

Co-op celebrates 100th at Wednesday meeting

By Karen Krien
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The St. Francis Merchantile Equity Exchange is celebrating 100 years in 2013 and it was evident at the annual Equity meeting Wednesday evening. Today, there are 87 farm supply co-ops in Kansas but only eight, including the St. Francis facility, have made the century mark.

Presenting a letter of congratulations to Karol Lohman, manager, from CoBank, the bank of cooperatives, was Larri Tappy, senior relationship manager. He said that the bank started working with the St. Francis Co-op in 1946.

Leslie Kaufman, Kansas Cooperative Council, had a plaque which she presented to Steve Yost, board president. Other special guests were Ron Seeber, Kansas Feed and Grain Association, and Steve Hornbuckle, Kansas Farmers Service Association.

Mr. Yost welcomed a large crowd which filled the St. Francis high school cafeteria. We're glad to have a good crowd which includes our young producers, he said.

Former Co-op board members attending were Ron Zwegardt, Dennis Noffsinger, Edwin Raile, John Keller, Elton Keller, Spencer Schlep and Junior Smull. Junior had four generations of his family attending the meeting - his son, Tom; grandson, Matt; and great-grandson, Jordan.

Greg Daughhete of Lindburg, Vogel, Pierce and Faris Accounting, gave the audit. He reported that the Equity had made money and there would be patronage checks distributed after the meeting. He noted that when he started working with the Equity, mid 70s, there were 260 Kansas cooperatives. Today, he said, there are less than 100.

Manager Lohman recognized the Equity employees starting with the longest employed, Bob Ochsner, who has worked for the Equity for 40 years. Shirley Zwegardt has worked for the Equity for 34 years; Janice Irwin, 33 years; and Gale Pittman, 32 years.

We have outstanding employees who are the heart and soul of our business, Ms. Lohman said. With all the years totaled, we have over 250 years of service to the Equity.

Ms. Lohman reported that the company in 2012 had handled 1,050,000 bushels of wheat; 1,740,000 gallons of petroleum products and applied input (fertilizer, chemicals, etc.) on 98,860 acres.

In 2013, Ms. Lohman said the board will continue to progress with new grain storage in Haigler, upgrade equipment with a new John Deere spray rig purchased from American Implement; expand the service at the station by adding a convenience store, and, in the 100th year in business, the Equity, with matching funds from CoBank, will give two \$1,000 scholarships to graduating seniors.

Shirley Zwegardt had baked and decorated three cakes depicting the logos during the 100 years. The Equity employees served cake and ice cream to those present while Danielle Stout and Ms. Lohman presented a power-point showing the Equity today along with older photos collected through the years.

During the meal, music performed by the high school advanced music choir, under the direction of Debbie Fiala, and solos by Chad Miller, was enjoyed.

Door prizes were given away including a \$100 bill, donated by Kansas Farmers Service Association, again, honoring 100 years of Co-op service, which was won by Elton Keller.



CAKE AND ICE CREAM were served to everyone attending by the Equity employees. Above, Shirley Zwegardt, Equity employee, cuts one of the cakes she baked. Herald staff photo by Karen Krien

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