

Hay, hay, hay: This school principal turns to farming

Story: JUDITH BERNE
Photo: JOHN STANO

Bob Riggs has little trouble making the transition from school principal to farmer.

The drive from his office in West Bloomfield's Orchard Lake Middle School to his 10-acre farm in Milford bordering the Proud Lake Recreation Area takes just 15 minutes.

Once there, Riggs leans on the fence and talks about farming as easily as he discusses curriculum development or middle school philosophy from behind a desk.

Riggs and his wife Jean opted for a farm four years ago. That's when they ran out of space for herb gardens at their former Farmington home.

"It's a hobby gone awry," Mrs. Riggs laughs. "I've been doing herbs for a very long time. He promised me a horse someday. We've overdone that

too." The Riggs have eight horses and board five others.

"I'm a sod remover," Riggs says. "When I don't have sod to dig up I get frustrated."

"Other people have psychiatrists. He has his dirt," she laughs.

AN 80-YEAR-OLD farmhouse and barn with hand-hewn beams now is both home and an auxiliary occupation for the Riggs.

Sunshine Farm & Garden is open four days a week in spring and summer, sporting 120 different kinds of herbs. The farm was named for Mrs. Riggs who was nicknamed "Sunshine" as a child.

"Herbs are fun. They actually do something. They taste. They feel," Riggs says. Their gardens are divided by specialty: kitchen, medicinal, fragrant and dyes. There is also a plot featuring plants of the Bible and an artemesia garden.

The gardens are a tour spot for garden clubs and parks and recreation excursions. The Riggs recently combined to teach a gardening class for West Bloomfield Community Education which climaxed in a visit to their farm.

Riggs says every acre is used at Sunshine Farm. "We keep it fairly simple — mowing and weeding," he says, noting that he sometimes gets tied up for a week at a time at his job or when it rains.

Although Mrs. Riggs has been into herbs for sometime, "We really didn't know a lot about farming," Riggs reports.

Now he cleans the barn, handles the horses and plants and harvests 1,000 bales of hay in addition to the gardening.

Earlier this spring, he set out after some boys who had been motorbiking over his land. "I heard them say 'here comes the farmer,'" Riggs relates. "I thought to myself I think I've made it."

AN ADDED BONUS for Riggs is the people he's met through farming.

"We have more friends here that I can count on in a pinch than in all the subdivisions I've lived in," he says.

Trading and borrowing goods and labor hangs on from earlier days. A neighbor helped Riggs build a lean-to. Riggs helped him fence. Another who works as a mechanic fixes Riggs' cars. "I did his rock garden."

"There's a necessity out here," Riggs says. At the same time, inflation has dictated there are no small projects. "I know 10 people I can call on," he adds.

Although the work is hard, Riggs calls it "creative."

"I've been to a lot of stress workshops," he reports. "You're supposed to have an alternative to your job."

"It's a chance to be outside, to see people. I can walk 10 minutes and lose myself. I like it."



Bob Riggs, down on the farm.

Fast food manager encourages teens

By MARY LOU CALLAWAY

Nobody badmouths teenagers around West Bloomfield's Big Boy restaurant manager.

"Teenagers are interesting, not sullied. They're enthusiastic. The problem often is people don't listen to teenagers so they get discouraged," says Maggie Weston.

Ms. Weston lives in Farmington Hills and puts in 65-70 hours a week as manager of the Elias Brothers Big Boy on Orchard Lake Road at Maple, a job she took less than a year ago. The store has a number of teenage employees and diners.

Met Pearl, a township resident and working owner, says, "I was extremely fortunate to find this lady."

Neither will take a lunch break until after the noon hour rush. Even then, during an interview, they keep watch to make sure the customers are well served.

She calls herself "the battleaxe" but that's hard to believe when she thanks an employee for even the smallest service.

"I don't feel I have the right to ask

employees to do a job I can't or don't want to do," she explains.

AND MS. WESTON has done it all. From a part-time waitress job after her divorce, she moved from cashing, cashiering and cooking to becoming assistant manager and then manager.

"When I train the employees, I tell them I'm demanding, unreasonable and unfair. If I get angry, though, it's at the situation, never the person," she says.

While still in high school, Ms. Weston considered becoming a nun so she could work with kids. "But I knew the convent couldn't handle me. I smoke too much," she laughs.

"This job is a vehicle to be with youngsters. I'm young enough so they don't see me as a parent but old enough so they figure I've got it all a little bit together."

Help is easier to get these days because of the economy, she says. "There's less turnover now," interjects Pearl.

"He's one of the reasons this is a nice place to work," says the manager after Pearl jumps up to fill someone's coffee cup.



MAGGIE WESTON

She approaches an older couple to see if they know about Big Boy's senior citizen discount program. Pearl is proud his restaurant was one of the first five Big Boys to offer the program.

Ms. Weston recalls no problem with sex discrimination on her way to becoming a manager. "A lot of women invite it, but people sense I can't be pushed around."

ASKED WHAT she does on her time off, she takes a few minutes to think of an answer. Because of her hours she says, "I can't plan anything. I catch a lot of TV. I'm sort of semi-engaged to a Canadian, so I skip up there," she adds.

Her 8- and 9-year-old sons are now living with their father in California.

"When it came up about the time I started here, it was a chance for a better life for them," she says. Admitting the cost of the boys flying back and forth is high, she's looking forward to their next visit.

"They think I own all the Big Boys," Ms. Weston grins.

INSIDE ANGLES

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

IA BEGINS on a tearful note today with some sad news from the Farmington branch library on Liberty. Denise Albrecht, children's librarian, regrettably passed away. The beloved, adorable, well-voiced Rosie, the library's resident guinea pig, died last weekend. She was a favorite with young library patrons who visited her, brought her neat stuff to eat and talked to her. Rosie reportedly talked back. "We'll all miss her squeaks, funny eating habits, chirping, purring and waddling around the library," Ms. Albrecht said. Rosie, 6, is survived by other library residents: hamster Taffy and gerbils Fuzzy, Wuzzy and Squeaky. When it came to holding the attention of the young patrons of the children's library, Rosie was truly a ringer. IA sends Rosie off with a salute of hamster tracks:

IT WAS OH SO veddy, veddy formal on the lawns of the Farmington Community Center the other day, my dear. A select dozen friends were invited by Southfield resident Beverly Bloom to take part in a formal picnic. No, that doesn't mean wearing your basic black peddle pushers. The party-goers were expected to don formal attire to the gourmet picnic. Invitations read, "black tie only please." Guest obliged, much to the surprise of bridge players who gathered at the center for some veddy, veddy serious tournament work. Sigh. All IA has to look forward to is the annual Geometric Figures Ball. And there such a group of squares.

SLOWLY AND UNSURELY Farmington Founders Festival continues to trickie its way toward IA. Here's the latest in the late, late breaking festival:

- The Farmington YMCA sponsors the annual Founders Day Festival Foot Race from 9 a.m. July 28 at the new Y, 28100 Farmington Road. The distances this year are 2.5 miles and five miles. Race times for the 2.5-mile are at 9 a.m. and the five-mile at 9:45 a.m. Check-in time is 30 minutes before the start. Registration fee before July 20 is \$3.50; after, \$5. The race will be divided into the following age divisions: 13 and under; 14-18; 19-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50 and over. Awards and T-shirts will go to the first 200 registered runners. First-place plaques will be given for each division. All of the runners will receive a commemorative patch. To register, just run over to the Y for an entry form or call 553-4020.

- The Shriners will be back again in the Farmington Founders Festival parade, July 26.

- The Our Lady of Sorrows Ice Cream Social has been dropped.

- The League of Women Voters and the Farmington Hills Fire Department will sponsor

CPR training sessions July 24-26 in the Kendallwood Center, 12 Mile and Farmington roads.

- Another perennial, the Pet Show, will be sponsored again by Dr. John Richardson, DVM. The Doc, the pets and the kids will get together July 25 in front of the Plaza Veterinary Clinic on Money near Grand River. That's the place to go for your registration forms, too.

- The showmobile will feature the Clarenceville Players, the West Bloomfield Family Players, the Franklin Village Band, the Clark Family Players, the Farmington Community Band and the police auction.

- Booths, it's rumored, will hawk such edibles as crepes and Pennsylvania Dutch cakes, such inedibles as Chinese yoyos, novelty items and one of those test-your-strength contests involving the hammer and the weight that propels its way to the top to ring a bell.

- The National Baton Twirling Association will conduct an open competition at 9:30 a.m. July 25 for individual twirlers and groups. The Baton and Drum Corps competition will begin after the parade awards on July 26.

"THE SHROUD: Fact or Fiction?" is the title of a special summer seminar offered at the Detroit Bible College. It will attempt to uncover some answers about the cloth and its image, which are shrouded in mystery. The Shroud of Turin will be discussed from 7-9 p.m. July 14, 21, 28 and Aug. 4 at the college, 35700 W. 12 Mile, Farmington Hills. Fee is \$12. No college credit will be given for this course. Registration is at 9:30 p.m. July 14. For further information, call the college at 553-7200. Dr. Gary Habermas, chairman of the department of philosophy, will conduct the seminar dealing with what some believe to be the burial garment of Christ.

CHILDREN AND ADULTS are offered classes at the Farmington Y this summer. Volleyball, tennis and gymnastics lessons will be offered. Call 553-4040 for information. Tennis lessons will be offered for children and adults at Harrison and North Farmington high schools. The Y is starting a gymnastics team. Try-outs are scheduled for 9 a.m. June 21. A women's volleyball clinic, led by Renie Nickerson, will begin during the week of June 23.

Gems of the night: emerald-toned knit sleepfashions from Gilligan & O'Malley

Invest in nightfashions you'll treasure for their rich tones, their ultra-soft fabrications. Gilligan & O'Malley has created them of polyester that has the look of cotton knit, in deep emerald accented with vibrant persimmon. Shown right: Deeply V-necked nightgown, softly touched with ruffles, \$23. Left: Foulard print skinny-strapped gown, \$26. Under wrap robe in same print, \$39. Misses' sizes P-S-M-L. Start your jewel collection in New Reflections Intimate Apparel, all Hudson's stores.

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