

# U of I's 4-H House celebrates 75 years

By DOROTHY SPENCER

**W**HEN farmers are heading for the fields this May, a group of University of Illinois alumni will be heading for their alma mater to celebrate the 75th anniversary of 4-H House, a cooperative sorority.

Located on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus, 4-H House has been home to more than 1,000 women since its founding in 1934. Born of the economic hardships of the Depression, 4-H House was begun by Mary McKee, a professor who wanted to make a University of Illinois education accessible for rural Illinois women. She did so by organizing the house as a cooperative, where women paid house dues in canned goods, cooked their own meals and did their own housekeeping.

## Getting its start

Permission to name the organization 4-H House was granted by the dean of the University of Illinois College of Agriculture, Herbert Mumford, and by national 4-H leaders in Washington, D.C. Today, the house remains as the only 4-H House in the nation, and still upholds its original standards.

## Key Points

- Cooperative sorority 4-H House will celebrate 75 years this month.
- The house was founded to make education affordable for rural women.
- Members have displayed a wide range of majors over 75 years.

The house began with 16 members and today houses 55 young women. Women are able to move in as freshmen; a minimum of five years of 4-H membership is required for house membership. Cooperative living continues; even today, the cost of living at 4-H House is a fraction of other university housing options.

Over the years 4-H House has been in three different locations on the University of Illinois campus. During the first two years, women paid \$10 a month and rented a house in Champaign. By 1938, a house was purchased, and the women paid \$25 a month. By the early '50s, the women became determined to build a house. They began a catering business and ultimately raised more than \$12,000 to start the building project. The house opened in 1961 and



**HOME SWEET HOME:** 4-H House has become a home away from home for more than 1,000 Illinois women attending college at the University of Illinois.

remains the current home of 4-H House. The Illinois Home Bureau Federation donated kitchen appliances and dining room furniture, which are still used today.

## Neighbors and majors

Among the changes during 75 years of history are the topics young women study during their college careers. In the 1940s, two-thirds of the members of 4-H House majored in home economics. Today, home economics is no longer a field of study at the university. Instead, many current members center their studies on agriculture, majoring in such areas as animal and crop sciences,

agribusiness and agricultural communications. Many others pursue non-ag majors, like education and engineering.

Much has changed in 75 years, but women in 4-H House still hail from farms and small towns, bringing with them strong family values and the belief in being a good neighbor. 4-H House has maintained its cooperative style of living, its 4-H roots and its ability to be the home away from home that so many young women seek.

*Spencer is a junior in agricultural communications at the University of Illinois and a member of 4-H House. For more information, visit [www.4hhouse.com](http://www.4hhouse.com) or call 217-344-4784.*

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