

John HeiserEPISODEmixdown

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SPEAKERS

John Heiser, Kara Snyder



Kara Snyder 00:10

Kara, hello and welcome to the podcast, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host, Kara Snyder, and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing communications and constituent relations for the College. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of the college, and today, we have a chance to talk to John Heiser. John is an alum of the Department of Agriculture and currently serves as the District One program advisor for the facilitating coordination in agriculture project. Welcome and thank you for being here. Thanks for having me. Well, Jen, I'd like to start at the beginning. Tell us why you chose ISU.

J

John Heiser 00:51

Yeah, I chose ISU as me and my parents were talking, you know, back early in my sophomore year when I decided to want to be an ag teacher, you know, my dad told me, you know, you want to go somewhere where the degree matters. And at Illinois State, they produce some of the best teachers in our state. And I really enjoyed getting to meet the Agriculture Department and finding out that you're not just a number and and you could build those connections with the people in the department, from Dr Riker to my professor and ag ed, Dr Stephen. And and so those were kind of the real reasons I chose ISU and got to come there and study agriculture education. So it sounds to me like you knew agriculture was the path for you before you landed on campus. So tell me about that. How did you find agriculture as your passion? Yeah, I took agriculture classes in high school with Mr. Triggers dad up at Byron. And what I also I got to participate in FFA, and got to do from meats judging, livestock judging, but also public speaking, agronomy, and I got a lot of leadership skills that I learned in that process. But I also learned the networking end of things, and got connected within the ag business crop, scouting up there at hens and working for MAPLEHURST. And those connections really made the foundation for me, and I wanted to be able to do that for other people and hopefully my future students, and guide them down a path of opportunity. You know, agriculture is the number one employer in our state, and I think too many students just think it's just farming, but it's from sales to flying a drone, creating apps to marketing, and I just wanted to provide those opportunities to future students. That's such a good point. I think you're right. I think a lot of people hear agriculture and they think immediately that they're in a field every day. And that is so not the case. It's that industry has a wealth of opportunity for a lot of different skill sets. So I'm so happy to hear you say that I'm curious, what do you miss the most about your time on campus? I miss the connections with not only my fellow classmates, but from the classes of being hands on to going doing tours, but also competing. We competed in something called pas, and the opportunity there really, to meet other professors that I didn't have in class, and work with them on preparing for those events, but also just seeing how the whole department would attend. It our chair at the time, Dr Riker, he even came and facilitated the quiz bowl event and we made it to the finals. It's just those connections are something I really enjoyed about campus.

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Kara Snyder 03:19

So tell us about that initial job search for you. Where did you end up after graduation?

J

John Heiser 03:25

Well, actually, I had my job before I actually graduated. So fall of 2010 I interviewed at Putnam County High School for an ag teaching and FFA advisor position. And I actually got that before I went and student taught at Seneca. So I kind of had that wrapped up before student teaching, which allowed me to really focus in on student teaching and getting the skills necessary to become an ag teacher. In ag education, there's a variety and plenty of opportunities each year. You know, we're between 40 to 60 openings a year in ag education, state of Illinois. So there's a lot of opportunity, a lot of opportunity for growth and movement. Yeah, I took advantage of that before I even went and student taught 2011 that's amazing. So you were essentially living the dream, because it took so much pressure off of like you said, you got to enjoy it and really capitalize on just getting those skills while you were in the classroom. That's very, very cool. So tell us then about your transition to your current role, which has taken you out of the classroom. Can you tell us about what your days are like? Yeah, it's unique. First of all, I was actually getting a visit from my program advisor, being Dr solmanson, who's now at ISU and in ag education, and Professor there, you know, he did a visit and talked to me about bigger picture of ag education and how to have that impact. And we were talking about retention and professional development, some of the things that we were both passionate about. And that's when I made that jump and joined fcae After kind of that end of mid, start of covid there, the fall, spring of 2020, I jumped into. This fcae position. And so in my current position, I serve in a territory Northwest Illinois, from Galina to Monmouth. It's about 111 to 118 AG, teachers. AG, in the classroom, my community colleges and universities and I perform professional development for them. My help of grants. Right now it's grant season, so we're we're doing amendments, we're getting ready to do FY 27 grants, but then we're also helping student teachers get selected for their placement and where they're going to teach. We are preparing for conferences and events like that, but then I get to do some other projects, like tomorrow, I'm hosting an event for admin and counselors to help them understand that the capacity and in the vast world of ag education and what that looks like in their community, and how they could be a pivotal part and impact those students and ag teachers and retention. So never have the same day. It's always a variety opportunities, and there's teachers that need certain things, young, younger teachers asking about experience, about what to do, an older teacher looking for maybe grants, or how to expand their facilities so it keeps you on your toes, and that's one thing I really enjoy about it.

K

Kara Snyder 06:13

I was going to say it sounds like there's a lot to like about this role. Tell us what your favorite part is.

J John Heiser 06:20

I think my favorite part is working with teachers, or when there is a problem, helping them find a solution and building their confidence up to one be able to do it themselves later on, but just let them know that there is support and understanding of the issues that they're going through. I think in today's world, it's easy to pass judgment on everyone. And I think, you know, to get that opportunity to show people to be quick to listen instead of being quick to anger, and to show a little grace to our community members or or to our teachers. If we do more of those things, we can have a positive impact on our corner of the world. And I think that's how you change the world, and that's that's what I really enjoy, is getting that opportunity that when something's wrong, provide some advice and help them through those little challenges, and let them see that there is the other side and they can get through it.

K Kara Snyder 07:13

What would you say the most challenging thing about your job is,

J John Heiser 07:17

not always, is there an easy solution to those obstacles that teachers face, and says, sometimes, you know, you have to coach someone and just let them know, like, yeah, that's an unfortunate thing, or, you know, that challenge that they're facing this, know, like, there isn't always a solution. Sometimes we just got to weather the storm. And seeing people go through tough times like that, or see them go through it personally, when they're affected with other things at home, that's a tough thing to deal with in the you know, it weighs on your emotions to see not always can you get a easy solution. And you know that impact then on that person you sometimes see it end up leaving the profession over whatever obstacle they face, and it makes you think about what you could have done different and what you could have done better to help that individual.

K Kara Snyder 08:10

Do you have any advice for students that are considering going into a career that might have an emotional impact like that? Is there a way that you are able to compartmentalize, that is there maybe something that you do routinely for stress relief? What does that look like for you

J John Heiser 08:29

from the emotional standpoint or emotional dealing with stress from work? I think it comes down to two things for me, one, that whatever happens, not always are in control that impact. And so you have to know what things were in control of and what things were not, which is very hard. And then the second way to compartmentalize, you know, for me personally, when I come home, I'm at home and I'm focused on the three at home. You know, we have two little girls, and I'm married to my best friend. And you know, that's where my focus needs to be, and and I try to focus in on those tasks. If it's helping my oldest with homework or or coaching them in basketball or T ball or or doing 4h I try to focus in on a task with them, and then that kind of helps compartmentalize what happened that day.

K Kara Snyder 09:18

Sometimes just being present is really half the battle, right? If we can be where our feet are, that can solve a lot of those problems, I think, yeah,

J John Heiser 09:28

I agree with that.

K Kara Snyder 09:29

So one thing that stood out to me when I read your bio was that you have been very active in your professional organizations, so I would love if you would talk to us about the importance of that and the role that service has played in your career,

J

John Heiser 09:43

I think being part of professional organizations is key to success. I learned that from Dr Stephen his involvement sitting on boards, yeah, it is extra time, and you're not always paid for those things, but some of those things can have the biggest impact on our groups or on end of. Individuals, and so I've had the pleasure of being elected to different boards or groups, and I've served as the president of the Ag teachers association. And the reason that is important is we have to be able to invest ourselves in the profession, to not only learn, but also give back. Not everything can be a take. It can't always be focused on me, and so I try to focus on what we can do to better others. Because we better others, we get more buy in to what we do or when we have to make a change, they at least know that they've been heard. And I think that's the key part about being involved in your organization. I also learned it from my family. You know my dad, coach. They were in 4h they helped with concession stands. I learned that at Illinois State is you have to be part of the whole picture. You know, you got to invest in your community, you have to invest at home, you have to invest in your organizations. And when we do those things, we build everybody up. And I think that's a key to success. And you know how it affected me in my career is that network. I think we downplay that even today. I know it's a big world, but the network, and you don't know how that could impact you down the road in that relationship. And so I learned that in an organization that there's a lot of learning that occurs by being part of an organization and just sitting and listening to people who have experience, and I think that's a key part of being part of that professional organization, is not only the buy in, but what you learn just by sitting and listening

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Kara Snyder 11:32

well and speaking of bettering others. That brings me to my next question, would you describe your leadership style for us?

J

John Heiser 11:40

Yeah, I think it's all about service. That's why I try to install upon our two girls at home. You got to contribute and you got to be engaged. And so I try to hopefully try to build people up and give them opportunities. I don't say no a lot, so that's probably sometimes a bad thing, but when there's problems in your community or problems at work, you got to be willing to jump in, listen to the problem and help solve it. And I think that service end is crucial to the betterment not only of a group or career or company, but in your community as well.

K

Kara Snyder 12:15

I would actually love if you would unpack that for us a little bit. When you said you don't say no a lot, but you also said you have two little girls and a family at home. So can you walk us through your decision making process as far as how you spend your time and where you choose to put your energy?

J John Heiser 12:32

Yeah, you know, as a former ag teacher, you know, you get asked to do a lot of things, and you still today, I get asked to serve on a lot of committees. I'm on a little league board right now, and we're getting ready for the season, and I'm taking care of three baseball fields. And so I do that to make sure that not only my daughters have a good place to play, or know that their friends have a safe environment, and they're all learning. And so I try to think about when I'm asked to do something, does it engage with my kids is an opportunity for us to do something together, and is it an opportunity for me to model to them my expectations coaching basketball? I'm no basketball star, but I see the young girls that my daughter plays with, and they're a really good group. I know everybody probably brags about the kids they play with for those things, but there really are a great group of young ladies, and so my goal is to teach them some skills, not only about the game, but about life, on how to work together as a team. And I think my goal then is when I don't say no, is to model that for my daughters, and to model engagement, and how we can engage together in activities that are that are fun, and sometimes not fun, but it benefits others.

K Kara Snyder 13:46

Thank you for sharing. Well, John, we are going to finish with a speed round, so just go with your first instinct on these questions, what is your go to breakfast?

J John Heiser 13:55

Scrambled eggs with good orange juice.

K Kara Snyder 13:58

Where did you go on your last vacation?

J John Heiser 14:00

We took our girls to a water park. They just really enjoy water in general, but slides and those things, and it was an opportunity to be in the hotel together and have some fun.

K Kara Snyder 14:11

Are you a cat person or a dog person?

J John Heiser 14:13
Dog person for sure.

K Kara Snyder 14:16
What are you reading or listening to right now? Anything we should add to our list?


J John Heiser 14:20
Well, I mean, ag education, there's the AI podcast, and it's about ag education approach from the university standpoint, of how we retain teachers and how we, you know, recently, is, is the the idea of learning, what is, what is learning look like, and how can we conduct that in our ag classrooms?

K Kara Snyder 14:41
And do you consider yourself to be an introvert or an extrovert?


J John Heiser 14:45
It kind of depends. I'm an extrovert most the time, but there's There's definitely times where I love just coming home and and being at home and not having to go anywhere. For sure,

K Kara Snyder 14:55
I ask everyone who comes on the podcast Avantis gondola or pub two. Cheese Balls,


J John Heiser 15:01
gondolas, for sure, it's one of the favorite things to come back on campus is to get a gondola.

 Kara Snyder 15:08


One last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say?

 John Heiser 15:14


I'd say be engaged in opportunity. There are a lot of opportunities on campus through whatever degree path you're seeking, and the opportunity to engage with your professors, to engage in an organization, from a CTSO, those things, those opportunities, are worth your time. And yeah, it may have to pull you away from work, and that's important to pay for school, but these opportunities to study abroad to do those things. It really does impact you for the rest of your life, and it can impact you in your future career opportunity. So be engaged in opportunity.

 Kara Snyder 15:52

Thank you. I appreciate that advice. That's great perspective.

 John Heiser 15:56

Welcome.

 Kara Snyder 15:57

Well, thanks so much for being here. That was John Heiser, the district one program advisor for the facilitating coordination in agriculture project. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our cast alumni. You.