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Attached to Ag: Tapp embracing role as new FFA teacher at Owensboro Catholic High School

By Don Wilkins Messenger-Inquirer
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Erica Tapp, Owensboro Catholic High School's new FFA teacher, stands Monday in front of the program's greenhouse that has gone into disrepair. Tapp is raising funds to install a new \$15,000 fiberglass greenhouse that will allow her FFA students more hands-on instruction.

Photo by Don Wilkins |/Messenger-Inquirer

Erica Tapp never envisioned herself becoming a high school teacher.

But in the fall, Tapp, 32, found herself as Owensboro Catholic High School's new FFA instructor — a role that she has embraced, especially with her close connection to agriculture.

Tapp, a 2006 Apollo High School graduate, grew up on a small farm in western Daviess County near the Saint Joseph community.

Tapp, who was also a member of Apollo's FFA chapter, said her family raised crops and a small cattle herd.

"I was out there in the summer, since I was like 4 years old, helping with tobacco," Tapp said. "I did all parts of that from planting to hoeing the weeds. I cut it, spiked it, stripped it and put it in the barn. I did all of that."

Although farming was in her blood, she considered multiple career paths before returning to agriculture.

“When I graduated high school, I actually wanted to be a large animal vet,” Tapp said.

She enrolled at Western Kentucky University as a pre-vet, but a year later changed course, switching to the University of Kentucky’s nursing program.

After a year pursuing nursing, Tapp said she realized that wasn’t the career for her either.

She returned home and became an emergency responder.

“I joined the volunteer fire department — Moseleyville,” Tapp said. “They told me they would pay for me to get my EMT; so I did that and went to paramedic school.”

However, agriculture was still calling her.

Tapp eventually returned to WKU where she received her bachelor’s degree in general ag, and in 2019 earned her master’s degree in agricultural education.

Prior to being hired at Owensboro Catholic, Tapp taught ag at Owensboro Community & Technical College for about five years.

“When the coronavirus hit and (OCTC) classes went online, agriculture isn’t something kids want to take on,” Tapp said. “It’s a very hands-on program, so our numbers dropped.”

And when the Catholic High FFA job opened over the summer, Tapp saw an opportunity to share her love of agriculture with younger learners than what she was used to.

For the bulk of the year, OCHS students have been attending in-person classes.

“I never knew I could be so happy at a high school teaching high school kids; it’s been great,” Tapp said.

So far, she has 43 students — a mix of city and county — enrolled in FFA.

And to help the students who are less familiar with agriculture, Tapp is raising funds to purchase a \$15,000 fiberglass greenhouse. It would replace the old one that had a plastic covering and has gone into disrepair.

Tapp said a greenhouse would allow the students to be more hands-on with plants and flowers, which could be sold as part of fundraisers. She has received a \$3,000 grant from Owensboro Grain and has applied for a \$10,000 grant through the Kentucky FFA Association.

“It’s something I feel that’s really needed in an agricultural program, so kids can actually learn what they’re taking from the classroom and putting it into real life,” said Tapp about the benefits of having a greenhouse. “They’ll be growing plants and learning about the different chemicals that go on them as well as the soil and the nutrients the plants need.”

In the meantime, Tapp said she’s clearing out a classroom that will become a makeshift growing lab.

“I’m going to put a few grow lights in there so that they can start getting a feel for growing plants,” Tapp said.

Tapp and her husband, Joey, currently live in Beech Grove and plan to start their own hobby farm sometime in the future.

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