

BHE ag alumni honor one of their own at annual banquet Fertilizer plant manager honored

Read more: <http://www.starcourier.com/article/20130128/NEWS/130129131#ixzz2brsO9xc1>

By Dave Clarke

Posted Jan. 29, 2013 @ 10:30 am

Kewanee —



At Black Hawk East, he was known as a "soft-spoken," but "solid" individual. Now, Mark Gordon manages a fertilizer plant in Central Illinois and is a state and national leader in Shorthorn cattle organizations.

Gordon was named the 28th graduate of the ag program at Black Hawk College East Campus to receive the Outstanding Ag Alumni Award at the annual meeting and banquet of the BHE Agri-Business Club Alumni held Saturday night at The Kewanee Dunes.

In making the presentation, Jon Wolf, Executive Secretary of the alumni group, said Gordon grew up in

Middletown, Ill., seven miles southwest of Lincoln on a 450-acre corn, bean and cattle operation. In 1981, he graduated from Lincoln High School with the State FFA Degree and entered BHE that fall in the Ag Production program.

At Black Hawk, he was an active member of the Agri-Business Club and was also on the livestock judging team, being a member of the first place team at the National Barrow Show.

After graduation he worked at BB Milling in Emden for two years, then became employed at Croft Fertilizer Services In Athens, Ill., where he is now plant manager.

In addition to his work at the fertilizer plant, Gordon continued to grow and expand Rockin' G Land and Cattle Co., where he raised multiple state fair and national champion Shorthorn beef cattle and is now a board member of the American Shorthorn Association.

He is also a member of the Illinois Beef Association, the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association, the Holy Catholic Church, Knights of Columbus and is past president and current member of the Illinois Shorthorn Association.

Gordon currently provides full-tuition student scholarships to members of the livestock judging team as a way to give back to the college and coach, Dan Hoge, who had a major impact on his future successes.

Hoge, who was with the freshman livestock judging team in Souix Falls, S.D., Saturday night and could not attend the banquet, relayed through Wolf that he remembered Gordon as a "low profile, soft spoken, very solid individual who was always there when called upon."

As an avid college basketball fan, Gordon attended a game at Lincoln College in the late 1990s, and got to know and respect their coach, B.J. McCullum for what he did for his team members.

When he learned McCullum had become head men's basketball coach at his alma mater, he decided to provide a full tuition scholarship for the basketball program, as well.

Gordon said when he heard he would be receiving the award and returning to BHE, "It was like going home. "(Going to BHE) was one of the best decisions I ever made in my life," Gordon said.

"I always called it the 'Harvard of the Ag Industry and I wouldn't be the person I am today without people like Dan Hoge and the other faculty who taught me how to treat people with respect."

He said he sees the same drive and eagerness to serve the students in today's ag faculty that was there when he was a student. "All of your accomplishments wouldn't be possible without the people here at Black Hawk East."

Associate Executive Secretary Eldon "Bud" Aupperle recognized members of this year's honor classes — 2008, 1998, 1988 and 1978. Graduates Keith Morby ('88), of Aledo; Cliff Lane ('88), of Toulon; and Pat Berlin ('78), of Kewanee, spoke about how their years at BHE had influenced their lives.

This year's meeting marked the 40th anniversary since the alumni group was formed on Feb. 2, 1973.

Aupperle, who founded the ag program at BHE in 1967, said 95 students graduated from BHE in the first five years with associate degrees in agriculture of which 64 attended the first alumni meeting in 1973. "We were one of the first — and today are probably one of the largest ag alumni groups from any community college in the United States," Aupperle said.

BHE recruiter Ashley Middleswarth introduced sophomore ag transfer students Breanna Lawyer, of East Hancock, Ind., and Nick Fitzsimmons, of Vail, Iowa, who explained their involvement in the current ag program.

The group also elected officers for the coming year including Dennis Aupperle, of Princeville, president; Ashlee Harkey, of Viola, vice president; Kindra Callahan, of Cambridge, secretary; and Andrew Bergeson, of Geneseo, treasurer.

Elected directors for the coming year were: Bill LeSage, Kewanee; Dr. Kim Stevens, Altona; Brooke Byers, Wyanet; Brandon Appenheimer, Williamsfield; Brent Reed, Cambridge; Tammy Pelz, Tiskilwa; Renee Gradert, Kewanee; and Nikki Klein, Kewanee.