

Alabama

Voices from the Past – Present – Future

Christine Kniep, NEAFCS Historian and the 90th Anniversary Committee

On June 29th, 1933, in Milwaukee, WI, during the annual meeting of the American Home Economics Association, The National Home Demonstration Agents' Association became a reality. Present were twenty-one home demonstration agents from 13 states: Alabama, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Vermont, Virginia and Wyoming.

The 90th Anniversary Committee has asked each of these 13 states to collect stories of their work and membership in NEAFCS from a retired or life member, the affiliate president and a “new” member – the start of an on-going narrative history of NEAFCS. Between now and our 100th Anniversary, stories will be collected from all of the affiliates. These stories will be included in our newsletter, posted on our website and included in our historical records.

It is with great pleasure I share the stories from the Alabama Affiliate, featuring:

Present – Synithia Flower

Future – Theresa Mince

Past – Debby Mathews



Present

My name is Synithia Flowers and I currently serve as the NEAFCS affiliate president in Alabama. I became an NEAFCS member in 2007 and have been employed with Extension for over 22 years. In my position as a Human Sciences Extension (HSE) regional agent, I cover counties that span the central and largest region of the state. A priority program that I conduct is Escape Vapes which addresses the critical needs surrounding the youth vaping epidemic. Realizing the complexities and dynamics of this issue, I helped

transition Escape Vapes into a multi-systemic initiative, providing education, prevention, intervention and cessation program options.

When making the decision to join NEAFCS, I was asked by several but was told by a few veteran colleagues with amassed years in membership, experience and wisdom that NEAFCS was an absolute must! Becoming an NEAFCS member certainly gifted me with an FCS tribe early within my career and set me on a more engaged and informed pathway in Extension. The first two National NEAFCS conferences I attended were, indeed, memorable! My Alabama affiliate hosted the first one and I was surprised with a national award for a written news release at the 2nd one! Both offered timely lessons in hard work, camaraderie and accomplishment.

A wish for the association, as it forges onward, is that it continues to serve as “that tribe” for professional development and collegiality while appropriately evolving to meet relevant FCS issues and challenges of tomorrow!



Future

My name is Theresa Mince, and I am an Extension Specialist with Alabama Extension at Auburn University, serving as the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Coordinator. I have been with Extension for 7 years and have been a NEAFCS member for 3 years. I currently serve as Parliamentarian for the Alabama affiliate of NEAFCS.

As EFNEP Coordinator, I provide statewide leadership to a \$2.1 million federally funded nutrition education program that focuses on adults and youth with limited resources. My Educators are housed in priority communities across the state of Alabama providing free, hands-on nutrition and physical activity education to adults with children, youth in grades 5-12, and pregnant women and teens.

I joined NEAFCS to expand my network of fellow Extension professionals passionate about improving the health and well-being of communities. I have developed professional relationships and strong friendships with people across the country who have helped me be a better leader and expand my work in new and unique ways. In 2023, I had the opportunity to present on our Today's Mom program, which is a prenatal nutrition education program developed here at Auburn University. Following my presentation, I connected with fellow NEAFCS members from over 25 different institutions!

I hope to see NEAFCS continue to grow and expand the diversity of its membership at all levels. NEAFCS can and should be the professional home for so many within Extension, and I am excited for what is to come!



Past

I'm Debby Mathews, Past National President 2016. For 38 years I served Extension in Alabama, then I retired two years ago. Singing with two choirs and two ensembles, acting with community theater, gardening, and tap dancing have provided many fun-filled hours for me so far. My three grandchildren have added to the fun by inviting me to plays, programs and ball games.

NEAFCS membership has been rewarding to me for forty years. I joined because a colleague invited me and because I saw it as a professional development resource. While actively employed it kept me current in terms of Family and Consumer Science knowledge and practice as an Extension Agent. It also helped me grow as a leader. One special project I helped fashion in my last year or two as an active member was the NEAFCS Leadership Experience. As our member resources subcommittee met, we felt a great deal of excitement as we built the program and selected the first class and their mentors.

In terms of my work, I believe the most impactful program (other than work with 4-Hers) was the Radon Education Program. Through that program I met leaders in medicine, building science, Extension and public health I would never have met otherwise. The highlight of the Radon program was working on the 2002 Jimmy Carter Build with Habitat for Humanity in Anniston, AL. That week a team from AL Extension, EPA, NEHA and Radon mitigators worked together to build twenty-two homes with active Radon Reduction systems.

My wish for NEAFCS is that it will continue to thrive in terms of both numbers and impact. May the passion and fellowship we share as Extension FCS professionals keep us motivated!

A picture from the Alabama archives:

