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Gwinn honored by 4-H

KIM HOEY

Special to The News Journal Special

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Hall of Fame adds 1st Delawarean

By KIM HOEY, Special to The News Journal

As a former head of the Delaware **4-H** and a lifetime member, Samuel W. Gwinn touched the lives of thousands of children, yet he says he's the one who benefited from it. "They had a tremendous impact on my life," said Gwinn, 83, who was recently the first Delawarean named to the National **4-H** Hall of Fame. "I believe so much in the kinds of things we [**4-H**] offer."

4-H is part of the Cooperative Extension established in 1914 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help inform the public of knowledge researched at land-grant universities. Gwinn was former director of the Cooperative Extension of the University of Delaware, a position he held for 22 years before retiring in 1984. His involvement with **4-H**, however, goes back much further than Gwinn's working career.

At the age of 10, Gwinn first joined **4-H** in Lockbridge, W.Va., where his family had a 200-acre farm. He took part in the club's traditional farm-related activities, such as raising animal livestock and growing vegetables. As he grew older his activities in **4-H** also grew. He was hired as a Sussex County Extension agent in 1948.

"The state was very much interested in starting a camp," said Gwinn of what made him decide to move to Delaware. A year after arriving, Gwinn achieved his goal of opening an overnight camp that is still in existence today at Camp Barnes in the Assawoman Bay Wildlife Area near Bethany Beach.

"I would say it is the thing I'm most proud of," said Gwinn, who met Dorothy, his wife of 55 years, at a **4-H** camp in West Virginia. "I have so many former **4-H**'ers call me and tell me how much the camp meant to them."

"He truly loves people," said Joy Sparks, state **4-H** leader who was hired by Sparks 30 years ago to work for **4-H**. "He always had plenty of time to talk to employees or students. It didn't matter. Sam was there for people."

Gwinn, who now lives in Newark, also helped establish the Delaware **4-H** Foundation, a fund-raising arm of the organization that helps pay for extras, such as for children who can't afford to participate in different activities or to pay salaries for the Junior Leader program.

"Extension really became well-known in the state and even nationally because of Sam's efforts," said Mark Manno, statewide Delaware **4-H** educator.

"He had a tremendous impact on laying the foundation [for all **4-H** is today]," said Sparks.

"Sam's a great guy," said Delaware Attorney General M. Jane Brady, of Gwinn. A former **4-H** participant, Brady credits the program with helping develop her skills and sense of responsibility as a child: "**4-H** is a big family in Delaware."

Other notable former and present **4-H** participants in the state include the head of the state police, secretary of agriculture and the governor.

"I recruited [the governor] as a **4-H** leader some 30 or more years ago," said Gwinn.

"He's a very special person to a lot of people," said Sparks about Gwinn. But Gwinn downplays his role in building the Delaware **4-H** program, even though people in **4-H** call him "Mr. **4-H**" or "Dean of Extension."

"I know a lot of people on the state and local levels who have done so much for **4-H**," he said. Nine years after retiring, he still gets calls occasionally asking advice about different programs. He counts being named to the hall of fame as a major accomplishment.

"It's the best honor I ever got," said Gwinn, who hung the plaque he received on his wall.

"I never expected this. I spent my life working with people, and I could not have chosen a more rewarding vocation."

PROFILE

Samuel W. Gwinn

Age: 83

Wife: Dorothy married 55 years

Residence: Newark

Honors: First Delawarean named to the National **4-H** Hall of Fame

Occupation: Retired former director of the Delaware Cooperative Extension at the University of Delaware and former state director of **4-H**

Photo Caption:

The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER

Samuel W. Gwinn of Newark is first Delawarean voted into National **4-H** Hall of Fame.

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