

Little Bit Of Country Smack In The City

RANDY WELLS

Indiana Co. Correspondent
 OXON, Hill, MD - Tammy Farmery McKibben finally arrives at work each morning after enduring 45 minutes of heavy suburban traffic

That's nothing out of the ordinary for many working Americans. But it's a little unusual in McKibben's line of work. She's employed on a farm.

Her down-on-the-farm job is also different because on some days, hundreds of kids stop by to watch her work.

And she can see the Washington Monument from her barnyard.

McKibben is the animal caretaker at Oxon Hill Farm, a 512-acre spread operated by the National Park Service at Oxon Cove Park near Oxon Hill, Md., just south of Washington, D.C.

McKibben grew up on a farm and has been around farm animals all her life. But on the farm at Oxon Hill the sounds of chickens clucking and cows mooing mingle with the noise of traffic on the nearby Interstate 95/495 Capital Beltway and with passenger jets landing and taking off from Ronald Reagan National Airport just across the Potomac River.

In 1891 the federal government acquired the Oxon Hill land and established a farm for St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Patients worked on the farm for therapy and to grow their own food. In the mid-1960s the farm was entrusted to the National Park Service, and in 1967 Oxon Hill Farm welcomed its first visitors.

"Basically we get a lot of families with kids," McKibben said. "Being that we're so close to D.C., we have a lot of school tours."

The Park Service runs Oxon Hill as though it were still the early 1900's, and a big attraction for many visiting youngsters are



Tammy McKibben said that her job as caretaker of Oxon Hill is made easier because of growing up on a farm. Photo by National Park Service.

the farm's beef and dairy cows, draft horses, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese.

And that's where McKibben fits in. She grew up helping her parents, Dwight and Shirley Farmery, run their dairy operation near Marion Center, and was Indiana County Dairy Princess in 1992-93. After graduating from Marion Center Area

High School in '93, she earned an associate degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Technology from Penn State University.

That combination of formal education and hands-on farming experience helped McKibben land the job as animal caretaker at Oxon Hill.

"I'm also in charge of a curriculum-based program for preschool and kindergarten students called Animal Life on the Farm."

Under McKibben's supervision kids have the opportunity to milk a cow, feed the chickens, pet the horses, and ask questions.

"A lot of them have never been exposed to farms. They hardly even know what a farm is," she said.

A frequently-asked question arises about one of the farm's Ayrshire milk cows.

"Everybody thinks she's a bull because she has horns," she said.

McKibben believes the Oxon Hill Farm experience is especially important for children from the cities.

"It's amazing that many don't know that some farmer out there grows all the crops," she said, and she emphasizes to the children the "no farms-no food" concept.

"The kids like to come out and see the animals. But they also need to know that pigs give you ham," she said.

McKibben also participated in a holiday tradition that involves two of the farm's Belgian draft horses - delivery of the official White House Christmas tree.

"We use one of the old-time wagons to haul the tree to the White House," she said. "The

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