



PHARMACY STUDENTS visited with Kurt Vollertsen (right), the owner of Ward Drug Store in downtown Oberlin, on Thursday during a tour of independent pharmacies in central and western Kansas. — Herald staff photo by Carolyn Kelley-Plotts

Pharmacy students visit Ward Drug

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What's it like to own and operate a pharmacy in a small to mid-size Kansas town?

Nine fourth- and fifth-year pharmacy students found out last week when they visited independent drug stores from Manhattan to Oberlin and Colby.

They were shepherded by Gene Hotchkiss, associate dean for the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy.

In Oberlin, the students spoke with Kurt Vollertsen, a pharmacist and owner of Ward Drug Store, about the advantages, obstacles and roadblocks to owning and operating a pharmacy in a small town.

Mr. Vollertsen told the students that he graduated from KU in 1980 and took over management of Ward Drug from his father. In 1990, he said, he purchased the store when his father retired.

He told the students that a successful business is the result of hiring competent, ambitious and courteous employees and giving them a feeling of ownership in the business.

Part of the advantage of a small-town pharmacy practice, he said, is the opportunity to work closely with doctors, nurses, and mid-level providers at the hospital and nursing homes.

Mr. Vollertsen said he serves as pharmacist for the Decatur County

Hospital and as a consultant for both the Good Samaritan Center and Cedar Living Center, the town's two nursing homes.

In a small town, he noted, it is possible to be active in community service groups, including clubs like Rotary, and to serve on the school board and city council, and the Chamber of Commerce and economic development boards. He said he's done all those.

One of the most demanding aspects of pharmacy ownership, he said, is the time involved, especially with Medicare Part D.

However, the rewards are endless, he said. And one thing you have to remember is that you will see your patients everywhere — in

church, at the grocery store, in the hospital, at community gatherings and at school events.

The students looked over the store for about 45 or 50 minutes, admiring the variety of merchandise and asking questions and visiting with employees. Then they were off to visit Palace Drug in Colby.

The students started out in Lawrence on Wednesday and visited pharmacists in Manhattan, Abilene, Ellsworth, Hoisington, LaCrosse and Hays that day. Then on Thursday, they visited drug stores in Plainville, Stockton, Phillipsburg, Norton, Oberlin and Colby. On Friday, they went on to Oakley, Scott City, Quinter and Salina before heading home.

Dairy teams up with Dannon Yogurt

By VERASLOAN
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While most of the country is fighting to stay alive in a recession that has gripped the country for more than three years, the McCarty Dairy in Thomas County is nearly done with a multi-million-dollar expansion which will make it a supplier of one of the nation's largest producers of yogurt and dairy drinks.

The dairy, southwest of Rexford, is building a plant to supply condensed milk to the Dannon Yogurt plant in Fort Worth beginning April 1.

"Never in our wildest dreams did we ever imagine anything like this would happen," said Judy McCarty, who owns the expanding dairy operation together with her husband Tom and four sons, David, Mike, Clay and Ken.

It was the wide-open plains of Thomas County that lured the family from a land-locked area in Pennsylvania. The family has been happy here, and after nearly 12 years, is still expanding.

From the McCarty's beginnings in Kansas, the original herd of 750 cows near Rexford was soon expanded to include a facility near Bird City in Cheyenne County that houses an additional 2,200 head. This past summer, the family leased a dairy north of Scott City. They began operations there with 500 head during the fourth week of November. And now there's more.

"It just sort of happened," said Judy, "The boys were talking to a consultant who works for Cargill. Cargill has a dairy division, and it was the consultant's dream to put

something like this together because it had never been done before, and that's how it all started.

"Dannon is a huge corporation which produces yogurt and dairy drinks for shipment from three plants scattered across the country ... in Fort Worth, Jordan, Utah, and Minster, Ohio. The Ohio location is the largest, producing 230,000 cups of yogurt hourly."

Dairying is more than just milking cows. There're newborn calves to tend to, heifers to be fed and prepared for breeding, manure to haul, feeding various rations to the various ages of animals, machinery and equipment to keep in working order, plus making sure it's all done by the clock. And there's never a day off when there are cows to be milked.

Mrs. McCarty said many area businesses and agencies, including Midwest Energy, Jim's Electric, the Thomas County commissioners, Foley Equipment, Colby Implement, Colby Canvas and the Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission, to name a few, have been good to work with. She said the workers on the project have given a boost to the area's economy with added business for restaurants and service stations and renting 80 to 90 motel rooms.

The Rexford dairy, she said, will add from 13 to 17 jobs for the new project, with the first product to be approved to go out April 1.

To fulfill the dairy's commitment to the Fort Worth plant, she said, the family needs to be milking 7,500 cows, so each dairy will have around 2,500.

The Bird City dairy completed a new free-stall barn this year. Crews now are enlarging the milking parlor and maternity area at the Rexford dairy.

Milk from Scott City and Bird City will be hauled to the condensing plant near Rexford, Mrs. McCarty said. They expect to ship out 3 1/2 loads of condensed product daily. And since milk is 87 percent water, the dairy will be able to reuse the water that comes off the condensing process, enabling it to use even less groundwater than before.

"Dannon expects everything to be immaculate," Mrs. McCarty said. "They are dedicated to meeting or exceeding all state and federal regulatory standards.... It's all about what's good for the environment, the employees and what's good for the business."

"The Dannon Company is very concerned about communities. They're especially concerned about their carbon footprint and about keeping the environment safe, and although they're really big, they are people just like us."

"The first time we all met, there was an instant connection, and we're really comfortable with it all. In fact, with no conference room here at the dairy, everyone, including the environmental people overseeing that end of the project, ended up using my kitchen for meetings."

"This," she said, making a sweep with her arm indicating the temporary modular buildings set up to house offices, project manager and environmentalists, "will all be gone and we'll actually have a real

office."

Mrs. McCarty said since they are a family dairy, the project manager encouraged them to incorporate a family theme into their office decor. They will be using some of the rock from a quarry at the old Pennsylvania dairy and wood in parts of the new office area.

The lab and processing area will be headed up by Dr. Joe Gillispie of McCook, Neb. He will be responsible for all lab work, which will be under sterile conditions to comply with regulations. Ashley Sherman, a Colby native, will stay on to handle tracking operations. Bill Adams, an accountant from Colby, will be in charge of the day-to-day finance.

"We owe many people a lot of gratitude for stepping up to the plate," Mrs. McCarty said, "and for that we are so very appreciative."

She said the family plans an open house sometime after everything is ready.

Chamber sells \$20,000 in scrip

Almost \$20,000 in Santa Bucks are circulating around town this year, members of the Oberlin Business Alliance learned at their January meeting last Wednesday.

The scrip money can only be spent at member businesses of the Oberlin Business Alliance and the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce.

At the meeting last week, Carolyn Hackney, chamber manager, said she sold \$19,000 in Santa Bucks by the end of 2011. Shoppers have until the end of March to spend the scrip.

People should know that money can only be spent at Chamber and alliance businesses, said Connie Grafel, marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp.

The alliance members talked about starting to distribute the Santa Bucks through a bank instead of the chamber office since the scrip money is like cash. They decided to ask The Bank to handle the Santa Bucks this year.

According to the member list the group has three new members, including 5K Angus, Lund Law Firm and APX Roofing.

Any business or individual can still join the group. Members first have to join the Chamber for \$125 for a business or \$50 for an individual. The alliance costs \$75 for a business and \$25 for an individual.

The members talked about

the Christmas shopping season and the Christmas opener after Thanksgiving.

The Parade of Lights, said Kurt Vollertsen, owner of Ward Drug Store, went well.

It sure brings people to town, said Ms. Grafel.

Thanks to Gary Walter, Judy Scott, Sid Metcalf and Ms. Hackney for their work on the parade, said Mr. Vollertsen, adding that he should also thank all those who had parade entries.

"How was the shopping after the parade?" asked Laurie Wasson, owner of Prairie Petals.

"We were swamped," said Joe Stanley, owner of Stanley Hardware.

The promotional giveaway using the turkeys and trees was a great idea, Mr. Vollertsen said.

Ms. Hackney said the alliance gave away \$575 on three nights, including the opening night and the Ladies and Men's Shopping Nights.

There were some comments on the shopping nights being late, said Mrs. Wasson.

Kimberly Davis, assistant publisher of The Oberlin Herald, said she had several people who asked why the shopping started so late. The businesses were open from 9 to 11 p.m.

The group talked about moving the nights up an hour, from 8 to 10 p.m.

Business group to offer 'spaghetti western' film

The Oberlin Business Alliance plans to host a fund-raising spaghetti dinner and western movie night at Sunflower Cinema on Wednesday, Feb. 1.

Spaghetti will be served in the bowling alley, next door, prior to the Clint Eastwood "spaghetti western" (so called because they were filmed

in Italy).

Connie Grafel, an alliance member and marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., said tickets will be on sale soon. Attire for the evening will be blue jeans and western wear.



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Ernest Clark, his daughter-in-law Michelle and his granddaughter Shelby

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