

investing in the future of rural communities

Henry County Pork Producers Association Scholarship Fund Helps Rural Youth



When the Henry County Pork Producers Association formed a scholarship committee in 1999 they raised \$3,000 to help high school graduates from pork producer families pursue their educational dreams. They have since increased their efforts ten-fold and on a recent evening were able to award \$32,000 to a group of high school seniors. “That’s a heck of a night when you can give away that kind of money,” says Henry County pork producer Mark Dedecker, chairman of the group’s scholarship committee.

The Henry County Pork Producers Scholarship Fund enjoys the support of local pork producers who annually volunteer their time and cooking skills in the pork chop tent at the Henry County Fair to raise money for the scholarships. “We try to get as many people involved as we can because it is so important that we invest in today’s rural youth to ensure a promising future for all of us,” says committee member and pork producer Gary Asay.

In 2003, their effort to help the rural youth of Henry County was bolstered by The Wilbert and Carol Keppy Charitable Foundation. The Geneseo, Ill. couple are considered pioneers in the pork industry. They have received much recognition for helping their community and for advancing the efforts of pork producers to meet the changing needs of consumers. When they eventually retired from farming, they were determined to create a philanthropic legacy dedicated to furthering education for Henry county agricultural youth. “The Henry County Pork Producers Association shares their vision and is proud to be a beneficiary of the Keppy Foundation generosity,” says Dedecker.

Putting College Educations Within Reach

The scholarships awarded by the Henry County Pork Producers Association are distributed specifically to the children of pork producers. High school seniors complete an application that is evaluated and ranked with a points system based on academic success, school and community involvement and an essay related to the pork industry. Awards of various amounts are then presented to the winners. In 2007, the committee received 20 applications. The average scholarship award is \$800-900 per student and the committee has been able to help every applicant.

After earning their college degrees, both Dedecker and Asay returned home to Henry County to begin successful careers as pork producers and, over the years, have each been leaders in local, state and national organizations. They know how important pork production is to the rural communities of Illinois and feel an obligation to help the rural youth of Henry County find their own success. “Education is one thing they can never take away from you,” says Dedecker.



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