Tuesday, July 8, 2014

Welcome/Opening Remarks/ Orientation/Introductions-Dr Jim Mazurkiewicz

Dr. Jim welcomed us to TALL XIV! I am so excited about being a part of this program. He gave us an overview of what to expect, and what will be expected, of our time in TALL. We represent a wide cross-section of agriculture in Texas. Of the more than 4000 who applied, we 28 were chosen because of our current leadership roles, and what we can bring to the class.

Dr. Steele welcomed us on behalf of Texas AgriLife Extension. He said we were bringing our time, talents and treasures to this program, and we would definitely see a return on our investment from it. He praised us for being ambassadors for agriculture, and encouraged us to help one another, regardless of what part of agriculture we represent.

It was interesting to hear from each class member as they introduced themselves. And to learn of connections we already have. And the bingo was a great way to connect names to faces!

Texas Department of Criminal Justice Agriculture Today-Mr Todd Swick

Mr Swick shared just how big the TDCJ agriculture program really is. It is quite an impressive program! While the amount of inmates makes it impossible to be a self-sufficient operation, the ag program greatly reduces cost of feeding them. Mr Swick’s photo of two windmills-old and new-reminds us that old ideas have new applications. We need to be open to change, but keep our values.

Texas Forest Service-Mr Tom Boggus, My Don Galloway, Mr Don Hannemann, Mr Curt Stripling, and Mr Hughes Simpson

The Texas Forest Service is the premier state forest service in the nation, and looking at the Operation Center, I understand why! These gentlemen and their staff have developed an amazing operation! All their technology made my nerdy heart glow, but it is truly driven by their devotion to TFS and keeping Texas safe. When faced with "sunset" legislation, they stepped up and demonstrated their relevance with many innovations, including the Texas Interagency Coordination Center (ticc.tamu.edu) and TxForestInfo.com. These portals offer immense information to landowners and fire departments throughout the state.
Etiquette Training and Meal-Dr. Susan Quiring

Dr. Quiring was great, but kind of an intimidating teacher. She was so thorough in showing us the proper way to eat and relate to others. Etiquette is mostly about showing others respect, and I think-once we are comfortable in behaving in a certain manner-it will become second nature. She even brought into the conversation international culture, and expected manners overseas. We learned a LOT, and I am looking forward to using her instruction.

Wednesday, July 9, 2014

AG Media Training-Faculty, Staff, and Students from the department of Agriculture Leadership, Education, and Communication.

This was quite a learning experience for me! Dr. Deb and her team really made us think on our feet. They emphasized in their feedback that for some people we are the ONLY information they have about agriculture. We need to be seen as credible and reliable sources. I need to build that relationship with the media, so in future interactions, they will be willing to listen to-and report-my story.

A Different Kind of Career: Under Cover in the CIA-Mr Jim Olson

Mr Olson was a fascinating speaker! I could have listened to him for hours! He truly loves America, and I was proud to hear that. He shared that the CIA is very much on the front lines of the war on terror, and terrorism affects every one of us. I can think of way it has affected me and mine. But Mr Olson and his wife were willing to risk themselves to serve and protect America. The question about if service as a spy was stressful on his marriage was answered yes, but that he and his wife were sustained by their faith in each other, a belief in the job, and their faith in God.

Lunch and Program-John and Connie Giesenschlag

Since we were running late after Mr. Olson's presentation (but no one complained), the lunch was a bit rushed. But it was very good! It was at Snook, TX at their activity room, Sweet Annie's, hosted by John & Connie Giesenschlag,
and sponsored by the Tri-County Crops Committee, Citizens State Bank, and Monsanto. After representatives from these groups spoke (it was hard for me to hear, as I was sitting by the a/c unit), we thanked them for their support.

**Tour Wiggins LLP-Watermelon Warehouse-Jody and Clint Wiggins**

We then drove over to Wiggins LLP-Watermelon Warehouse, Inc. and saw their operation. That's a LOT of melons! It was cool how they sorted the melons by weight, and the workers packed them so neatly. Even the sticker machine was pretty cool. I was impressed by the attention to detail—the sticker machine, how neatly the melons were stacked, the beautiful graphics on some of the boxes, even different boxes for different vendors.

**Tour Blue Bell Creamerries-Mr Paul Kruse**

I have to admit, I was very excited about the next stop. Touring Blue Bell!! And they were so nice. The workday was wrapping up, but we still got to see the line going. The Banana Split Ice Cream has real fruit, so they hand-peel bananas every day for that day’s production. I learned about Blue Bell using a direct-to-door system. They keep control of their product until it is actually in the store freezer. That way they can control the quality of their product. I truly feel this is why Blue Bell is considered one of the top ice cream companies around. They also take care of their employees, leading to promotion from within, and many of their top managers have 20+ years with the company. Mr. Paul Kruse was a special delight. I have met him before, and he is passionate about his product. He is also passionate about supporting agriculture.

**Tour Brazos Valley Recycling-Mr Charlie Mancuso and Amanda Mancuso Laird**

Next, we went to Brazos Valley Recycling (BVR), owned by Charlie Mancuso, along with his daughter, Amanda Mancuso Laird. They are constantly looking for ways to more efficiently recycle the waste that is brought in. Right now, they can recycle 80% of the waste—plastic, glass, wood, concrete, paper, and organic waste such as food waste. I was very impressed with how they are being good stewards and making trash into treasure.
Free Evening

Ok, so now we're spoiled! But visiting and relaxing together was also important. We got to know each other a little better, and started on the road to friendship.

Thursday, July 10, 2014

ChallengeWorks-Bob Gantt

This was an activity I really wasn't looking forward to. But I wasn't going to let my fears win. After a few getting-to-know-you exercises, we split into two groups. Our team, led by Brenda, did some activities to work on problem solving and working together to find efficient ways to succeed.

After lunch, our group went to the rock climbing wall. Oh, my! We had to serve as our belay team, as well. After some training, away we went! I wanted to get it over with, so I wanted to go first. But I trusted my belay team to take care of me. I ended up going twice! But I was glad when we were done!

The team building exercises were very good. We learned to work together, encourage each other, and help each other accomplish our tasks. I think our group did very well!

Overview and bus tour of TEEX Emergency Services Training Institute-Mike Wisby, Associate Division Director

TEEX is an internationally recognized training center for emergency response, homeland security, and workforce training exercises. Their 300 acre campus has some of the world's top training facilities for fire and rescue, and law
enforcement. While we were there, they were having their Spanish-language training week for fire and rescue people from around the world. We watched a simulation of a train tank leak, and an oil well head fire. We were very impressed with both the facilities and the firefighter's work.

Social and Reception

At the Social and Reception, we mingled with many dignitaries and guests, visiting with them and thanking them for their support. After a few words from Dr. Jim, Mr. Jim Prewitt (Pres, TALL Foundation & Chairman, TALL Advisory Board), and Bill Dugas, Ph.D (Acting vice Chancellor & Acting Dean of College of Ag & Life Sciences, TxA&M), we heard from Dr. Mark Hussey, Interim Pres, TxA&M. Then we had our first introductions! We each got on the dais and shared a tiny bit about ourselves. And we were all a bit nervous! Then Dr. Jim paired us up with our dinner hosts for the evening. I went with Richard & Doris Ruffiano and their granddaughter, Lauren. We went to a lovely Italian restaurant, Amico Nave Ristorante. Yum! We had a very nice visit. Mr & Mrs Ruffiano run a meat market/grocery. Lauren is attending TxA&M, majoring in Ag Leadership. I was sure to tell her about both TALL and the Texas-Polish young farmer exchange!

Friday, July 11, 2014

Setting the Context: Strategy, Policy and the Gate of the Nation-Dr. David McIntyre

This was a very interesting speaker. Dr. McIntyre has a unique perspective-his approach is strategy-based. His thinking seems very logical to me, and I can see how it would apply to many aspects of life and business. He gave us several real-life scenarios and evaluated them, such as the current border crisis. The logistics of moving thousands of people wasn't an overnight occurrence. Our government had to have seen it coming.
Brigadier General Joe Ramirez

Gen. Ramirez was another wonderful speaker! He shared several "Rules of Leadership"-

- Know yourself-your assets and limitations
- Know your people-who is a benefit, who needs encouragement, and who is a liability.
- Know your job-yours, the job of the person under you, and the job of the person over you.
- Know your priorities-know what assets are recoverable and which are not.

He told us a positive attitude is a asset multiplier, and it is a tool that can make you a success. no one wants to follow a leader like Eyeore!

We will all have a tombstone eventually, and the most important information on there will be the dash-the life we have lived. How will we live the dash?

Responsibilities of the TVMDL-Dr. Terry Hensley

The Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory helps animal owners with professional expertise and consultations. They provide services for all kinds of animals-except fish. For aquaculture, they maintain a relationship with Mississippi State. The TVMDL has two full service labs-College Station and Amarillo. The Amarillo lab was opened in 1975, due to the strong feedlot and cattle industry in the area. They cover many disciplines from pregnancy checks to necropsy, but one growing area is drug testing at youth livestock shows, even on the county level.

I was impressed by the wide array of services provided by the TVMDL.
"Behind the Scenes" Tour of the George Bush Presidential Archives-Dr. Robert Holzweiss

We then drove ourselves to the George Bush Library & Museum. We met Dr. Robert Holzweiss, Supervisory Archivist. He supervises a staff of 13 archivists and technicians who preserve, review and release the REAMS of records and objects in the GB Library. He took us on a behind the scenes tour of the archives. They are responsible for filling requests of researchers wanting to view the papers and other media from Pres. Bush's term. All requests will be vetted by any agencies or foreign governments involved. They may-or may not-permit the researcher to view the documents. It is all up to the agency or foreign gov't. The library will abide by how they classify it.

After the tour, we had our class picture by the Freedom Horse Sculpture. Dr. Jim had a few closing remarks, and then we were done. We said our goodbyes, then each headed on our way.

My thoughts-

Oh, what an amazing experience! I learned so much, and had fun, too. Some things that were stand-outs for me were Mr Jim Olson, The TFS facilities and web portals, and Brig.Gen. Joe Ramirez. These men and their presentations were especially interesting to me. The TFS because of their dedication to protecting the state from fire danger by making their facilities and information the very best they possibly can, and their willingness to share with others. Mr Olson and Brig. Gen. Ramirez because of their deep love for America and their willingness to be leaders in protecting our country. I was humbled by their stories.

I am really looking forward to the next session in Lubbock & Amarillo, and showcasing MY part of Texas.