

## **Savannah Gillis Leads by Example in all Aspects**

*By Tyler Dunkel, Sports Information Director, NMAA*



Forbes magazine lists 10 qualities that define a great leader. Those qualities are commitment, honesty, the ability to delegate, communication, a sense of humor, confidence, a positive attitude, intuition, the ability to inspire and creativity. Hot Springs High School senior Savannah Gillis embodies all of these, at such a young age, making her an up-and-coming leader in her community and with the New Mexico Future Farmers of America (FFA).

Gillis, a native of Arrey, N.M., grew up in the Hatch Valley, where her family has been growing the famous Hatch Chile for over five generations. Agriculture is a way of life for the Gillis family, which is why she sees herself one day being an advocate at the national level.

“Agriculture has been in my family for over five generations, farming chile,” Gillis said. “I was born into the business. I’m a firm believer that everything is agriculturally based. When you walk into a supermarket, everything comes from a farm. I do have plans to be in the agriculture industry and be an advocate for agriculture. I think growing up on a farm has taught me how to appreciate what you have, which is something my parents have instilled in me.”

Nate Wolf, Gillis’ FFA advisor at Hot Springs High School, feels that she has a bright future in Agriculture. “We try to encourage to all of our FFA members that the sky is the limit on whatever they want to achieve,” Wolf said. “Savannah is from a very unique situation because she grew up on a farm and knows where the food on her plate comes from. I think she has the leadership and public speaking skills, along with the motivation and drive to be a big part of the agriculture industry and be an advocate.”

FFA is a dynamic youth organization within agricultural education that changes lives and prepares students for premier leadership, personal growth and career success.

Being a leader is a quality Gillis has refined over the last few years as a member of FFA and that has not gone unnoticed by her peers. This past year, Gillis was elected as the District VI president and a State of New Mexico vice president. In that role, Gillis will travel this year to other chapters in her district and talk to other students her age about leadership skills and team building.

“I’m the District VI representative for the State of New Mexico and a state vice president for FFA,” Gillis said. “I started in FFA when I was in middle school and have continued to be involved up to this point. I mentioned to my FFA advisor that I wanted to be a state representative for FFA and he encouraged me. FFA has given me a solid foundation when it comes to leadership skills. I think leaders are going extinct in today’s world. We need to continue to groom leaders for the future and the more leaders we have the better off we as a society will be.”

Wolf agrees that Gillis was a great choice to represent the district and the state. “Savannah was nominated by our state board. She then had to campaign and was voted in by her peers throughout the state. I think her peers have a great respect for Savannah and who she is. They feed off of her energy and her leadership skills. They also see admiration in her ability to lead and represent the district as a whole. She is very involved in

FFA, not only through the different leadership activities but in the show world as well. She is a participant in all levels of FFA and has been quite successful in all of them.”

Gillis has been extremely successful in her FFA efforts, winning several awards including the 2013 Grand Champion Swine and Reserve Champion Lamb. She was also the Reserve Champion Lamb in 2012. Gillis was a National Honor Society inductee in 2013 and was recently named the Hatch Chile Queen in August of 2014. Gillis also participated in several FFA functions including the National and State FFA Conventions and the Pasture and Range Champions.

Despite her busy schedule, Gillis continues to maintain a 3.8 GPA and play libero for her school’s volleyball team. Gillis says her education and volleyball are equally important to her as well. “Right now I carry a GPA of 3.8. Education is the key to anyone’s future. Your education is something that no one can ever take away from you. The years you spend in school learning will guide your future.”

Hot Springs volleyball head coach Robert Haro says that Gillis is the type of player you want at the libero position. “The libero is the best athlete on the court for your team because they need to be able to move all over the court, see the entire floor and get to balls that no one else can get to. Savannah has a nose for the ball and wants to be that person to have the ball in her hands. Savannah is a very workable young lady, with a good work ethic. She is always cheerful and she strives to do the best she can in everything she does.”

Last year, Gillis was awarded the school’s sportsmanship award. Coach Haro says this award is a testament to the type of person she is. “Savannah is the epitome of what any coach is looking for when it comes to sportsmanship. She always greets the other team and officials and never has a bad thing to say about anyone. I think her positive attitude really flows over to her teammates. She is the type of person that I would like to have as a daughter. Savannah is always smiling. She has a lot of drive and won’t walk off the court until she has done it right. I really can’t ask for more in a ball player.”

Gillis says that she wants to be a positive influence on others around her and good sportsmanship is an avenue she has taken to heart. “I’m a big believer in win or lose you need to be a classy person and be a good sport. I always make it a point to congratulate the other team and thank the referees for coming out. Everyone on the court, whether it be the players, coaches or the officials, everyone works hard to do their best and I feel it’s important to let them know I appreciate that. I just try to be a positive influence out on the court.”

Gillis, a two-time all-District volleyball player, plans to attend New Mexico State University in the fall of 2015 and views all her activity involvement as just the foundation for what’s to come. “Volleyball and sports in general have taught me how to be part of a team and be a good teammate, while the FFA has provided me with an opportunity to learn how to speak in front of others and a confidence to be able to engage others in what would normally be an uncomfortable environment. I think it’s a good foundation for my future.”