



Angels hover in the rafters above the manger scene during the reenactment of the first Christmas. The reenactment was held four times at Fred and Julie Heller's farm in Lititz last weekend.

Farm Attracts Crowds For Nativity Reenactment

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

LITITZ (Lancaster Co.) — Hundreds of people followed the brightly shining star to the Fred Heller farm last weekend. The 10-foot diameter star teetered 140 feet above the farm.

Like the star that drew the wise men to the manger where the baby lay, this star too was used to draw crowds to a reenactment of the baby's birth. Only this star did not appear in the heavens but was lifted by a crane.

Fred and Julie Heller's 17-year-

old son Dan directed a camel, a donkey, sheep, goats, a calf, and a caste of actors in a real-life reenactment of the story of the origin of Christmas.

Lancaster County Poultry Ambassador Michele Stauffer narrated the nativity play from the haymow, which was used as a stage.

Hay was scattered over an area of the barn where the six goats, three sheep, two turkeys, and a calf mingled next to the manger. Joseph Martin played the part of Joseph as he brought his wife Mary

played by Holly Hurst, on a donkey to the shelter of the barn.

Angels, played by Zonya Zimmerman and Chad Shirk, hovered in the rafters above the manger.

The barn doors opened so that the crowd could see the shepherds and sheep walking down the hillside to visit the newborn child. Three wisemen guided a gangly camel, named Job, down the hillside to the site.

Six musical groups sang Christ-

mas carols while children in the audience joined the animals in the hay for an on-the-spot petting zoo.

Dan said that he thought of the idea for the play while working for Paul and Brenda Zimmerman, who own Hammercreek Exotics in Lititz. The Zimmermans lent the camel and other animals for the reenactment.

The rustic barn was an ideal site for the play. Built in 1817, the barn was used for storage until Dan got the idea to use it for the Hammer

Creek Mennonite Church Youth's play.

Youth from the church helped the Heller family clear the barn. A blower was used to remove the cobwebs and plenty of volunteer sweeping power was donated by youth and family members.

The youth agreed that the work was worth it. "It was fun working together, but to see the people's reaction was the best part," Dan said.

Meyers Home Aglow

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Mom, who believes in teaching children early to cook. A few years ago, she purchased two loose-leaf cookbooks for her daughters. The girls copy favorite family recipes and lend a hand in the kitchen so that they can learn to cook just like Mom.

"The problem is Mom doesn't have a recipe for a lot of stuff," Stephanie said of her mother's reputation as a "dash of this and a lump of that" cook. "We have yet to figure out how she makes barbecue."

Writing down recipes is allocated not only to the girls in the kitchen. The boys are learning their share of recipes too. For the family's annual butchering of two beef and seven pigs, recipes for homemade bolonga, scrapple, and home-cured ham must be carefully calculated.

"If those recipes aren't written down, and someone dies, the recipes are lost forever," Meyer said.

"The butchering takes five days to complete, because we butcher in

between milking," Meyer said.

In years past, the butchering was always done during the week between Christmas and New Year's. "But that always cut the enjoyment of Christmas," Meyer said. This year the family butchered at the beginning of December.

"Now we can really enjoy Christmas," he said.

Butchering requires several family members to arise at 3:30 a.m. While several milk the cows, others butcher. The butchering requires sawing meat, grinding it for hamburger and bolonga, and endless wrapping.

"It's a job we both enjoy and dread," Stephanie said. "Because we want to eat good, we do it."

Two large-sized freezers are filled to the brim, one with meat and the other with produce from the garden.

The family farms in partnership with Meyer's parents, Marvin and Betty, and a brother Clyde and his wife Carolyn.

The three families own 300 acres and rent another 100 for raising corn, alfalfa, and soybeans.

But their primary focus is milking 140 cows, which requires five to six persons help for each milking since a 68-stall barn is used for the 140 cows.

Stephanie is often asked why she doesn't run for dairy princess. Her standard answer is, "I'm too busy working on the farm."

It's her job to help with evening milking.

In addition to the milking cows, the Meyers have about 140 replacement heifers and the girls raise pigs for their 4-H project.

The Meyers live on a farm with a barn that dates back to 1857. Although it's not the original, the house was built in 1864. "It costs \$8,000 to build back then," Meyers said of the brick homestead that has been in the family since it was built.

Helping on the farm, housework, and working part time as receptionist for a law firm doesn't occupy all of Lois's time.

She said, "Give me a sewing machine and material and I'm happy."

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The wisemen lead Job the camel down the hillside to the barn during the Christmas play. The wisemen, from left, are Dan Heller, who also directed the play, Rod Weber, and Mike Stoltzfus.