

A Sweet Opportunity

FOUNDERS HALL

MILTON
HERSHEY
SCHOOL
FOUNDED 1909

Since Milton Hershey School was established 116 years ago, countless students and educators have walked through the doors of Founders Hall.

Community

Milton Hershey School grows leaders through classwork, community and hands-on learning.

BY JODI HELMER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS SIMPSON

When chocolate magnate Milton S. Hershey and his wife, Catherine, founded Milton Hershey School (MHS) in Hershey, Penn., in 1909, their goal was to provide a tuition-free, private education for students from low-income families. Their school's commitment to providing a rigorous academic environment that includes education in agriculture and vocational disciplines to "transform lives" remains unchanged.

"Milton Hershey did give a lot to start the school, and he wanted it to be agriculture-focused," says Logan Keister, an MHS senior and the MHS FFA Chapter's secretary. "The fact we are still carrying on the tradition of what he set in stone many, many generations ago feels like we're doing great work and trying to do our best to keep it alive."

The Agriculture and Environmental Education (AEE) program includes an Environmental Center, Animal Center, Horticultural Center and Ice Cream Center that provide one-of-a-kind



Harleigh Myers stops and smiles with one of the sheep being raised in her school's Animal Center.



In addition to taking classes, Milton Hershey School students live and work on campus — a well-rounded experience that helps them gain real-world skills.

Right: The school's campus includes a statue of Milton and Catherine Hershey, which serves as a reminder of their school's long-standing history and traditions.

Below: Tristian Miller (left), Anna Sargent (middle) and Jesse Boron (right) check on the hanging baskets.



opportunities to care for animals — including horses, cattle, goats, sheep, rabbits, reptiles and amphibians — as well as grow crops, tend orchards and learn about floriculture production.

In addition to classroom instruction, MHS offers extracurricular activities to help pre-K through 12th-grade students gain additional experiences in agriculture. These include horsemanship and soap-making clubs, growing succulents, making ice

cream, internships and student work opportunities to continue building knowledge. Students can also join the school's FFA chapter.

Interest in hands-on education and learning opportunities is widespread. Although MHS prioritizes students from surrounding counties and the state of Pennsylvania, students from as far as Alaska and Hawaii have studied at MHS.

There were just two students in the AEE program when Nick



“I was always interested in farm life, but I never had the opportunities before now.”

- Kalena Williams-Ross

Isenberg started teaching agricultural science at MHS 20 years ago. Now, 42 students are enrolled in the program. Isenberg believes the integration of Curriculum for Agricultural Science (CASE) courses designed to prepare students for college and career readiness, “have added rigor and relevance” that has helped build interest and engagement in the program.

Dairy Leaders of Tomorrow.

“I’ve wanted to be a farmer my whole life,” he says. “When I came here [in ninth grade], I realized we have such a great opportunity. We can help with feeding, giving shots, learn about diseases ... some days we do animal therapy, and we can come down here and spend the afternoon with the animals.”

Participating in the MHS FFA Chapter also helped Keister expand his skills. “Going to different competitions and having an actual farm on campus where we have live animals that we can evaluate whenever we want gives us more of an advantage than other teams,” he says.

“I was talking to a couple members [at national FFA convention] and they said, ‘We don’t even get half the opportunities you guys do,’” Keister adds. “I didn’t realize how lucky we are at MHS, and most of that is due to Mr. Isenberg; he pushes us out of our comfort zone really well.”

Isenberg, who planned to work for the family dairy farm until his agriculture teacher encouraged him to pursue a career in agricultural education, appreciates the credit.

“It’s great having students who are willing to listen to me, take a chance and try different FFA activities and competitions,” he says. “When they come back, they always say, ‘That was a little nerve-racking, but I had fun.’ It happens every time.”

Room to Grow

Kalena Williams-Ross is a senior at MHS and the MHS FFA Chapter’s treasurer. When she enrolled in the school in fifth grade, she was interested in animals, but had no previous interactions with cows, goats, sheep or other livestock. Now, she’s planning to enroll in the pre-vet program at Delaware Valley University.

“I was always interested in farm life, but I never had the opportunities before now,” says Williams-Ross. “When I visited here, I was just like, ‘Wow, what is this place? It’s a new world.’”

Keister also enrolled in the AEE program with a strong interest in agriculture. After graduation, he hopes to secure an internship with



Above: Chloe Kreiser gently cares for plants.

Left: Jesse Boron (left) and Kourtney Daley (right) water flowers in the Horticultural Center.



The Agriculture and Environmental Education (AEE) program includes an Environmental Center, Animal Center, Horticultural Center and Ice Cream Center.

Alana Christian enjoys a special moment with baby goats.

Found Family

It's not just the academic environment that makes MHS stand out. Students who attend live with "houseparents" in on-campus housing, and seniors move into apartment-style residences to learn the basics of budgeting and household management

before graduation.

"We're all on the same campus; we see each other 24/7," Williams-Ross says. "We share the same buildings and we're always in the student homes from freshman to junior year ... and it allows us to share experiences. If you're wary about the AEE program, you can ask people who have already gone through it, or who are going through it

with you, and it makes me feel like I'm not as alone."

This residential setting creates connectedness among students in different grades who live and work together, and it's common for students in the agriculture program to turn to one another for advice and support when navigating life on campus.

"Being in AEE creates a family dynamic," says

Edythe Rossman, an MHS senior and the MHS FFA Chapter's vice president.

"It's very nice to have a group of people you can call your sisters and brothers. It's given me so many opportunities, especially because I'm just shy and [working on] getting out of my comfort zone. Being in an area with lots of people, different stories and backgrounds and learning so



Logan Keister ponders the possibilities of what his future in agriculture could include.



Above: Advisor Nick Isenberg (left) encourages students like Tristian Miller (right) to expand their knowledge, both inside and outside of the classroom. **Below:** Located in a community known for its iconic chocolate company, Milton Hershey School upholds a standard of excellence inspired by its founders.



Below, left to right: Nick Isenberg (right) leads Jaionna Lewis (left) through an interactive activity in class. Milton Hershey School FFA members gain farm-to-table experiences by growing plants in their school's greenhouses and raised beds.



Seeds of Knowledge

Scan this code to watch and learn how Milton Hershey School FFA members receive a one-of-a-kind education.



many new things has been so good for me.”

In addition to providing top-notch education, hands-on learning and helping students build new relationships, the tight-knit campus and robust agriculture program also benefit the surrounding community. MHS hosts plant sales, petting zoos and open house events, and students sell produce grown

on the farm in the MHS Project Market. They also run Spartan Ice Cream Center, a campus ice cream shop that’s a local favorite.

Rossman hopes inviting the community onto the MHS campus will help others understand the importance and benefits of agricultural education.

“I wish people had a better understanding of what agriculture is and what it

does for us,” she says. “There’s more to it than animals, mud and tractors, and I feel like that’s what people associate us with. So, I feel like if we could give them a better understanding, we could change that.”

Learn more about enrolling at Milton Hershey School at MHSKids.org/Admissions/ and the careers available at MHSKids.org/Careers/. •