

Legislators Recognize Grange Legacy During Rotunda Celebration

HARRISBURG, Pa - The Pennsylvania State Grange, a fraternal organization dedicated to promoting agriculture, rural development, and community engagement, is proud to celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2023. This milestone achievement was highlighted during a media event on June 13 on the steps of the Main Rotunda in the State Capitol.

Matt Espenshade, Pennsylvania State Grange Master, thanked Grange members and legislators for attending. He noted that since its establishment in 1873, the organization has grown in influence, becoming a leading voice for the Pennsylvania farming community.

“We look back, and think about the ways the Grange has helped empower our rural communities, and worked in the service of agriculture,” said Espenshade.

Among the dignitaries present, Gregory Hostetter, Deputy Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA), reiterated the value of the Grange and PDA’s support for the organization. Hostetter presented a formal citation to the Pennsylvania State Grange to commemorate its 150th anniversary.

Representative Eddie Day Pashinski (D-Luzerne), who has served as the Democratic chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee since 2017, congratulated the Grange for 150 years and noted there are more than 5,700 members. Pashinski also recognized the Grange junior and youth members in attendance.

“You are the voice of rural Pennsylvania. Whether its rural electric, broadband, and all of the things that you are involved in, it is improving the lives of rural Pennsylvania,” said Pashinski.

During his comments, Representative Dan Moul (R-Adams), the Republican chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, focused on the rich history of the Grange. He praised the Grange for working towards the betterment of the American way of life through community service, education, legislation and fellowship.

Representative Donna Oberlander (R-Clarion) pointed out she first worked with the organization when she was a county commissioner. She discussed the importance of the work the six local Granges in her district do to promote agriculture education in classrooms. As the chairman of the House Tourism and Recreational Development committee, she is working to bridge a gap between tourism and agriculture. Oberlander lauded the National Grange for allowing women to be equal members and to vote since its inception in 1867, decades before women could vote in civic elections.

Doug Bonsall, chairman of the Pennsylvania State Grange History Committee, shared the committee’s work to compile excerpts of the storied past of the Grange in the Commonwealth. The anniversary celebration will continue throughout the year, including a presentation in the Pennsylvania State Senate in September. The year-long celebration will culminate at the 151st Pennsylvania State Grange session in October, which will be held in Morgantown, Berks County.

PHOTO: 150Rotunda.jpg

CAPTION: “Legislative Director Carrie Nace welcomes Grange members and state legislators to June 13 event in Capitol Rotunda celebrating 150th anniversary of Pennsylvania State Grange.”

PHOTO: PDAGränge.jpg

CAPTION: “Deputy Ag Secretary Gregory Hostetter presents State Grange Master Matt Espenshade with a citation from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.”

Youth and Junior Ambassadors Share Concerns with Legislators

HARRISBURG, Pa - On June 14, the State Grange Junior and Youth Ambassadors visited the Capitol where they met with their local representatives. They were joined by Gail Switzer, National Grange Outstanding Young Patron. Afterwards, all were recognized during the opening of the House session.

“Royalty Day at the Capitol is a great opportunity for our Junior and Youth Ambassadors to gain valuable experience in advocating on behalf of the Pennsylvania State Grange. Not only do they share the concerns of rural communities, but also the hopes of the young people who are the future of those communities,” said Matt Espenshade, Master of the Pennsylvania State Grange.

During legislator meetings, Junior Ambassadors Danni Wilcox and Tyler Davis, along with Youth Ambassador Logen Smith, shared issues important to youth living in rural communities. Wilcox noted that her school district does not have an FFA program, and will not have opportunities for agricultural focused education in school. Smith emphasized that while much attention and funding is placed on continuing college education, expanding the trade school pathways through CTC should not be forgotten. He noted he is on a waiting list to get into the welding program. The ambassadors highlighted the need for all Pennsylvanians have access to reliable high-speed broadband to enable education, business opportunities and telemedicine.

The ambassadors arrived in Harrisburg on June 13 to participate in the 150th anniversary celebration. Afterwards they traveled to FNB Field on City Island to throw out the ceremonial first pitch at the Harrisburg Senator’s baseball game. More than thirty-five Grange members attended the baseball game. While in the area, the ambassadors also visited attractions in Hershey.

PHOTO: 150youth.jpg

CAPTION: “Junior Ambassadors Danni Wilcox and Tyler Davis, Youth Ambassador Logen Smith, and National Grange Outstanding Young Patron Gail Switzer met with state legislators to discuss rural issues and concerns among youth.”