

Congratulations to Kate Loftus, 2011 Freddy of the Year!

Kathy "Kate" Arnold Loftus has deep ties to San Luis Obispo County agriculture and is recognized for her many contributions to ag and the community.

Loftus was born to Claude and Hazel Kuhnle Arnold. She and her twin sister, Claudia, grew up on the family's ranch, the Chimineas, in the Carrisa Plains. The sisters still own part of the Chimineas that is in Santa Barbara County.

Claude Arnold came with his parents to the Santa Margarita area in 1913, where relatives still reside. Hazel Kuhnle's family settled on the Estrella Plains in the 1850s, and in the 1880s they moved to Shandon to farm, where relatives still farm today. Loftus is a fifth-generation San Luis Obispo County native, making her two children the sixth and her three grandchildren the seventh generations to grow up in agriculture in San Luis Obispo County.

When they were young, Kate and Claudia's mother drove them 80 miles a day, mostly over dirt roads, to the two-room classroom of Carrisa Plains Elementary School. Their nearest neighbor, the Carrisa Ranch, was 10 miles away. Kate attended high school in Atascadero; along with her sister, they were Belles of Pioneer Day their senior year. Kate went on to attend Cal Poly and majored in Animal Science.

After attending Cal Poly, Kate met and married Don Loftus. The family of his mother, Donnajean McMillan, also goes back generations in the county. Shortly after getting married, Kate and Don, along with her family, leased Santa Margarita Ranch from friends in Texas who had purchased it.

With their strong roots in the county's agriculture, Kate and Don researched the history of Santa Margarita Ranch, the oldest continuously run and most historical cattle ranch in California, going back to Mission times. This passion for history led them to create a museum on the ranch and host numerous tours and events, each highlighting the history.

At the ranch, Kate and Don raised their two children, Claude and Katie. Today, Claude, wife Bonnie and daughter Hazel live in Templeton. Kate, along with her daughter and son-in-law, Katie and Stan Cooley, and their sons, Clayton and Grady, recently bought a portion of Santa Margarita Ranch, where they reside. "I feel so fortunate to have all my family so close by," Kate Loftus says. "It is one of life's greatest rewards."

Loftus was on the San Luis Obispo County Cattlewomen's Board of Directors, president of the Santa Margarita PTA, and active with numerous other civic organizations when in 1990, at the age of 36, her husband Don was diagnosed with terminal cancer. For the next three months, Loftus and many of her relatives took care of Don, whose only request was to pass away at the ranch. While her strong family support helped this to happen, she had a sense of what people without this support do.

At that point, Loftus was made aware of Hospice and helped start "An Afternoon at the Ranch," a fundraiser for Hospice at the Santa Margarita Ranch. It became the most successful fundraiser in the county and continued for many years. Although she resigned from many organizations to raise her children, a new opportunity began for her to host tours and historical events at the ranch, as well as many fundraisers for nonprofits. Throughout the years, Loftus was instrumental in seeing that many organizations were able to hold fundraisers at the ranch. A few nonprofits benefitting from events at the ranch are CASA, Hospice, Jack's Helping Hand and Children's

Health Initiative.

Loftus is most proud of her children's graduation from Cal Poly, as well as having other students from ranching and farming families stay at the ranch while attending Cal Poly. Over the years, 15 students lived at the ranch, with 10 of them graduating from Cal Poly. She believes that this, not scholarships, was her way of helping students get their education.

Loftus has been President of Atascadero High Schools Safe and Sober Graduation, served on its Athlete Board, was Grand Marshall of Santa Margarita Days of the Dons, and has stayed involved with numerous organizations, especially those involved in agriculture. She has served on the Farm Bureau Board of Directors for the past 15 years, and is involved in Mid-State Fair with Cattlemen and Farmer's Day, along with volunteering in the livestock office. In 2006 Loftus, along with Steve and Debbie Arnold, put on a fundraiser for the California Farm Bureau Federation called, "Save the Family Farm." She has served on the Cal Poly Rodeo Board of Directors for the past nine years, twice hosting their Champions Weekend fundraiser. In 2010, she was honored for her years of service to the rodeo program with the Cal Poly Rodeo Appreciation belt buckle.

"I have had the great opportunity of being partners with not only my family, the Arnolds, but also some of this county's agricultural leaders such as John and Dee Lacey and Dick Nock," Loftus says. She also is a partner on the cattle operation of Santa Margarita Ranch with its current owners Doug Filipponi, Karl Wittstrom and Rob Rossi.

In addition to all of these activities, her main passion is helping to share the history of agriculture – past, present and future. She was a founding member the Santa Margarita Historical Society and serves on its board, having been past president. During the past 35 years, many groups that have come from all over the world have been hosted by the Santa Margarita Ranch.

"The one I remember best is when Ronald Reagan was President, the ranch hosted the top nuclear scientists from Russia. I still have several of their business cards and often wonder what happened to them."

In 2007, more than 7,000 people were hosted at ranch events. For years, Loftus invited numerous schools to come on field trips to learn the history of agriculture. "My hope is that I can make a difference and help anyone coming to the ranch, no matter what for, to go away with a better understanding of agriculture and its ongoing importance in this county. As I say, if I can influence anyone on the importance of agriculture – past, present and future in this county and state – I will have done my part."