

Retiring addresses provide closure for officers' year

By CASSANDRA SHEAFFER

How do you squeeze a year of excitement into 15 minutes? National officers face that challenge each year as they prepare their retiring addresses.

"Writing it was a challenge, but once I put my thoughts together it was pretty easy," said Greg Vetter, national FFA western region vice president.

Vetter gave his retiring address yesterday morning, but has been working on it since August.

"I wrote 18 speeches before I

wrote the right one," admitted Trisha Bailey, national FFA southern region vice president. "I started writing in July and finally found the right one when I was in the state of Washington this October."

National FFA President Corey D. Flournoy got his inspiration from the Vanessa Williams song "Long Way Home," which he first heard during the national officers' trip to Japan last winter.

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SAM HARREL

National officers Corey D. Flournoy and Lee Schroeder share memories with Trisha Bailey at address yesterday.

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"I'm not the best with memorization," Flournoy said, "but the retiring address was easier to memorize because it's straight from the heart. It's things I've seen and done."

Many FFA members consider the retiring addresses a highlight of the convention.

"They're definitely motivational," said Joey Ingram, treasurer of the Hokes Bluff FFA Chapter in Alabama. This is his chapter's first year at the national convention.

Convention veteran Steve Harris, Oregon state sentinel, said he was feeling ill, but the chance to see Vetter's retiring address kept him from staying in bed.

"The retiring addresses are very valuable to the members because national officers are highly successful people who have reached their own personal successes," he said.

Advisor Kris Spath, from the North Bend FFA Chapter in Nebraska, encourages her students to attend the retiring addresses each year.

"Each retiring address is an opportunity for students to see the national officers as real people," she said. "It makes their own goals more realistic."

After delivering his speech, Vetter said he felt the crowd was with him as he spoke.

"Now the reality check is setting in though. It's over," he said. "But it's been a great year."

Bailey couldn't agree more. "It's the most rewarding feeling to know I started and finished something," she said. "I've gone as far as I could with the FFA." ■