

"Uncle John" Sanders



Mr. Sanders gives a special award to Kathy Eisaman for her 4-H dog training class

Uncle John Sanders

by June Kennedy

Back in Lexington in the 1940's the little guy who spotted him first sounded the alarm like a virtual Paul Revere. But it wasn't the British who invoked his high pitch of excitement in our neighborhood during the endless, delightful summer days of childhood. Bounding up the hill, his squeaky leather satchel slung over his shoulder, momentarily would appear the kindly postman, John Sanders. Every Fido and Trix awaited his dog biscuit, every child his or her candy kiss. In exchange we promised to marry him and sent him off with a favorite hair ribbon or similar precious trinket. A pat on the head, a few moments of friendly chatter—he loved us all and we knew it.

Many, many years elapsed. We hadn't been in our Westford home but half a day when at the door, laden with supplies which we thought might be needed on moving day appeared Mr. and Mrs. John Sanders. I'm glad the postman always rings twice for now I was able, in the eyes of an adult, to reaffirm a child's perception of a kindly person and to really discover the magnitude of the generosity and meaningful contributions of this man known to townspeople as UNCLE JOHN.

He started his hobby of working with young people through the Boston Council of Boy Scouts and worked up to Scout Commissioner. The depression of 1929 forced him to close his business and brought him to Westford. Here Mr. George Erickson, County Agent for 4-H, along with Mr. and Mrs. Willard Moore, found him and interested him in starting a 4-H Garden Club. Without car, John spent many happy hours walking from garden to garden to inspect the produce and delight in happy faces. In 1937 his work took him back to Boston, but his heart was in the country town and its young people and he returned to Westford in 1951.

'Uncle John' is currently serving on the State level of the 4-H Board of Directors. He has served as a 4-H Club Leader and Advisor in Middlesex County for nearly 24 years. Co-founder with the former County 4-H Agent, Mr. James, of the Westford 4-H Junior Leader and Citizenship Club which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year, he feels much pride in this group for their presentation to the townspeople of two brand new ambulances during recent years. He served as Leader of the Busy Beavers Woodworking Club when it organized in 1951. It just happens to be the oldest continuous woodworking club in the state. As Town Chairman for 4-H Clubwork in the 1950's, he found time also to be County

Fair Director, was instrumental in re-organizing the Middlesex County Northern Service Club and acted as Advisor for several years, was one of the Founders and Directors of the Williams 4-H Center of Middlesex County, Chairman of the Middlesex County 4-H Advisory Council a year co-chairman of the Farley Memorial Lobby fund drive for the National 4-H Center in Washington, D.C. UNCLE JOHN was also one of the Mass State delegates in '59 to be on hand for the opening of the 4-H Center in Washington when President Eisenhower cut the ribbon and made the principle address. It impressed him the way the President said, with heart, 'I like 4-Her's.' In addition, he served two terms as BIG CHIEF or President of the Delta Chapter of Massachusetts All Stars.

Hundreds of young people have been in his clubs. He loves them all. He enjoys it most when his club members are recognized County, State, and Nationally, as many have. What a thrill when the ambulances were presented all paid for. What joy to see members off on their way to Chicago or Washington or England! How rewarding to see his members inducted into the All Stars, to see two of his boys selected for the Services Annapolis and West Point.

Equally pleasant is the receiving of mail from former members whose work or marriage has taken them to foreign lands, and always a pleasure to add a few more grand nieces and nephews.

UNCLE JOHN has a special place in his heart for the older people too. This is very evident from his directing the

programs of the Holden Age Club in Westford. Right now he is on a trip to Washington, D.C. with 40 of Westford's Senior Citizens and serving as chaperone. As Chairman for the Senior Citizens in Westford he is concerned with any problems involving surplus foods, Community Action or Housing. Having first served on the Housing Authority Committee to inquire into the needs of housing for Senior Citizen, he was appointed to the Housing Authority in 1970 and elected to office in 1971 at the Town Meeting in March. Presently he is chairman of the Housing Authority.

It's not an afterthought, but because there is so much to tell about "UNCLE JOHN", I just happened to think that he was responsible for the newly formed Westford Dog 4-H Club and that the prettily decorated Christmas trees at the Westford Nursing Home each year are the gift of his Citizenship Club. He has always been active in The Grange, Westford Historical Society and Church activities. In fact, he was working in the post office until he retired several years ago. It isn't fair to say that "UNCLE JOHN" RETIRED. It took many weeks to arrange a few hours to interview him. Each day on the calendar is circled for this or that — "Aunt Marion" agrees that every day is sprinkled with much good humor. Westford should be proud to have a citizen like "UNCLE JOHN".