



A FISHY Business With a Promising Future!!!

By Kip Doyle

The National FFA Organization, formerly known as the Future Farmers of America, is a youth organization that helps prepare students for leadership and careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture – as part of local FFA chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Katlyn Santangelo of the Cuba-Rushford FFA Chapter in New York State was recently named the national winner Aquaculture – Entrepreneurship/Placement Award during the National FFA Convention, October 22-25, 2008.

The award recognized outstanding student achievement in agribusiness gained through establishment of a new business, working for an existing company, or otherwise gaining hands-on career experience.

Santangelo received her experience in aquaculture during her four years of high school working at the Cuba-Rushford's Middle/High School Fish Hatchery program under the leadership of Mr. Scott Jordan, Fisheries and Wildlife teacher. The hatchery was opened in 1996 and is one of the only working hatcheries at the high school level in the United States.

During her senior year at Cuba-Rushford, Ms. Santangelo was manager of the hatchery, putting her in charge of feeding the fish, collecting data, and taking water samples, all while supervising her fellow students.

"I enjoyed having the responsibility," she said. "It was difficult at times working with students the same age as me, but I gained their respect and it worked out for me."

To earn the award, Ms. Santangelo had to work her way up through a local and state application process. The winners from each state were then narrowed down to the top four and eventually to the final winner.

During the event, "I was competing most of the time," Ms. Santangelo said of her experience at the convention. "We all were interviewed by nine judges. After looking over our applications and our interview, they chose the winner," which wound up being Katlyn.

The hatchery manager position that earned Ms. Santangelo the award is especially important at the hatchery, Mr. Jordan said, because it teaches high-school students what it's like to work at a real job.

"As students go out into the working world, they're able to use their experiences from the hatchery as a reference for getting jobs," he said. And it's not just about being in charge of a hatchery. They're in charge of people. They had people that had to answer to them. That's what's important."

Ms. Santangelo said she was especially excited when she recently returned to the school and found some paddlefish she released into the school's 1-acre pond four years ago. Not only were they still

alive, she said, but they were 6 feet long. And Ms. Santangelo is taking that experience to the next level, majoring in environmental studies at State University of New York at Cobleskill. "I work not only with fish, but with all aspects of the environment," she said.

The Cuba-Rushford also offers Ms. Santangelo an opportunity to stay involved with her high school's hatchery. SUNY Cobleskill is a partner with Cuba-Rushford, bringing in high-school students to help at the college facilities, and then giving back eggs and fingerlings – very young fish – to the high school's hatchery.

"In exchange for helping them, they give us some of the eggs to take home and raise in our hatchery," Katlyn said. "Within our hatchery, we raise the fish and then we release them – when they get about 3 inches long – into local streams." □

Additional information on the award and the Fisheries and Wildlife Program or live webcam videos from the facility may be found at

www.crcs.wnyric.org

