Extension Homemakers and Family and Consumer Sciences: 
A Century of Strong Women Bringing Prosperity and Progress to Durham County

It is a historical year for Cooperative Extension’s Family and Consumer Sciences and the Extension and Community Association. This year marks the one-hundredth anniversary of improving the quality of families and their lives through the work and programs of Family and Consumer Sciences and Extension Homemakers, the forerunner of the Extension and Community Association. Throughout 2011 the Cooperative Extension Service will be celebrating the Family and Consumer Sciences Centennial. A major part of recognizing Family & Consumer Sciences is honoring the Extension Homemakers who have been the impetus for successfully implementing Family & Consumer Sciences programs throughout North Carolina.

In Durham County both Family and Consumer Sciences Agents and Durham County Extension Homemakers made significant contributions that helped the then rural county progress into the economically vibrant urban county Durham is today. However, it has been the Extension Homemakers of the County’s Home Demonstration Clubs that promoted and promulgated the mission of Family and Consumer Sciences Agents. Thus the results and success of Family and Consumer Sciences education is intertwined in the history of the Durham County Home Demonstration Clubs and the Extension Homemakers. The first Home Demonstration Club in Durham County can be traced back to the Women’s Betterment Society founded in 1913. Home demonstration work began in the county in 1915 after the first home agent, Mrs. Beulah Eubanks, was hired. Eventually the Women’s Betterment Society became a platform for Extension and home demonstration work and grew into the Oak Grove Home Demonstration Club. During the first five years, home extension work was done in communities around the county according to county files still in existence. As home demonstration work became prevalent in Durham County, so did the involvement of Durham Extension Homemakers. Homemakers heeded the campaign of the United States Department of Agriculture to help supply food shipments to War World I troops in Europe. For their part in the war effort, Durham Homemakers canned 94,672 containers of fruits and vegetables that were ultimately sent to our servicemen aboard. In 1920 Miss Anna Rowe came to Durham County to assume the role as Home Demonstration Agent and she was charged with forming permanent community home demonstration clubs. During Miss Rowe’s tenure in Durham twenty clubs totaling 745 women were organized. The first new club to be organized, after the Women’s Betterment Society converted to a Home Demonstration Club, was the Bahama Home Demonstration Club founded in 1919, and a year later the Nelson Home Demonstration Club was organized. The Home Demonstration Clubs were highly structured.
from the beginning as they remain so today. They were each established with a governing body of annually elected officers that carried out an annual plan of work. Community officers formed the County Council and served as the supporting body to the home agent. Today, this would be equivalent to an Advisory Board. Leadership skills that members developed from their association in the Home Demonstration Clubs became significant contributions to their respective communities and to the entire county. Collectively, Extension Homemakers learned and used their Home Demonstration Clubs as a dais to interface with their local school officials and government leaders. Among the most significant accomplishments of these twenty community clubs was the eventual founding of the Durham County Home Demonstration Curb Market. The establishment of the Curb Market led to the growth of the overall Extension program in Durham County.

These early twenty demonstration clubs remained operational and met regularly through the remainder of the decade and through two more home demonstration agents who followed Anna Rowe between 1924 and 1927. In 1927 Rose Ellwood Bryan was appointed the Home Demonstration Agent for Durham County, and under her leadership, Extension Homemakers made noteworthy contributions to not only to Durham County Cooperative Extension Service, but also to the financial well being of their families. The number of home demonstration clubs grew to twenty-six. The names of the clubs corresponded with their communities:

- Alston Avenue
- Bethesda
- Fairview
- Lake Michie
- Oak Grove
- Rose of Sharon
- Umbra
- Airport
- Bragtown
- Glenn
- Lowes Grove
- Pinhill
- Roberson Grove
- White Cross
- Bahama
- Chandler
- Hillandale
- Nelson
- Pineland
- Rougemont
- Sherron Avenue
- Belmont
- East Durham
- Holt
- New Hope
- Riverview
- Sherron Avenue

Just as the number of Home Demonstration Clubs grew in the late twenties, so did the clubs’ community involvement. A plan of work compiled for all Durham Home Demonstration Clubs recorded monthly programmatic topics that were to be covered in each club from the years 1928 to 1940. The topics of interest for the women of the Home Demonstration Clubs dealt mostly with improving the quality of family life and included subjects such as food preservation, preparing school lunches, infant feeding, time management, managing household accounts, clothing construction and care, controlling household pests, gracious entertaining, and home decorating.

As the Home Demonstration Clubs became prominent community organizations, they used their status to support Extension’s youth component, 4-H. They contributed to the achievements of 4-H youth by supporting their club and project work. Between 1930 and 1939, Extension Homemakers raised funds to send 75 senior 4-H members to Raleigh for 4-H State Short Courses and 120 junior 4-H members to camp.
When Durham County had their first 4-H club member win a state honor and was awarded a trip to broadcast for the *National Farm and Home Hour*, Durham County Home Demonstration Clubs cooperatively raised funds to help send Pearl Nichols Williams to Washington, D.C. Then later in the midst of the depression when three other Durham 4-H members won state honors and were awarded trips to National 4-H Congress, Durham Demonstration Homemakers collectively raised more funds, and proudly sent the Durham youth to Chicago, Illinois.

Extension Homemakers in Durham County had grown in numbers and fortitude by the time the Great Depression hit. In 1930 the Durham Home Demonstration Curb Market was organized to help bring income to farm families hurt by the Depression. The Curb Market took off almost immediately. It was housed in the basement of the Farmers Mutual Exchange in downtown Durham, where the Extension offices were also housed. A market committee composed of eight Home Demonstration women acted as a board of directors. They formulated regulations, passed infringements and determined policies in conjunction with the Home Demonstration Agent. Homemakers came weekly on Saturday mornings to sale fruits and vegetables, poultry, eggs, butter, meats, cakes, breads, flowers, canned goods, arts and crafts, and miscellaneous items. The Curb Market opened on May 24, 1930 with about 50 sellers, but by the end of the decade there were 365 sellers. Extension reported that Durham Extension Homemakers sold $291,245.38 worth of produce during the first ten years of the Curb Market’s existence. However, the impacts the Curb Market made on the families of the Homemakers were often far more substantial than the income they earned. For example, Mrs. E. A. Perry was cited in a *Durham Herald-Sun* article of earning enough money at the curb market from selling eggs that her family was able to wire their home with electricity and install a system of running water. Another homemaker credited the curb market for pulling her family out of the depression. After they had lost all other sources of income the Curb Market gave her family their last hope, and helped them survive economically. Actually the sales at the Curb Market steadily increased during the worst years of the depression, which proved to be a lifeline for many Homemakers and their families trying to subsist through it. Durham citizens valued the Curb Market as much as Extension homemakers. By 1941, an average of 1050 citizens was shopping at the market monthly. They came for the fresh produce, meats, dairy products and the high quality of baked goods. The successfulness of the Curb Market was so astounding according to Extension records that homes lost in the depression were reclaimed, tenants become homeowners, boys and girls pursued college educations, and standards of living were raised for families associated with the market. Indeed the Curb Market had become such an institution in Durham that it out grew its quarters at the Farmers’ Exchange. In 1941 Durham County Extension Homemakers went before the County Board of Commissioners to request an agricultural building large enough to house the Curb Market. Eventually, after several persistent attempts and a bond referendum passing, the Durham County Agriculture Building was built in 1947. The building housed the Extension Service, the Durham Soil and Water Conservation District and the USDA Farm Service Agency; it included a state of the art demonstration kitchen and an indoor pavilion large enough to house the weekly Curb Market. Extension
Homemakers weathered the greatest financial storm of the twentieth century through sales generated at the Curb Market, but in doing so they also helped to bring the value of Extension Service to all of the county’s citizens.

Despite Durham Farm Agent and Home Agent reports documenting substantial losses to farm families during the depression years, the County Home Demonstration Clubs between 1930 and 1940 grew in numbers and philanthropic work in addition to their clubs’ monthly plans of work. Besides the phenomenal reception and exposure they received from organizing and running the Curb Market, the Home Demonstration Clubs cooperatively funded an annual Thanksgiving dinner for the Wright’s Refuge beginning in 1926 and continuing through 1940. Wright’s Refuge was a local Durham orphanage that housed 35 children. They contributed annually to the Jane S. McKimmon Loan Fund, a fund designed to award deserving rural girls with funds to attend an "A" grade college to study Home Economics. They collected 4,669 garments during the 1930s and distributed the clothing in 26 communities to needy families. Many of the garments were often made by hand by Extension Homemakers especially for the clothing drives. Extension Homemakers helped 166 club members by sponsoring their attendance to North Carolina Home Demonstration Short Courses in Raleigh. A 1940 county report stated the Extension Homemakers along with 4-H girls canned 3,987,493 quarts of food and distributed much of the food to the hungry. Four more Home Demonstration Clubs formed to bring the total number of clubs to 30 by 1938. The new clubs were: Maybrook, Lynn’s Cross Roads, Red Mountain, and Woodland. Five of the clubs mobilized their communities to raise funds and built club houses. These were the Home Demonstration Clubs of Nelson, White Cross, Lynn’s Cross Roads, Glenn, and Maybrook. Though the depression must have been devastating to many Extension Homemakers and their families, they seemed to find strength in numbers, and thus in helping themselves, helped the greater part of Durham County.

Emerging from the depression, families were faced with the subsequent calamity facing the nation, World War II. The Durham Home Demonstration Clubs placed emphasis on food production and conservation during the war years to aid with wartime needs. Additionally, Durham Homemakers along with Home Demonstration Clubs across the state were actively supporting war efforts by collecting scrap metal, rendering fat for weapon and ammunition production, and growing victory gardens for food production. Just as Extension Homemakers were determined to endure through the depression they took on the war years with as much zeal and determination.

Once World War II had ended and the Durham County Extension Service had settled in their new offices at the Agricultural Building, Durham County Home Demonstration Clubs began to focus on domestic issues. The war years must have been difficult for the Extension clubs, because by 1947 the number of Home Demonstration Clubs in Durham County had dropped to sixteen clubs totaling 370 members. These were half the members and clubs prior to the War. However, the Durham County Curb Market continued its successful run in the forties, just as it had done in the thirties. During the decade of the forties Durham County had the most prosperous of all the curb markets in the state. In 1942 the Durham Market topped
sales in the state and continued to hold the state record for the highest annual sales until 1951 when Mecklenburg County passed Durham County Market sales by $105.00.

Food preservation was still a major emphasis of Extension work, but by 1947 many farm families now had freezer lockers in their homes, so freezing food was practiced as well as canning. During the 1947 growing season for example, Extension Homemakers canned 40,507 quart jars of fruit, 50,914 quart jars of vegetables, and 2,040 quart jars of meat. They also froze 1,710 quarts of fruit, 2,706 quarts of vegetables and 18,607 pounds of meat.

Durham Home Demonstration Clubs were civically involved in the late forties. Clubs raised funds to purchase community playground equipment, buy velvet curtains for a school stage, buy a freezer for another school so school food could be stored safely, and donated money for a local youth center. Since five home demonstration clubs had their own facilities, they offered their clubhouses to other community organizations that needed meeting space. When a community church burned, the Maybrook Home Demonstration Club lent its clubhouse to the church until a new church could be built. When a Glenn Club member’s home was destroyed by fire, other club members rallied and obtained building materials and supplies from a local contractor to help rebuild the home. Home Demonstration Clubs all the while, continued their support of county 4-H programs and assisted with raising money whenever necessary to help send 4-H members to district, state, and national 4-H events.

Since Home Demonstrations Clubs were first organized in Durham County, members had a source and opportunity to develop leadership skills. Certainly, they took advantage of these opportunities since Extension Homemakers were the basis for Durham County having its own Agricultural Building. Extension Homemakers broadened their abilities to take on positions of leadership within their district and state organization, the North Carolina Federation of Home Demonstration Clubs. In 1938 Mrs. E. W. Lloyd of the Bragtown Club became the state president of the NC Federation. Other county women served on both district and state-wide committees of the Federation during the thirties and the forties. In 1950, Mrs. W. K. Cuyler, one of five North Carolina Extension Homemakers, was chosen to attend the international meeting of the Associated Country Women of the World in Copenhagen, Denmark. The Associated Country Women of the Women was the national affiliate of the newly renamed North Carolina Organization of Home Demonstration Clubs. Mrs. Cuyler was again chosen to represent North Carolina Extension Homemakers as a delegate to the United Nations during United Nations Week in 1954.

Developing an outlet for cultural appreciation and a desire to encourage music was the inspiration that prompted Mrs. J. C. Dodson to organize the Durham County Home Demonstration Choral Group and the first Rural Church Music School in North Carolina. The success of the Rural Church Music School in organizing rural church choirs led to thirty-three such music schools forming across the state. The county music programs that resulted from the Rural Church Music School generated the development of the Julie Cuyler Foundation by Dr. W. K. Cuyler of Duke
University. Through the foundation a trust fund was created that further promoted Home Demonstration
music education throughout the state. The trust fund created scholarships that were used to send Home
Demonstration Club women to state-wide music camps and workshops.

By 1950 club membership was up to 400 and two more Home Demonstration Clubs had formed. Locally, Extension
Homemakers engaged in a variety of educational and public service activities that were often covered as news worthy stories
in the local newspaper, The Durham Herald-Sun. Homemakers were interested in improving their rural roads, and started a
campaign that led County Commissioners to indentifying county roads and putting up road posts naming rural roads. Collectively,
Durham Extension Homemakers raised funds and helped to supply county schools with athletic equipment and first aid kits.
They contributed canned goods to the orphanage, the Wright Refuge. They held community educational programs that
promoted Tuberculosis screenings, taught basic first aid skills, and addressed home safety issues. Extension Homemakers
attended educational programs on home beautification, practical kitchen design, and clothing construction. During the
fifties Home Demonstration Clubs hosted annual fashion shows which were a popular source of community entertainment and allowed their members to show off garments they had made during the year. Durham County Homemakers also continued their loyal support of Durham County 4-Hers. They prepared meals for summer local 4-H camps and raised funds regularly to send 4-Hers to camps, district, state and even national 4-H achievement programs. The fifties were a decade of highly visible activities and community involvement for the Home Demonstration Clubs and their members, as newspaper articles of the time document. In fact the Raleigh News and Observer in 1954 printed that “The Home Demonstration Clubs of North Carolina are a Vital Part of Our Society.”

The sixties were all about change. In Durham County it was not only the social landscape that was changing, but also the landscape in general. Urbanization began taking hold. The development of Research Triangle Park (RTP) founded in 1959 was well underway by 1965. Most of the original 4,000 acres incorporated in RTP was in Durham County. As RTP grew, so did communities neighboring the Park. Surrounding farm land gave way to development. To address the conflicting advancement of urbanization on agriculture, the Durham County Extension Service led the Agriculture and Community Improvement Committee of the Northern Central Area Development Association. Although urban development was methodical and somewhat controlled at first, it did begin to take a toll on Home Demonstrations Clubs. The Durham County clubs decreased by two to total sixteen in all by 1961. Clubs continued their emphasis on community service, supporting the local 4-H members and clubs, and the Wright Refuge Orphanage. They also visited known local “shut-ins” and prepared meals and holiday gift baskets for home-bound citizens. Home Demonstration Clubs supported North Carolina troops and
worked with the local Red Cross chapter to prepare ditty bags for American servicemen fighting in the Vietnam conflict. The more rural outlying Extension Homemaker clubs continued their interest and commitment to food preservation by preserving a total of 2,950 quarts of vegetables and fruits and freezing 3,506 pounds of garden grown produce. Homemakers displayed their interest in fashion and practicality by hosting annual community fashion shows that modeled clothing styles made by club members. Home décor still proved to be a major interest among Extension Homemakers and many home improvement projects were highlighted during monthly Home Demonstration Club meetings. Homemakers were also interested in many of the new time-saving appliances and time efficient cooking methods. Demonstrations were widely given with an emphasis of reducing time spent in the kitchen through the use of blenders and using various recipe “short-cuts”.

Even though there was little to suggest how the major impact of school and social integration affected the county’s Home Demonstration Clubs, the White Home Demonstration County Council, merged and integrated with the Durham “Negro” Home Demonstration County Council in 1968. On the state level after integration of Extension offices, the North Carolina Organization of Home Demonstration Clubs became the North Carolina Extension Homemakers Association. However, the individual clubs remained segregated according to monthly newspaper club reports.

As the seventies evolved, membership in Home Demonstration clubs was in decline. The Family and Consumer Sciences traditional model for delivering Extension education to community Extension Homemaker Clubs also was shifting. To better accommodate the changing times as more women entered the work force, Family and Consumer Sciences agents began reaching non-traditional audiences in urban areas and by building collaborations with other civic groups and county agencies. Additionally, Family and Consumer Sciences curriculum began to shift in order to address issues concerning the changing social dynamics of families, as the culture evolved from an agrarian landscape to an urban one. Overall county membership totaled 240 which included sixteen clubs. Four of the original clubs formed in 1920 were still active. They were the Bahama, Nelson, White Cross and Bethesda clubs. However, younger women were not joining Extension Homemaker clubs, primarily because they were choosing to work outside the home. With RTP in close proximity more jobs were available. These employment opportunities apparently affected membership in the Home Demonstration Clubs, and they sought new means to attract younger women to their clubs. Several clubs began to hold night meetings and were successful in drawing some new members. But even with the declining general membership of Home Demonstration Clubs, Durham Homemakers responded to the social changes of the time. In 1970 the first integrated Home Demonstration Club was organized, the Neighborhood Actionettes. In 1973 the Durham Extension Homemaker County Council elected its first Black president, Mrs. Arthur Dennegan. Even with fewer members, Extension Homemakers stayed in the public eye and remained relevant in their communities and in the county. They kept county commissioners aware of Extension work by hosting an annual Commissioner and Extension Luncheon. Additionally, clubs presented local community programs that focused on current social issues like, drug abuse among youth, air pollution and recycling. Extension Homemakers supported the new federal initiative the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program referred to as EFNEP. From 1971 until 1980, Extension Homemakers provided food and served as volunteer music and craft instructors for summer EFNEP day camps. In 1975 Extension Homemakers published a cookbook titled “From the Kitchens of Durham County Extension Homemakers.” Sales from the cookbooks were used to fund county 4-H programs, and in 1976 Extension Homemakers held a bicentennial field day to raise funds for the 4-H Development Fund.
Although the Curb Market had been active throughout the fifties and sixties, local interest gradually waned during the seventies. Market sellers steadily dropped as the decade wore on. The last market account entries were made in 1976. The last Extension Homemaker to sell at the Curb Market was Mrs. Linda Keith. After a 48 year run, the Durham County Curb Market closed in 1976.

The early eighties saw a slight bump in membership. Durham County Homemakers comprised of 21 clubs and a county membership enrollment of 321. Still membership slowly decreased during the nineteen-eighties. To stay in tune with times in lieu of dwindling membership, Extension Homemakers emphasized automobile restraint systems for children, programs in family resource management and decision making, nutrition, and emergency preparedness. Extension Homemakers continued to support Durham 4-H as an on-going mission. Cooperatively, as a state-wide organization, they consistently backed the education of North Carolina youth and awarded twenty annual scholarships to college students attending North Carolina colleges.

Urban sprawl eventually over took many Durham County communities as new housing and shopping developments were built. Today, many of the original communities that Home Demonstration Clubs represented no longer exist. Communities of the nineteen-twenties faded into subdivisions or into RTP as it expanded. More Extension Homemakers have entered the workforce as their children grew-up and left home. Improvements to county roads and the creation of the Durham Expressway, Highway147, paved through several traditional Black neighborhoods. Coincidently, the responsibilities of Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agents are in constant flux as they are directed to address and collaborate more and more with non-traditional audiences and instructed to tackle urban issues. In 1995 to rejuvenate their image the state-wide association, the North Carolina Extension Homemakers Association, became the Extension and Community Association and is commonly referred to as ECA. The decreased membership of ECA on the local as well as the state level is currently reinventing itself to maintain existing clubs and to ultimately attract new members. Consequently, the North Carolina Extension and Community Association as a whole is under-going an organizational change designed to update by-laws and the leadership structure that will engage newer members in the association. State Extension advisers and a state ECA advisory board has been working for the past several years to implement a more stream-lined organization absent of prior more restrictive club guidelines. Though ECA numbers may never get to the broad numbers of membership indicative of the early beginning years, ECA anticipates to move forward offering both men and women the opportunities of leadership and community involvement that so aptly established the Extension Homemakers as viable and relevant community leaders, advocates and peer educators in their respective communities, towns and counties.

In Durham County, charter Extension Homemaker members completely died out during the last thirty years. Only two the original Home Demonstration Clubs, Rougemont and Bethesda, and two more early-on clubs, Union and Forest Hills, are currently active. Presently, eighty percent of the county’s population lives in the city of Durham. Although Durham Home Demonstration Club membership, now referred to as the Extension and Community Association (ECA), is at an all-time low, Durham County Extension and Community Association is still an integral part of the Durham Cooperative Extension Service. With a strong emphasis on education and service, Durham ECA makes a difference in the lives of youth and adults by significantly impacting and improving family life through sponsoring and presenting programs that emphasize education, health, nutrition, civic engagement and community development. Durham ECA
ECA members are supportive of families who are coping and caring for aging and incapacitated parents and/or other family members in crisis. ECA Club members led the drive in Durham County to educate and sign senior citizens up for direct deposit of their social security checks, enabling seniors secure and faster access to their monthly income. Fidget aprons, mammary pillows and rag dolls are made and distributed routinely by ECA members to Durham County caregivers who care for family members suffering from Alzheimer’s, Breast Cancer or childhood diseases. In supporting Durham County youth, ECA members through their volunteer efforts have held life skill classes for youth attending Durham County 4-H Summer Day Camps, and helped Durham 4-H sponsor District Activity Day by hosting concessions for 4-H judges. Durham County ECA promotes Extension health and nutrition educational objectives by offering public programs that highlight healthy living habits. Durham Public Schools have benefited from ECA outreach, through the use of eye patches made by ECA members to assist with student vision tests held in the county’s elementary schools. Through their other community outreach efforts, ECA helped to encourage community engagement and volunteerism with the creation and disbursement of leader appreciation packets among community partners. Because of their leadership and active involvement in Durham County, Durham ECA is able to empower hundreds of Durham residents by promoting and providing sustainable Extension-based life solutions every day.

The Durham Extension Homemakers, both past and present, enabled the Durham County Cooperative Extension Service to carry out its mission throughout the twentieth century, into the twenty-first. Their successes helped rural families make it through the dark depression era and the turbulent years of war. They furnished a social network of rural women that generated community leaders. Extension Homemakers supported and promoted the education and welfare of their children and those less fortunate living around them. Their generosity improved the standard of living in their respective communities, and enabled families to send children to college. They graciously modeled social goodness and acceptance as social norms changed to a more divergent integrated society and as urbanization swallowed many of their rural communities. Perhaps, it is because of their successes and achievements that Extension Homemakers no longer signify the contemporary community stature and prominence of their rural past. However, as the Durham County Cooperative Extension Service continues to remain a significant local entity and resource, it must pay tribute to the strong women who have backed Extension from the beginning; to the strong women who guided the Extension mission by bringing the needs of their communities to the Extension Service; to the strong women who were and still are Extension advocates, volunteers and advisors; and to the strong women who helped create the rich Extension heritage that will prolong Extension’s future in Durham County.