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Former student is new FFA advisor

By Mary Weber
Staff Writer

What began as a teenager's passion with the Alcona High School FFA program, has flourished into a new career at the same school.

Helen-Ann Prince is delighted to have been named the new FFA advisor for the school and is well prepared for the challenge. Prince, who grew up in Alcona County and graduated from Alcona High School, has not been a stranger to the school or the community.

Last year she was a volunteer education coordinator for Huron Pines AmeriCorps and was based at the school where many students saw her on a near daily basis and called her Helen-Ann. This year students will be addressing her as Miss Prince while she is acting in the advisory capacity. The new use of a formal name will be something stu-

dents and Prince are trying to get used to.

Prince served the Great Lake Stewardship Initiative well in her duties as an AmeriCorps volunteer last year. She was also extremely instrumental during the season as a FFA Alumni member who worked to help rekindle the almost nonexistent alumni membership from 16 to nearly 50 members.

Prince began her appointment as FFA advisor in June after the departure of Brian Matchett. He vacated the dual position he held for 10 years as FFA advisor and agri-science instructor to begin a new career as the coordinator for the Institute of Agriculture Technology with Michigan State University.

Prince will oversee all aspects of the FFA program while instructor, Beth Read, will teach agri-science classes. Prince believes she



Helen-Ann Prince

is the first female FFA advisor at the school and is proud to follow in Matchett's footsteps.

She has been quite busy already in her part-time, year-round position as FFA advisor. She helped supervise and take kids to the Region 6 FFA Camp at Lost Lake Woods in

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June and in July she attended the FFA State Leadership Conference for chapter and regional officers. Prince said there was a lot of training involved to prepare advisors and officers for the upcoming year.

Last week Prince was busy with the FFA's involvement at the Alcona County Fair where the FFA members held a pancake supper, a pie eating contest, an obstacle course for kids and a child identification program.

Prince has also been busy working on a mentoring program with FFA alumni members and chapter officers which she said will be a nice resource in the coming year because she will not be able to be at the school every day due to the part-time hours she is working.

Her goals for the coming year will be to focus on award applications with individual students so more FFA members will be able to gain recognition for their work. "To go along with that I'd like to get more students involved in supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs). Every FFA member is required to have an SAE. Currently, we have students who show sheep, goats, steers and calves, so there is a lot of livestock SAEs at the school. Some other examples of an SAE would be the maple

syrup production facility where we have an FFA member who manages production throughout the year.

"We have a lot of hard working students who could apply for proficiency awards because of their awesome SAE projects. It would be nice to see if they could get recognition on a state level and perhaps even a national level," Prince said noting the awards not only look good on job and college applications, but they also do a lot to boost the students' self-esteem.

Some of the programs which former FFA advisor, Brian Matchett worked on with students will not change. "We will keep the sheep production project and ewe-tube," Prince said. Ewe-tube is a live stream Internet video feed which allows the public, students and staff the ability to view the sheep, become educated on their care and even observe lamb births.

Prince said the sheep program will be altered a bit as it will become a student's SAE project as well as an advanced agri-science project. "We are very excited to be able to keep it (sheep project) going as we were a bit nervous on whether we would be able to do that or not," Prince said.

The maple syrup production will also continue. "The class schedule has shifted a lot so maple syrup season will be a lot different this year. Last year, 80 to 90 percent of the maple syrup tapping was done during class

time; there was a two hour block to do that in the morning. This year there is only a 50 minute block and it's not first thing in the morning, it's going to be after lunch.

"We are definitely going to need volunteers to help students collect the syrup, setting tube lines and evaporating after school," Prince said, explaining it would be a great opportunity for students to have FFA alumni members helping them.

"I remember how exciting it was to be an FFA member in school, how much the program taught me and what a leg up it gave me when I went to college. I'm excited to continue the program and ensure the promise of FFA," Prince said. "Kids wonder why they should be an FFA member or participate in a leadership conference. I've been in their shoes and can show them how the public speaking and other experiences they receive will help their future. I'm excited to hopefully inspire kids to love the program as much as I do."

Prince will remain a volunteer AmeriCorps member until the end of her service commitment in October. She was recently recognized as Michigan's AmeriCorps member of the month for her devotion to echo-tourism and schools outreach programs which involved hands-on, feet-wet educational experiences for a wide geographical area of students from Oscoda to Rogers City, Mich.



FFA members keep busy at the Alcona County Fair. The FFA held a child identification program, a pancake dinner, a pie eating contest and a children's obstacle course. FFA obstacle course volunteers and participants are (from left, front row) Nathan Nardi, Kaitlin Nardie, Makayla Prince, Samuel Prince, (back row) Schuyler Bates, Shannon Oliver, Jeremy Lickey, FFA Advisor Helen-Ann Prince, Morgan Stewart and Rebekah Maturen. Photo by Mary Weber.