

PYFA HOLDS WINTER CONFERENCE

The Pennsylvania Young Farmers Association held their annual winter conference February 6-8 at Seven Springs Mountain Resort, hosted by the Berlin Brothersvalley and Rockwood Young Farmers chapters of Somerset County.

Guy Chemical Company was the site of the first tour. Founded in 1995, the company now has 130 employees and produces one million pieces of silicone and epoxy products each day for nationally known companies. They recently completed a new production and storage facility to keep up with their growing business.



Baer Brothers Maple Camp was the second stop. Somerset is the #1 county in Pennsylvania for maple production. Baer Brothers has 5000 trees tapped and produces 1500-2000 gallons of maple syrup annually. The sap run has already begun this season, with cold nights and days above freezing needed to start the flow. The season can last from four to ten weeks, depending on the weather. It takes about 60 gallons of sap to produce one gallon of syrup. Baer Brothers still uses a wood fire

to boil down the sap, along with a reverse osmosis process to shorten the cooking time.

Educational workshops are always a part of the conference. Tammy Colt, Regional Wildlife Diversity Biologist for the PA Game Commission, spoke about the Hunter Access Program and its benefits to farmers. The program has existed since 1936 and now has 14,000 properties with 2.6 million acres enrolled. Participating landowners can receive consultation and assistance with habitat improvements, liability protection, and even discounts on hunting licenses.



Justin Croner, from Growmark FS's Miffield Analytics Team, showed new equipment to



enable variable rate planting of seed and application of fertilizer to increase efficiency and crop yield. He also spoke on the benefits of crop scouting by satellite, plane, or drone imagery to determine areas of the field needing more or less fertilizer or seed.

Phil Martz, from Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, brought their powerline safety demonstration trailer and showed the dangers of electric wires interacting with tree limbs, ladders, kites, and even mylar balloons. It is impossible to tell if a wire is dead or carries 14,440 volts, so don't touch, call the electric company.



Thursday's tour visited the International Conservation Center, a facility of the Pittsburgh Zoo to research, breed, and conserve African elephants. The site has housed elephants since 2008 and currently is home to five elephants, three of which were rescued from Botswana in 2011. Visitors were fascinated by the huge animals and their behavior.



At the Wednesday evening banquet. Representative Carl Walker Metzgar presented a proclamation of PA Young Farmers week in Pennsylvania. PA Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding spoke about the Strategic Plan for PA Agriculture recently released and the economic analysis of agriculture in the Commonwealth.

The Outstanding Community Service Award was presented to Dennis J. Boop, Mifflinburg Young Farmers Chapter.

Dr. John Ewing of Penn State was presented the Honorary Young Farmer award for his work with the PYFA.

Keith and Denise Leydig, Berlin Brothersvalley YF Chapter, were awarded the Richard Hoppes Memorial Award for their long-time service to PYFA.



Outstanding Young Farmer Advisor was Gary Weimer of the Rockwood YF Chapter, Somerset County.

(l to r) Gary Weimer, Grace Hoppes, Denise & Keith Leydig, Jason Rentzel PYFA President

Jason Rentzel of Somerset YF was re-elected President of PYFA for 2018. Lizzie Bailey, Shippensburg YF, will serve as President-Elect. Also re-elected were secretary Becky Nas, Gettysburg; Treasurer Ed Zug, Solanco; Eastern Region Vice Presidents Ken Sanner, Kutztown and Dan Fox, Ephrata; Northern Vice President Steve Kline, Mifflinburg; and Western Vice President Judy Croner, Berlin Brothersvalley; Membership chair Debbie Zug, Solanco; and Public Relations chair Jennifer Balmer, Cedar Crest Young Farmers.

Next year's PYFA Winter Conference will be February 5-7, 2019, hosted by the Mifflinburg Young Farmers chapter.