

Flying Farmers Combine Love Of Farm And Flight

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MARIETTA (Lancaster Co.) —

Flying and farming may seem like opposite occupations, but for 375 people who attended the International Flying Farmers Convention held in Reading last week, the combination reflects their love for flight and farm.

The Vogt family of Marietta are typical members of the Flying Farmers.

Their day-to-day job is connected to the earth, but they take to the skies in their Cessna 182 for mini-trips and for a moonlighting job.

Keith and Kathy Vogt operate R. K. Vogt Grain on their Dizzy V Ranch in Marietta.

"Stay around here long enough and you'll know why it's called Dizzy V Ranch," said the Vogt's 18-year-old daughter Becky.

The phone rings constantly. If it isn't for the grain business or the Vogt Farm Bed & Breakfast, it's for Becky or her teen-age sister.

"Flying Farmers is a family organization," Kathy said. It was founded in 1944 by Oklahoma farmers who recognized the growing interest in airplanes among farmers.

"You can't take long vacations when you're in farming. An air-

plane allows farmers to take day and weekend trips," Kathy said of the reason farmers opt to fly planes.

Flying Farmers started with 38 charter members in Oklahoma. Farmers in other states soon became interested and within two years, 262 farmer-pilots from 16 states attended the first convention. The organization grew rapidly until it reached its height with almost 11,000 members in 1977.

Today, a struggling farm economy is reflected in the dwindling membership. There are 5,000 members in 35 chapters across the United States and Canada.

"Farmers have a tough time affording a plane with commodity prices so low," Kathy said.

But the farmers who manage to combine farming and flying are an enthusiastic bunch.

"The organization is very family oriented," Kathy said. The convention contained lots of children and youth activities.

In fact, Becky, who is Pennsylvania's Farmerette for Flying Farmers, took first place in the youth talent competition.

Becky sang, "Love in Any Language," and accompanied herself on the piano.

As the state Farmerette, Becky also competed for the international

farmerette title.

"I wanted to be a farmerette ever since my sister Michele won the title," Becky said. "It's like having our own little Miss America thing."

As the state farmerette, Becky travels to meetings to represent Flying Farmers.

Becky is a senior at Donegal High School where music plays a key part in her life. She is a member of marching, concert, and jazz bands. She plays the horn, mellophone, and piano. She also is a member of the chorus and the rhythm singers, and she sings and dances in several school musicals and shows.

She also is baseball manager, a member of the National Honor Society, and active in the youth group at Calvary Bible Church. This summer, Becky is working at K-Mart and helps her dad with computer and secretarial work for the grain business.

Her enthusiasm for Flying Farmers is not limited to talking. Her goal is to become a pilot.

Her father became interested in flying 21 years ago when he accompanied a friend who flew a small plane. Six months later, Keith attained his visual flight license and the next year, his instrument rating.

Kathy said that she learned to land a plane and can pilot it except that she refuses to solo. "In an airplane, I can't pull to the side of the road until I gain a sense of direction."

But Kathy has played numerous active roles in the Flying Farmer's Association. In it, she was a previous state queen and was named Pennsylvania Women of the Year.

Keith's primary purpose in attaining his pilot license was the opportunity flying allowed the family to take day trips that would require overnight stays if taken by car.

His grain business that he began on the farm started with hauling grain by truck. It has now expanded to include storage and drying facilities. Harvesting months require long hours around the clock, but during the winter months, Keith has some time to pilot for a local embryo transplant company.

Kathy said the bed and breakfast business sort of evolved from her love of having visitors on the farm. When she wanted to earn some

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During this busy harvest season Keith Vogt barely takes time to sleep. He operates a grain business, flies an airplane for pleasure, and is a company pilot for a nearby embryo transplant business. The annual convention of the International Flying Farmers is always a high point in his life. This year, he was so busy with his grain business that he found little time to attend sessions at the convention held in Reading.

HOMESTEAD NOTES

International Flying Farmers Select Representatives

READING (Berks Co.) — For the first time since 1985, the International Flying Farmers organization held their annual convention in the eastern part of the United States last week.

For the first time ever, Flying Farmers elected a woman to hold a position on the international board of directors.

Aileen Homan from Centre County is the secretary of the international organization. It is a five-year commitment that will result in her moving through the ranks and eventually become the president of the organization.

The Holmans have been members of the organization since 1952 when Aileen's husband Elwood purchased a plane. The Holmans own a 300-acre farm about eight miles west of Penn State University.

"Both flying and farming has changed for us over that time span," Aileen said.

The Holmans are now retired and their son crop farms the land with some help from Elwood. Over the years the Holmans have owned several larger-size planes that they used to fly across the country, but now they settled on a J3 Cub, which they use mostly for pleasure flying in the area.

"At one time, it was much cheaper to learn to fly and the upkeep of a plane wasn't as great," Aileen said. "It's also more expensive and time consuming to farm. Consequently it's difficult for young farmers to fly."

"Membership is mostly older couples but I'd like to see younger couples able to participate," Aileen said.

Aileen has held every state office in the Pennsylvania Flying Farmers Chapter during her 50 year involvement. She has been the Pennsylvania Queen for the organization three times.

Being the first woman elected to a position is nothing new to Aileen who was also the first woman president of the Pennsylvania chapter and of Ag Land Preservation in Centre County and of the Centre County Waste Authority. She has been one of three women to become supervisor for Ferguston Township. She is or has served on the boards of Food Bank, League of Cities, Garden Club, and other organizations in addition to being active in the local Church of Christ.

"I'm so happy to serve in this capacity," Aileen said of the job that will require her flying to many different states during the next five years.

In other business, Kelly Jennings from Iowa was selected as the International Farmerette.

The adult counterpart is Queen Naomi Wallman from Kansas. Assisting her is the International Dutchess Sharon Johanings from Ohio.

Another Pennsylvanian, Matthew Zimmerman, was the first-place winner in the junior talent contest.

In addition to chapter meetings held in 35 states, the international convention is held each year in a different state. The convention date alternates annually between July and August.

Those interested in knowing more about the Flying Farmers should contact a member or the Holmans at (814) 237-7510.



Becky, right, and her mom talk about their involvement with Flying Farmers while relaxing on the flagstone patio of the Vogt Farm Bed & Breakfast in Marietta.



It's seldom that a member of the Vogt family has time to sit and enjoy the beauty of the farm, which is named Dizzy V Farm. Becky said, "If you sit around for awhile, you'll soon know why this place is called Dizzy V."