

Ceremony marks opening of HCHS agricultural center; 'Amazing things' to come with program and FFA



Officers and members of the Harlan County High School FFA Chapter took part in the ribbon cutting ceremony.

The opening of the Finley and Michael Howard Agricultural Center on the Harlan County High School campus will take the agriculture program “to new heights,” says Future Farmers of America (FFA) Chapter President Austin Caudill.

Addressing a gathering of about 60 people taking part in the ribbon cutting ceremony and touring the greenhouse on Thursday, Caudill said, “This organization is very happy to have this facility in our hands. This greenhouse will help us not only continue the expansion of education in agriculture science, but also the expansion of education in greenhouse technology.”

The agricultural center is named after former Superintendent T. Michael Howard and his

late father, Finley, an avid gardener and agriculture supporter.

“This greenhouse is evidence that with the caring support of our school district and community, students like us are capable of achieving great things,” said Caudill. “Because of people like you, we are now able to take this program to new heights. The greenhouse will be a wonderful asset to this school and this community.”

FFA Sponsor and Agriculture Teacher Joseph Dempsey said the greenhouse “shows that hard work and dedication can make the difference in a school and the community. Agriculture and FFA play a vital part in a school’s curriculum and the community. For nearly 100 years, both agricultural education and FFA has made a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success. This program, and this greenhouse, will be the vital key that will make that happen in this community.”

Dempsey pledged that the community will see a successful program.

“Today we begin preparing students for an even wider range of careers,” said Dempsey. “Today we show what it means to say ‘I believe in the future of agriculture... Today we show the world what things are possible in a small, forgotten coal town in Kentucky. Today is a win for agriculture, agricultural education, and FFA in the heart of southeastern Kentucky.”

“This greenhouse is going to do amazing things, and will be student ran,” said Dempsey. “This greenhouse will produce many types of vegetable plants, annual bedding plants, ferns, and many other plant products. All of the proceeds will go to fund necessary equipment and activities of agricultural education and FFA in Harlan County.”

Harlan County Board of Education Chairman Gary Farmer and Superintendent Brent Roark spoke briefly during the ceremony, saying that to return agriculture to the school district and construct the greenhouse have been a priority. However, he said it took a longer than expected.

“It took a little longer than we had hoped,” he said. “Mr. Howard stepped aside (retired) and let me take over. I am very pleased to see it completed. You can’t have FFA if you don’t have a greenhouse. It was a large commitment by our board of education and Mr. Howard to see it completed.”

Farmer and Roark noted they were pleased the board selected to name the greenhouse after the Howards, honoring them for their service to students and the community.

“It is very fitting, beyond fitting, that it is named after Mr. Howard and his father, Finley. If you knew Finley, he was an awesome individual. I got to know him through my association with Mike. I served as his (Mike’s) assistant for several years. Finley was an awesome person. He personified all the good in people. He was pleasant all the time. He was a great natured person. If the world was full of Finley Howards we would have a lot better world and we’d have a lot more vegetables,” said Roark.

“We are very proud of the work Mr. Howard did on getting this in place. Mr. Howard did an awesome job in his tenure as superintendent and the contributions Finley made to our county, to our entire community, were tremendous.

Roark told those attending to “look for great things to happen in this greenhouse with our FFA program.”

Mike Howard spoke on behalf of the Howard Family, thanking the board of education, the school administration and others for their work and for the honor of having the greenhouse named after him and his father.

“It humbled me,” said Howard. “I can’t tell you what it means to me to have my dad’s name on it... He loved to garden. He loved to grow things.”

Howard said his mother loved to grow and work with flowers, but that his father concentrated on vegetables and other items that you eat.

He said his dad would remark that “I never did eat a good mess of flowers. He loved to grow things to eat. I got that from him. I love to garden also. He would share with others what he grew. I love to do the same. I love to see students involved in things. It is so good to see the FFA going. It is good to see the agriculture department to start to grow. It hurt my heart when we had to cut agriculture when we were building the new high school. This will help our students and give them more opportunities here in Harlan County.”

Also taking part in the ceremony were Mike Howard’s siblings, Manuel Howard and Deborah Mullins.

FFA Assistant Vice President Rayven Joseph agrees. “Agriculture is a big thing in our time,” she said “It provides big employment opportunities for people on a large scale in underdeveloped and developing countries.”

“We would like to extend a very sincere bit of gratitude to the Harlan County Public School District, Harlan County High School, and the entire community for making this facility possible,” said Caudill.

Dempsey thanked the board of education, the high school administration, faculty, staff, former teacher Rachel Mason, Ben Baker and the students “who are the reason we are here. Without these people, this program, nor this greenhouse could be accomplished or this strong.”

Community support for the program and the greenhouse is encouraged, said Dempsey.



FFA Chapter Chaplain Jace Howard addresses the crowd before delivering the invocation.



FFA Chapter President Austin Caudill says the greenhouse at Harlan County High School will take the agriculture program to new heights.



Participating in the Finley and Michael Howard Greenhouse ribbon cutting on the Harlan County High School campus were, from the left, Board of Education Chairman Gary Farmer, Career and Technical Education Coordinator David Hensley, Agriculture

Teacher Joseph Dempsey, FFA President Austin Caudill, Board Attorney Johnnie Turner, Manuel Howard, Mike Howard, Deborah Mullins, Board Members Myra Mosley, Pam Sheffield and Brenda Henson, Harlan County Farm Bureau Representative Nathan Boggs, Board Member Wallace Napier, HCHS Principal Edna Burkhart, Harlan Appalachian Regional Hospital Community and Patient Advocate Mark Bell and Superintendent Brent Roark.



Agriculture Teacher Joseph Dempsey talks about the importance of a successful program in a rural community like Harlan County.