

# Tank to Tank

Energize the enthusiasm within ... 2

Understanding new Wellness traits ... 4

New in synchronization ... 5



## Blazing the AGvocating trail

By Dori Lichty, Communications Specialist

She is one of the first of her kind ... an e-AGvocate -- a dairy farmer using social media to portray respectful and meaningful activity on his or her dairy farm.

About 10,000 people watch for her bull- and heifer-calf announcements through Twitter. Almost 33,000 followers tuned in on Facebook as the family endured difficult times last summer when her mother in law crushed her leg in a farm accident. An impressive 3.2 million more have read her blog posts detailing various animal-husbandry practices with titles like "Sometimes we are mean to our cows." And, if that's not enough, she travels around the country educating others about production agriculture and using social media to tell agriculture's story.

Carrie Mess, known to many as Dairy Carrie, has been a true trail blazer for agriculture education via the use of social media. However, when she's not posting, sharing, tweeting, blogging, or speaking, she's working with her husband and his parents to make their dairy farm in Watertown, Wis., as humane and productive as possible.

*Left to right: Dale Griebenow, East Central/Select Sires A.I. technician; Clem and Cathy Mess; and Patrick, Carrie (Dairy Carrie), and Silas Mess.*



# Energize the enthusiasm that exists within

By John Gerbitz, Products and Training Manager

I need to begin with a little background for this article. My intention was to share industry information I learned at the Dairy Calf and Heifer Association (DCHA) conference. If you haven't attended this meeting, I recommend it. It's held in Madison every year, and the organization does an excellent job choosing timely and relevant presentations. There were classes on accelerated growth programs for calves, measuring reproductive performance in heifers, long-range consequences of scours and pneumonia, and setup and operation of TMR mixers. Those are the things I planned to cover in this article, but then I saw the presentation by the keynote motivational speaker, Paul Vitale, titled, "Energizing the enthusiasm ... that exists within." As I listened to his message and thought about the 2016 dairy situation and outlook, I knew this was what I needed to share.

Paul Vitale encouraged us to "Choose the wow over the towel." "Energizing the enthusiasm that exists within begins with making a conscious choice: recognizing the wow of your own unique life or wanting to simply throw in the towel. Enthusiasm coupled with the right mental attitude sets the tone for excellent-quality outcomes, one individual at a time!"

This took me back to an afternoon in the summer of 1993. I don't remember the exact date and I don't remember specifically what

caused me to confront reality. I do remember exactly what I was doing, and I do remember it as the day I realized: If I would be farming in 1994, I would be doing things much differently than I was doing them in 1993. I was ready to throw in the towel. And so, I went out to rake hay, and as I watched the windrows roll off the rake, I weighed the options. By the time I headed home from the field, I had a plan. There were a lot of details left to fill in, and more than a few adjustments to be made, but God had given me a new start and new enthusiasm. That new enthusiasm was the beginning of several successful years of farming and other opportunities after that.

Paul Vitale's second point was to "Examine confidence from within." "Our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, but we are responsible for who we become. Having self confidence is not about being arrogant, but possessing a belief in the ability to succeed. Passion, resilience, and the willingness to learn are common denominators that equal accomplishment."

My brother, Andrew, was born with Down Syndrome. His circumstances set him up with challenges that you and I cannot imagine. Andrew's attitude, along with support from family and friends, put him in a position to be an inspiration to everyone he meets. Andrew lives on his own. He has served on various boards

which advocate for people with disabilities, including a governor's task force. He has a job as a day-care provider and has started his own professional speaking business. He has thrown out a first pitch at a Brewers game and sung the national anthem at a Bucks game. Andrew is a great example of what can be accomplished with passion, resilience, willingness to learn, and confidence -- in spite of your background and circumstances.

The next point Paul Vitale made was "React steadily and remain composed. Circumstances will continuously occur and

individuals will always act and react in various ways. You might not be able to control how others react, but you sure can control how you react."

I heard this from my father-in-law long before I heard it from Paul Vitale. I remember my father-in-law's reactions were always controlled. With all my leadership training, I have never found a better example of leadership than my father-in-law, who controlled every situation by controlling his reaction.

Paul Vitale concluded by commenting on the value of selflessness. "There will always be those who take a little more than they give. When this occurs, we have the opportunity to convey through our example; everyone dies, but not everyone lives ... that's the value of selflessness ... utilizing our talents and resources wisely to help with the needs of others, for the greater good of all."

I remember a winter late in the 1980s when an early snow prevented a lot of farmers from harvesting corn. Church groups and community organizations went out to pitch in by hand picking corn. I heard a story of a farmer who lent cob corn to a neighbor until the neighbor's corn could be harvested in spring to replace what had been borrowed -- a selfless, neighborly act that got a beginning farmer through a tough winter. There are many more stories of neighbors who helped in time of injury or other disaster. Most farmers have a story of someone who made a difference at a critical time and how they "wouldn't be farming if it weren't for their help." Farming communities know the value of selflessness.

Hopefully I have shared Paul Vitale's ideas in a way that helps you to "energize the enthusiasm that exists within." With the dairy industry in financial and emotional turmoil, it's important for us all to remember Paul Vitale's suggestions: "Choose the wow over the towel ... Examine confidence from within ... React steadily and remain composed ... and utilizing our talents and resources wisely to help with the needs of others, for the greater good of all."

I will close with his thoughts on optimism. "There will always be those who choose to look at the negative versus the positive. When this occurs, we must remember: It takes no more time to see the good side of life than it takes to see the bad ... that's the value of optimism." ♦

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