



The Goodland Star-News Conservation Awards

Friday, February 21, 2003

Fortmeyers win windbreak award

By Sharon Corcoran

The Goodland Star-News

With a one-day planting frenzy in the spring of 1984, Darle and Eileen Fortmeyer began their windbreak, but they say their love of trees began long before.

Being able to see and enjoy their trees is important to the Fortmeyers. From an enclosed back porch/patio, they can enjoy their award-winning windbreak in all seasons as if they were in it but without the discomfort of Kansas' sometimes cold and windy weather.

The Fortmeyers were chosen for the Sherman County Conservation District's windbreak award this year, but for Darle, it's not as much about conservation as wanting to have trees. "I just like trees," he said.

It's nice to be able to look out and see all the trees, Eileen agreed.

And they have more than a few. The Fortmeyers said they bought 75 big trees from a neighbor in 1984 and planted them all with a tree planter in one day. Then they kept adding to them, Darle said, bringing their total today up to around 250.

The windbreak includes Austrian pines, scotch pines, blue spruce and a few white pines, Darle said, and is watered with a drip system. Some of

the trees grow really true to shape without much help, he said, but others don't. The Austrian pines have the best shape to them, he said.

Though the Fortmeyers would have trees just for their beauty, they said they enjoy other benefits from the trees. It helps with the wind, Darle said, and the snow.

"If we ever get any," Eileen added.

But they have needed the trees to block snow in the past, in fact, before they had planted any. The Fortmeyers said when they first moved to their farm in 1982, it was a wheat field. The day after they moved in, Darle said, a blizzard that covered the car and everything. There was no windbreak, he said, just wheat stubble.

Two years later, the Fortmeyers said, they put up a windbreak overnight by planting the 75 big trees. Darle said they have added seedlings to it ever since.

This isn't the first windbreak they have planted. Before moving to their farm, Darle said, they lived about a quarter mile down the road where they had owned Hawkeye Spraying.

"There were no trees to speak of when we moved there," Darle said, "except a few Chinese elms which are

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Darle Fortmeyer checked the condition of the needles on a spruce tree in his windbreak Tuesday. The planting, much of which was planted 18 years ago, won the Sherman County Conservation District's windbreak award.

Photo by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

**59th annual meeting, Monday, Feb. 24
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are always open; looking for new ideas and tools that can make his business a little more efficient; a little more productive. He listens hard when other people talk farming. But mainly, he takes a long look at his own program and decides things for himself.

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Couple combines faith, farming for success

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News

Nestled on the eastern edge of Sherman County is a farm and cattle operation that has combined an unbridled faith in the Lord with good crops to give Allen and Doris Quenzer this year's Conservationists of the Year.

They have been living in the same location for 32 years, and married for 42 years. They were chosen for the award this year by the Sherman County Conservation District.

Allen, the son of Herman and Eunice Quenzer, grew up in Utica. His father died while he was in high school. Allen graduated in 1957, and headed to Fort Hays State to study agriculture.

Doris, whose parents were Troy and Lottie Dillinger, grew up three miles north of where the couple lives today. She graduated from Brewster in 1957, and headed to Fort Hays State to study business education. That's where she met Allen.

They were married in December 1960 in the Pleasant Home Church, a few miles northwest of their home.

After graduation in 1962, the couple moved to Ness County where they farmed until 1969. While in Ness County, the couple won the conservation district's Kansas Bankers Award in 1967. They won the Bankers Award in Sherman County in 1984.

When they moved to Sherman County, they farmed with Doris' father and brother, Edwin, for a year before buying six quarters to start their own operation. Allen said all the land was dryland at that time, and they have always balanced the farming with a background and fattening cattle operation.

"She has been the bookkeeper," Allen said. "It has been the good Lord and my good wife that have made this a success."

He said in the livestock operation, they buy the cattle, mostly heifers, in the fall and winter them until spring, when they take them to a commercial lot for finishing and selling.

"Between the cattle and crops, they have balanced themselves and have complimented each other," he said.

Over the years, Allen and Doris have added both land and children. They now have nine

quarters, and their three children also own land.

The oldest is Jeff, born in 1962. He is now the athletic director at Colby High School, and he and his wife Becky have three children, Jamie, 18, Dusty, 16 and Troy 8.

Next is Todd, born in 1965. Todd farms and with his wife Bronwyn has four children, Brianna, 9, Shaniah, 7, Talen, 5, and Morgan 1.

The youngest is Brenda, whose husband, Steven Nice, is a corporate pilot for Contact Freighters Inc. out of Joplin, Mo. They have a daughter Bridget, 1.

The proud grandfather pulled out a recent issue of the *Colby Free Press* to show a photo of his oldest grandchild, Jamie, a senior at Colby high school.

On the southwest corner of a section of ground to the west of the Quenzer home is a building and a tall tower that house KGCR radio, which the family helped start 15 years ago.

Allen said at the time he started the station, there was little Christian programming, especially after the new owners of KXXX in Colby took the Bible programs off the air.

"I was listening to Christian programs out of Nebraska and other parts of Kansas," Allen said. "It was very important to us, and the farm had blessed us. With the help of another man, we got the license and started the station."

Five years ago, they gave the station to Praise Network, and Allen serves on the board of the network, which has KPRD in Hays and two stations in Nebraska.

"These are all in rural areas," Allen said.

Doris worked for the station for 10 years, and Allen was an announcer in the early days. Even daughter Brenda was an announcer while in high school.

"We held a Share-a-thon every fall, and with the support of our listening audience have kept it going," he said. "We feel we have a good audience within a 75 mile radius."

The station will celebrate 15 years on the air the first of March.

The family belongs to the Pleasant Home Church, and being on the edge of the time zone boundary, they have adapted.

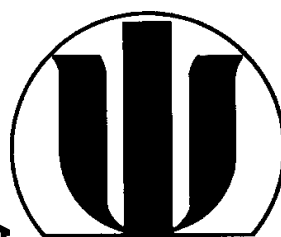
"When we were going to school as kids, the

See QUENZER, Page 5



Doris and Allen Quenzer, Sherman County Conservationists of the year.

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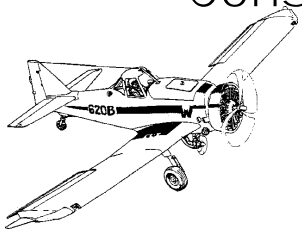
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Fortmeyers grow windbreaks



Darle and Eileen Fortmeyer (above), windbreak award winners, in their home east of Goodland. A row of trees on the east side of the Fortmeyers' house (below) is mostly spruce but includes some white pines. Photos by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News



TREES, from Page 1

no longer there. All the evergreens I planted.”

The Fortmeyers sold the spraying service in 1982, and that’s when they had to move.

“We sold the business,” Eileen said, “and the house went with it.”

Besides spraying, Darle said, he farms, planting mostly corn, wheat and sunflowers, but branching out to other crops from time to time. He said he started no-till farming in 1970, before it was popular, but it always worked for him.

Perhaps that pioneer spirit came from his grandfather, who Darle said came to Sherman County to homestead north of Ruleton in 1886. His father was born in Sherman County and so

was he.

Darle said he left for about 10 years to go to college and spending some time in the military before returning to Sherman County in 1951. He said he went to Iowa State University, and that was where he met Eileen.

“She was my ‘Sioux City Sue,’” he said.

The Fortmeyers said they raised five children, Penny Sheldon of Goodland, Cindy Hutchins of Levant, Sharon Selan of Houston, as well as a son Eric and a daughter Dena who have died.

The Fortmeyers said they appreciate having two daughters so close and their grandson, Andy House, and his two children here as well.

“We’re lucky to have them so close,” Eileen said.



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Couple ‘blessed by the Lord’

QUENZER, from Page 3

Brewster school district was the border for the time zone,” Doris said. “We just keep our clocks on Central Time, but the church is on Mountain Time. So we have ‘Church Time’ and everyone adjusts to that.”

Doris said she taught businesses classes for one semester at Ellis, and has done some substituting at Brewster.

They buy most of their cattle in the area, usually heifers, but this year they have some steers as well.

They began irrigating in 1970 when they put down three wells, and the fourth was on the land when they bought it.

Today they have seven sprinklers covering 840 acres. Allen says they have done some flood irrigation as well, but not much recently.

Usually they have two fields in wheat, one in soybeans and four in corn. They rotate the crops, and he said the corn is mostly for the cattle.

They have grown milo, but it has to get planted early because of the altitude. Allen said there is enough of an altitude difference to make the evenings cooler, and change the growing pattern for crops like milo.

The family got to take a trip to Kansas City in 1985 when they were picked as the American Royal’s Kansas Farm Family by the Farm Management Association.

When they bought the farm ground where they live, there was nothing but a small shed, and Doris said the first thing they did was plant a windbreak. Allen said the windbreaks have been very important with the cattle.

Today there are several large windbreaks around the house and the cattle pens to the east and south.

Allen said that they have terraces on most of their farm ground, and for the last 10 years they have been using more no till practices.

“Leaving the ground untilled keeps the ground cooler, and holds more moisture,” he said. “The Lord has been good to us.”

Looking at the problems of keeping a farm in a family for generations, Allen said, it seems to be that the first generation works to build the farm, the second generation lives off the farm and the third generation loses the farm.

He feels very lucky that he has been able to provide a good home for his family, and he and Doris continue to work the farm along with their son.

“We are our own separate units,” Allen said, “but we do work together and share.”

With all their children grown and out of the house, there was some question about how they would handle the empty nest, he said.

In 1991, they got involved with an exchange student program, and Miguel Reza spent a year living with them and attending school in Brewster. He is from Chihuahua, Mexico.



Allen and Doris Quenzer have a successful background and fattening cattle operation, and believe their windbreaks have been very important in keeping the cattle through the winters. The Quenzer’s are the Sherman County Conservationists of the Year, and their award will be presented at the annual dinner at 6:30 p.m. on Monday at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall.

Photos by Tom Betz / The Goodland Star-news

“He was a very good student, and a big help around the farm,” both Doris and Allen said. “We enjoyed having him live with us, and we have been down to his home three times.”

They have not been involved in the student

exchange program since, but in 1998 Miguel’s brother Francisco “Toto” Reza called to ask if he could live with them for a year to learn English and attend school. Then a cousin, Eduardo Varela, came to live with them in 2001.

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NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PERSONNEL

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Soil expert is Educator of the Year

By Sharon Corcoran

The Goodland Star-News

What is a pedologist?

That's someone who does scientific studies of soils, and a Hays pedologist has been chosen as the Educator of the Year by the Sherman County Conservation District.

Jim McDowell of the Natural Resources Conservation Service area office in Hays said he tries to teach youngsters that soil is more complicated and has more uses than most people think.

Kids usually know soil is used to grow crops, McDowell said, but don't think about it being a home for animals, such as prairie dogs and gophers, or something to build on or to filter water.

"I try to expand their horizons," he said.

They find out soil has more uses than they thought, McDowell said.

McDowell said he has expanded students' knowledge of soil at conservation days in area counties and the last four years at the Jump Start Your Mind fair in Goodland. One demonstration McDowell said he has done is using sand to build a dam and clay to build another dam to show the kids which one holds water.

McDowell said he talks to students about parent materials, the types of rocks, wind-



Jim McDowell, Sherman County Educator of the Year.

blown matter and particles from water erosion that soil comes from.

Soil texture, the percentage of sand, silt and clay in soil, determines what the soil is suitable for, he said.

McDowell said part of his job is to do soil investigations to see if, for instance, soil is suitable for an ag waste pit without the waste seeping into the ground water or if a liner is needed to prevent seepage.

McDowell said he also serves as a guest instructor for Fort Hays State University, Kansas State University and the University of Kansas and helps graduate students at the universities with research.

McDowell said graduate students have come to him because the projects they were working on for their thesis dealt with soil.

Among the projects McDowell said he has helped with are one dealing with kit foxes' den sites in northwest Kansas and the effects of long-term irrigation on the soil in Thomas County.

The results of the study on irrigation will be interesting, he said, really good information. When the study is complete and published, McDowell said he will get the information out to the counties in this area.

McDowell said he started at the old Soil Conservation Service in Liberal in 1988 and worked in Hutchinson and northern Minnesota before going to the Hays office in 1994.

The soil in Minnesota is a lot different from that in Kansas, he said, since glaciers left a lot of rocks and rubble there. The soil in northwest Kansas is perfect for growing crops, he said.

"You have great soils to farm out there," McDowell said. "Your problem is needing rain. It works pretty well if it rains."

There's a big difference between the eastern and western parts of Kansas, McDowell said, since the eastern part of the state gets enough moisture to grow most crops.

It's heart-breaking sometimes to work with farmers in northwest Kansas, he said. Irrigation is a great practice if you get help from the rain. But this year, especially, he said, the drought has shown that irrigation alone isn't enough.

McDowell said the Hays office serves 18 counties: Sherman, Cheyenne, Wallace, Thomas, Rawlins, Logan, Trego, Gove, Sheridan, Decatur, Norton, Graham, Ellis, Rooks, Russell, Osborne, Smith and Phillips.



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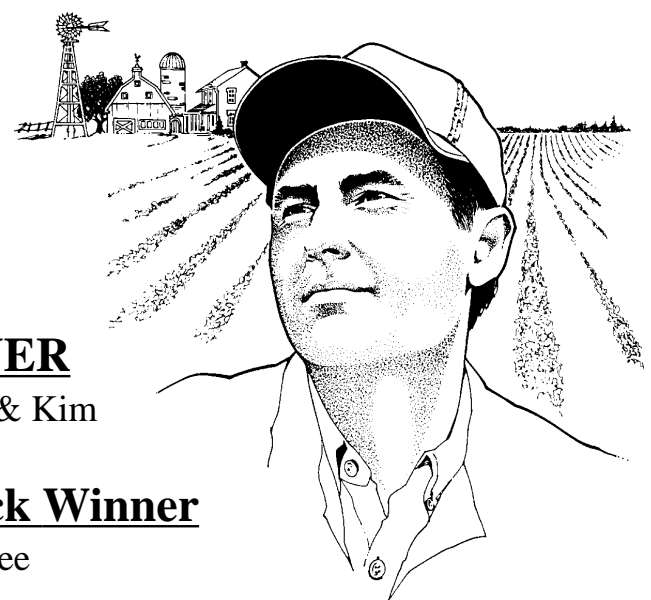
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Sieck family honored for conservation effort

By Michelle L. Hawkins

The Goodland Star-News

The Sieck family has gone above and beyond the call when it comes to conservation practices, and that's one reason they've been named the 2002 Sherman County Conservation District Bankers Award winners.

Melvin Sieck and his sons, Mike and Mark, farm in eastern Sherman County north of Edson. Their family will be recognized during the annual awards banquet and meeting Monday night.

For years, the Siecks have practiced no-till operation and crop rotation. Since they don't disk their fields after harvesting a crop, the stubble remains and protects the land from wind and water erosion.

The stubble also provides a safe environment for wildlife to breed and live during the fall and winter months. Because of the ground cover, wind speed over the land is reduced and moisture is preserved.

Often the family rotates from wheat to corn without tilling the ground or using minimal tillage combined with herbicides.

On other fields, the Siecks say they rotate between wheat, corn, sorghum and summer fall-

low to keep the ground from being depleted of nutrients. They have practiced crop rotation since 1995.

The family has both dryland and irrigated crops as well as cattle. On their irrigated land, the family uses a center pivot system to reduce the amount of water used.

Fred Wedel of the Sherman County Conservation District said the Siecks work hard to conserve water by using the no-till practices and pivot irrigation.

"They do a good job of irrigation water management and managing their moisture," he said.

As well, Wedel said the family works hard at planning and managing their finances.

"Mike studies his operation and is a good manager," Wedel said. "He is one of the only farmers that I know of in the area who downloaded the entire farm bill off of the Internet."

The family has been farming north of Edson since the 1920s when Melvin's dad, William Sieck, moved to Sherman County from Greenville, Ill. After coming through the area on a custom harvesting crew, William decided

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Mark (left) and Mike (right) Sieck kneeled in one of their fields where no-till practices are being used. Leaving the stubble in the field preserves moisture and reduces erosion.

Photo by Michelle L. Hawkins/The Goodland Star-News

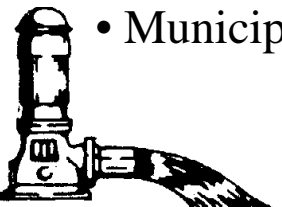
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The Sieck farm, run by Melvin Sieck and his sons Mike and Mark, is north of Edson in eastern Sherman County.

Sieck family honored

SIECK, from Page 7

he liked the area and moved.

Along with the farming, William also operated a dairy farm on the land which lasted until the 1970s. Mike said a regional distributor would come by twice a week to pick up the milk for a farm cooperative. The family also kept pigs, sheep and chickens on the farm at that time.

Now the focus is more on cereal


crops, but the Siecks proudly maintain a family operation and use very little outside labor.

"When you do it yourself, you can be self-sufficient," Mike Sieck said. "We don't have to be concerned like some farmers about lay-offs."

Although he said the yields were down last year due to the drought, he said they feel fortunate their area of the county received more moisture than others.




The Sieck family were this year's winners of the Bankers Award given by the Sherman County Conservation District, (from left) Mike and daughter Peri, his wife Teresa, his brother Mark holding Mike's son Powell, their mother Marsha, Mike's son Parker and his dad Melvin, holding Mike's son Payton.



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