

A Convocation for Annie's Project

Annie's Project National Educator Professional Dev. Conference, September 23, 2015
Luncheon Remarks

By Dr. Cathann Kress, Vice-President, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Good afternoon- it's a pleasure to welcome you all here- at this time of year when many of our colleges have been holding their fall convocations –

Convocations typically surround the welcoming activities for the incoming freshmen and/or the capstone celebrations for the graduating seniors. What convocations really do is recognize the scholarly circle of life. One comes in, another goes out.

We celebrate these entrances and exits. The incoming freshmen class comes in with great potential to learn and to grow, to expand their experiences

In turn, the graduating seniors go out with great potential to demonstrate the skill sets they have developed, to advance their career aspirations while concurrently making important contributions back to society

- A convocation is a time to mark a change, a new beginning.
- As Iowa State steps back from its national leadership role with Annie's Project, the work continues to go forward.
- We can think of today as our convocation -- a celebration as Annie's Project embarks on this new phase of education for farm women.

The state of Iowa has been known for people who are ahead of their time.

- first to accept the terms of the Land Grant Act
- farmers engaged with their land-grant university to begin extension work
- home to forward-thinking people bolstered by common sense and determined to make life better for others
- *(Norman Borlaug, Henry Wallace, George Washington Carver, John Atanasoff, Black Hawk, Carrie Chapman Catt, Jessie Field Shambaugh)*

- And that's only the short list.

However, next door in Illinois lived another forward thinker, Annette Kohlhagen Fleck, known simply as "Annie."

- Annie spent her lifetime learning how to be an involved business partner with her farmer husband. Together they did great things, but it wasn't easy.
- She was a real farm woman facing real farm challenges.
- Annie was an inspiration to another forward thinker, Ruth Fleck Hambleton, who founded Annie's Project – based on Annie's experiences and providing education for farm women living and working in a complex business.
- We owe a lot to Annie, to Ruth, and to so many other forward thinkers in Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and across the country, who believe in Annie's Project and meeting the educational needs of farm women.

Agricultural risk management is essential to successful farm operations.

- Women control a significant and growing share of agricultural assets.
- Until Annie's Project they were an audience that had largely been underserved.
- Annie's Project is a powerful example of a demand driven educational program targeting an underserved audience with unique learning needs.
- For more than 10 years it has expanded through the collaboration and networking of extension educators, directors, and partners.
- Today it's a program of local, regional, and national value in risk management education.

The curriculum starts with where people are and builds human capacity.

- It assures sustainability -- incorporates local resources, peer learning networks
- Women in Annie's Project are more confident in their own knowledge and aware of when they need help.
- They also raise the expectations for themselves and for extension to provide more educational opportunities.

- The growth of Annie's Project to well over half the states in the nation, without a federal mandate and with limited federal funds, speaks volumes about the relevance and quality of the program.
- Annie's Project is brought to local farm and ranch women through the dedication of state coordinators and local course facilitators across the country who consistently apply the core values and methodologies.
- In 2012 Annie's Project was recognized as a Distinguished Extension/Outreach Program by the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association.
- In 2013, we received the Governor's proclamation honoring Annie's Project 10-year anniversary.
- The award and the proclamation validate what Annie's Project participants have known all along.
- Annie's Project is a valuable education experience for farm and ranch women across the country, who are rapidly becoming a force in today's agriculture

When I was with the Department of Defense, we continually were reminded that our job was to serve as “defenders of the Constitution.”

- However, there's more than one way to preserve democracy.
- As extension educators and partners we can serve in this role by cultivating informed and engaged citizens.
- *M.C. Burritt, Director, Cornell University Extension: “Extension work is not intended primarily to make better crops and animals, but better men and women.” (1922)*
- Our people need our land-grant universities to be their lifelong partner for retooling, reinvention, and reawakening. Today more than ever land-grants must be resources to society and co-learners with citizens.
- Extension educators, together with our partners, can help people find their “true north” as they seek personal and professional satisfaction and success for their communities. We can help them become informed and engaged citizens.
- That's exactly what we're doing when we focus on building the capacity of our people. We create better men and women for strong states and a resilient nation.

We live in a world that tends to focus not as much on wisdom, but on metrics.

- GPAs and impact statements, refereed articles, number of participants, grant dollars ...
- We keep score of our accumulations of these metrics and others, and we assume that what we amass speaks to the totality of our work.
- We might believe this equals value. But value and accumulation are not the same.
- Some things cannot be measured, but only felt. The value of kindness ... personal growth ... patience ... showing up year after year to do work that needs to be done.
- Just because our contributions cannot be easily measured in the short-term, does not mean they are not worth making.

The not-for-profit “Annie’s Project – Education for Farm Women” carries on the legacy of forward-thinking people. Forward-thinking people understand a few things about leadership that are worth our attention.

- 1. Disappointment isn’t failure.** In the course of leadership, we will be disappointed. Perhaps many times. Here’s an important thing to remember: disappointment is not the same thing as failure. Disappointment is almost always what I call an ego “toe stub.” My ego didn’t like how something went, things didn’t go the way I had it planned out in my head. But I’ve come to learn, once I accept that there may be many ways ahead and let go of the ego, things work out.
- 2. People will judge.** I once read a quote by Abraham Lincoln which said: “I do the very best I know how – the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what’s said against me won’t amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.” That pretty much sums it up. People will judge – whether we are doing the right things, the not quite right things, the innovative things, the things that must be done. Get used to it.

3. **It's OK to be unsure.** Not only is it OK – I get nervous around leaders who are never unsure. How could they possibly know? Give me a leader who is still a learner, still asking “what if?” and still experimenting.

4. **Go out to meet it.** This is the essence of leadership: commitment. Until leaders are committed, there is little reason for people to show more than the minimum level of initiative required. Once leaders demonstrate commitment, then it's easier for others to step up. Leaders secure commitment through commitment.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is proud of the role we have played in moving Annie's Project forward across the country.

- Over the past 12 years, Annie's Project has been offered in 38 states to more than 12,000 women.
- About 33 states currently are offering the program.

Iowa State continues our commitment to educating farm women and we look forward to continuing strong Annie's Project programming.

- The not-for-profit “Annie's Project – Education for Farm Women” is well equipped to carry on the mission -- empowering farm women to be better business partners through networks and by managing and organizing important information.
- Farm women's desire for education is what has shaped Annie's Project so far and will continue to move Annie's Project forward.
- I thank all of you for the role you will play in helping our nation's farm women grow in confidence, increase their skills, and strengthen their roles on their farms and in their communities.