



Office of County Commissioners
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www.habershamga.com

August 19, 2024

Re: Recognition of Helen Barrett: A Pillar of Community, Education, and Progress in Habersham County

To whom it may concern,

There is a thread in Habersham County that weaves through generations – a commitment to community, education, and progress. Helen Barrett has embodied this spirit, leaving an indelible mark on many lives and the landscape of our county. Today, we celebrate the illustrious career of Helen Barrett, whose journey from student to pioneer has shaped the fabric of our community.

Helen's story is deeply rooted in both education and home, starting from her formative years at South Habersham High School. Her passion for learning and community service led her to the University of Georgia, where she pursued her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Home Economics. Armed with knowledge and a desire to make a difference, Helen embarked on her career with the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service in Gilmer County in 1963.

In 1966, Helen Barrett returned home to Habersham County, taking on the roles of county home economist and 4-H agent. Her dedication and innovative spirit quickly became evident to UGA's leadership team. In the early 1970s, Helen was one of the first women in the state to be appointed as the County Extension Director—a testament to her leadership, resilience, and unwavering commitment to excellence.

Throughout her tenure, she continued to blaze trails including serving as National President of the American Home Economics Association and receiving the William H. Booth State Award for the Outstanding 4-H Agent in Georgia.

In an era before the internet, social media, and digital learning, Helen Barrett dedicated her career to improving the lives of families and youth through education and community engagement.

Long before the convenience of Googling recipes or nutritional information, Helen Barrett was a trusted source of expertise on nutrition and food safety. She educated the community on the essentials of a balanced diet, food safety, and preservation. Many adults and youth remember seeing their first microwave oven demonstration by Ms. Barrett—long before they had one in their homes. She hosted countless workshops, food demonstrations, and specialty classes such as cake decorating and holiday food preparation.

In times when financial advice was not readily accessible at the click of a button, Helen Barrett provided indispensable guidance on household budgeting. She offered practical advice on managing

family finances, saving for the future, and making informed purchasing decisions. She also designed home kitchens to increase productivity and efficiency.

Helen's dedication to community engagement went beyond individual households. She was instrumental in organizing community events, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration among residents. Her initiatives encouraged civic participation, volunteerism, and collective effort to improve the quality of life in Habersham County.

She was a charter member of the Chattahoochee Mountain Fair Board, the Habersham County Business and Professional Women's Association, the Habersham County Farm Bureau Women's Committee, and was a member of several other community organizations. She worked tirelessly with Habersham County's industries to provide University of Georgia resources to enhance production, employee wellness, leadership, and economic development initiatives. In the 1980s, Ms. Barrett started the Leadership Habersham program, now facilitated by the Chamber.

Helen's greatest fulfillment came from working with 4-H club members. She was an enthusiastic advocate for youth development. Helen played a pivotal role in shaping the lives of young people in Habersham County through the 4-H program, which focuses on "head, heart, hands, and health." Helen held monthly club meetings on every school campus and organized numerous activities, including agricultural projects, leadership training, and public speaking opportunities—helping young individuals develop essential life skills, confidence, and a sense of responsibility.

During her twenty-seven years in Habersham, Helen had many state and several national 4-H project winners. At her retirement reception in 1993, she stated, "The 4-H club's purpose is to develop kids to be better citizens, and it's rewarding to see students grow and be useful citizens."

Helen's work as a University of Georgia County Extension Director touched the lives of countless families, shaping the county's social and educational landscape. Though she has now been retired longer than she worked, she remains plugged into her beloved community, serving her family, church, and others.

Helen Barrett's illustrious career is a testament to the power of dedication, education, and community service. Her legacy continues to inspire and shape the lives of those in Habersham County, proving that one individual's commitment to betterment can indeed make a profound and lasting impact.

Sincerely,

Bruce Harkness
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