

New President Gives Thoughts On Vision For Pa. DHIA

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FAYETTEVILLE (Franklin Co.) — The new Pennsylvania DHIA president brings both heritage and vision to his roll in the state's largest milk records and testing organization. Lane Sollenberger remembers that when he was a boy, the milk tester came and stayed on the farm overnight and ate meals with the family.

"I can still hear that centrifuge spinning and see him pulling the samples out," Sollenberger said. "The tester would handwrite all the figures in the books. We still have them. Our herd has been on test since 1948. When the tester left, we had everything left on the farm.

"Then we went in a different direction and sent everything away so there was nothing left at the farm on test day. Now we find ourselves coming full circle to where again more and more of the records are completed in the computer and left on the farm."

The vision comes from his personal passion to communicate to the 50 percent of dairymen in the state that do not test.

"We now have so many programs that can be tailored to so many different farming operations that I believe every dairy farmer can benefit from PA DHIA's services," Sollenberger said. "And for people outside our normal territory who have an interest in our services, I don't think we stand second to anyone.

"Some people, even some people in our organization, think maybe we are less than first class. And this isn't so. We are a top rated lab. And we are a top rated DRCP. When National DHIA finally gets around to publishing the scores the way we need them to be published in a competitive environment, we'll see who is producing top-notch services. Then it will be in writing that we are a first class operation."

Sollenberger has been successful with his 170 head of registered Holstein milk cows that average 19,500 pounds of milk. Individual records currently go up to nearly 30,000 pounds. One-hundred thirty head of young stock are being raised as replacements. The herd is



Lane and Judy Sollenberger, right, are pictured with their family at the time Brent, No. 7, was a member of the winning national Little League team when they played in Washington, Pennsylvania, last summer. Brian is in back, Kayla is in front.

housed in free stalls and milked in a double eight herringbone parlor. Since January the herd has been milked 3x and Sollenberger has seen great improvement in udder health. But the labor intensive way to handle the herd calls for a good labor force.

The new president thinks farming has come full circle too. When he was young, his uncles and neighbors got together in harvest and planting to help each other. Then the time came when each farmer bought a full line of equipment and did all the work individually. Now because of high farm machinery costs, Sollenberger believes neighbors are again sharing pieces of equipment among their farming operations. In addition, custom operators are coming back to take up some of the work, especially in application of chemicals where new labor laws place detailed restrictions on these operations.

In the financial areas of farming, Sollenberger thinks you need some outside help to develop realistic cash flow expectations and input costs. "I think you use your strengths and hire to compensate for your weaknesses," Sollenberger said. "If you like the cows and do crops because they are there to do, you better get some help with them. In addition, you need to have a strong financial plan in place and know what it takes to run the size business you have."

Sollenberger is the fourth generation family member on the farm. Both the house and the brick barn, located right along Route 30, are more than 100 years-old. Ties to the farm and the dairy cows are strong. But ties to his church and family are stronger.

As a young man, Sollenberger gave two years of voluntary service under a church program in Africa. There he worked, building a dam to serve the people of the area. When the chief engineer died in the middle of the project, Sollenberger provided the leadership to complete the project. At home he teaches a class and has held many offices in his church.

When he and his wife Judy were first married, they lived across the road for five years while Lane and his father were in partnership. Later Lane and Judy took over and moved to the farm house. And along the way the fifth generation of Sollenbergers on the farm have

arrived. Brian is 18; Brent is 15, and Kayla is 12. This younger generation gives the family involvement in senior high, junior high, and the middle school system at Chambersburg. All are active in sports, so the family has a lot of activities outside of farming to keep them busy.

Brent was a member of the PONY little league team that was first in the nation and second internationally, losing only to the team from Taipei in Washington, Pennsylvania, last summer. As you might expect, Lane has been involved in the little league organization as president and has been a coach for nine years. He helped coach Brent's national winning team. And of course the whole family was involved.

"If my wife and I have a choice to do something else or something with the family, we come down on the side of the family every time," Lane said. "If a man can't be involved with his family, he isn't of much value as a leader in the community either."

And it's this family approach that Lane says the new general manager, Dave Slusser, has brought to Pennsylvania DHIA.

"One of the things I look at with some pride is the opportunity I had to serve on the search committee for a new general manager," Lane said. "We saw the need to have a manager who was membership oriented and who was going to hear the needs of the members. Our problem was that we didn't have time to train anyone. We had to bring someone in who had instant credibility in the farm community. We found that in Dave Slusser."

"Dave is spending 50 percent of his time on the road with members. His heart is there, and this has been a real benefit. Another thing I appreciate about Dave is that he has created a family atmosphere at Pa DHIA.

"Every family, if they are honest, sometimes talks straight to one another. They sometimes criticize each other. But ultimately, they are working for one goal. We are able to work things through at Pa DHIA, and after everything is on the table, we walk out of the room with just as good a relationship as when we went in.

"In the past, there was division in the organization that segmented

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Lane Sollenberger's 100 year-old barn has the Christian communion symbols incorporated into the brickwork. Because the barn is quite visible from Route 30, visitors often stop to chat and take pictures of the barn.