

Local

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Farm Bureau honors history project booster

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John Kegebein, for more than 30 years a participant in the local agriculture scene, last night was named the 1989 Friend of Agriculture by the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau.

The honor is bestowed on an individual not involved in production agriculture, but who has done much for the industry.

Announcement of the seventh annual award was made at a belated Agriculture Day observance held at the Gizdich Ranch in Watsonville. National Agriculture Day was Monday.

Although Kegebein, 53, has worn many hats — most of them of the western variety — throughout his tenure as an agriculture leader, lately he's been most visible as the charter president of the Agricultural History Project.

Founded in 1986, the project is currently establishing a permanent home at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.

As the museum's biggest booster, Kegebein works the local community in search of funds for the project.

Last night was no exception.

Seconds after accepting his honor, he urged the more than 500 guests present to pledge their membership "so we can get the museum on the road."

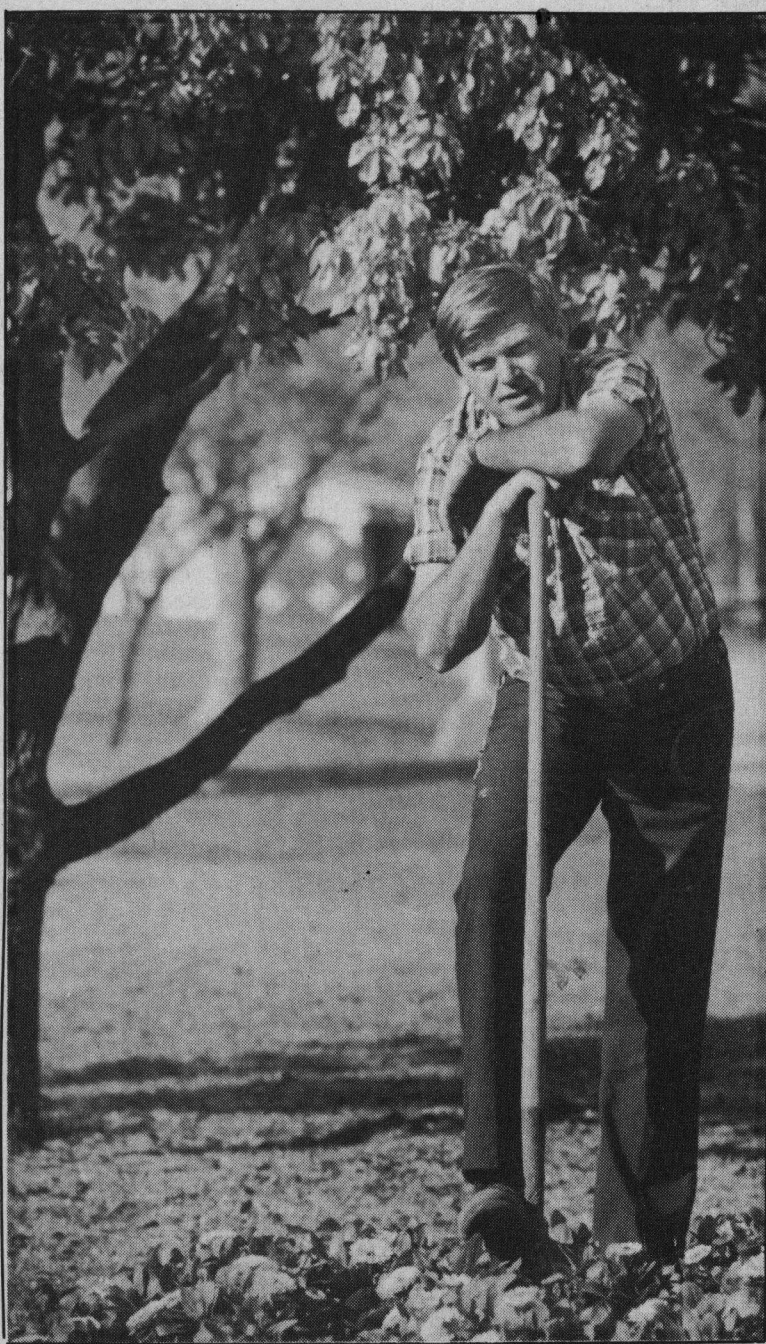
"The contract should be a little easier to sign now," Kegebein said, as he waived his framed award.

Visitors to the ranch may have strolled by an apple wagon, circa 1880, which is from the museum collection.

Loaded with stacks of wooden apple boxes adorned with festive labels of yesteryear, the wagon served as backdrop for farm implements also on display.

Throughout the two main farm buildings on the ranch, farm exhibits and the more than 600 poster entries for this year's Farm Bureau contest lined the walls. This poster competition, open to all elementary schools in the county, drew 400 more entries than last year's competition. Favio Zarate, a fifth-grader at Salsipuedes School, won this year's contest.

But last night belonged to



R-P file photo/Kurt Ellison

John Kegebein has left his mark on local agriculture.

Kegebein, who during the awards ceremony was presented with resolutions from the offices of U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta, state assemblyman Sam Farr, Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy, state Sen. Henry Mello, and Supervisor Sherry Mehl.

Mehl chided Kegebein, assuring him that he could not afford to bask in his glory for long.

"You still have a lot of work ahead of you," she said.

Last summer, Kegebein was given the Hubert Wyckoff Award for his efforts in making the Agricultural History Project a reality after 20 years of planning.

Although Kegebein retired as a senior maintenance worker with the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds in 1984, he continues his involvement with the organization.

Currently, he serves as vice president of the fair board. He was appointed to the board last year by Gov. George Deukmejian.

And for the past two years, Kegebein has served as the County Fair livestock co-chairman.

A native of Crystal Lake, Ill., Kegebein came to Watsonville in 1956, after serving with the U.S. Army in Fort Ord.