



# DWAYNE O. ANDREAS AG ACADEMY

In December of 2017, the **Howard G. Buffett Foundation (HGBF)** provided a gift of more than **\$1.65 million** to establish agricultural education programming in both Decatur Public High Schools.

A strategic S.W.AG (Starts With Ag) marketing campaign managed by the **Neuhoff Media Group** yielded capacity enrollment of 202 students for Year 1 of program activities.

Agriculture educators **Ashley Austin** (Eisenhower High School) and **Andrew Klein** (MacArthur High School) assumed duties in August of 2018.

Named for late agribusiness pioneer and **ADM President/CEO Dwayne Andreas**, the academy focuses on career exploration and hands-on learning for what has grown to an enrollment of 361 students in the most recent academic cycle.

Only 2% of agriculture-related jobs worldwide directly involve farming. The academy's prime objective is introducing urban students to the other 98%, represented by abundant employment options such as engineering, welding, commodity trading, sales, marketing and food science, each of which are prevalent in Central Illinois and elsewhere in the state. The production of food, fuel and fiber is vital to the health of the region as it supports global food supply chains and economics.

## ACADEMY STUDENTS ENGAGE IN THE NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION'S "THREE CIRCLES" MODEL, COMPRISED OF:

- Academic coursework in agriscience and agribusiness, ag mechanics, animal science and horticulture
- Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE's, such as internships or work on the Andreas Academy's Living Science Farm)
- Career Development Events (CDE's, such as public speaking or entrepreneurial ventures)

## Howard G. Buffett,

Chairman and CEO of the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, notes that the intent of the program is to get students excited about agribusiness.

"We have to engage more young people to pursue opportunities in agriculture if we want the United States to continue to be a leader in global food security,"

Howard says. He also notes that the Academy's namesake, Dwayne Andreas, was "a true pioneer who helped make the U.S. a global leader in agribusiness; we hope this Academy inspires the next generation of leaders to build on his legacy."

## Mayor Julie Moore Wolfe shares this sentiment.

"You wonder maybe if you're a kid in high school, 'What does that mean if I'm not a farmer?' Well, our companies right here in Decatur, Illinois feed the rest of the world," the mayor says. "We should all take a great deal of pride in that, but you don't have to be a farmer to be part of the global importance of our agribusiness companies."

Beyond exploring career fields and growing into more informed consumers, Andreas Academy students improve soft skills while developing leadership capabilities that will serve them well no matter what career choices they ultimately make.

## Nicole Bateman, President of the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur and Macon County,

feels that strategic investments in our high school talent pool will maximize the community's ability to maintain a stable source of employees. From blue-collar to the board room, we seek to "grow our own."

"The Decatur Public Schools by nature are our largest producer of workforce," she says. "And so the opportunity to train a workforce while they're still in high school gives our local employers an opportunity to bring in really skilled, talented individuals, either right into a job or recruiting them back after they've been away to college."

An FFA alumna who grew up on a dairy farm, Nicole has a first-hand awareness of the organization's effectiveness, and played a key role in design work for the Andreas Academy.

## Neuhoff Media Vice President of Business Development Brian Byers

has long advocated for the creation of agriculture-focused programming in Decatur's public schools. An Eisenhower High School alum, he wondered why a school district situated in our agribusiness region has never established a program prior to now.

"It never made any sense to me," Brian says. "We'd be out at the Farm Progress Show and all these busses from all over the state would pull in, and we'd never see any District 61 kids. I'd say how can that be? There are all these careers in all kinds of agriculture-connected fields, and our students weren't even aware they exist."

A frequent collaborator and organizer for HGBF initiatives, Brian also served two terms as a Foundation Board Trustee. He credits current school district administrators for their willingness to buy into the importance of agriculture education.



## The Decatur Public Schools Board of Education and Superintendent Paul Fregeau

enthusiastically embraced the idea when approached with the prospect of sending students to the 2017 Farm Progress Show. More than 700 middle-school students attended the show that year, with a similar number of new students sponsored by the HGBF attending in August 2019.

“Seeing these kids get excited about the large equipment is like watching them go to the moon,” Brian says. “It’s completely foreign to them, and it’s an eye-opener for so many. We try to convey that every large tractor represents a job for an engineer, a salesperson, a welder, a mechanic. There are so many opportunities for them that we have to introduce at an early age.”

## Off-Campus Engagement

New teachers **Seth McMillan** and **Kacey Reinholtz** have expanded learning opportunities for horticulture and animal science. Students have engaged in dozens of enrichment activities during the first two years of the Academy’s existence, with academic work meeting freshman seminar requirements and providing the opportunity to earn Honors credit. Yet it’s what happens outside the classroom that can prove the most meaningful.

A highlight for members has been establishing the Academy’s **Living Science Farm**. This facility remains in continual development, incorporating test plots and vegetable plantings for consumption, along with a timber-frame livestock and event barn and substantial poultry facilities. In order to house small animal projects at the farm, students actively engaged in civic government by successfully lobbying for a city zoning amendment approved by Decatur’s City Council.

One tremendous benefit to farm activities has been the fact that students can work in small groups in a safe, socially-distant manner in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions on group activities. Enabling Academy members to continue work on individual projects kept them in better communication with classmates and teachers than they would have been without the farm.

Produce during Year 1 went to local food banks. Summer 2020 featured a **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** market offering Andreas Academy eggs produced by pasture-ranging hens, broiler chickens, and vegetables ranging from sweetcorn to potatoes, tomatoes and pumpkins. Supporters could also purchase hanging baskets, floral bouquets and mums grown in the Eisenhower greenhouse.

Academy students have shown their foundation ewes to good success, and anticipate eight lambs in Spring 2021. A brace of milking goats expect kids. Students plan to show their two Hereford steers (one sponsored by the **Erv and Linda Arends Fund**) throughout spring and summer, then will offer Andreas Academy steaks and ground beef beginning next fall.

Funds generated through Living Science Farm pursuits are placed in an Ag Activities savings account with the Foundation. At the conclusion of the HGBF grant cycle in 2022, these funds will sustain the farm and support FFA activities.

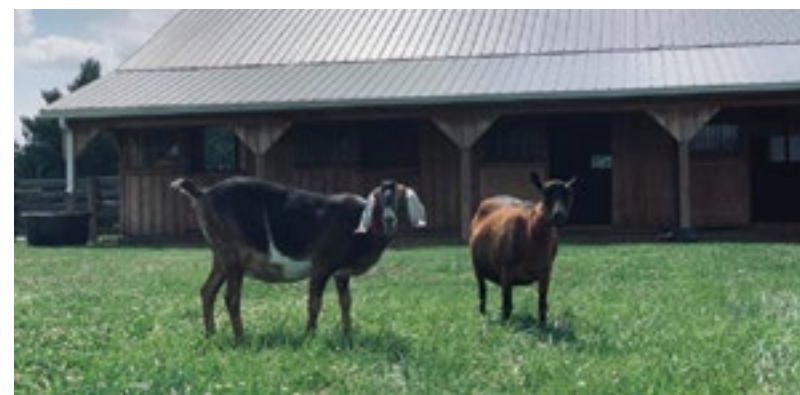
Many students taking on farm responsibilities – and engaging with the Academy in general – have never been exposed to agriculture as a concept or career path.

“This program has genuinely changed my life,”

says **Marie Shaffer**, who served as President of the MacArthur FFA chapter and now studies plant biotechnology at the University of Illinois, with related interests in Agroecology and Ag Business. Her enrollment in the College of ACES (Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences) is a direct result of her participation in the Academy.

“I can’t express how grateful I am to have had this experience,” Marie says. “Agriculture is such a major industry in the world and Decatur, so I’m shocked that this program hadn’t started sooner. There have been so many opportunities presented to me through the Andreas Academy, and I can’t wait to see where else agriculture takes me. Thanks to FFA and Mr. Klein, I’ve found an amazing community that I want to be a part of in my future. All I can say is Thank You! I’m so blessed to have been in school when this started. I’m excited to see all that it grows into.”

Marie managed the Living Science Farm operation last summer, and has worked to establish a new registered student organization on the U. of I. campus; her **Urban Ag Alliance** concept seeks to connect students from non-agrarian backgrounds to the hundreds of diverse careers offered by agriculture.



**I ILLINOIS**  
College of Agricultural, Consumer  
& Environmental Sciences

## Dr. Kim Kidwell,

Dean of the College of ACES, is a respected scholar of plant breeding and genetics, and points out that opportunities like this don’t exist everywhere for high school students.

“This is really unique,” she says. “You have a chance to actually lean in and figure out how you can make a difference in the world through your education... I always tell students to explore the opportunities and the possibilities. See if it feels good to you, then pursue that career pathway. Because you want to love what you do.”

Marie and her fellow officers also have a leg up on performance learning, such as their work to host the Foundation’s 18th annual *Legacy of Learning* banquet in November. Their team welcomed guests to Millikin University to introduce Outstanding Educator Susie Niesman and provide an overview of Academy development. This active leadership exemplifies the manner in which students have taken ownership of the program.

*The Academy is pleased to congratulate founding MacArthur instructor Andrew Klein for his selection by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) as Principal Consultant for Agricultural Education. This position has a great deal of influence on the direction of Ag instruction across the state. Andrew’s experience in establishing a successful agriculture program in an urban school district made him a unique candidate for the job. ISBE and Illinois FFA leadership have placed an increasing emphasis on the inclusion of non-traditional students, particularly minorities, to engage with the agriculture industry. Andrew is well-qualified to lead this effort. The Andreas Academy and District 61 look forward to following his work and its impact on Illinois students from diverse backgrounds!*

## Andreas Academy Support Network

The success of the agriculture education program is a result of supporters from all over the community and school district pitching in to make it happen.



## A prominent example is work put in by District 61 Buildings, Grounds and Maintenance crews.

The guys provided considerable time and expertise to – among other tasks large and small – lay the foundation and pour concrete for our event and livestock barn; run the water line; excavate and pack the access road; grade the building site; and install electric at the building. The crews saved the Foundation approximately \$20,000 for the program on this barn project, and another \$40,000 by constructing the Eisenhower Greenhouse from the ground up, including utilities.

The union has promoted the Academy’s growth from the outset, encouraging students and facilitating construction of the Mennonite-built barn.

“I think the Ag program is phenomenal,” says **Scott Tapscott**, a 26-year electrical specialist at District 61. He and partner **Floyd Bolt** installed hardware and wiring. “It’s fun to be involved in projects like this, and to see the benefit the kids get out of it. We’ve enjoyed working on that barn more than anything we’ve ever done.”

15-year maintenance man **Scott Johnson** says much the same. Chief Union Steward for SEIU Local 73, he spent a lot of hours on the skid steer preparing the construction site.



“It’s great to see it develop,” he says. “We all work for the students, and this is an opportunity for them to explore things they’ve never had a chance to see.”

Countless other examples demonstrate the willingness of the crews to support the program: **Roger Torbert’s** work on the bulldozer and drainage systems; **Josh Ray’s** experienced hand at beekeeping; **Ryan Atwater’s** maintenance of the Science Farm John Deere; **Tim Slemp’s** and **Jim Baitty’s** plumbing and water work. Director of Buildings and Grounds **Steve Kline** and Assistant Director **Phil Tapscott** are frequent visitors to check on farm activities, and Maintenance Foreman **Dan Hainline** traveled to the Chicago High School for Ag Sciences to take notes on their program.

Without such willing collaborators, programs like this never get off the ground. It’s remarkable to track the growing number friends and businesses providing time, talent and insight to assist. As new needs arise, partners have stepped in to meet the need every step of the way.

Original plans incorporated less of a livestock component. When the students steered the program that direction, the Academy needed a truck for hauling hay, equipment and trailers. Enter **Steve** and **Drew Gensler**, the father and son at **Bob Brady Auto Group** who organized a new Dodge Ram at no cost to the Academy. An Ag-Certified dealer, Steve appreciates the Academy’s approach to steering kids towards careers.

“It means a lot,” Steve says. “You never know where life is going to take you. I started here when I was 15 years old, went into military service, came back and have been blessed to work my way up and enjoy a great career here. There are so many jobs out there for kids as they start out in life. Look at what we do – we always need mechanics, and so do the big ag dealers looking for people to work on heavy equipment. Being in an agriculture program teaches the value of hard work and developing discipline. These kids will gain skills that help them all through life.”

The Genslers have been personally supportive, as well, loaning the FFA students the use of their family rack wagon to host fall hay rides at the Living Science Farm. Their interest and engagement mirrors the support provided by the community to ensure that enrollment in the Andreas Academy is a memorable experience for students.

Interested community members can visit virtually at [www.itstartswithag.com](http://www.itstartswithag.com) to learn more about how the Dwayne O. Andreas Ag Academy is providing students in Decatur with opportunities they would never have without privately-funded enrichment programming.

### THE FOLLOWING FRIENDS HAVE SUPPORTED THE PROGRAM’S DEVELOPMENT AS IT GETS OFF THE GROUND:

Agricultural Watershed Institute, Archer Daniels Midland, Akorn Inc., the Andreas Family, Bodine Electric, Brush College Animal Hospital, Caterpillar, the City of Decatur, Decatur Boys and Girls Club, Decatur Pipe and Steamfitters, Decatur Industrial Electric, DPS 61 Board of Education, Economic Development Corporation, EPL Bio Analytical, Facilitating Communication in Ag Education, Farm Progress Show, From the Ground Up, Grain Journal, the Great Pumpkin Patch, Greater Decatur Black Chamber, Heartland Tech Academy, IBEW 146, Illinois FFA Center, Limitless Decatur and Macon County, Macon County Conservation District, Macon County Farm Bureau, McLeod Express, Midwest Inland Port, Millikin University Tabor School of Business, Neuhoff Media, Norfolk Southern Corporation, Parke Warehouses, Regional Office of Education, Richland Community College, Robertson Charter School, Scott State Bank, Sloan John Deere, Tate & Lyle, University of Illinois College of ACES, Van Horn Inc., WAND Ag News, WCIA, Wells Fargo Advisors – and the MANY thoughtful individuals who have reached out with offers to assist in this ambitious venture!

### MEET STUDENTS AND CREATURES AT THE ACADEMY VIA:

[facebook.com/LivingScienceFarm](https://facebook.com/LivingScienceFarm)

Funding for the Academy’s four-year pilot is allocated through the end of the 2021-2022 academic year. The DPS Foundation is developing relationships with Decatur-area farming partners to endow acreage that provides funding for Academy activities moving forward past the pilot period. Please contact Zach directly to discuss opportunities to partner on this effort. He can be reached via (217) 362-3042.

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# A SPECIAL THANK YOU



**Bob Brady Auto Group – Official Truck Sponsor of the Dwayne O. Andreas Ag Academy**

**Facilitating Communication in Ag Education (FCAE)**

*Thank You to Megan Coy and her colleagues for your invaluable assistance in designing our program!*

*Thank you also to Principal Robert Aranda and his faculty at Bryan High School (Omaha, Nebraska) and to our friends at the Chicago High School for Ag Sciences for your assistance – both hosting us and visiting – as we conceived the Academy.*

**Neuhoff Media, Brian Byers and Nick Smith**

*for your effective concept and management of the S.W.A.G (Starts With Ag) campaign! Without that coordinated effort, the program would never have gathered such early momentum.*

Visit the Academy at [itstartswithag.com](http://itstartswithag.com)

## OTHER INDIVIDUALS LENDING THEIR VOICES TO PROVIDE PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

*Community Advisory Committee*

- |  |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Rob Albers</b><br>Macon County Farm Bureau                                      | <b>Megan Coy</b><br>Facilitating Communication in Ag Education     | <b>Kim Hurm</b><br>ADM – Innovation and Commercialization Director         | <b>Colt McLeod</b><br>McLeod Express – Executive Vice President         | <b>Pam Smith</b><br>DTN/Progressive Farmer   |
| <b>Larry Altenbaumer</b><br>Retired – Ameren Illinois, Economic Development Corp.  | <b>Niki Fenderson</b><br>Robertson Charter School – Principal      | <b>Cordell Ingram</b><br>MacArthur High School – Principal                 | <b>Kevin McSherry</b><br>From the Ground Up                             | <b>Jess Smithers</b><br>Richland Community College – Director of Agricultural Programs |
| <b>Mark Avery</b><br>Grain Journal   | <b>Tamarra Fuller</b><br>Greater Decatur Black Chamber - President | <b>Steve John</b><br>Agricultural Watershed Institute – Executive Director | <b>Julie Moore Wolfe</b><br>Mayor – City of Decatur                     | <b>Matt Snyder</b><br>Regional Office of Education – Superintendent                    |
| <b>Nicole Bateman</b><br>Economic Development Corporation – President              | <b>Steve Gensler</b><br>Bob Brady Auto Mall – Vice President       | <b>Matt Jungmann</b><br>Farm Progress – Director, Trade Shows              | <b>Chris Phelps</b><br>Scott State Bank – Ag Lending Manager            | <b>Gavin Stoddard</b><br>Parke Warehouses  |
| <b>Dr. Najiba Benabess</b><br>Millikin University – Dean, Tabor School of Business | <b>Ashley Grayned</b><br>DPS 61 – Director of Innovative Programs  | <b>Dr. Kim Kidwell</b><br>University of Illinois – Dean, College of ACES   | <b>Dave Rathje</b><br>Bodine Electric – Kelly Construction              | <b>Trent Thompson</b><br>Decatur Industrial Electric                                   |
| <b>Adam Brown</b><br>Macon County Farm Bureau Board                                | <b>Mark Greenawalt</b><br>Decatur Pipe and Steamfitters            | <b>Robin King</b><br>EPL Bio Analytical                                    | <b>Dr. Dave Rosch</b><br>University of Illinois – College of ACES       | <b>Dr. Cris Valdez</b><br>Richland Community College – President                       |
| <b>David Brown</b><br>WAND Ag News   | <b>Dr. Greg Haarman</b><br>Field Production Sponsor                | <b>Jarrold Krall</b><br>Krall Custom Baling                                | <b>Dr. Bill Van Alstine</b><br>Brush College Animal Hospital            | <b>Jennifer Walker</b><br>Tate & Lyle Brand Manager – Community Affairs                |
| <b>Mindy Bunselmeyer</b><br>Illinois FFA Center – President                        | <b>Ed Harris</b><br>Van Horn Inc.                                  | <b>Dr. Amy Leman</b><br>University of Illinois – College of ACES           | <b>Josh Sapp</b><br>IBEW 146  | <b>Greg Webb</b><br>ADM – Vice President – State Government Relations                  |
| <b>Brian Byers</b><br>Neuhoff Media – Vice President of Development                | <b>Ty Hildum</b><br>Norfolk Southern Corporation                   | <b>Paul Marien</b><br>Macon County Conservation District                   | <b>Jim Schroeder</b><br>First Illinois Ag Group – Senior Vice President | <b>Dr. Amy Zahm</b><br>Eisenhower High School – Principal                              |
| <b>Tom Courson</b><br>Busey Ag Services – Senior Vice President                    | <b>Bret Hitchings</b><br>Heartland Tech Academy – Principal        | <b>Ann Mathieson</b><br>Enterprise Montessori – Principal                  | <b>Mark Schweitzer</b><br>ADM – Vice President – Investor Relations     |  |
|  |  |  | <b>Jeff Sloan</b><br>Sloan Implement                                    |  |