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**SD FFA Leadership Retreats celebrate 50th anniversary**

BATH (July 18, 2022) - Fifty years ago, the SD FFA held the first ever South Dakota FFA summer leadership camp, which over the years has been re-named SD FFA leadership retreat. The SD FFA values tradition and builds on it to make a difference today’s youth. This year’s leadership retreat students celebrated fifty years of SD leadership retreat, and all those who make it possible every year! In 1972, the state FFA officer team saw a need and took the initiative to determine how to make an FFA camp happen. State Officers Kendal Thompson, Craig Johannsen, Eugene Moeller, Kim Wallum, Jon Wehde and Harley Hansen were not able to conduct the first camp as officers but did all the research and leg work for the SD FFA members to have an FFA camp in 1973, the summer after they completed their state officer duties. It was held at 4-H Camp Lakodia, near Madison, SD.

Over the years, SD FFA leadership retreat was held at various camp facilities including NeSoDak, SDSU, Swan Lake, Camp Bob Marshall, Camp Judson, and Storm Mountain. No matter the facility, FFA members were motivated, and gained advocacy, fundraising, service, networking, goal setting, and teamwork skills. SD FFA grew from 1 to 2 camps, and from 1997 through 2008 held 3 FFA camps over the summer, with about 350 members attending each year.

The 1972-73 State President, Kendal Thompson, from Willow Lake, shared how registration that 1st year was mailed to him at his home and deposited in a bank account in Willow Lake set up just for camp. He said, “We did it on a shoestring budget, help from a few young teachers, and lots of heart for the organization, but not a lot of expertise. It was very exciting, as we had a pretty good number of members attend that 1st year and lots of enthusiasm!” After college, Thompson taught agricultural education in Willow Lake, and had great memories of taking members to camp. Thompson then went into ag business but continued to be involved with FFA and support the SD FFA Foundation with his time and resources.

Thompson was proud to be part of the team that stepped up and found a way to make Leadership Camp a reality. In honor of 50th years of leadership camp, this spring he started a fundraising campaign. He stepped up again, writing letters and speaking to past state officers to help. His goal was to be at one of this year’s SD FFA Leadership retreats to present the SD FFA with a check from past state officers to help fund the SD FFA Association endowment for the Leadership and Programing Management staff position for the SD FFA. Unfortunately, Thompson passed away very unexpectedly on June 5, but his family continues to support Kendal’s love of FFA. This year’s SD FFA campers and staff celebrated 50 years of leadership with cake and memories of past years, as Thompson had requested.

The SD FFA Foundation is continuing Thompson’s legacy and raising funds to support the SD FFA Association endowment funding the Leadership and Programing Management staff position. To donate and support the SD FFA members and advisors through this position, or for more information about the South Dakota FFA Foundation or South Dakota's FFA programs, visit [www.sdffafoundation.org](http://www.sdffafoundation.org/) or click on the attached QR code.

Caption: 2022-23 State FFA Officers celebrate 50 years of leadership with cake for members at the 2022 Leadership Retreat. Vice President – Megan Sanders, Oral; President- Ella Stiefvater, Salem; Reporter – Sidney Peterson, Sturgis, Secretary Kathryn Rausch, Hoven, Treasurer – Jacob Olson, Aberdeen; and Sentinel Caleb McGregor, Webster.