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March 2026 Edition

Beyond Busy: How “Extra Work” Leads to Success



January through March is a busy time for NEAFCS members! We have annual session proposals, awards

submissions, webinars, *Connecting with Colleagues*, and committee work as we move towards planning the annual session, impact statements, and create the Journal. There were many years, in addition to all the other work requirements, I questioned if I should do this seemingly “extra work.”

In college, my goal was to become a university professor. I finished my MS degree, and my life took the path ordained for it. Years later, I “began” my Family and Consumer Sciences career with Extension and this past year, and was recently promoted to Full Professor. A lifelong dream realized. How did I get here? By doing the “extra work” consistently year after year which led to success. While none of us can do everything, we *can* be strategic. Each year, choose a few intentional steps that align with your long-term goals. NEAFCS provides powerful pathways to help every member grow, lead, and achieve.

- **Awards** – Plan annually what awards you will apply for and design your programming around the requirements. Form a team so you can all celebrate together!
- **Conference Presentations** – Presenting nationally strengthens your professional portfolio and expands your influence. NEAFCS and JCEP (Joint Council of Extension Professionals) conferences offer many opportunities to share your expertise and elevate your work.
- **Webinars** – Share your successful programs and innovative strategies with colleagues across the country.
- **Journal of NEAFCS** – Publication in the Journal is a distinguished achievement showcasing your scholarship and impact nationally.

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NATIONAL NEWS & UPDATES

Beyond Busy: How “Extra Work” Leads to Success *(continued from page 1)*

- **Connecting with Colleagues** – Relationships are one of our greatest professional assets. Collaboration leads to innovation, shared resources, and lasting professional friendships.
- **Committee work** – Join with intention. Serve where your interests align with your aspirations. Map your growth—committee member, chair, national leadership.
- **Annual Session** – Attending and serving at the national conferences strengthens and builds relationships nationally and provides incredible professional development.

NEAFCS is more than an association—it is a path to professional growth and success. The benefits are not abstract; they are actionable. They are the building blocks of advancement, recognition, leadership, and lifelong professional fulfillment. The “extra work” is not extra at all. It is the investment that compounds over time. As we move through this busy season, I encourage you to choose intentionally. Step forward. Submit. Present. Publish. Connect. Lead.

Dianne Christensen

NEAFCS President



Looking for Leadership Opportunities? Join the NEAFCS Board

Jennifer Bridge (KY) | Immediate Past President

Serving on the NEAFCS board has been one of my most rewarding experiences. Our board represents all members, united by our shared mission and goals. Each year, new officers are elected to keep our board strong. This year, we seek dedicated leaders for the **President-Elect, Vice President Member Resources, Vice President Professional Development, Secretary, East Regional Director**, and **West Regional Director** positions.

Ready to step up, grow professionally, and make a difference? Visit the [NEAFCS National Officer Candidate Resources](#) webpage to learn more. Questions? Contact [Jennifer Bridge](#), any [Nominating Committee member](#), or the [national office](#).

Don't miss this chance to expand your network and contribute to the future of NEAFCS—apply today! Applications are due by **May 1, 2026**.



President Dianne Christensen (NM)
Immediate Past President Jennifer Bridge (KY)
President-elect Chris Zellers (NJ)

NATIONAL NEWS & UPDATES

NEAFCS Newest Policy Changes

Christine Zellers (NJ) | *President-Elect*

The benefits of membership in NEAFCS are endless and a big advantage is the ability to build professional relationships. Those relationships are invaluable to me personally and professionally, just as they are to our members. While it's important to have opportunities to build relationships, it is equally important that those members who hold office represent our association in a way that is fiscally and professionally responsible and therefore, we have policies. Several of NEAFCS's policies have been updated and will be found in the appropriate policy areas to reflect the fiscal and professional responsibilities of the board and members of our association. The board has approved a new policy while making appropriate updates to the following policies:

- [Annual Session Refund and Cancellation Policy](#) (located in the **Annual Session Handbook** page 18)
- [Elections and Campaigning Policy](#) (located in the **NEAFCS Policy Manual**, page 63)
- A [Committee Member Decorum and Code of Conduct Policy](#) (located on the **Committee Resource Website** under **Committee Member Decorum and Conduct**)



Members Share Professional Advice

Sheila Gains (CO) | *Western Region Director*

At the **2026 Extension Leadership**

Conference, NEAFCS

Members were asked to share the best professional advice they have ever received. Of the 50+ members attending the conference, 30+ shared their advice so that others might also benefit. Below are the first 8 responses in no particular order. (Some submissions were edited for length and clarity.)



- *Make your passion your profession. This makes it easy to continue growing and learning.*
- *Don't sweat the small stuff.*
- *Find your own mentor. You don't have to go with the one assigned if it is not a good fit. Mentors are helpful at every stage in life and career.*
- *If today is bad, show back up tomorrow, no day is the same in Extension*
- *Go to National meetings when you can and be an active member of your association (Local, State and National) .*
- *Learn how to take feedback constructively, so you can grow.*
- *Don't be afraid to say "NO". Take time for yourself and space for your own mental and physical health.*
- *Don't let this job become your identity. Feel free to have unrelated hobbies.*

Send your "Best professional advice ever received" to Regional Directors [Lisa Fishman](#) or [Sheila Gains](#), for inclusion in a future newsletter.

NATIONAL NEWS & UPDATES

Newell Brands, maker of Ball® Fresh Preserving Products is Celebrating America's 250th Anniversary with Limited-Edition Americana Mason Jars

Ashley Pierce (Newell Brands, maker of Ball® mason jars) | Senior Brand Manager

In 2026, America celebrates a significant milestone with the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding, and Ball® mason jars is honoring the moment with a special limited-edition launch.

We are excited to announce the introduction of Ball® Americana Mason Jars, a collection designed



to celebrate America's heritage, traditions, and shared moments. From county fair jams

to porch-side pickles, Ball canning jars have preserved the flavors of the nation for generations.

The Americana Mason Jars feature a celebratory star-embossed design that reflects pride and craftsmanship. Their classic look transitions seamlessly from kitchen to table, making them ideal for preserving fruits and vegetables, serving drinks, or adding a decorative touch to everyday spaces.

This spring we have also released a new Elderberry Jelly recipe which delivers a jewel-toned preserve with a bright, balanced tang that highlights elderberry's distinctive flavor. Developed and validated under updated elderberry safety guidelines, this recipe reflects extensive research and testing to ensure consistent quality, flavor, and shelf stability.

Using precise ingredient ratios and classic pectin, it produces a beautifully set jelly with deep color and a smooth texture. Designed for home preservers who value both flavor and food safety, this release brings confidence and clarity to working with elderberries while celebrating their bold, timeless taste.

Ball® and Ball®, TMs Ball Corporation, used under license.

Making a Difference: Advancing Heart Health Through Research and Extension

Rachel Dotson (USDA NIFA) | Public Affairs Specialist

According to the Centers of Disease Control, in 2022, one in every five deaths in the U.S. was caused by heart disease. Access to nutritious foods, opportunities for physical activity, health education, and community support all play a role in reducing cardiovascular risk. Across the country, Land-grant Universities are addressing these factors through NIFA-funded research and Extension projects that translate science into obtainable, everyday solutions for individuals and families. [Read more about their work.](#)



AWARDS

Call for Judges: Help Recognize Excellence in NEAFCS

Jamie Mahlandt (IL) | *Chair-Elect Awards Training Committee*

Planning to apply for awards this year? If so, consider also [volunteering to serve as a judge](#) and support the awards process. Serving as a judge provides valuable insight into how submissions are evaluated and helps ensure a strong, fair, and thoughtful review process for all applicants. Judges will be accepted through the end of March.

If you are not planning to apply this year but would



like to learn more about the awards program, volunteering as a judge can be an enlightening learning experience. Reviewing

applications offers a firsthand look at expectations, scoring criteria, and examples of high-quality work from across the country.

Whether you are new to NEAFCS awards or have prior experience, serving as a national awards judge offers meaningful professional benefits. Judges stay informed about innovative programs and emerging trends while gaining a broader understanding of Extension work nationwide. Participating in the judging process is a rewarding way to grow professionally while contributing to NEAFCS's continued success.



2025 President Jennifer Bridge (KY) with **NEAFCS Hall of Fame inductees Kathy Dothage (MO), Christine Kniep (WI) & Margaret Viebrock (WA)**



Members cross the stage to receive well-deserved recognition.



More awards photos can be found on the NEAFCS website. See back page of newsletter for details.



MEMBER RESOURCES

Unlock Your Potential: The *Membership Playbook* is Here!

Troy Anthony Anderson (MD) | VP of Member Resources

With the launch of the **NEAFCS Membership Playbook**, members now have a vital resource to *streamline recruitment, improve retention, and enhance their experience*. This playbook provides a structured approach to cultivating a vibrant and engaged community within the organization. The primary objective of the **NEAFCS Membership Playbook** is to offer a comprehensive guide for local affiliates and leaders to effectively engage potential and existing members. By standardizing strategies and offering innovative ideas, the playbook ensures consistency in outreach efforts and fosters a welcoming environment for professionals in the field.

How to Use the Playbook

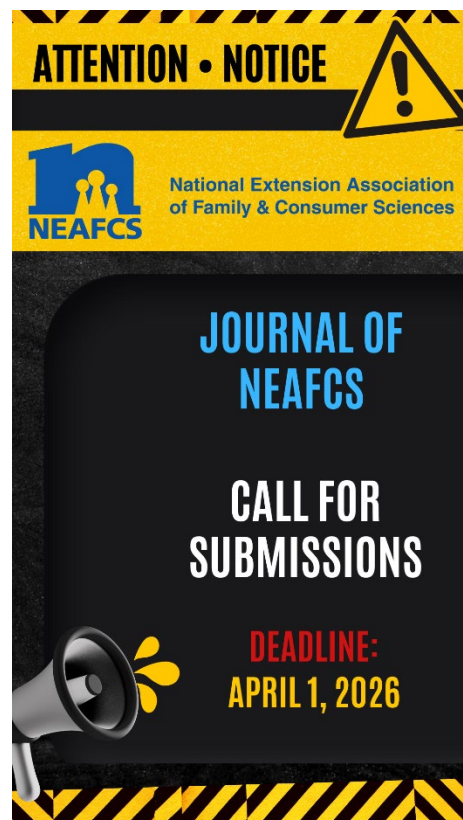
The playbook is intuitively organized, allowing users to navigate through different sections that cover recruitment, retention, and recognition strategies. Each section is packed with actionable steps, sample scripts, and creative ideas to implement at local and national levels. By following the guidelines, leaders can enhance their recruitment drives, improve retention rates, and effectively recognize member contributions.

Benefits of the Membership Playbook

Utilizing the **NEAFCS Membership Playbook** enhances organizational growth by expanding membership bases and building stronger community ties. It empowers leaders with the tools needed to maintain an active, engaged membership, which in turn supports the association's mission to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities.



The **NEW NEAFCS Membership Playbook** can be found in the [document library](#) on the NEAFCS website.



MEMBER RESOURCES

MR Membership Hub: Looking In, Looking Out, Looking Even Better!

Troy Anthony Anderson (MD) | *VP of Member Resources*

Membership offers a unique opportunity to enrich your personal and professional life by "looking in" to strengthen your skills, "looking out" to expand your network, and ultimately "looking even better" by elevating your impact. As a NEAFCS member, you gain access to a wealth of resources that foster growth and innovation. Members can attend exclusive workshops, access cutting-edge research, and participate in networking events designed to connect you with leaders in their field.

Members are encouraged to become actively involved in committees to utilize resources more effectively and drive positive change within the community. By participating in these committees, you can directly influence future initiatives and projects. Don't forget to mark your calendars for the **May Membership Month of Activities!** This exciting month promises guest speakers, panel discussions, and networking opportunities.

It's a perfect chance to connect with fellow members and celebrate the vibrant community we have built together. Let's look inward for growth, outward for collaboration, and together, create an even brighter future.

Member Resources Committee Updates

The **Access Engagement and Outreach (AEO) Committee** is thrilled to announce a new series of webinars focused on enhancing community engagement. These sessions aim to equip members with practical tools and strategies to make a meaningful impact in their communities.

The **Journal Editorial Committee** is calling for manuscripts for the upcoming special issue. This is a fantastic opportunity for members to contribute their research and insights, sharing valuable knowledge with a broader audience.



Important Member Announcements

Scholarship Opportunity	Award Nominations	Panel Discussion
Access Engagement Outreach Committee Scholarship: If your presentation proposal is accepted for NEAFCS in the track (Education, Leadership, and Community Engagement), consider applying for the AEO Scholarship!	Mary W. Wells Memorial Award: The AEO committee looks forward to reviewing applications for 2026	Join us during Membership Month May 14, 2026 at 1:00pm EST for a panel discussion on ways to improve inclusivity within our organization.

MEMBER RESOURCES



SAVE THE DATE



MEMBERSHIP MONTH



04
MAY



CONNECTING WITH COLLEAGUES

Dive into dynamic discussions with our Regional Directors and explore the groundbreaking changes rolling out through Extension because your voice matters in shaping the future!

14
MAY



MEMBER RESOURCES FORUM FUSION

Discover how Extension professionals are pioneering local innovations amidst political, social, and cultural shifts. Unite with our Access, Engagement & Outreach (AEO) panel of speakers in crafting inclusive, impactful community engagement.

19
MAY



SEEN, SUPPORTED AND OH SO LOVED

Get ready to be inspired and equipped with the tools to make a meaningful difference as an Extension Educator in the community with Maranda Brooks (University of Kentucky).

26
MAY



THE POWER OF DIFFERENCE

Don't miss this chance to revolutionize your impact with actionable insights that redefine success serving others with Ricardo Kiaros (Rutgers University).

FOR MORE INFO:
Follow us on



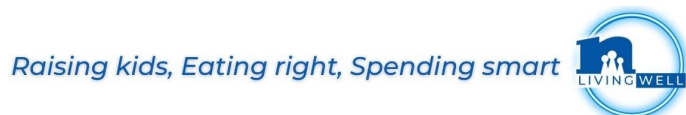
I'M A PROUD MEMBER

www.neafcs.org

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Living Well Month: Sharing Wellness in Our Communities

Lorrie Coop (MD) | *Public Affairs Advisory Committee Chair*



March is **Living Well Month**, and the Public Affairs Advocacy Committee has updated promotional materials and the campaign calendar to make



participation easy. This national awareness effort, coordinated by National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, highlights the

meaningful work Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) professionals do every day.

Celebrating **Living Well Month** helps communities recognize how education and practical skills lead to healthier lives and stronger families. Agents and partners are encouraged to connect with local organizations, share research-based tips online, and host simple wellness activities that demonstrate the value of FCS programs. Small efforts — a short post, a resource table, or a quick class — can spark lasting change.

FCS programming supports well-being across the lifespan through nutrition education, financial readiness, relationship skills, and health practices. Living Well Month provides a unified opportunity to tell that story and showcase Extension's impact where people live and work.

Access ready-to-use materials and a step-by-step guide on the [NEAFCS website](https://www.neafcs.org).

Together, we can help individuals and families take practical steps toward living well.

Available Resources Include:

- Living Well Logo
- Social Media Guide
- March 2026 Living Well Month Calendar
- Weekly visual schedule graphics
- Living Well videos covering 8 different domains of wellness
- Living Well Proclamation template
- Additional graphics available in the [graphics library](#)



ENDOWMENT

Giving from the Heart

Theresa Mayhew (NY) | *Committee Chair and Life Member*

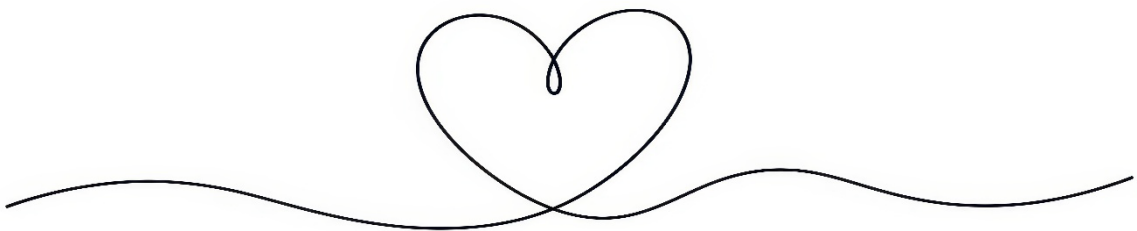
As a NEAFCS member, one way we can honor or memorialize someone special who has encouraged our professional development journey is to contribute to the [Endowment Fund](#) in their name.

- Perhaps it is someone who encouraged you to study family and consumer sciences or a related discipline.
- Or someone who encouraged you to consider a career in Cooperative Extension.
- Or someone who encouraged you to join and get involved in NEAFCS – a colleague, administrator or family member.
- Someone who was there to identify opportunities, mentor you or cheer you on.

Let them know how much you appreciate their heartfelt support by donating to the Endowment in their name. In doing so, you help recognize, preserve and grow their impactful legacy not only to you but to other NEAFCS members and the profession, too.



Donations to the NEAFCS Endowment can be a one-time donation, monthly installments, and/or non-cash donations. All the details, along with information on how to apply for Endowment Grants, can be found on the [NEAFCS Endowment website](#).



HISTORIAN

Uncovering Hidden Gems

Christine Kniep (WI) | *Historian*

Sometimes, the most valuable items for a Historian are tucked away in unexpected places:

- a file folder pushed to the back of a drawer
- a box in the storage room left behind by a predecessor
- even mementos from Annual Sessions.

Each of these may contain treasures that capture the history and legacy of our organization.

This month, as Kathy Byrnes (KY) approached retirement, she asked if the items she discovered in older Kentucky files would be of interest. The answer was a resounding yes! I was delighted and surprised by the remarkable materials she found. Among them were copies of newsletters—specifically “The E.H.E. Reporter” from 1969 through the seventies—along with awards program books and a 1949 correspondence. These items collectively document our role and work over the years and are truly priceless.

On a personal note, I took the opportunity to look for mentions of colleagues in Wisconsin, the roles my mentors played in the Association, and award winners. Through these materials, I found my own introduction to NAEHE/NEAFCS and gained insights into what Extension work has meant in Wisconsin and across the country.

Thank you to Kathy and to Kentucky for preserving these important items. I encourage anyone who has file folders, boxes, or mementos and is ready to pass them on to NEAFCS to please contact me. Together, we can ensure our history is not lost but celebrated for generations to come.



Items submitted by Kathy Byrnes (KY) for the NEAFCS Historical Archives.

From 1949 Correspondence
found by Kathy Byrnes (Ky)

“...all girl projects (in 4-H) are under the leadership of Home Demonstration Agents who are trained economists and are on equal standing with County Agents.”

More historical “gems” can be found in the [NEAFCS Historical Archives](#).

To donate items to the Historical Archives, contact our historian [Christine Kniep](#).

THE BACK PAGE

Annual Session 2026 Registration

Tennessee *HERE WE COME!!* Annual Session this year will be held in Knoxville, TN, Sept. 28 – Oct. 1, 2026. The [Annual Session webpage](#) is your best information source. Watch for Annual Session pricing in April with registration expected to be open by early June.

Annual Session 2025 Photos

Photos of our time together in Grand Rapids, MI, can be found on the [2025 Annual Session webpage](#). Photos include:

- State Photos
- Opening, Closing, & Welcome Events
- National Award Ceremony
- Leadership Event

Use download pins to download photos and save.

Obituaries

Shirley Barber, MN

- March 17, 1939 – Dec. 26, 2025
- [Obituary](#)

Marie Henrikson, MN

- Sept. 17, 1934 – Sept. 29, 2025
- [Obituary](#)

The March 2026 Edition of NEAFCS Network Newsletter is created by Cindy Thompson, National Secretary, the contributors, and with support from the NEAFCS National Office.



Mark Your Calendar

March

3/15/26 National Awards Deadline

April

4/1/26 Journal of NEAFCS Manuscript Submission Deadline

4/7/26 *Connecting with Colleagues*

4/28/26 Town Hall Meeting

May

5/1/26 Hall of Fame Nominations Deadline

5/1/26 National Officer Candidate Deadline

5/5/26 *Connecting with Colleagues*

5/15/26 Endowment Grant Proposals Deadline

June

6/2/26 *Connecting with Colleagues*

