FARM LEADER OF THE YEAR

KEN DALLENBERG

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Welcome to the second part of our annual Agribusiness section, where you get to meet the 2020 News-Gazette Farm Leader of the Year, Ken Dalenberg. He was easily chosen earlier this year in a meeting of past Farm Leaders.

He developed his farm management business, innovative ag-tech for startups and large corporations and served on agricultural boards at the local, state, national and international levels.

We're still awaiting word on Laverl Byers at this year's banquet, but our ag coverage is anything but a裁员. And since last year's banquet was also canceled, we're ready to do so. And since last year's banquet was also canceled, we'll be sure to honor Laverl Byers at this year's banquet as well.

As part of our renewed coverage of agriculture, you'll also find in this issue three articles from Our County editor Dave Hinton.

He interviewed Cody Conrado about his recovery from a terrifying accident while on a tractor. Hinton also chatted with Doug Crummet from Premium Cooperative about what's driving the rise in crop prices.

And he profiled a vital force behind the annual History and Industry Antique Tractor Show, held every other year in Rantoul, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Illinois Antique Tractor and Gas Engine Club.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and to our farmers, good luck this year in the fields!

CONGRATS TO FARM LEADER OF THE YEAR, FROM THE PREMIER COOPERATIVE TEAM!
‘Always on the cutting edge’

A transplant to the Champaign area, Ken Dalenberg’s willingness to be an ‘innovative thinker’ has garnered the appreciation of his fellow farmers

By BEN ZIGERTMAN
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MANSFIELD — An innovative and influential farmer near Mansfield has been named the 2020 News-Gazette Farm Leader.

Ken Dalenberg has traveled the world through his work on international soybean organizations and has been an early adopter for the current wave of precision ag equipment, helping test products and tech for everyone from top manufacturers to California startups.

He’s also helped countless researchers at the University of Illinois, running different trials on the farm he’s expanded since graduating from the UI in the 1970s.

“He’s very serious about what he does,” Former University of Illinois President and dean of its College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences Bob Easter said. “Not only is Ken focused on his farming operation and how to make it successful, he’s also very supportive of, engaged in and willing to take time to work on issues of importance to the broader agricultural community.”

Dalenberg grew up on a dairy farm in Bond County outside of St. Louis.

“Like many who study at the University of Illinois, he stuck around. I came to the University of Illinois for school and never went home,” Dalenberg said.

As a student, he worked for a soil conservation service and learned “he didn’t like having a boss.” Farming looked like a better option, and after college, he rented his first piece of land, “which I still have today.”

Over time, he’s grown his farm into a successful business, married his wife, Barb, and raised three kids.

Please see DALENBERG, C-5

FARM LEADER of the Year

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Ken Dalenberg
surveys the land on his farm in rural Mansfield on Monday.
Robin Scholz/ The News-Gazette

Please see DALENBERG, C-5
Dalenberg continued from C-4

On top of that, he’s helped researchers and innovators by testing the latest ag tech on his farm, and he’s been involved with virtually every local, state, national and international organization helping to sell American soybeans around the world.

Dalenberg said he first got involved with the Champagne County Farm Bureau and was named a former Farm Leader. By 1980, he was elected to the Land of Lincoln Soybean Association, and over the years, he’s been a national officer for the American Soybean Association, and served as a member of the United Soybean Board, the United Soybean Board, the Chicago Federal Reserve advisory board and the Chicago Board of Trade ag advisory committee.

He helped form the United States Soybean Export Council to encourage sales of beans to other parts of the world, which took him on his international trips.

He’s worked on projects with the USDA Agricultural Research Service, served on NASA’s 10-year planning council for agriculture and helped work on two Farm Bills in Washington, D.C.

Dalenberg said he sees it almost as his duty to share his time and talents with the ag community.

“You have to have an interest in them,” he said. But “part of it is a willingness to give back, to do something to make a difference.”

His colleagues said he played key roles on those boards and was always well prepared and thoughtful.

John Baize, who ran the Washington office of the American Soybean Association and served as a consultant to the U.S. Soybean Export Council, said Dalenberg has been “a good spokesman for the industry.”

“He really cares,” Baize said. “He was a guy that everybody looked to who knew his stuff.”

Baize, who accompanied Dalenberg on some of his international trips, said he became leaders on the various boards because “he was better prepared, more knowledgeable—people knew he was knowledgeable. He did the studying necessary to do these things.”

And quite honestly,” Baize said. “He took the time to do some of these trips around the world.”

Dalenberg said “Because that’s not easy if you’re running a farm to take off and go somewhere for a week or two weeks and add those pressures.”

Baize, who lives in Virginia, also said Dalenberg avoided the internal politics that can often be present in organizations and earned the respect from farmers around the country.

“He’s a friend, but I admired him. He was very serious, and he stayed out of the politics,” Baize said. “He wanted to say, ‘Let’s do the right thing.’”

1991 Farm Leader John Reifsteck, who first got to know Dalenberg through the Champagne County Farm Bureau, said he has a “great ability to lead.”

Please see DALENBERG, C-6
“He’s been involved in all of it and a willing participant, stepping up to do the things necessary,” he said. “He has a broad range of experiences where he’s provided leadership.

“He is accommodating and deliberate,” Redflock said. “It’s important to be traditional, but then you’ve got to step out of your comfort areas to do some of these other things, and that means you’ve willing to take a little bit of risk, a little bit of effort to learn, and so he’s done that, stepping back and forth between those. Not all farmers are comfortable doing that.”

Redflock described him as focused and disciplined, whether that’s in the board room or his front yard.

“The farmstead is always meticulously moved and taken care of. His fields always look good,” Redflock said.

Easter said he got to know Dalenberg through his service on the Crop Sciences department’s advisory board.

Please see DALENBERG, C-8
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He said Dalenberg was focused and would always ask good questions. "Ken is as scholar of agricultural production … in every dimension: the agronomy, the economics, the market, fertility programs, all of those things," Easter said.

2015 Farm Leader Chris Hausman said he's always been impressed with Dalenberg. "He was always an innovative thinker, and especially when it came to international trade issues and what can help the Illinois soybean producer, Ken was a tremendous asset," Hausman said. His colleagues also described him as innovative and an early adopter. "The other thing that always impressed me about Ken was, he was always on the cutting edge of innovation and was always willing to try and do new things," Hausman said. "And he was willing to share his experiences. He didn't keep it to himself; he shared it with researchers around the world." Researchers and tested new technology from startups to large corporations such as John Deere. "Most of the precision ag stuff that's on the market today, I probably had my fingers in one way or the other over time," Dalenberg said. "We had GPS back in the early '90s. We had auto-steer before auto-steer was a common thing." Dalenberg said he had an early interest in computers and enjoys learning new things and working with the different companies. "I do a lot with startups in California that are working in ag," he said. "A lot of those people are great data scientists but don't have the practicality of knowing the agronomics or what a farmer's view or farmer's needs are. It's kind of fun to work with those groups because they're brilliant people who do brilliant analytics, but they need to ground them and bring them back to reality." Harold Reetz said he's brought international visitors to Dalenberg's farm and has known him since college. When Reetz worked for the Potash & Phosphate Institute, he had test plots on Ken's land. "I've always enjoyed working with him," Reetz said. "He was always a good cooperater if we wanted somebody to try new things." He said companies like Deere "respected his opinions." "Because he was detail oriented. He would tell you what worked and what didn't and always had good ideas to pass on to those kind of farmers," Reetz said. Quentin Band, who has tested different technologies on Dalenberg's farm since the '90s, said he has "always been very exploratory on his new technologies." "He's always wanting to try new things and gives them an honest evaluation," Reetz said. "That's what Ken does a great job of: just bringing those new technologies home and say, 'Hey, this is worth-while. This isn't.'" With the Champaign County Farm Bureau, Manager Brad Uken said Dalenberg has been generous in opening his farm to visitors. "Ken has always been willing to help me when it comes to hosting an event out on the farm, whether that be the Illinois Farm Bureau’s”) and that the Illinois Farm Bureau had — we made a stop at his farm with a bunch of bike riders — to finished meetings at his farm," Uken said. Dalenberg, who declined to share his age, said he doesn't plan to retire any time soon. "How long do farmers farm? Until it isn't fun anymore," he said. Is Dalenberg still having fun? "Oh yeah," he said.

DALENBERG

Continued from C-6

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Grain merchantises predicts prices to stay strong

Demand from China, bad season in S. America helping upward trend

By DAVE HINTON
dhinton@news-gazette.com

Corn prices have remained high, primarily because of the good growing season in South America. "Corn is well bolstered by China's demand," Crop said. They bought another 65 million bushels last week. When you look at these types of numbers, do you go higher?"

Cropp said they could. The same goes for beans. The grain merchant said there "is a good chance" prices will continue to rise, possibly up to the $16-a-bushel level, until new crop supplies come in this fall.

Cropp said the USDA's estimate of the carryout level (the amount left at the end of the marketing year) of beans is 120 million bushels. That sounds like a lot, he said, but it might not be enough to meet demand domestically.

"We're dealing with historically high levels, which means that's down to the supply that's in transit or a train," he said. "We always import a few beans, but we might have to import more," he said. "This could be a year when we get into that July-August timeframe just before the new crop beans are available that there might be some people putting trades on to bring in some more beans." That would be more likely on the East Coast, which is far enough away from the Midwest supply to make it easier to bring in beans.

Corn prices, Crop said, should definitely remain strong until the USDA determines how many acres are planted and how the crop develops.

Farmers are expected to plant close to a record number of acres this year. The acreage-planted numbers will be released March 11. Some projections place the acreage at 90 million soybeans and 94 to 95 million corn.

Cropp said soybeans are much lower closer to the 50-50 level due to higher soybean prices.

The end of June USDA survey will give a better picture of how those numbers really are.
Ladies Auxiliary ‘a vital part of our organization’

By DAVE HINTON
dhinton@news-gazette.com

PENFIELD— Behind every successful men’s organization, there’s a strong women’s group. At least that’s the case with the I&I Antique Tractor and Gas Engine Club.

The Auxiliary was formed in 1996 when I&I bought the former Penfield Grade School property. Mary Miller and Jane Berbaum first chaired the women’s group.

In 1995, a ladies group chaired by Mary White and Berbaum set up an antique household display at the Forest Preserve. In 1996, the show was moved to the grounds that the club bought in Penfield, and in 1997, the auxiliary was officially formed. The goal was to help clean up and purchase some of the items needed in the kitchens and elsewhere.

The Auxiliary is in charge of a number of jobs at both I&I shows and other events.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of last year’s Historic Farm Days show and many of the meetings of the men’s and women’s groups. Fortunately, the Half Century show was in its off year. So far, it appears both the July and August shows will go on this year, I&I President Chuck Stelter said.

Food and history are a major focus of the Auxiliary during the I&I-hosted shows.

“We’re support for the club, I would say,” Auxiliary member Jane Piatt of Gifford said.

At the antique tour, which the Auxiliary provided the food for two years, “We don’t do as many fundraisers as we used to,” Piatt said.

Fundraisers over the years have included soup suppers, fish fries, the Pork Palace food sales at the shows, a root beer float stand, snacks and drinks at the Lions Club tractor pulls and the Gifford bank craft sale at Gordyville.

Other events the Auxiliary has organized include a 50/50 raffle, toy tractor raffles and an annual quilt raffle. The club also bought items for the kitchen and bathrooms in both the Penfield school and the club hall.

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The Auxiliary is in charge of many of the history exhibits of what the home used to look like back in the day.

Auxiliary Treasurer Betty Benny said in 1996, when the I&I bought the Penfield school grounds, the Auxiliary claimed two of the rooms in the old grade school for a museum.

“We always try to feature something a little different,” Benny said.

Displays show how women worked in the home and on the grounds. There’s a laundry area with clothes hanging on an outdoor clothesline, an old-fashioned kitchen, wrought-iron bedstead, general merchandise store, one-room school, ice cream parlor, veterans corner and a children’s store.

Most Auxiliary members are married to members of the I&I club, although any woman is welcome to become an Auxiliary member.

During the Historic Farm Days show, the Auxiliary is in charge of many of the history exhibits of what the home used to look like back in the day.

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Please see AUXILIARY, C-12

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The accident happened in May 2019. Four months later, he and his fiancée, Bailey Eden-Goode, were married. At the rehearsal dinner before the wedding, his fiancée was wearing a bulletproof vest from her time as a U.S. Marine. Cody’s doctors, they were able to save his elbow by using a cadaver tendon to replace his lost tendon. Bailey Conrady said. He said he had to be retrained at the scene and spent 45 days in the burn center. His upper body was 100 percent burned. 

“Grounded the spray boom, entered through my left hand and exited out both of my feet,” Conrady said. 

“I had seen the spray boom entering through the roof,” Bailey said. “I was in the attic right above the boom.”

“It entered through my arm, so it took all of the boom,” Bailey said.

The lower leg prosthesis he received has worked better than the artificial arm, which is the first of its kind in the country.

Conrady received his leg 10 days before their wedding.

“My goal was to try to walk down the aisle, but I accomplished,” he said.

At first it wasn’t so easy walking with the prosthesis. After a few days, “it just kind of clicked.”

He likened it to “not riding a bike for years and years, and then all of a sudden, you remember how to ride.”

Recovery involved physical therapy and occupational therapy followed by strengthening the arm.

“His left arm was amputated below the elbow,” Bailey Conrady said.

Conrady liked to run for fitness. He may be able to resume a full range of activities, but with the weight limitation, there are no other restrictions on what he can do on the farm.

Originally from the Lincoln area, he and Bailey met showing cattle at a 4-H county fair. Bailey is assistant manager of the Champaign County Farm Bureau, while Cody Conrady is a family farm in rural Armstrong.

“Prior to the accident, we were limited to being able to do that again,” Bailey said.

“Without the help of that support system, we could not have done what we have,” Bailey Conrady said.

He hopes to continue to work on the farm until he retires.

“Codi wants people to realize the dangers of this profession. “I grounded the spray boom, entered through my left hand and exited out both of my feet,” Conrady said.

The arm is equipped with two batteries, which can be lifted.

“Every night he has to charge the batteries just like one does a phone,” Bailey said.

“Conrady has been able to resume a full range of activities, besides the weight limitation, there are no other restrictions on what he can do on the farm.”

“Cody has been able to resume a full range of activities, besides the weight limitation, there are no other restrictions on what he can do on the farm.”

“Cody Conrady is working with Safe Electric on a safety campaign via social media, he gives safety talks for the Champaign County Farm Bureau, and is scheduled to give talks with Carl’s Center for Rural and Health and Farm Safety but so far has been prevented from doing so due to COVID-19 restrictions. Conrady is working with a Peoria-based company “that is trying to prevent” what happened to him. He said the work is in the developmental stage.

“As far as farm safety, there’s just a lot of things out there” that can go wrong, he said.

“Farming is a pretty dangerous profession.”
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