



FEATURE STORY

VISITING STUDENT LEARNS COLD, HARD FACTS OF MINNESOTA LIFE

"That's a snowmobile," Gonzalo Castro remarks in a no-big-deal tone. But it is sort of a big deal when this college student recognizes the high-pitched whine because Gonzalo grew up far south of Minnesota. This February visitor to Pipestone Vet Clinic came here from Chile.

Back home on the family hog operation near Santiago it's summer—around 90° F—in a country where winter never turns colder than 36 above. Obviously, Gonzalo doesn't customarily hear snowmobile traffic.

"I'm so cold here I wear this down jacket indoors!" he confesses. Why put himself through this? The student from Chile came to learn how pig production in the Midwest differs from his father's 1,500-sow farrowing operation. Dad, also named Gonzalo, decided his son needed a new perspective and suggested a visit to Pipestone because they have friends here.

"Dr. Kennedy, Dr. Minion, and Dr. Kerkaert...they've all eaten dinner at my home, so my father talked to them about letting me visit," Gonzalo explains. The younger Castro ended up eating dinner with the Kennedys often, while staying in their home.

Spending time with our veterinary professionals was a highlight for this agronomy student. (Gonzalo explains his future agronomy degree from Universidad Mayor

will combine animal science and what we call "ag studies".) "On the way to a farm, Larry (Dr. Goelz) or Curt (Dr. Vlietstra) explained what I would see and what they would do. Then I watched them do those things. It was very helpful," Gonzalo says. "I also spent time with Dr. Kennedy learning about sheep."



Mostly, though, he came to see how pigs are raised in our part of the world. What did he learn from time spent in a Pipestone System* barn? "Here's one question I will ask my father when I am home: 'How do they take care of twice as many sows with half the employees?'" He's referring to a farrowing unit in which seven people tend 3,000 sows. He contrasts that ratio to the 14 employees who work for his father.

It's likely the elder Castro will have a good answer. He's no stranger to U.S. pork production after spending two years in Nashville, TN as an employee of PIC International (a worldwide swine genetics company that supplies boars to PAB**). Gonzalo

*Pipestone System sow barns across the upper Midwest produce piglets that are then delivered to and raised by Pipestone System family farmers.

**PAB (Pipestone Artificial Breeders) enables family farmers to produce pigs with top-of-the-line genetic qualities.

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Veterinary Voices

G. F. Kennedy, D.V.M.
G. D. Spronk, D.V.M.
J. D. Bobb, D.V.M.
B. R. Kerkaert, D.V.M.

J. L. Goelz, D.V.M.
L. W. Minion, D.V.M.
C. S. Schmitt, D.V.M.
S. R. Wayne, D.V.M.

C. W. Vlietstra, D.V.M.
N. L. Weber, D.V.M.
J. L. Nerem, D.V.M.
C.A. Odland, D.V.M.

D. F. Peterschmidt, D.V.M.
B. B. Myers, D.V.M.
A. Emme, D.V.M.

COLD, HARD FACTS OF MINNESOTA LIFE

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and his younger brother perfected their English while the family lived in Nashville and made friends, some of whom Gonzalo will visit on his trip home.

He'll be leaving behind a crop of friends in Minnesota, too. He considers that aspect the most notable outcome of his visit. When he arrived in Pipestone, Gonzalo "expected people to be nice...but not so nice! At the end of my first day at Pipestone Vet Clinic I already felt welcome and ready to come back to work the next day."

Gonzalo learned the routine of packing orders for

shipping and he worked in the Shetek sow barn. It was a happy, friendly, and thoroughly chilling experience. As a result of his time here, he'll have stories of small-town life to share with his mother, Doree (five million people live in Santiago). He'll also have pig-raising questions to ask his father.

But will he ever again need to identify the distinctive sound of a passing snowmobile? "I don't know where life will take me after I graduate. I'll be happy wherever that is." As long as he has a warm down jacket. ■

MEET THE LEADER OF A BAND OF COUSINS

Don't look now, Samantha Berg...you're being followed. Every summer since she was five, the Pipestone High School junior has been showing sheep and cattle while leading a growing parade of younger kids around local fairs.

"How many kids do your parents have?" She's asked that question all the time. No wonder the average person is confused—at the Red River Valley Fair in Fargo, the Berg clan merges into a herd of matching T-shirts. While the fair offers kids plenty of opportunity to show livestock, it's also the site of their family reunion!

"All my cousins are there and since I'm the oldest I show the younger ones what to do. My cousins from Vermont come to stay with Grandpa and Grandma (Marlin and Donna Berg) for a month and my other cousins visit from Wisconsin and the Cities," Samantha explains. Add to that number Phil and Laurel Berg's other three children—Andrew (14), Hannah (10), and Isaac (8)—and Samantha's following grows to nine kids and eight cows.

"My cousins like to come here, do chores with us, and go to the fairs. It's outside of their normal routine." The rest of the year, it's Samantha and her siblings who regularly tend the registered Red Angus cattle and Suffolk sheep.

When the out-of-town help arrives, she takes charge, as she's done for 12 years. "Some of the kids think I'm a slave-driver," Samantha admits with a little smile.

Admittedly, this soft-spoken teenager can be pretty determined when the topic is livestock. She's a champion in the ring, having shown the 2009 Champion Red Angus heifer in open class at the Minnesota State Fair. She was a member of the livestock-judging meats team that earned a spot in the national competition last year. At the fair, she also competes in events that offer the opportunity to talk about sheep and the benefits of wool.

That doesn't mean Samantha needs a pre-arranged public forum to make her case for wool. She's a promoter, encouraged by her parents and grandparents to make a strong case for the livestock industry even on a school day. "I wear wool and hand out 'Wear Wool' stickers. People ask me, 'Isn't wool itchy? Isn't it hot?' I explain things that are just common sense to me."

On other days, she might be wearing one of "about a zillion Red Angus shirts" from her closet. Those are conversation starters, too. Of course, she's accustomed to drawing looks because of those shirts. She's the platoon leader in the Berg family army of livestock experts. You can see them in action during fair season every year. ■



THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO KEEP A PET FIT

At first glance, Carol Tjarks and Irma Mechling probably don't have a lot in common. One is a marathon runner and the other recently had hip surgery. One is a dog lover and the other a cat person who, until last year, made it her business to find homes for strays. So how did they come to be the two winners in our Pet Fit competition?

Both Irma, of Ihlen, and Carol, of Flandreau, love their pets enough to do what's right—even when it's difficult. That makes training a healthy pet sound doable.

For Carol, urging Shelby (her chocolate lab) into top condition means quite literally going the extra mile. As Carol trained for the Sioux Falls Half-Marathon this past summer, Shelby logged all the same workouts. Before long, Shelby was jogging into the lead in the Pet Fit Challenge sponsored by Pipestone Vet Clinic.

Carol admits she didn't run all the miles Shelby did. For one thing, her dog does more meandering as she follows her nose along the gravel road. For another Shelby took a second workout every day with Carol's husband, Dale. In that way, the lab managed to rack up double miles and climb to the primo position on the chart attached to Dr. Nicole Weber's office door. Shelby's final total: 646.5.

Convincing a healthy dog to run isn't that difficult, so long as you consider the weather, according to Carol. All of her runs with Shelby occurred in the cool of the morning and Dale exercised the lab in the evening. And over the years—the dog is 11—she's been trained to obediently jog along with Carol.

Getting an overweight cat to diet also takes planning, and nearly as much self-control as training for a marathon. After all, Irma had to look into Nike's yearning face at every feeding.

"We wouldn't give her up for a million dollars." Irma thinks of Nike as a member of the family, "I must love her because she's had a forty-five dollar haircut and I never did!" the senior citizen jokes. But, in truth, Nike is adopted.

"She's a stray and we think she was probably abused. She's very shy of people—though she likes Katie Wiese and Dr. Weber just fine," Irma continues. Nike will be 14 in May, and carrying too much weight can lead to feline diabetes. Irma went through that struggle for 4½ years with her previous cat. Time to put Nike on a reducing plan.

Since Nike is a nibbler, Irma says it was simplest to apportion her new Hill's r/d® meals into separate feedings. Irma fed her only half a cup of the new food carefully measured and divided into three helpings per day.

Though Nike follows no organized exercise program, she lost 20% of her body weight on the new eating system. Katie notes, "Her weight loss proves cats can lose weight—even older ones."

The cat is trimmer and accustomed to her new food regimen. Now if only Irma can re-train husband, Erich, who started giving Nike a little extra food while her mom was recuperating from surgery. "But she'll be back to ½ cup soon enough!" Irma promises. ■



KATIE WIESE AND NIKE,
OWNED BY IRMA AND
ERICH MECHLING.
KATIE STOPPED BY TO
DELIVER THE BAG OF CAT
FOOD NIKE WON FOR
HER WEIGHT LOSS
PERFORMANCE IN OUR
PET FIT CHALLENGE.



SHELBY, OWNED BY
CAROL AND DALE
TJARKS, RAN AWAY FROM
THE COMPETITION IN OUR
CONTEST TROTTING AN
AMAZING 646.5 MILES IN
FIVE MONTHS!

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There's an important new story on our Web site. Go to www.pipevet.com to read about the surgery that saved Aaron Lass's dog Penny and learn what you should do if your dog swallows a foreign substance.

THANKS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE

BY G.F. "DOC" KENNEDY, DVM



On January 1, 2010, I divested my financial interest in Pipestone Veterinary Clinic and most of the System companies. I will continue as a managing member of Pipestone Artificial Breeders and remain on with the other companies as an employee, advisor, and consultant.

When I graduated from veterinary school in 1960, I understood it would be my obligation to serve my clients well because I needed to pay back the opportunity provided me. By doing that, I assumed I would be treated well in return, and I have been.

My work here has been a rewarding experience for me and for my family. Most of my friends are people I work with every day, which explains why I've stayed this long and why I choose to remain connected with this clinic. It's what I live for.

In over 50 years as a veterinarian, I have adapted to plenty of changes in agriculture and at the Clinic. I'll adapt to this change, too.

There's been a lot to enjoy in my life's work. I've enjoyed working in beef feedlots, doing export work, pregnancy-testing beef- and dairy-cattle, and preparing dairy cattle for sale. I liked working with swine, sheep, goats, and working in general practice. It was all memorable.

Earlier in my tenure, I involved myself in community projects here in Pipestone: school board, chamber, fair boards, vocational school, and serving as a bank director. It was a good opportunity to work with other people.

As our businesses grew and intensified, I gave up most of those outside interests to serve as senior managing partner of our businesses; I tried to be a benevolent dictator. I see the businesses will continue to grow and our clients and customers will continue to prosper. I am also relieved that I no longer have to make the final decisions, though I will still have influence and be able to coach.

Business responsibilities forced me to pass up certain options earlier in life; I can now do those things. Deb and I look forward to cooler temperatures in the summer at our lodge in Alaska as well as being able to enjoy extended hunting trips in the fall.

Some years back, I was interviewed by an FBI agent who said, "Now don't try to pass yourself off as a country bumpkin veterinarian. I have investigated you and know you are a sophisticated businessman." I laughed and said, "I hope I'm somewhere in-between."

That's where I am now—somewhere in between—less involved in day-to-day operations but no less interested. And, I'm thankful for the opportunity to serve you. ■