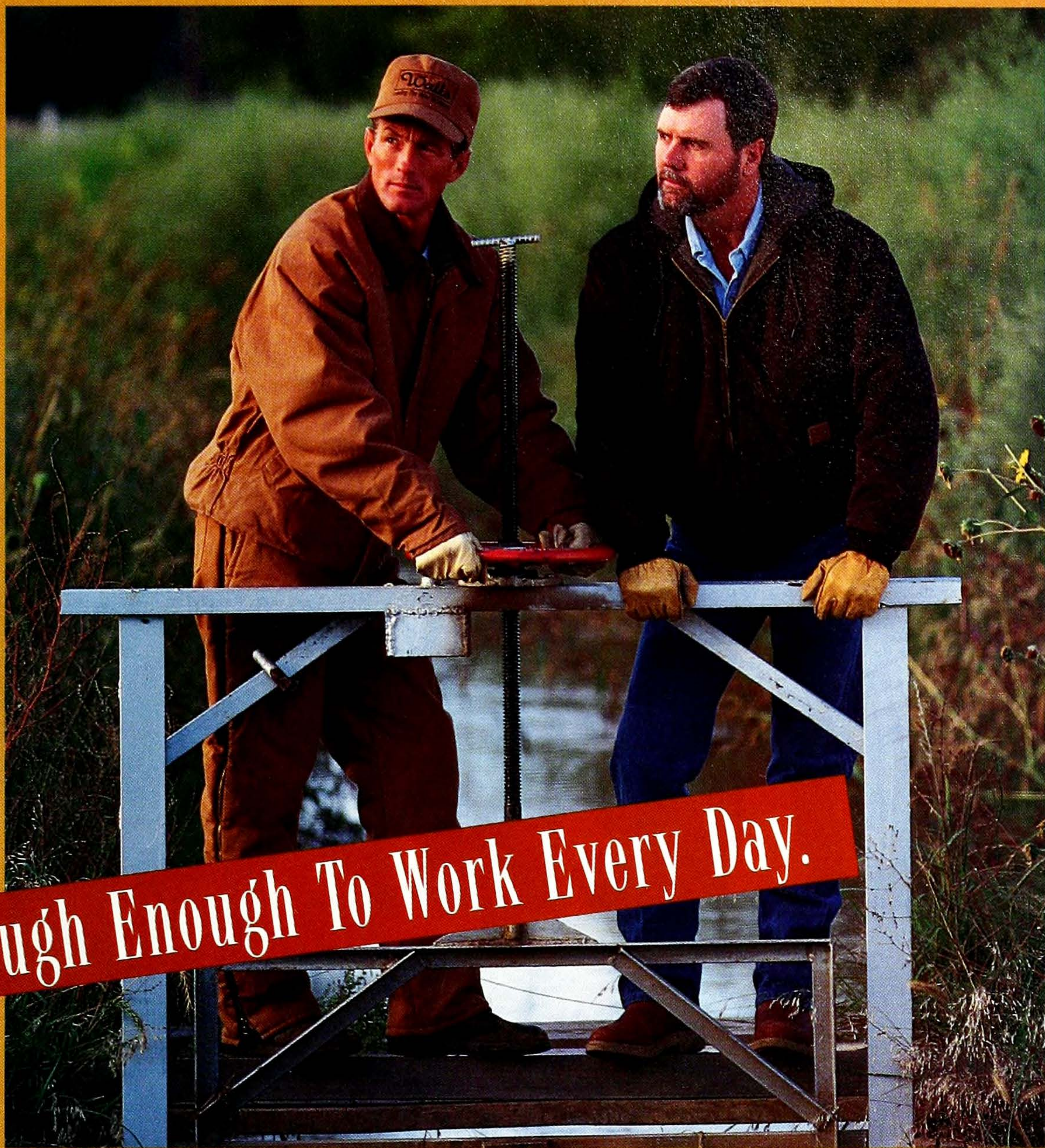
Plainview FFA members (L to R) Jason Graves, Jason Derington, Leslie Eberling and Jason Langston take pride in their FFA involvement.

5 Rotan, TX

When I got to Rotan, I opened the car door and thought I had just opened a hot oven—that's Texas in June. I met chapter advisor Norman Fryar and FFA members Kaleb Goodwin and Leslie Jones at the Rotan ag shop. It was here that the chapter recently worked on an unusual animal science project. It all started when a local rancher called in saying a two-faced calf had been born. Since this was an extremely rare occurrence (estimated to happen in one out of every 50,000 to 100,000 births), the members went to see the calf, which was believed to have already died. When they arrived, the calf was alive, but had been abandoned in the pasture by its mother. The students decided to try to save the calf known as "Daisy". Sharing the care duties and keeping a detailed journal as they went, the Rotan members nursed the calf for nearly a month before its condition deteriorated and it had to be put to sleep. The members say they learned a lot about caring for animals and gained valuable lessons in teamwork and in the value of life.

The Texas heat doesn't bother Kaleb Goodwin (left) or Leslie Jones—they're used to it.





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By Chris Hayhurst

Photography By Shane Morgan

SWING



After a 40-year hiatus,
swing dancing is hot again

Shift





Kick up your heels, little sister. Grease back the hair, smooth-talkin' daddy-o. It's time to swing!

If you're like many dance-crazed teenagers around the United States, you may already be dressed in a pin-striped "zoot suit" or a vintage poodle skirt. Or, at the very least, you've probably seen the Gap "Khakis Swing" commercial in which two bouncing young couples bust loose from a crowd to "Jump, Jive and Wail" into your living room. Or perhaps you like the music of the Cherry Poppin' Daddies, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, or Royal Crown Revue,

all swing-like-mad bands that have radio stations across the country bopping to the tunes of trumpets, trombones, and saxophones.

Swing—a dance style that first gained popularity in the United States in the 1930s—is back. And, according to Michael Moss, publisher of San Francisco-based *Swing-Time* magazine, it's here to stay. "The swing scene is hot," says Moss, who then lists a number of reasons why: "The music is just great. The dancing is super fun. And it's something that young people can call their own. Modern swing is not your grandparents' swing."

continued on next page

East Coast Swing

The two most popular forms of swing are "West Coast" and "East Coast." Here's a run-down:

East Coast Swing

Also known as the "jitterbug" or "bop," this Gap-style dance is energetic, upbeat, and improvisational. It's done "in the round," or in a circle with your partner. Typical music: Big Bad Voodoo Daddy.

West Coast Swing

Quieter, slower, and less energetic than East Coast Swing, this dance takes place in a slot. The leader stays in place; the follower, improvising something stylish like a spin or fancy footwork, moves back and forth along the slot. Typical music: rhythm and blues.

Pictured in the foreground on the previous page: Minooka (Illinois) FFA member Gina Puleo, 19, and Chicago (Illinois) FFA member Jonathan Hampton, 16. In the background (L to R): Triton Central (Indiana) FFA members David McGown, 14; Angie Guidry, 16; and Cody Dopson, 17; Sarah Steele, 16; Ryan Kern, 16; Rachel Prather, 17; Drew Arbuckle, 17; and Sarah Wager, 18.

Swing explosion

Steve Perry, the lead singer of the Cherry Poppin' Daddies ("Zoot Suit Riot"), has called this new musical flavor "swing-core"—an energetic reinvention of the swing of the past. Others hip to the scene have termed it "neo-swing," or "rockabilly." Whatever people want to call it, there's no denying that swing has swung and, for that matter, hit a grand slam.

The movie "Swingers," first released to theaters several years ago, continues to do well on video. Swinging bands with big-time names, like Lavay Smith and Her Red Hot Skillet Lickers, have drawn devout local followings and have begun to turn heads nationally. Most states now have swing-dance clubs, as do many high schools and youth groups.

There's even an annual U.S. Open Swing Dancing Championships, where couples from around the country and as far away as Singapore and France gather to put their skills to the test (one of the competition's categories, called "Young America," is for dancers ages 13 to 18). And according to Debbie Ramsey—a World Swing Dance Champion and a three-time winner of the "Feather Award" for best female swing instructor in the nation—more people, and especially teenagers, are lining up for dance lessons today than ever before.

The Gap influence

"Everybody wants to learn what they're doing on the Gap commercial," says Ramsey, who is currently teaching the steps to 22 members of a

Raleigh, North Carolina, youth group. She has found that teenagers are especially good at picking up the moves because they have no fear of trying something new, or at least, as she puts it, "new to them."

Swing dancing, which is a form of partner dancing, "is really a three-minute relationship on the dance floor," says Ramsey. "And it's either a good relationship or a bad relationship." Those that do best use good communication, are understanding, and have patience. "It's something you learn," adds Ramsey. "You don't just look at a picture and say 'OK, I can do that,' and go out and jerk your friends around. You have to put time and energy into learning how to do it properly."

The road to swing

If you're willing to follow an instructor, the rewards can be great. First, you'll be in excellent shape.

According to Ramsey, swing dancing is very physical. Expert dancers do what are called "aerials"—maneuvers that require the guy to flip the girl into the air, who then proceeds to twist and turn on her way back to the ground. Needless to say, such moves are reserved for experienced dancers, and

should never be attempted without instruction.

Second, you'll find that dressing up for a swing-good time can be fun. Guys can wear anything from jeans and a T-shirt to bowling garb (including the shoes) to a 1940s-style custom-made suit with a vintage straw hat. Girls can wear black slacks with suspenders and a T-shirt, or they can go with a poodle skirt and bobby socks. Ultimately, says Ramsey, the point is that swing dancing isn't formal: If you like, you can wear what you wear to school.

Finally, anyone can swing. All you need to do is organize a group of friends with whom to take lessons, and you'll be on your way. Who knows, maybe someday you'll jump, jive, and wail your way out of the ballrooms and school dances and onto the stage of the U.S.

Open awards ceremony. ★



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For a resource guide and contest rules, ask your advisor or call the National FFA Organization at 317-802-4222. For more information, check out National FFA Online at www.ffa.org.

This contest is offered by the National FFA Organization in cooperation with the National Council for Agricultural Education and with funding from the Risk Management Agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a special project of the National FFA Foundation, Inc.

A day at the
1998 National FFA
Convention
with four
Mississippi FFA
members

party of four

By Erich Gaukel
Photos By Dan Frueh



It's 8:14 a.m. on Thursday morning. Courtney Pitts, Jonathan Collier, Angie Neal and John Holley—all members of the Nettleton FFA Chapter in Mississippi—are in Kansas City for the 1998 National FFA Convention. After a 16-hour drive, they are ready to experience the convention, and they have generously agreed to let *FFA New Horizons* follow them for the entire day with a camera. We start our day in Bartle Hall, the center of convention activity.

Courtney Pitts, Angie Neal, Jonathan Collier
and John Holley (L to R)

8:31 a.m.

They had been at the convention for less than an hour and already they were signing autographs. No, Courtney, Jonathan, Angie and John are not celebrities—they're just taking part in a convention tradition in which FFA members try to get other FFA members from each state and territory to sign their convention guidebook.

aquaculture-related exhibits, learning about the latest classroom software and equipment.

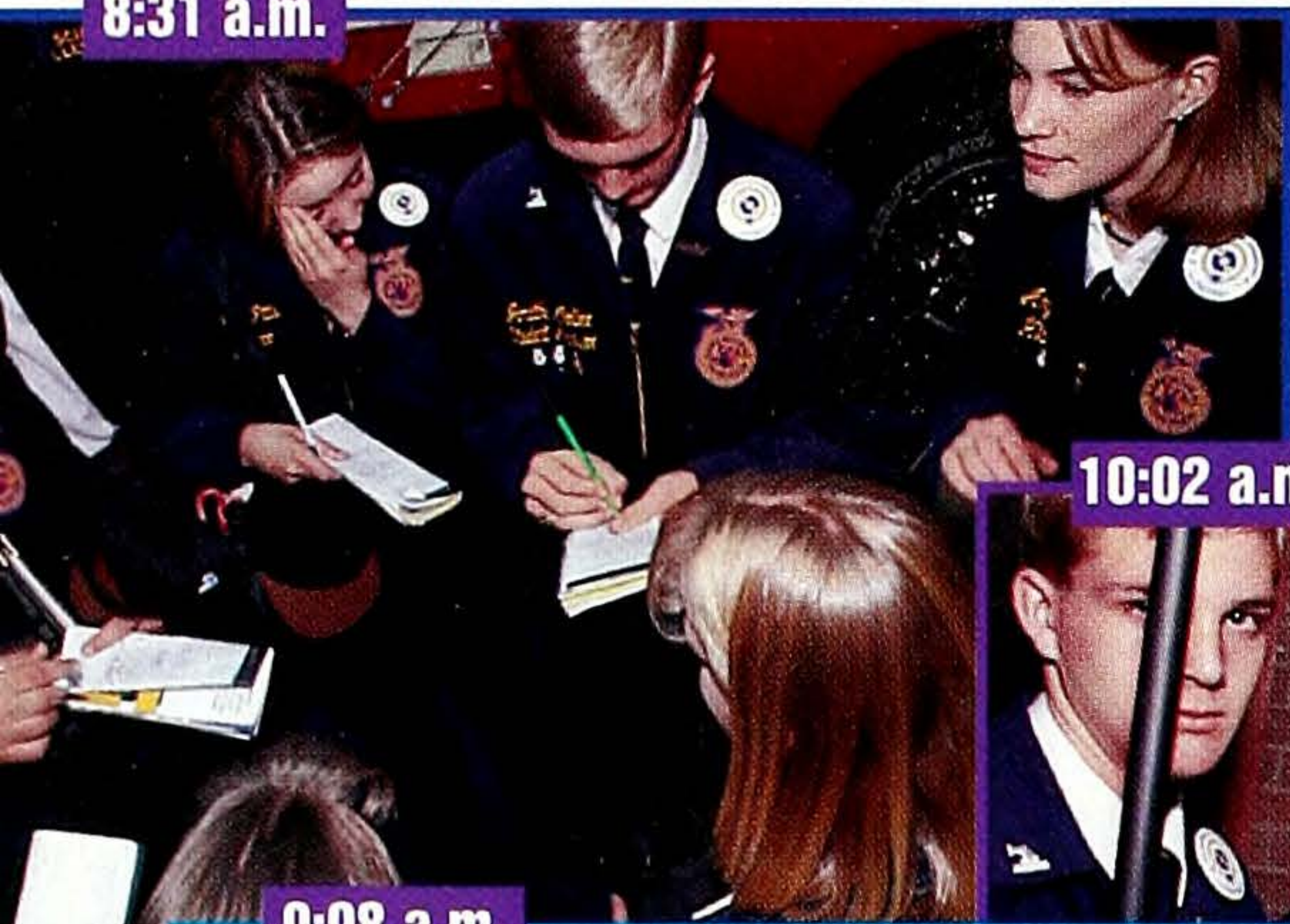
10:02 a.m.

Handcuffed and jailed at the career show—and all before noon. Before we could post bail for these hardened criminals, the FFA sheriff released Courtney, Jonathan, Angie and John on their

Dodge's van-jam, a contest to see how many FFA members could be packed into a plain white utility van. Courtney, Jonathan, Angie and John gave it a shot, but couldn't match the 71 FFA members who

the same time. Fortunately, the general session going on across the street at Municipal Auditorium was simulcast on huge video monitors here. So, everyone got to hear motivational speaker Les Brown speak while the pizzas baked.

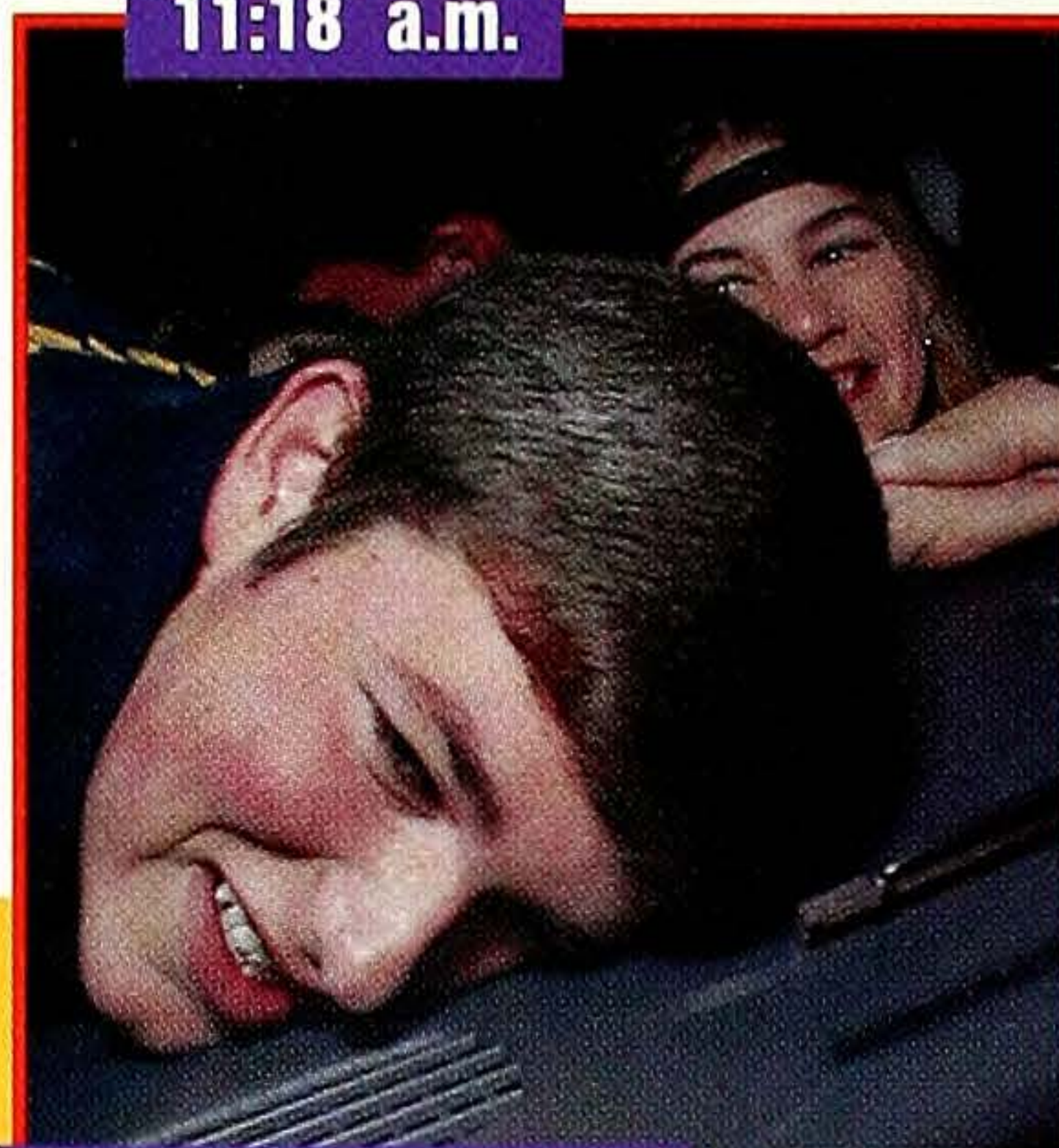
8:31 a.m.



10:02 a.m.



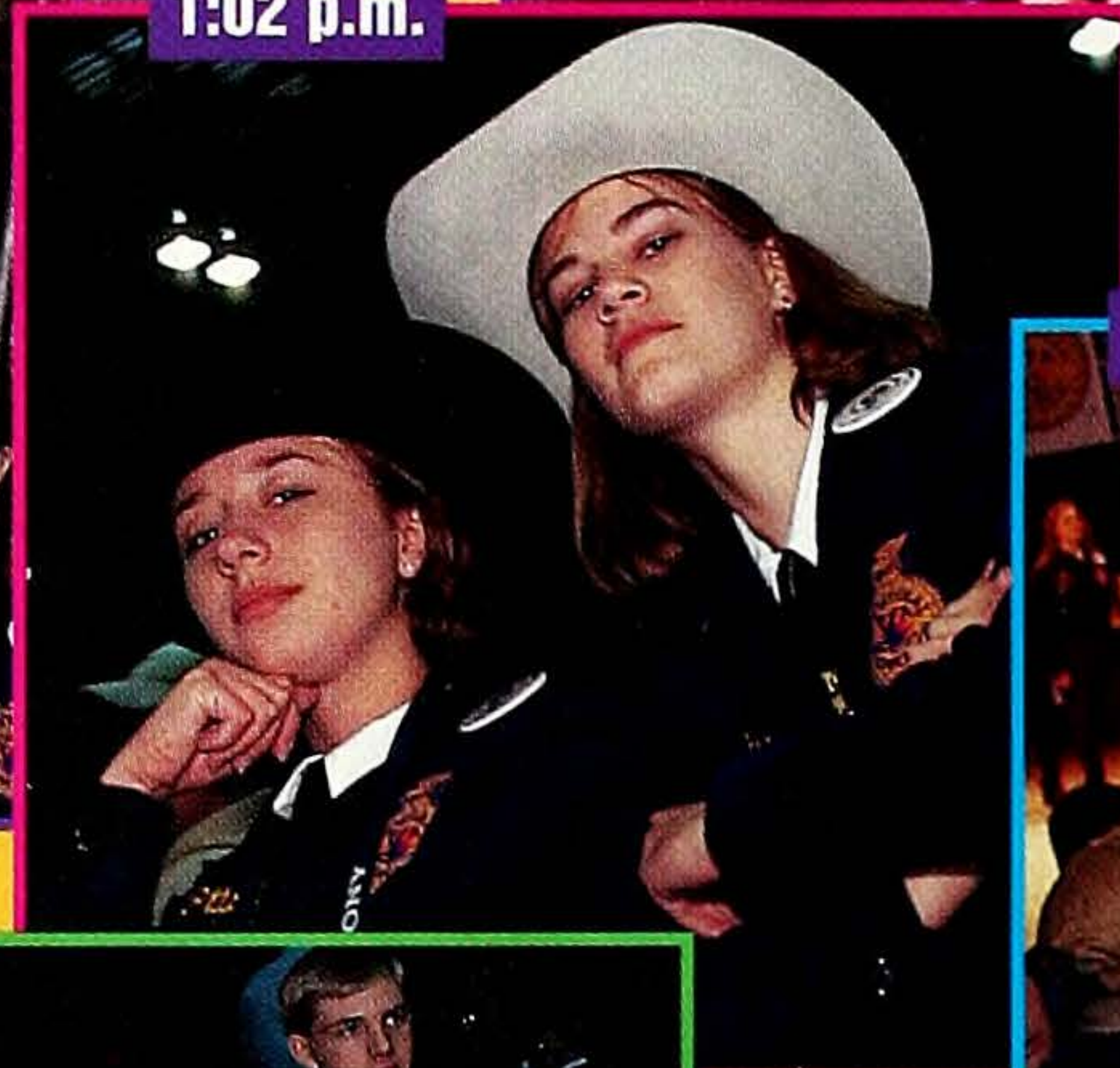
11:18 a.m.



1:42 p.m.



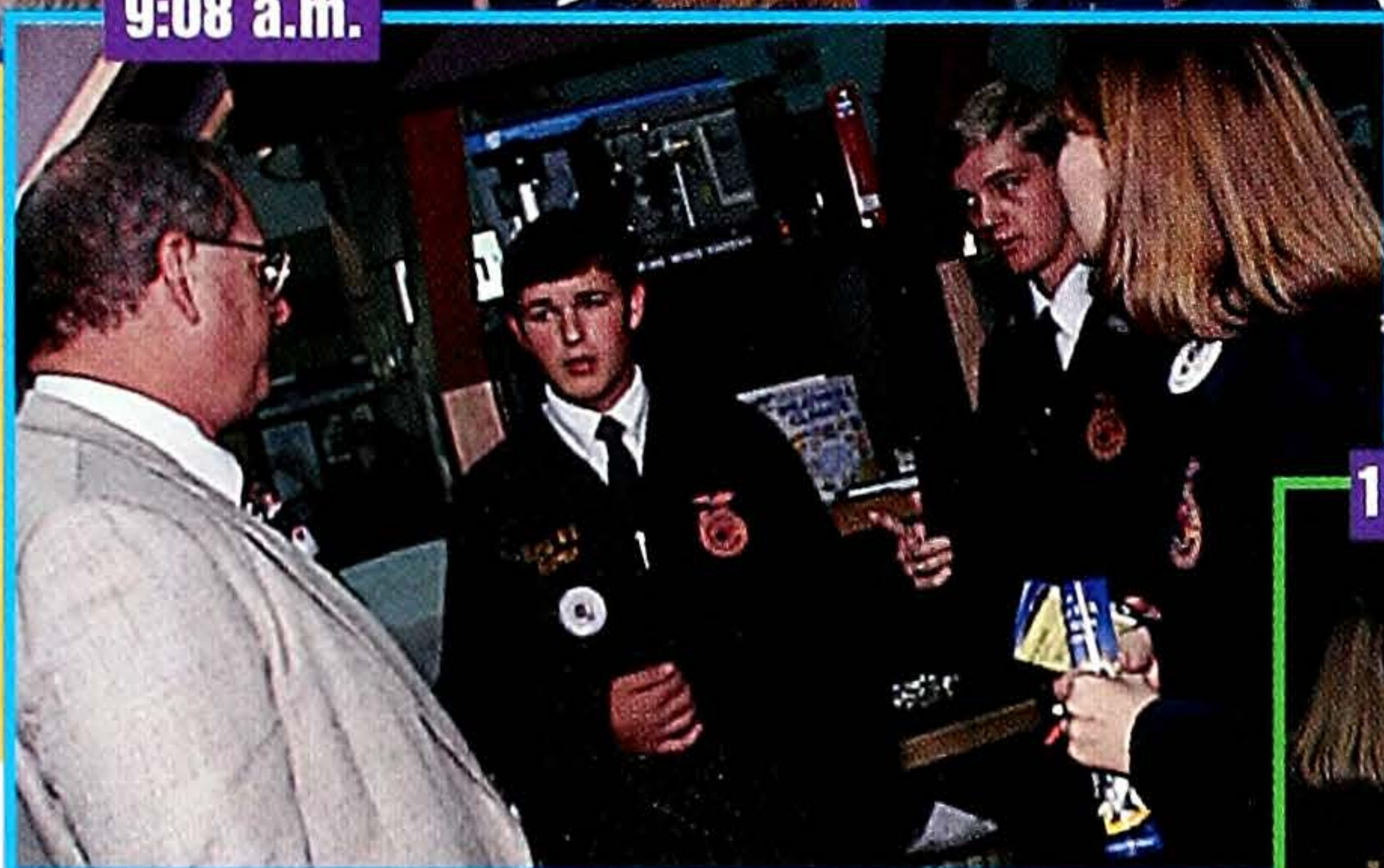
1:02 p.m.



3:28 p.m.



9:08 a.m.



12:20 p.m.



This autograph exchange took place shortly after they entered the FFA national agricultural career show, where 325 exhibitors—ranging from AGCO to Auburn University to the USDA—competed for the attention of thousands of FFA members.

9:08 a.m.

Because the Nettleton FFA Chapter is establishing an aquaculture program, Courtney, Jonathan, Angie and John spent the better part of an hour talking to representatives at two

own recognizance. The crime? They hadn't given enough thought to becoming agriculture teachers. After being released, they were sent through a labyrinth lined with agricultural education facts.

11:18 a.m.

Ford, Chevy and Dodge attracted huge crowds at the career show with flashy cars, pickups and sport utility vehicles. Courtney, Jonathan, Angie and John couldn't resist

somehow squeezed their way into the van the day before. No injuries to FFA members or the van were reported, though John's face had to be peeled off the dashboard.

12:20 p.m.

Waiting 30 minutes for a Domino's pizza is standard procedure, except when you're waiting in line. But that's what happens at the FFA food court when a thousand people want pepperoni pizza at

1:02 p.m.

No national FFA convention experience would be complete without a stop at the FFA shopping mall. You can buy CDs, clothes, jewelry, boots, toy tractors, personalized business cards and cowboy hats. Though Courtney and Angie weren't in the market to buy hats, they had fun trying on these stylish Stetsons.

1:42 p.m.

Courtney, Jonathan, Angie

and John crossed the street to attend the convention's second general session at Municipal Auditorium. After a high-powered opening ceremony, complete with laser light show, smoke machines and ground-shaking music, they had the opportunity to hear Shannon Wilcox's

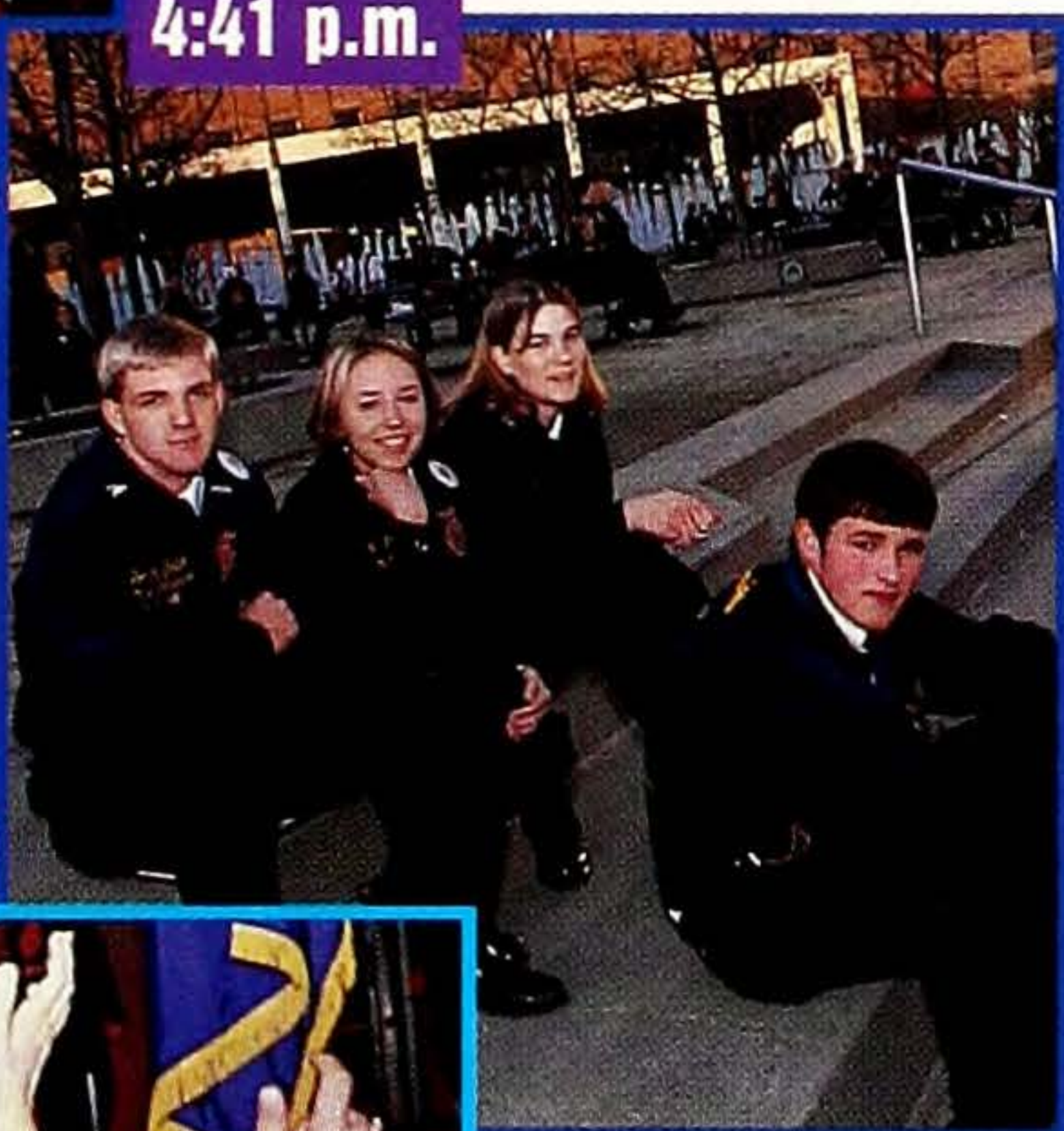
national chapter award program.

4:41 p.m.

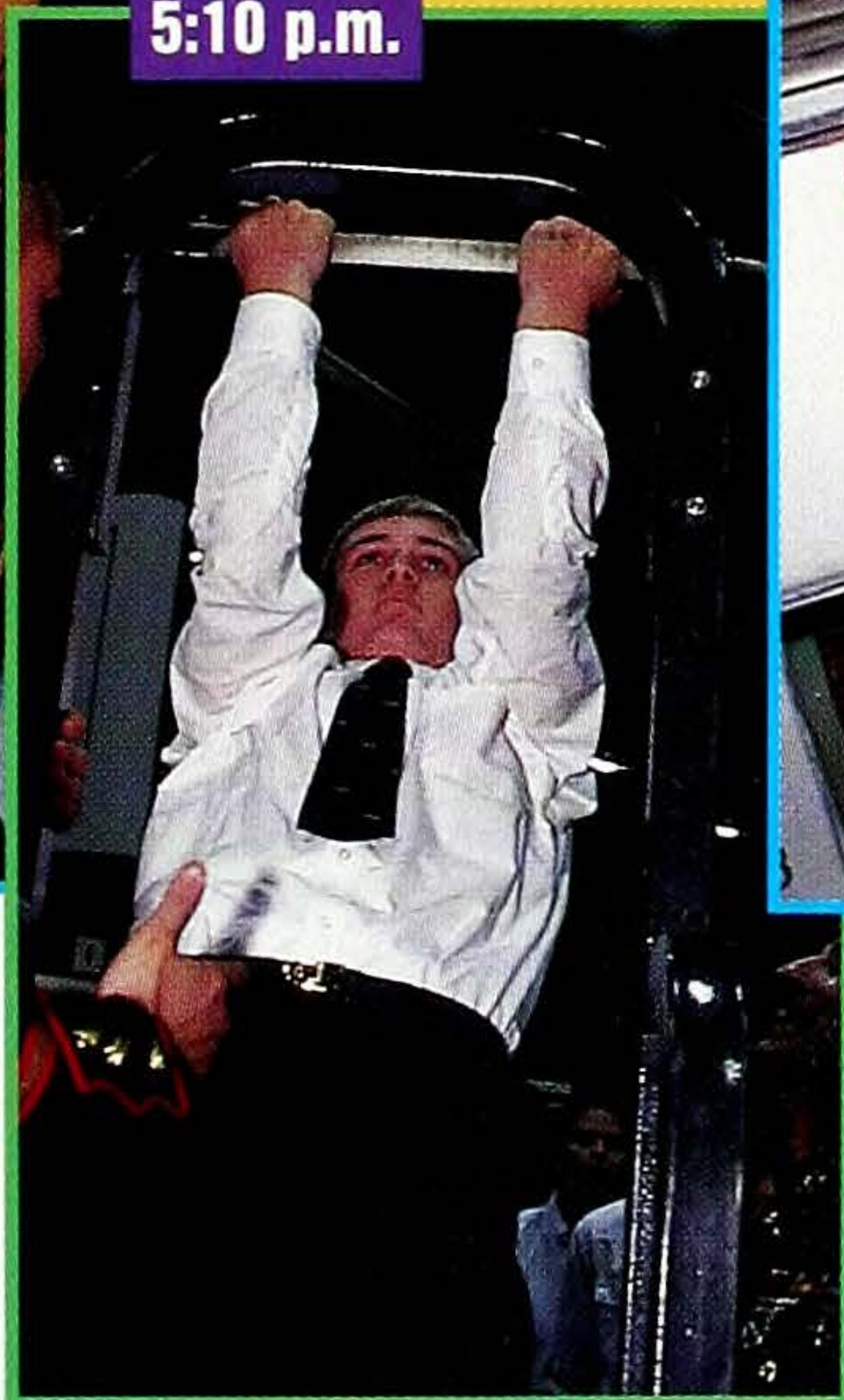
After sitting for nearly three hours, Courtney, Jonathan, Angie and John decided it was time to get some fresh air at the plaza across the street from the auditorium. Unlike the two prior years, the temperatures in Kansas City reached the 60s during the convention.



4:41 p.m.



5:10 p.m.



emotional retiring address and the adventures of storm chaser Warren Faidley, who was a technical advisor on the movie "Twister."

3:28 p.m.

Near the end of the session, Courtney, Jonathan, Angie and John charged the stage to cheer on their fellow Nettleton FFA Chapter members who came onstage to accept a plaque for their chapter's one star ranking in the

5:10 p.m.

The waiting line for the pull-up bar at the Marines' career show exhibit had been too long earlier in the day, so Jonathan and John came back. They both took shots at the current standing convention record of 26 pull-

ups. Both fell short of the record, but the Marines on hand told us that with a few short weeks of boot camp, Jonathan and John could probably break that record.

5:15 p.m.

With hunger and exhaustion kicking in, Courtney, who chose not to take part in the Marines' pull-up contest, waited downstairs with Angie.



5:15 p.m.

6:47 p.m.

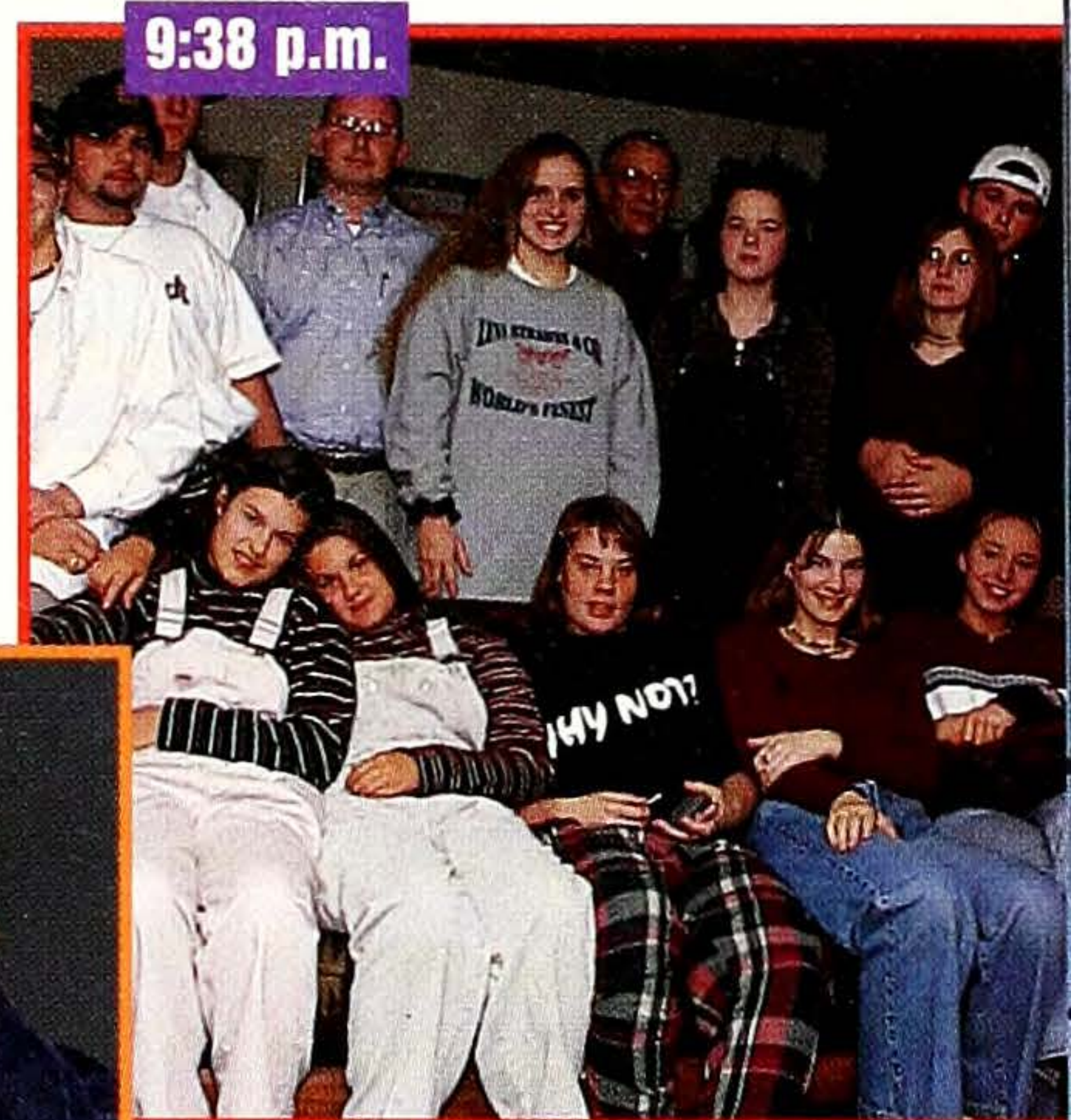


6:47 p.m.

After deciding not to wait an hour for a table at a Japanese restaurant, Courtney, Jonathan, Angie and John decided to try Otto's Malt Shop, a '50s-style diner with tattooed waiters, Partridge Family memorabilia on the walls, and dangerously greasy food. Even though the shakes were served in plastic cups, Otto's still received a thumbs up from the Nettleton crew.

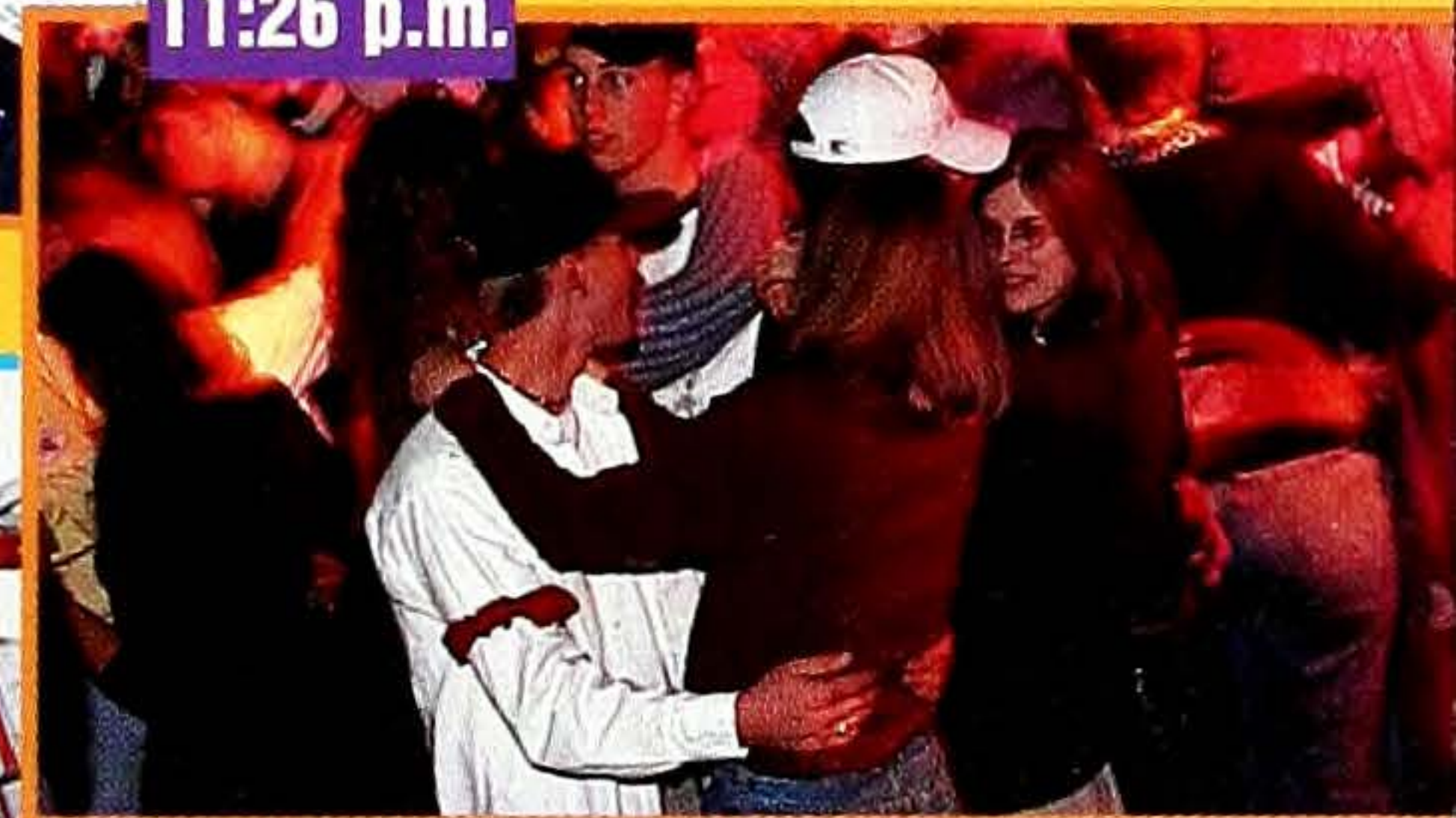
9:38 p.m.

Back at the Holiday Inn Express for a clothes change, card game, chapter rendezvous and the latest episode of E.R. Next stop: the FFA dance.



9:38 p.m.

11:26 p.m.



11:26 p.m.

With the DJ spinning an eclectic mix—Alan Jackson, Led Zeppelin, the Brian Setzer Orchestra and Digital Underground—the FFA dance attracted thousands of FFA members. With two huge video monitors, spotlights and a huge sound system, the place was hopping. The DJ threw in a few ballads to allow for some slow dancing, as demonstrated here by Jonathan and Angie. ★

what's

"Titanic" tops the charts in both the "hot" and "not" categories—go figure. Meanwhile, France makes a comeback, and dogs top cats as the pets of choice.

Special thanks to the Kingfisher, Oklahoma, and Monroe, Georgia, FFA Chapters for sending in the most What's Hot/What's Not surveys.

hot

titanic

movie

titanic

not

hot

mcdonald's

fast food

hardees

not

hot

blue

color

pink

not

hot

dog

pet

cat

not

hot

france

country to visit

china

not

hot

movies

place to go on a date

his/her house

not

hot

football games

school event (non FFA)

assemblies

not

hot

snickers

candy

m&m's

not

hot

swimming

summer activity

working

not

what's

NOT



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The Winners

The 1998-99 National FFA Officer team



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Iowa
national president



Abby Dougherty
Indiana
national secretary



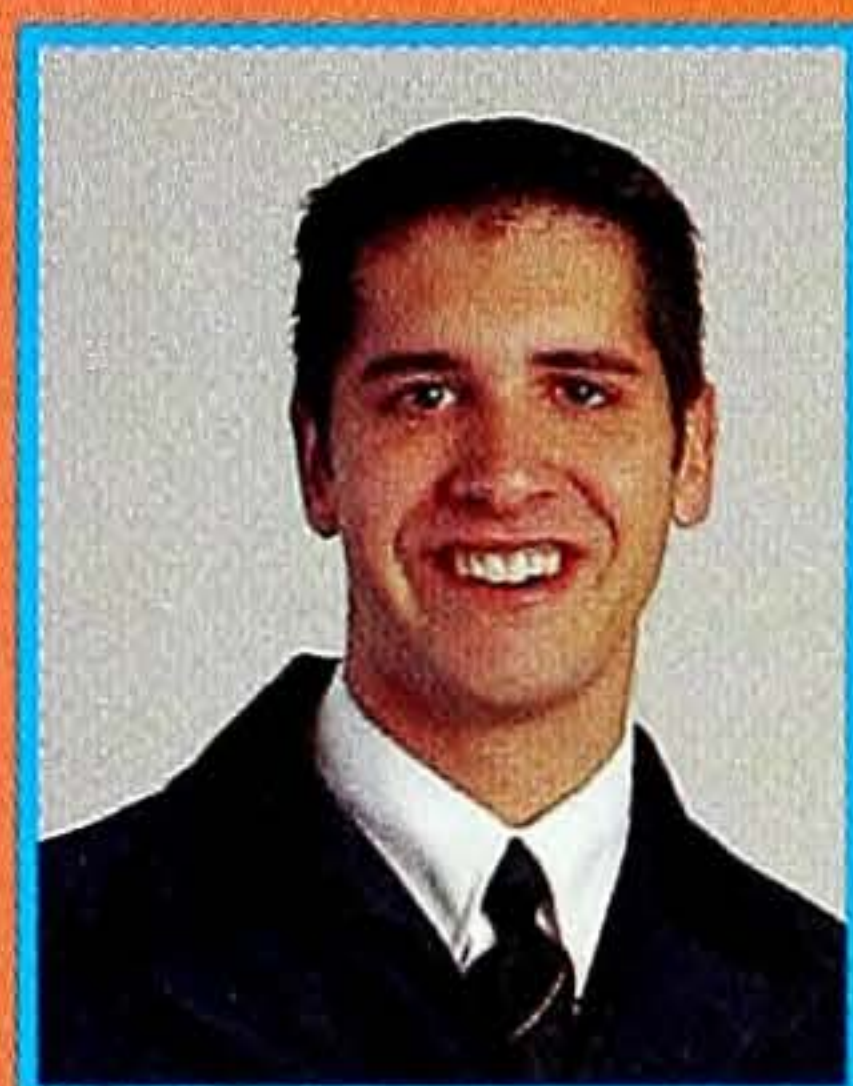
Andy Armbruster
Kansas
national central region
vice president



Emily Buxton
Ohio
national eastern region
vice president



José Santiago
Puerto Rico
national southern region
vice president

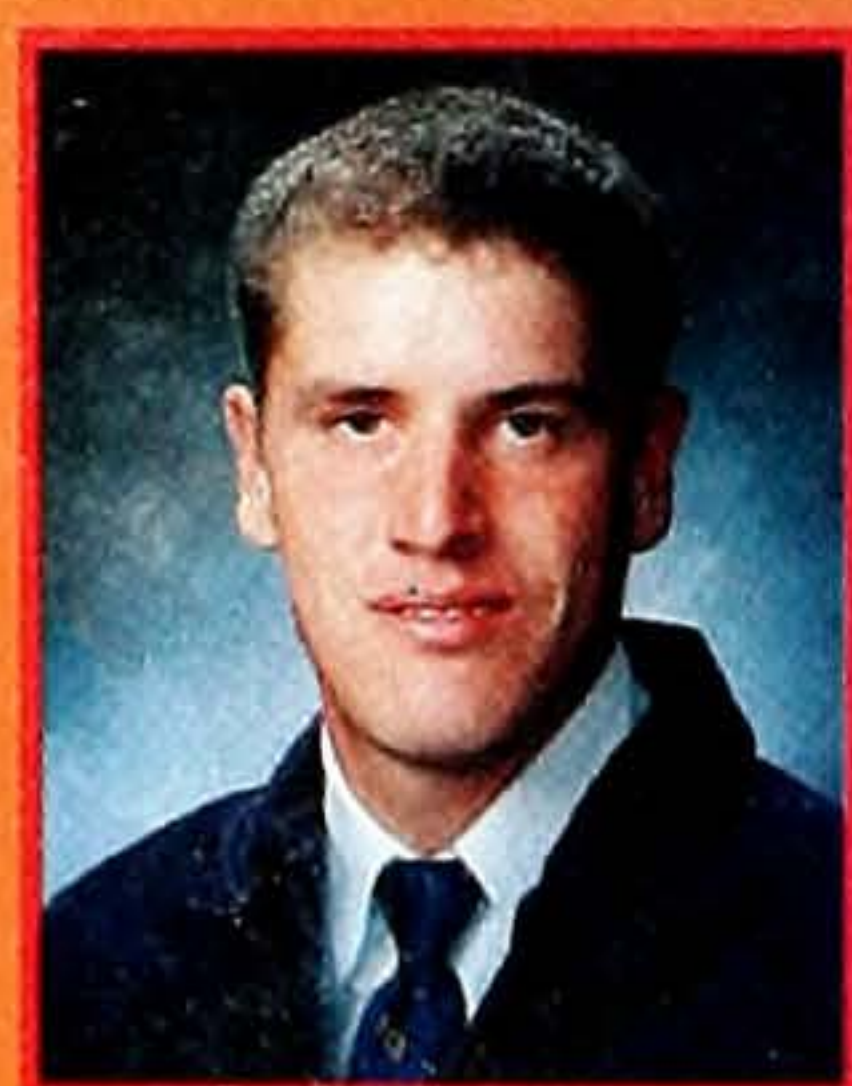


James Garner
California
national western region
vice president

The 1998-99 Stars



Charles Pearce
Wisconsin
American
Star farmer



Andrew Tygrett
Iowa
America star
in agribusiness

National chapter models of innovation awards

Bowling Green FFA
Ohio
student development

Spencer FFA
Wisconsin
chapter development

Creston FFA
Iowa
community
development

See www.ffa.org for complete listings of CDE, proficiency award and other results.

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Taking care of business

For the 32nd straight year, the National FFA Foundation, led by Chairman Charles Fischer of the Dow AgroSciences, set a record level of support—\$7,201,000—for FFA and agricultural education programs. In addition to the annual funds raised for these purposes, Fischer announced that \$5,206,000 had been pledged to the “I Believe in the Future” capital campaign to relocate the FFA center to Indianapolis.

Next Stop: Louisville



Our 71-year run with Kansas City is over, but we're thrilled about the upcoming 1999 National FFA Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. With over 49,000 attendees at last year's convention in Kansas City—and more expected this year—we look forward to the many advantages Louisville offers FFA members: added convention floor space, increased seating capacity, more affordable hotel rooms, more parking, and a location that is closer to more FFA members.

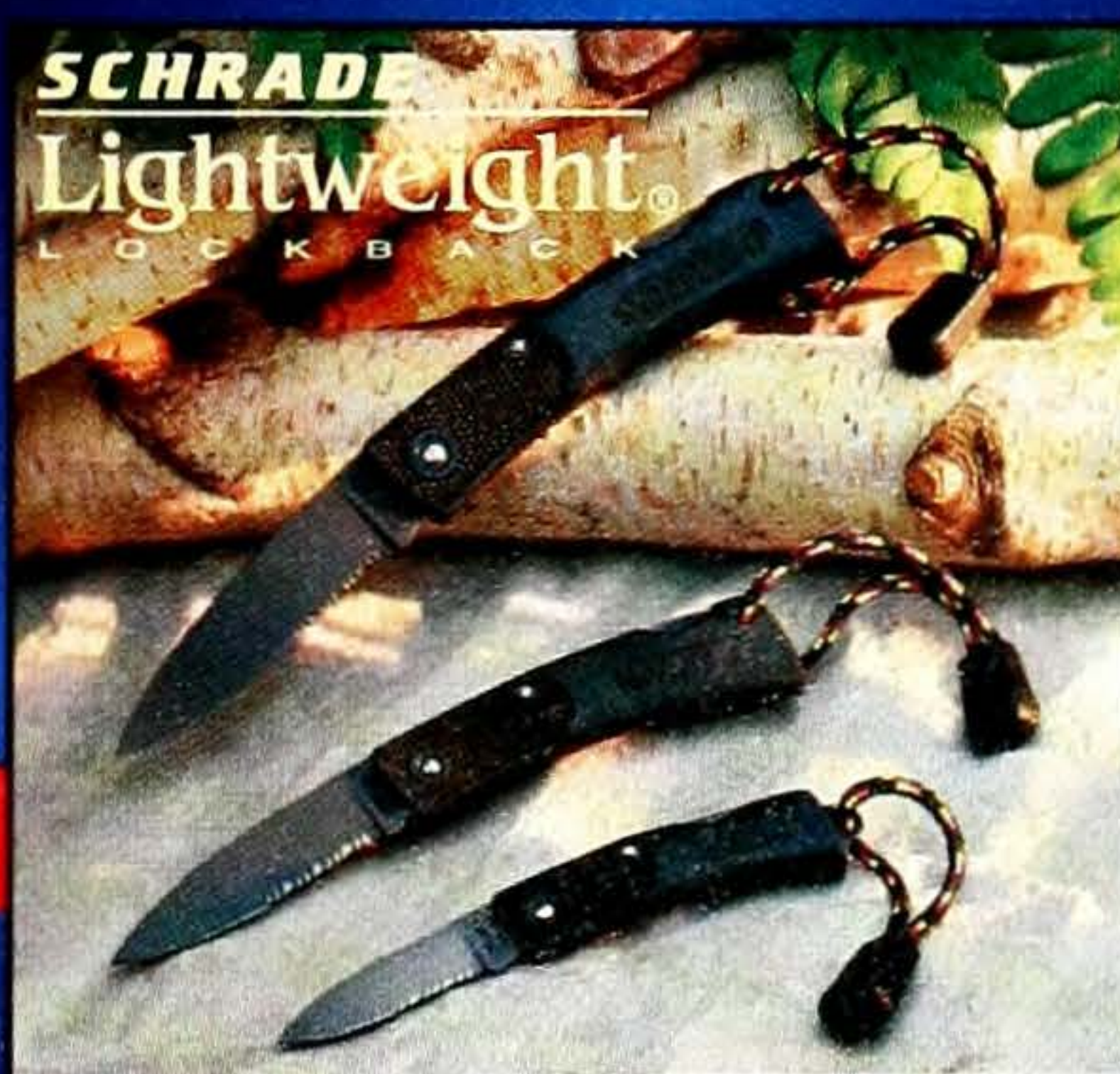
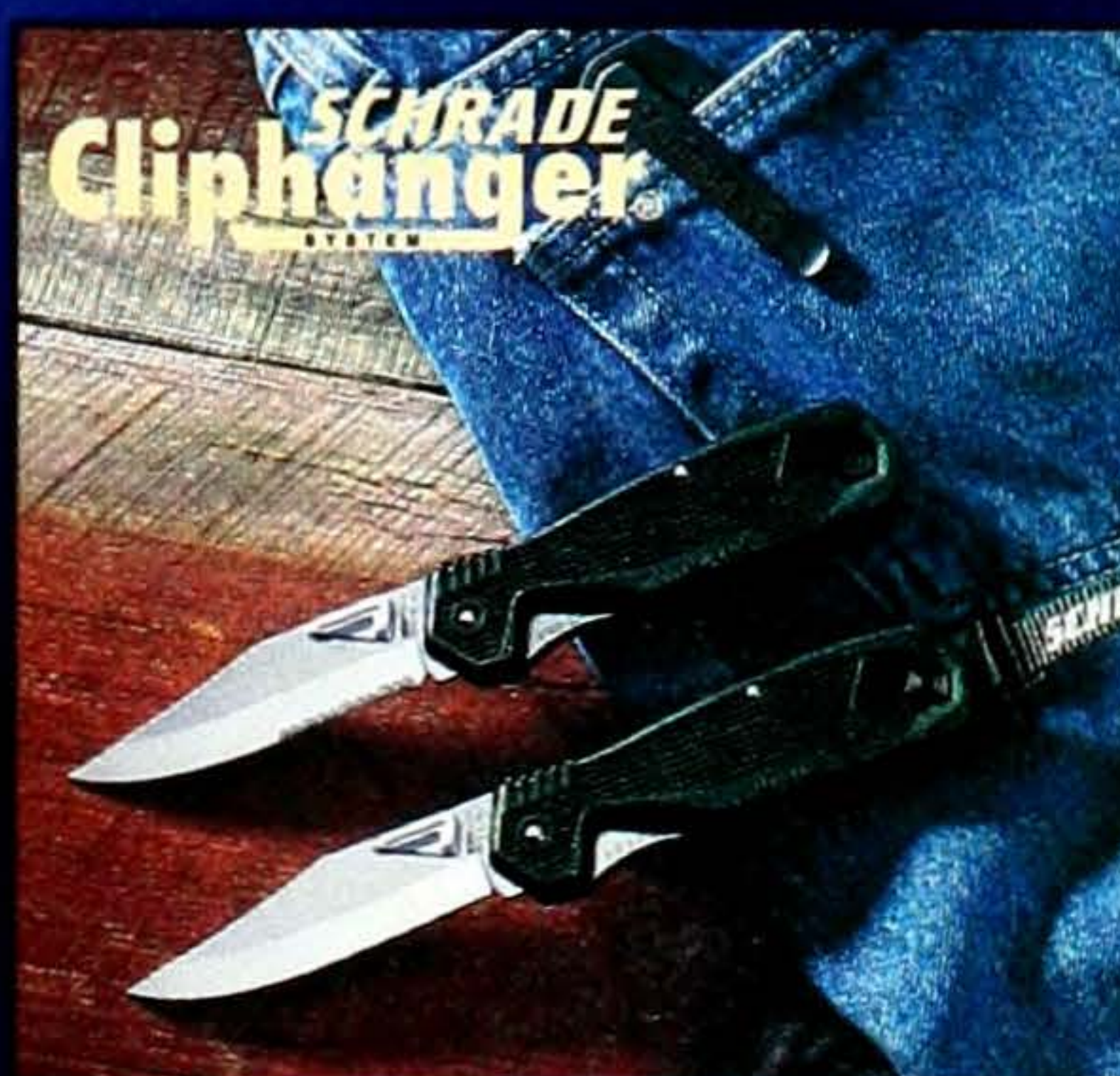
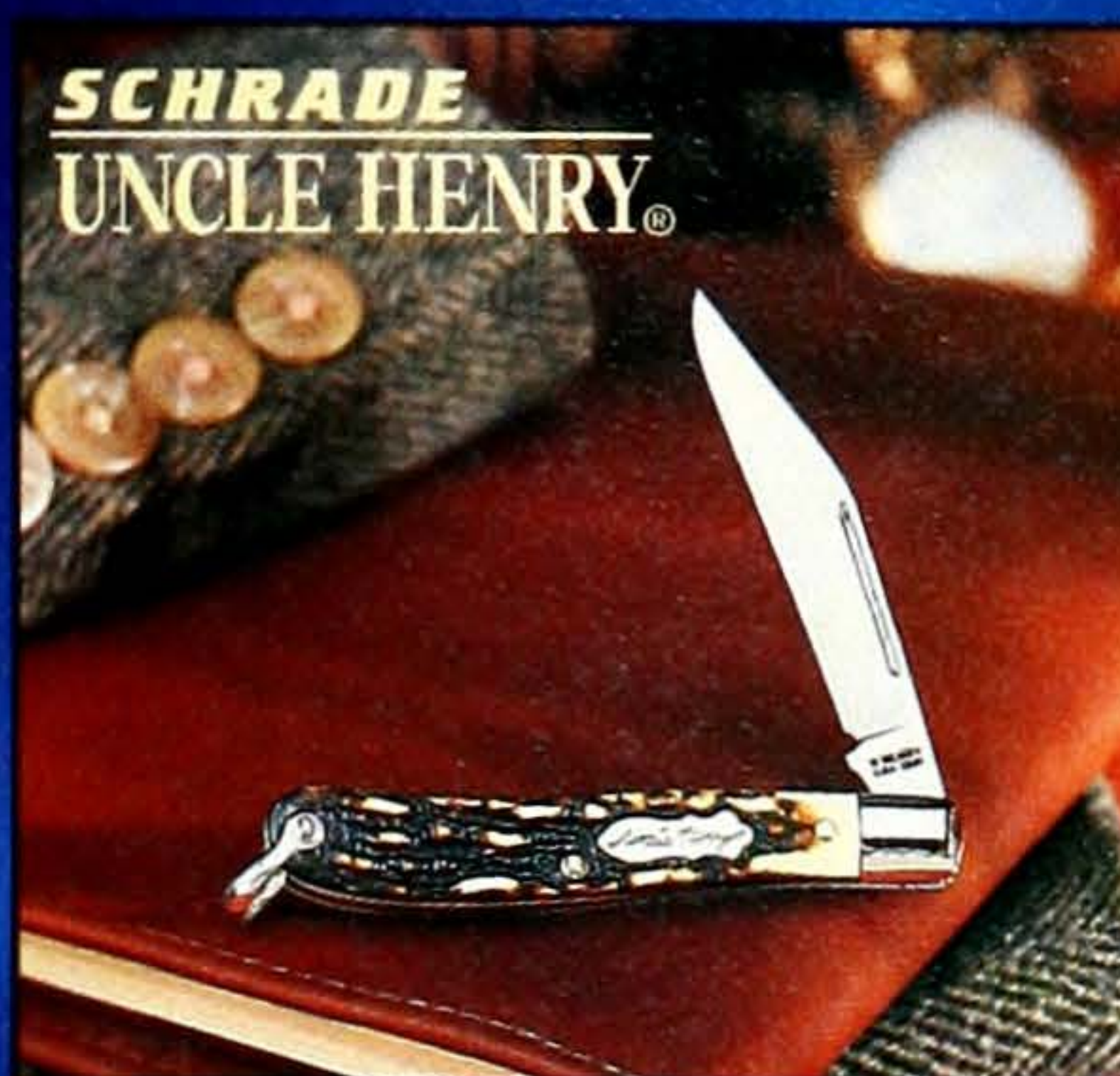
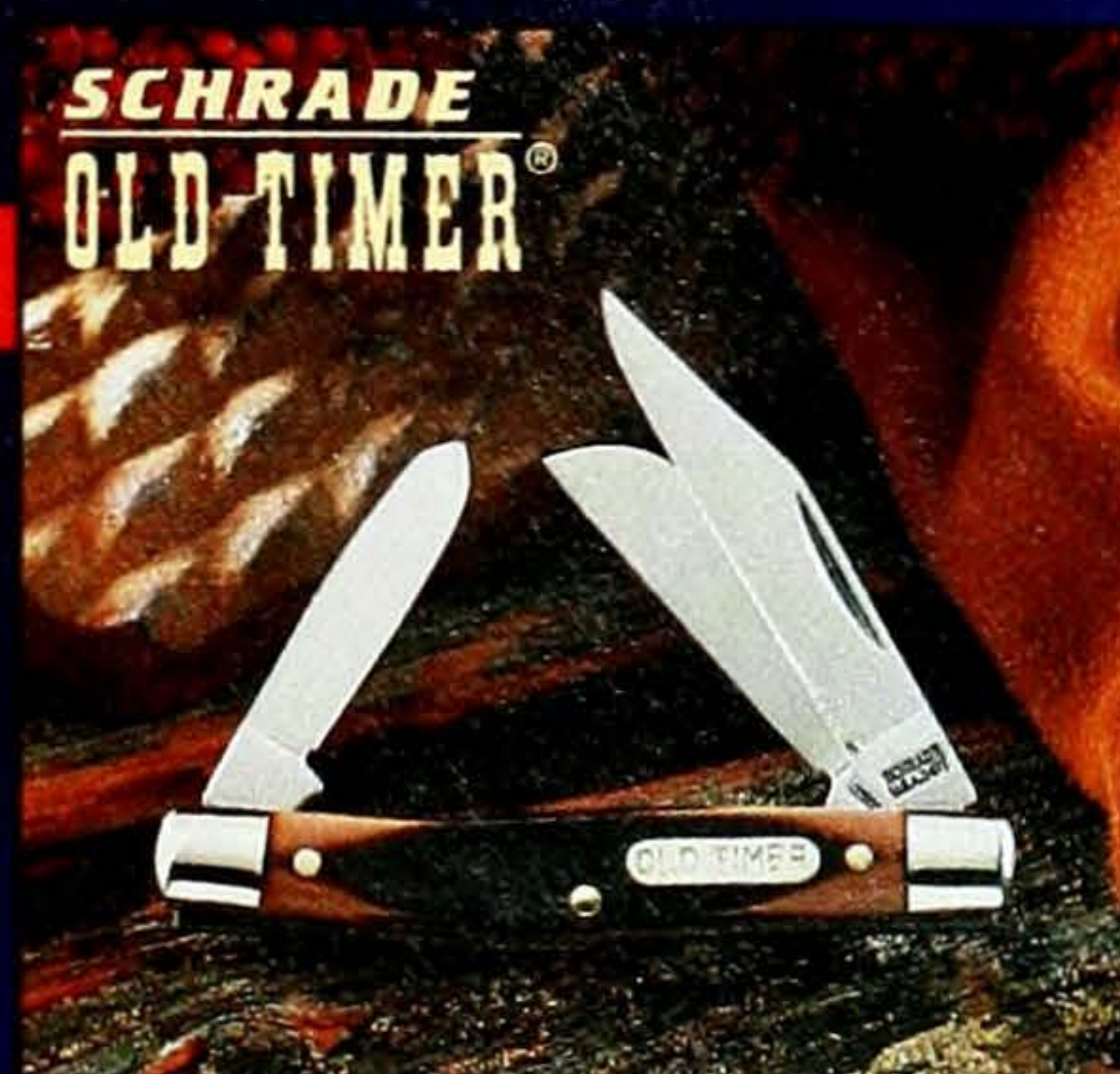
We've changed the venue, but we've also moved the upcoming convention from November to October so that members from northern states will no longer have to drive through blizzards in order to get to the convention. The 1999 convention will run from October 28 to 30.

Your chapter should have already received a Louisville convention preview video. If you haven't seen it, you can view it online at www.ffa.org. We will be bringing you more information on Louisville and the 1999 National FFA Convention in upcoming issues of the magazine.

Speak out

Your vote counts! We would like you to help us select speakers for next year's national FFA convention. When coming up with names, try to think of people who have meaningful messages that they can share with FFA members. Send your suggestions to:

Jennifer Conway
National FFA Organization
P.O. Box 68960
Indianapolis, IN 46268
e-mail: jconway@ffa.org



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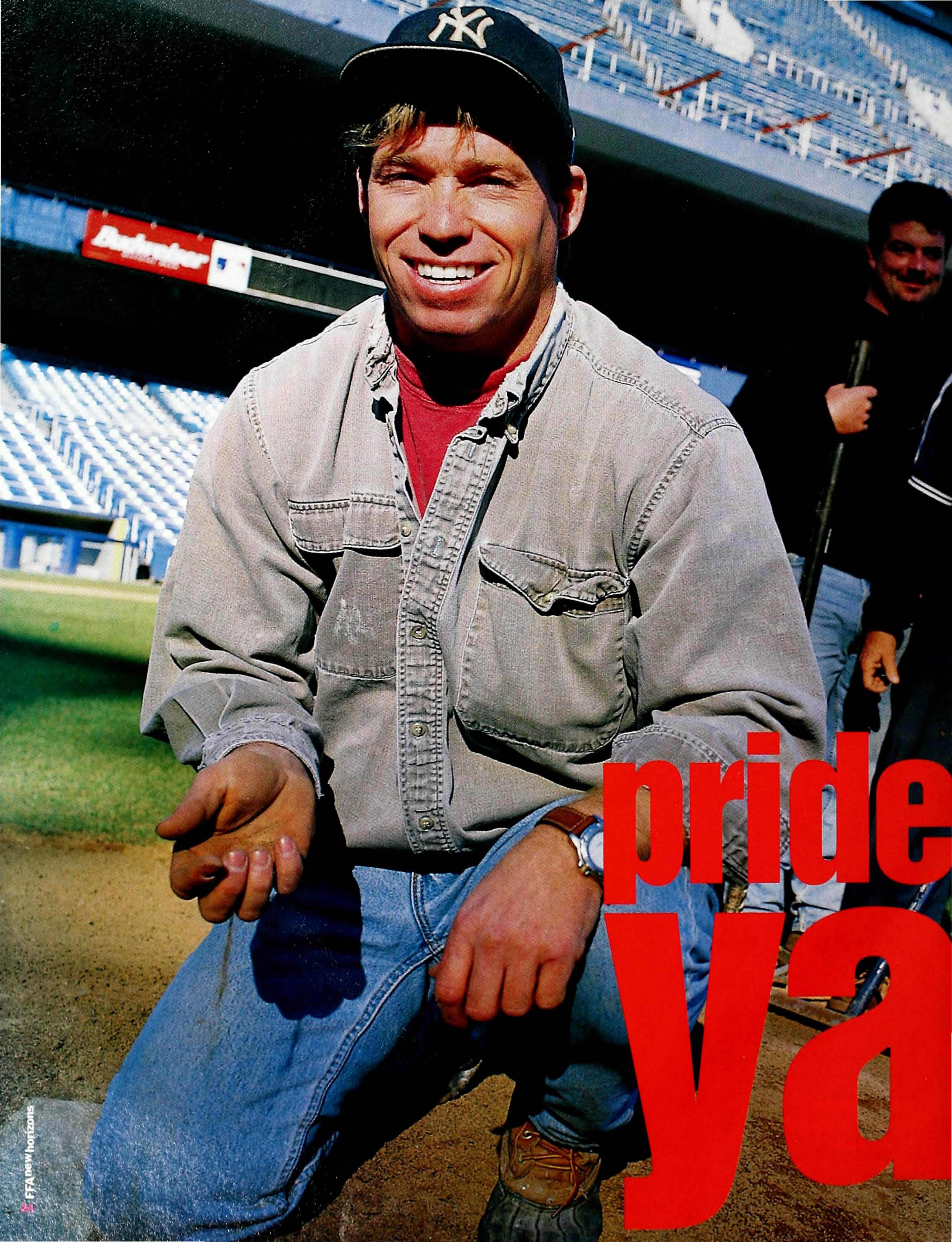
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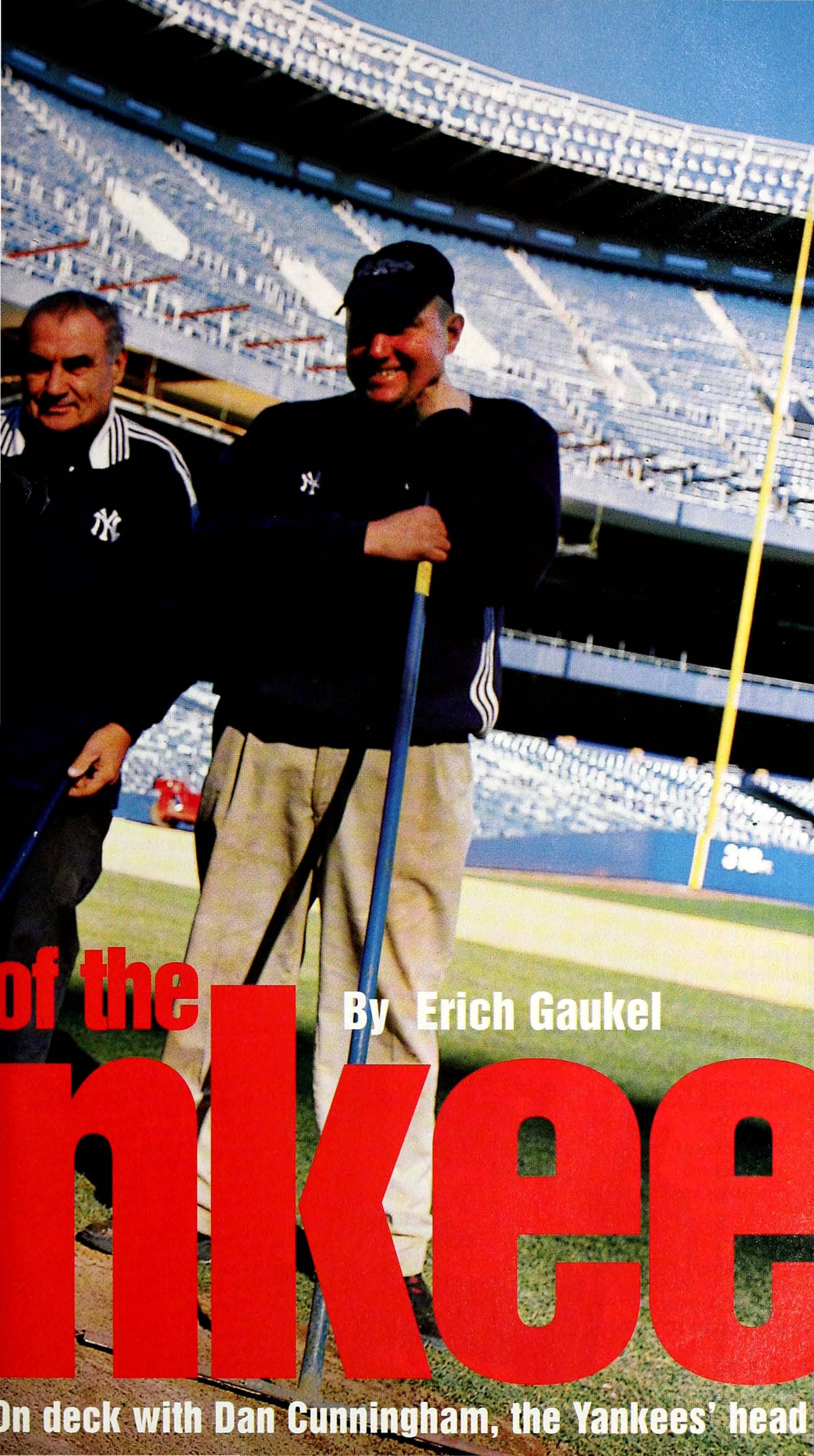
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The 1998 baseball season had it all: Mark McGwire launched a record shattering 70 home runs while Sammy Sosa cranked out 66; 20-year-old pitching phenom Kerry Wood tied a major league record by striking out 20 batters in a single game; and the New York Yankees, one of the best all-around ball clubs to ever take the field, capped a remarkable 125-win season by demolishing the San Diego Padres in a four-game World Series sweep.

Fans enjoy baseball because of the players, but the players rely on people like Dan Cunningham. Dan doesn't play baseball, and he's not a millionaire. As the Yankees' head groundskeeper, however, he and his six-person staff play a critical role in the game by maintaining a top-notch field of play.

It's all in the dirt

When you see a big-league ballgame on the tube, you see a perfectly manicured grass outfield and a tiny dirt infield. Dan says that 85 percent of the field is made up of turf grass, but 85 percent of the work is in the dirt. "It took me a couple years to figure that out," Dan admits.

"You think about it," he says, "and most of the

of the

By Erich Gaukel

Yankees

On deck with Dan Cunningham, the Yankees' head groundskeeper

Game day schedule

Dan says most of the construction and setup work on the field—trimming back the turf, bringing the pitching mounds, bullpens and infield up to specifications—happens in the spring. Once the season starts, it's a matter of maintaining what's already been done. Here's what Dan and his crew must do for a typical Saturday afternoon game.

7 a.m.
Arrive at Yankee stadium.

7:15 a.m.
Mow the outfield and infield turf.

Get the pitching mounds, bullpens and home plate areas in order.

Start "soaking" infield with water to ensure a moist playing surface throughout the game.

10 a.m.
Start setting up batting cage for batting practice.

10:30 a.m.
Each team takes batting practice for one hour.

12:30 p.m.
Breakdown batting cage and do final touch-ups to field before game.

1:30 p.m.
Game begins.

3:30 p.m.
Do a "quick drag" in the bottom of the fifth inning to smoothen the infield.

5 p.m.
Do another quick drag and tack in the pitching mound and home plate areas with moist clay.

game is on the dirt—that's where we've got to push our efforts." Dan says that the dirt (called the "skin" in baseball talk) is one of his biggest challenges.

"Most of our infielders like the skin kind of damp, to a point where it's not too wet or too dry," he says.

"You want it to have sure footing and you want it to have consistent ball hops."

To know if the skin is producing consistent ball hops for the infielders, Dan has to know the fundamentals of baseball, and he has to be able to communicate with the players. With the quality work that Dan and his crew do, there aren't many complaints from players. But if there are, Dan says, nine times out of ten it will be about the dirt.

So, from his vantage point in the first base photographers' booth, Dan watches each game with a close eye on the infield and on the game. He'll notice if shortstop Derek Jeter is getting the right ball hops, or if David Cone is struggling to keep his footing on the pitching mound.

Tales from the outfield

When it comes to the outfield, Dan uses a blend of bluegrass and perennial rye because of its durability in the northern climate.

Because the field requires a lot of overseeding, Dan says the rye grass works great because it comes up and germinates quickly.

Because the mowing patterns are easily visible on TV and in the stands, mowing is the part of the ground crew's job that gets the most attention. But don't look for Dan to be mowing zigzag patterns in the house that Babe Ruth built. "I'm just not a big fan of all the craziness," Dan admits. Using two basic mowing patterns, the "diamond" and the "straightaway," Dan strives to "keep it simple, yet classic."

Mower blades aren't the only blades that have been used in this outfield. Before game one of the 1996 World Series, New York got so much rain that the game had to be postponed. To help dry up the drenched outfield the next day, Yankees management called in the blow dryers—two NYPD helicopters, which hovered inches over the field for two hours.

"It worked to a point," Dan explains. "We have a heavy, clay, silty soil there, and once that moisture gets locked down in there, the helicopter is really not doing much more than putting on a good show."

Breaking in

Dan came out of the turf management program at

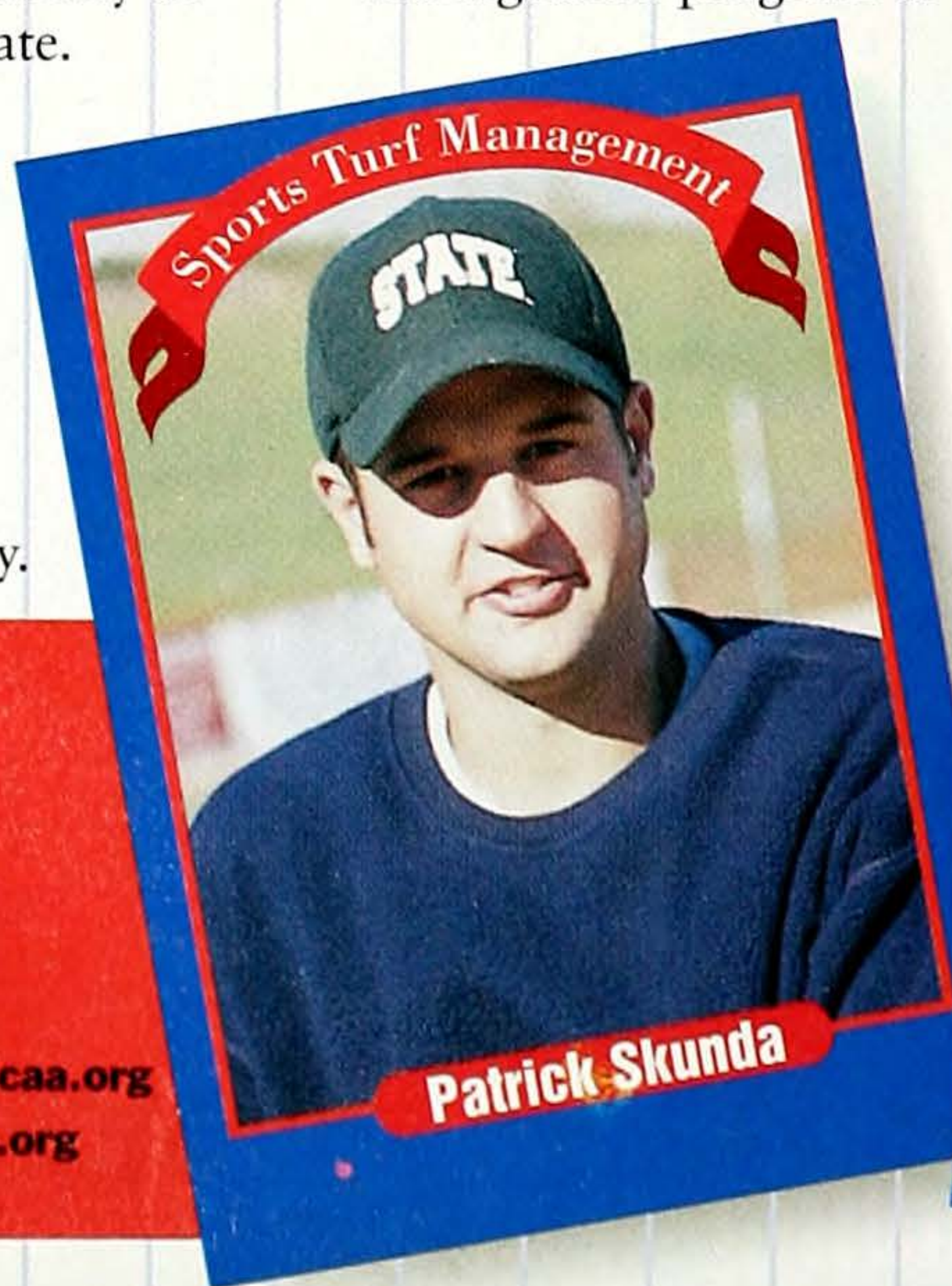
Rhode Island University. He had originally started out as a banking and finance major, but gravitated toward turf management toward the end of his sophomore year.

After working at various golf courses, he joined the Yankees crew ten years ago and has been the head groundskeeper for the last five years.

Dan says that either a two- or four-year degree in turf management can get you in the door. A four-year degree can be more beneficial, he says, because it gives you a better background in other areas, which is helpful if you make a career change later on.

Preparing a field for two World Series championship teams has made Dan's job a fun and exciting one. In fact, when we talked with Dan, just a week after the World Series ended, he was hard at work getting the field ready for the filming of a movie directed by Kevin Costner which takes place at Yankee Stadium.

The job doesn't go without its challenges, however. Dan says you have to get used to working long hours during the season, and you always have to be ready to go into extra innings with Mother Nature. ★



The dirt on careers in sports turf management

The Sports Turf Managers Association and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America report that two-thirds of turf management professionals have two- or four-year degrees. Patrick Skunda, 20, head groundskeeper for the Kane County Cougars (a class A minor league affiliate of the Florida Marlins, located in Geneva, Illinois), landed this job straight out of Michigan State University's two-year turf program, but he knows he'll have to work his way up if he wants to make it to the major leagues. If you're interested in turf management, do like Patrick and Dan and work part-time at a local golf course.

Turfing the Internet

Check out these websites for more information on turf management careers:

Sports Turf Managers Association: www.aip.com/stma/

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America: www.gcsaa.org

Professional Lawn Care Association of America: www.plcaa.org

American Landscape Contractors Association: www.alca.org

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Please take a moment to fill out this survey from the National FFA student services team.

Mail to the address at the left with (or without) your "What's Hot/What's Not" survey.

1. Are you aware that the National FFA offers international opportunities for FFA members?

Yes

No

2. Would you participate in an FFA international travel experience? (choose one)

___ Yes, I have participated.

___ No, I have too many responsibilities.

___ Yes, I plan to participate.

___ No, I am not interested.

___ I would if I had the money.

___ I don't know enough about it.

___ I would if my parents would let me.

3. If you could visit any place in the world, where would you go? (check your top three)

___ Australia

___ China

___ Costa Rica

___ France

___ Germany

___ Greece

___ Russia

___ United Kingdom

___ Virgin Islands

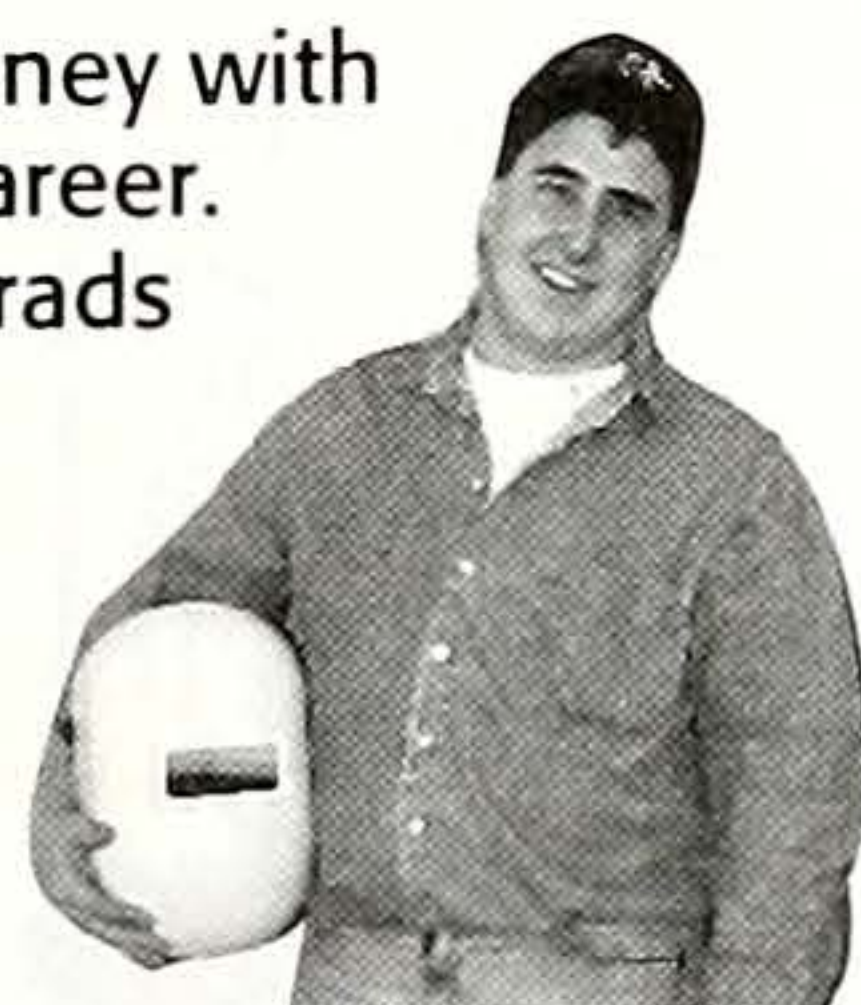
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Last Laff

Q: What does a bald rancher say?

A: I need mohair.

Jennifer Danals

Burleson, Texas

Q: Why was the soap looked down upon?

A: It was found in bars and made of lyes.

Kate Weitzel

Bellville, Ohio

Q: What's an oyster's favorite rock band?

A: Pearl Jam.

Benjamin Acedo

Lomita, California

Q: Why was Frankenstein arrested for throwing a party?

A: He threw it across the Grand Canyon.

Douglas Pierce

Chandler, Oklahoma

Q: What do you say to a dead robot?

A: Rust in peace.

Todd Buse

Auburn, Iowa

Q: What do you call a truck hauling a dozen and a half pigs?

A: An 18-squealer.

Ben Storey

Saratoga, Texas

Q: Why did the cowboy buy a dachshund (wiener dog)?

A: Folks kept telling him to get a long little dogey.

Morgan Majors

Stevensville, Montana

Q: Why did the chicken join the band?

A: He had the drumsticks.

Michael Vallijo

Easton, California

Q: Why was the bride unlucky on her wedding day?

A: Because she didn't marry the best man.

Brooke Metzger

Thorntown, Indiana

Q: What does a duck wear to the prom?

A: A duxedo.

Rickie Young

Higdon, Alabama

Q: What did the veterinarian use to fix the chimpanzee's broken arm?

A: A monkey wrench.

Aaron Wilson

Omak, Washington

Q: What eight-letter word has only one letter in it?

A: Envelope.

Jordan Smith

Marion, South Dakota

FFA New Horizons will pay \$5.00 for each joke selected for Last Laff. In case of joke duplication, payment will be for the first one received.

To submit a nomination for "FFA Stars," tell us why you think you or your nominee is an "FFA Star." You must also include the following: color photo, name, address, phone number, chapter and birthdate of nominee, as well as your name and phone number (if different).

Jokes and nominations for "FFA Stars" must be addressed to:

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Attn: Twana Griffin
P. O. Box 68960
Indianapolis, IN 46268-0960

Contributions cannot be acknowledged or returned.

Agri-nuts by Jim Bradshaw





Kaylin Hedrick just got a big head start on life

Winning a classic 4020 tractor is just the beginning of a bright future for Kaylin Hedrick. Kaylin, who was chosen from over 100,000 entries in the 5th annual John Deere Credit "We Understand Getting Started Classic 4020 Tractor Program", brought the tractor home to Monroeville, Ohio. "I was surprised that I could actually win," said Kaylin.

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