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Bland joins extension office in dual role

By Freddie Bourne McLean County News
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Kelly Bland, extension agent for family and consumer sciences and 4-H youth development for the McLean County Cooperative Extension Office in Calhoun, sits in her office Monday.

Freddie Bourne | McLean County News

Kelly Bland is the new extension agent for family and consumer sciences and 4-H youth development for the McLean County Cooperative Extension Office in Calhoun.

Bland was hired after a search that took nearly two years.

"I'm very excited to be here and I look forward to meeting everyone and getting involved," Bland said Monday.

"It's been a long time coming," said David Fourqurean, extension agent for agricultural and natural resources. "We're really tickled that she's on board with us and hopefully everything will (go well). The folks are very accepting here. We're looking forward to some big things from her."



Bland, 48, was born in Italy and moved around throughout her youth due to her father's involvement in the military.

Bland primarily grew up in the Orange Park, Florida, area until moving to Owensboro her junior year of high school when her stepfather received a promotion with the Boy Scouts of America.

Her time in Florida did not involve any exposure to the agricultural field.

"The closest thing to farm that we had around us were the orange groves," Bland said.

After graduating Owensboro High School, Bland attended Western Kentucky University with intentions to become a teacher, but she switched gears and graduated with a degree in therapeutic recreation and tourism in 1996.

Bland started out as an activities director at Signature HealthCARE at Hillcrest in the Alzheimer's unit, followed by a stint at Leisure Years Nursing Home — more recently known as the Owensboro Center.

In the late 90s, she moved to North Carolina to become a district executive with the Boy Scouts of America where she worked heavily in creating events and programs for youth.

She returned to Owensboro to become coordinator for the family resource center at East View Elementary School in the Daviess County Public Schools district in 2003, where she taught finance and parenting classes while also organizing activities for kids.

She began working for the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Office in 2019 as a nutrition education program assistant for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education.

In this role, Bland said she was only able to teach nutrition courses and "missed the other components."

Bland said she knew about the position in McLean County for some time, but was initially hesitant to apply for essentially two roles. Her colleagues — Katherine Alexander, Jeremy Teal and Sharayha Clingenpeel — encouraged her to take the chance.

The position is a good fit for her overall experiences, Bland said.

“It seemed like everything that FCS covers is what I covered in family resource,” she said. “...This combination position of the FCS and the 4-H — I get to work with kids all the way to adults.”

Bland began her new post on July 5 — which also coincided with the extension office’s “Farm to Fork” program.

Fourquarean said Bland was able to fit right in and get off to a promising start.

“I think she’s going to be a great addition,” he said.

Bland said she has been embraced with open arms in her short time here.

“I went to (McLean County Ag Fair) and met so many people ... and everyone that I met said, ‘We’re so glad to have you here,’ ” she said. “That just made me feel so good.”

Bland plans to meet with the advisory boards for 4-H and FCS to see what the “wants and needs” are for the community in order to “do the program right” and to have continued success.

“I really have a heart for helping people, I really do and it’s really something that I love to do,” Bland said.

“... I like to help people better themselves however way that is.

“I want to make sure what I’m providing to the community is a quality program.”