

Lebanon dairy family expands for a homecoming

BY DONNA TOMMELLEO
LEBANON — Robert and Edith Bollinger's Lebanon County dairy sits along a narrow, winding road, polished by layers of January ice. But, several hundred visitors braved the slick conditions on Thursday and turned out to help the Bollingers officially christen their new barn, silos, 3,000 gallon bulk tank and milking parlor.

The open house proved more than a christening; it was a homecoming, a celebration of family.

Before the additions, the two oldest Bollinger boys, Glenn and Ron had married and left the farm to pursue their own careers, leaving their father and brother Bruce to run the 60-head operation.

Glenn was employed as a tractor mechanic for a local dealer while Ron worked full-time for a propane dealer and specialized in adapting automobile engines to liquid propane fuel.

But for the country-born men there was no place like home, and they returned to their roots. However, the dairy was too small

to support three families and after two years of thought and much discussion the majority of the Bollinger family decided to expand.

Edith admits that she was the only hold out.

"As much as I was skeptical and hesitant, the rest of the family was the other way," Edith recalls.

Her husband explains the expansion was the only way to provide enough work for the four men.

"We needed to make a bigger paycheck to pay the boys," notes Robert.

However, Edith says she enjoys the simple pleasures of having everyone home again.

"It's still a joy to see them coming in the back door or have them meet you on the stairs," she says.

Before the farm's face-lift, the Bollingers milked in a 58-stall tie-stall barn. Without the luxury of an around the barn pipeline, they enlisted the use of dumping stations and stored the milk in an 800-gallon bulk tank.



The Bollinger family break from their busy schedule, outside their remodeled milk house. The family from left to right includes: front row, Ronald and wife Kathy, Edith and Robert; back row, Bruce, Glenn and wife Dawn.



Their years of tractor and automobile repair allow Glenn, left, and Ron to work side by side in their own machinery repair business.



With the exception of a few dry cows, most of the old stall barn remains empty until next Fall, when the Bollingers hope to add another 60 milking cows.

Their only silo, a 20 X 72 was used for corn silage. They baled all of their hay and stored ear corn in a crib.

Today the Bollingers' commercial Holstein herd consists of 79 cows, housed in the new 176 foot tie stall barn. Robert explains they kept the tie-stall design, rather than opting for a free-stall, because they wanted to hand-feed and devote individual attention to each cow.

The dumping stations have given way to a brand new double-six herringbone parlor with automatic take-offs. And what used to be a two-man operation has evolved into a one-man show, with 16-year-old Bruce as the pit's sole occupant.

"I don't think I know how to milk the other way," he jokes.

By next fall, the family hopes to and more cows, increasing their total to 134.

"At this point," Edith notes, "three families cannot live off of 79 cows."

To help keep the farm operating, Glenn and Ron operate a machinery repair service for neighboring farmers. Although the men don't advertise, their reputation and low prices are known by word of mouth.

"We have guys coming back," says Glenn. He estimates that last year, they serviced almost 20 tractors during the winter months. On Thursday, the large repair shed was packed with tractors of all

sizes and one combine.

In fact, the only indication the repair business exists, hangs in the barn. A cardboard sign tacked to a door bears the Bollingers' motto, that Glenn explains, applies not only to repair work but all tasks — "Quality is a must, not a maybe."

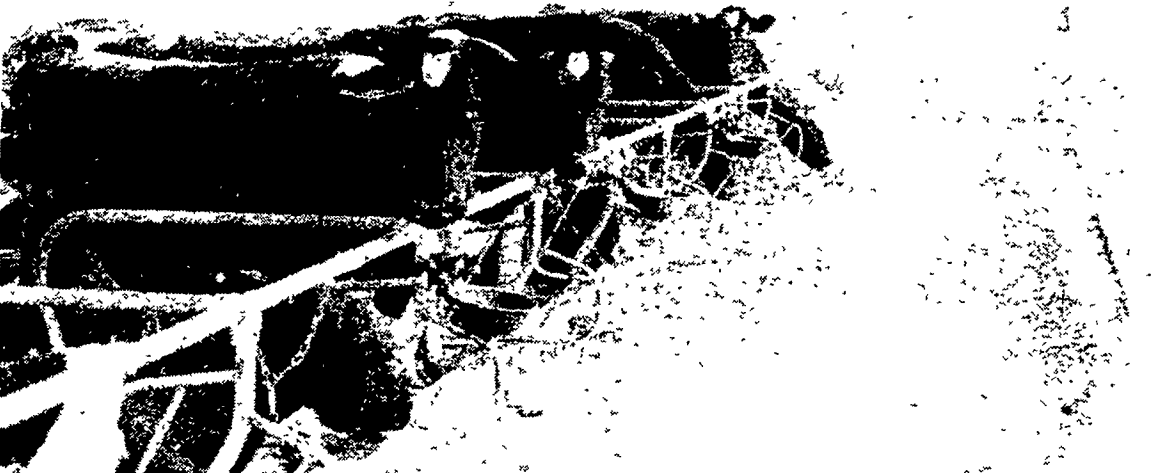
Their repair work is not confined to the four walls in the shed, either. During warmer weather, Glenn makes his share of road calls.

The Bollingers are no strangers to custom farming. While Robert farms cash-crop for a neighbor, Glenn hops aboard a combine to tackle small grains, corn, and soybean for customers. When needed, Ron occasionally picks up

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Happiest in the barn, 16-year-old Bruce says he's looking forward to finishing high school and returning to full-time work at the farm.



The 79-head herd has adjusted well to the transitions, including the new 176 foot by 38 foot tie-stall barn.