

Long time UF extension agent retires

At their Thursday, Aug. 13 meeting, Okeechobee County Commissioners recognized Pat Miller upon his retirement after 37 years with the extension service - 25 of those years were spent in Okeechobee County. Commission chairman Clif Betts, left, presented the proclamation to Mr. Miller. **Photo: Okeechobee News/ Pete Gawda**



By Pete Gawda / Okeechobee News

The person who has been the face of the Okeechobee County Extension Office for 25 years has finally called it quits.

Pat Miller has spent the last 25 years as a cooperative service extension agent in Okeechobee County. The University of Florida, through the Cooperative Extension Service, provides research based knowledge in various agricultural related areas such as dairy, water quality, 4-H and livestock.

The Indiana native first spent 12 years in three different counties with the extension service in Indiana before coming to Okeechobee County. His duties include coordinating three other agents, one program assistant and one secretary and supervising a 4H Club program of 500 students.

Mr. Miller has enjoyed working with kids in 4-H and watching them learn responsibility and become productive members of society. The most rewarding part of his job has been the pleasure he gets from helping people with their problems. He has already been recruited to serve as a 4-H volunteer.

He was quick to give praise to his staff. "There is not a more dedicated, professional, knowledgeable group of agents anywhere," he said. "I'm extremely proud of them. There aren't many questions that one of us doesn't have the answer. We've got the right people in the right jobs. A lot of what we do comes from years of experience."

The four agents together have 95 years of experience with 51 of those years in this county. Mr. Miller said only three percent of extension agents receive the Distinguished Service Award. All four Okeechobee agents have received the prestigious award.

He also expressed appreciation for community support. Mr. Miller said that 10 years ago a state wide award for the 4H Club Leader of the Year was established. After six years of Okeechobee residents winning the award, they stopped nominating people from Okeechobee to give other counties a chance.

He's been an excellent long time, helpful professional," stated rancher and citrus grower Sonny Williamson. "Ask him for information from the University of Florida and he will find it."

Mr. Miller was presented with a 25 year service award and a Proclamation of Recognition at the Thursday, Aug. 13, meeting of the Okeechobee County Commission. "We've had ups and downs and good times and bad times" stated Commission Chairman Clif Betts. Mr. Betts commended Mr. Miller for his work with youth. "We appreciate your service," Mr. Betts said. "We will miss you."

Mr. Miller then thanked his family and the present commissioners and their predecessors for support of the extension office.

Now that he has retired, Mr. Miller plans to spend more time with his grandchildren. There are three here and one in Tallahassee that he hasn't been able to see very much. His 10-year-old grandson in Okeechobee is his best fishing buddy. Mr. Miller is also looking forward to slowing down, traveling and cooking. In past years he has cooked for various extension service programs and a few weddings.

Mr. Miller officially retires Aug. 31. Until then he will be using up vacation time. His last day at work was July 24, 37 years to the date from the time he was first hired by Perdue University in Indiana.

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