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**Professional Dairy Producers<sup>®</sup>**  
Dairy's Professional Development Organization<sup>®</sup>

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**“To share ideas, solutions, resources, and experiences that help dairy producers succeed.”**

**PDPW Mission**

*Dedicated to the PDPW leaders, founders and board members whose selfless acts and servant leadership built PDPW into the grassroots organization it is today. Thank you for giving each dairy farmer a voice — and the opportunity for a brighter future.*

*As we remember PDPW’s past and document its humble beginnings, it is our hope that PDPW will always remain mission driven.*

## Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin: *The first 25 years of history, influence and legacy*

As the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin (PDPW) celebrates 25 years as an organization, we are faced with the challenges of accurately and adequately documenting and presenting that history.

We can attempt to engrave the names of people and important dates and events on paper or digital “headstones,” but with each step we are reminded again and again that PDPW is a living, breathing thing.

So, while we may collect remnants of PDPW’s first quarter-century from minutes of meetings, newspapers, notes on the backs of envelopes, photographs, videos and sometimes-frail memories, we come to the realization that the interpretation, influence and legacy of the organization’s history is more profoundly written and stored in the hearts and minds of the people who have and continue to live it.

For that reason, this story is less about PDPW’s chronology – although there is some of that – and more about the visionary actions, shared through words from the people who created the organization and direct it into a second quarter century and beyond.

*“In the early 1990s, members of the next generation were starting to hear about how many farms we’d lost, that there wasn’t opportunity in dairying, and that they had to find something else to do with their lives. And yet there were those people out there who were still positive, still saw a bright future, and really believed in the young people and the opportunities available to them.”*

*Ben Brancel, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection*



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

## *In the Beginning...*

By definition, a 25-year time period has a specific beginning and an end. But while we can assign a “birth” year for PDPW and trace its formative years, we also know its genealogy is embedded in the agricultural and cultural history of Wisconsin.

During the 20th century, Wisconsin had made the transition from being “America’s Breadbasket,” harvesting 1 of every 6 bushels of wheat in the U.S. in the 1840s to 1880s, to “America’s Dairyland,” producing 1 of every 6 pounds of milk collected in the U.S. by 1980.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wisconsin remained atop the U.S. list of leading milk-producing states. However, under that “#1 Dairy State” banner were dark undertones. Milk per cow had slipped to middle of the pack and cow numbers were dropping.

There were other ominous signs. While Wisconsin dairy farm numbers had seen attrition no matter what the economic conditions, fewer young people were stepping up as the next generation of dairy producers and leaders. Facilities and feeding systems built in the traditions of the 1950s and 1960s were outdated and crumbling.

There was a parallel situation in the state’s dairy processing

sector. Outdated plants needed modernization and recapitalization. To do that, processors required assurances there would be adequate supplies of milk to fill the tanker trucks, butter churns and cheese vats of those investments. Wisconsin’s dairy farms didn’t seem up to that promise, so processors began to look elsewhere.

The torch was passing to California as the leading milk-producing state. That transition was measured not only in dairy cows and pounds of milk, but also in the psyche of Wisconsin producers.

Following long-held traditions, the Wisconsin dairy farm business relied primarily on family labor. The time and burden of everyday work not only limited management development, but also restricted participation in off-farm educational opportunities. Middle-aged and older producers were leaving because they were tired. Young people saw no reason to lock themselves into what appeared to be an unfulfilling financial and personal career.

It was under those clouds that small groups of dairy farmers and others began to gather around kitchen tables and in farm meetings to discuss Wisconsin’s dairy future, both collectively and for their own individual livelihoods.

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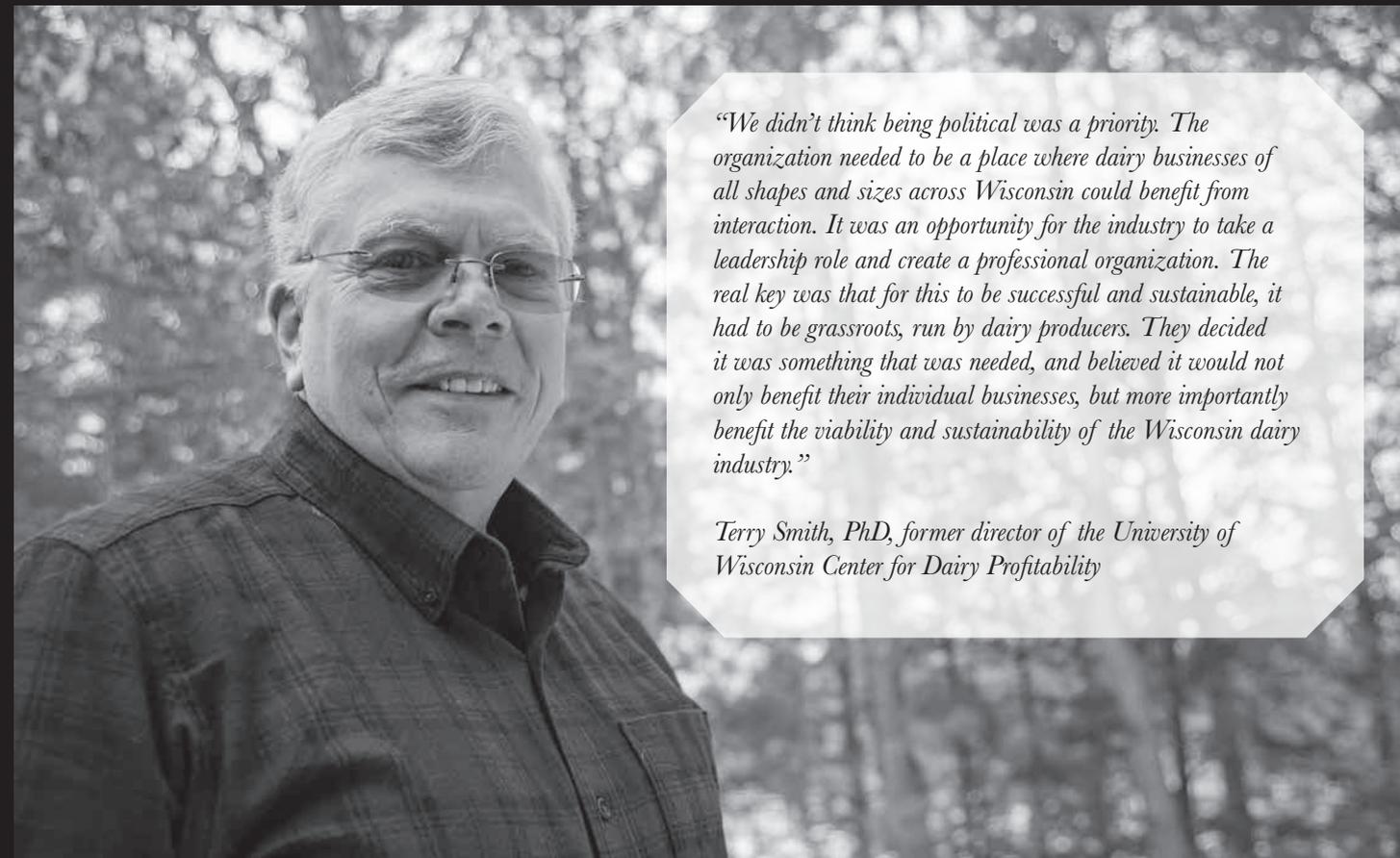
*“We decided to never be a lobbyist organization. We would work with those organizations. We wanted to educate on how to dairy better.*

*Today, seeing where PDPW is brings tears to my eyes. PDPW is one of the most important things I have done in my career in the dairy industry. It’s not about a bunch of old people looking for seed corn hats. It’s young people coming to make their business better.”*

*Al Koepke, PDPW Founding Member, PDPW Board Member 1992-1997*

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*“We didn’t think being political was a priority. The organization needed to be a place where dairy businesses of all shapes and sizes across Wisconsin could benefit from interaction. It was an opportunity for the industry to take a leadership role and create a professional organization. The real key was that for this to be successful and sustainable, it had to be grassroots, run by dairy producers. They decided it was something that was needed, and believed it would not only benefit their individual businesses, but more importantly benefit the viability and sustainability of the Wisconsin dairy industry.”*

*Terry Smith, PhD, former director of the University of Wisconsin Center for Dairy Profitability*

## *A Vision Takes Shape*

Based on recommendations contained in a report from the Wisconsin Dairy Industry Task Force in the late 1980s, the farmer and industry advisory board of the newly created University of Wisconsin-Extension Center for Dairy Profitability (CDP) began to explore the state’s dairy future.

In 1991, CDP’s first director, Terry Smith, established a six-member subcommittee to explore the need and potential for a dairy producer-led organization to address the professional development of the next generation of dairy producers and industry representatives. The conclusion: the idea was worth pursuing, based on the belief dairy farmers could best address their challenges by working together.

The subcommittee evaluated organizations in Virginia, Texas and Idaho. An early concept was to create county-based dairy farm groups, using localized resources to help address farm profitability. That geographical, piecemeal approach didn’t seem to fit a dairy industry becoming regional and national in scope.

There was also the fear of organization fatigue: Why do we need yet another dairy association or group? So, subcommittee members approached other Wisconsin farm organizations,

seeking potential affiliation within an existing structure. None were interested.

Finally, leaders recognized that to fill the void, it was up to them to create an organization with a “long view” toward addressing the financial and business management needs of Wisconsin dairy farmers who were being pushed into the future.

As much as anything, it was about getting dairy producers to think more like business people, thinking about their business as a business, operating it professionally, recognizing the importance of employees, including family members and other staff.

With discussions facilitated by Smith, the group discussed structure and strategies for creation of a “professional dairy farmers association.” A teleconference, held on March 4, 1992, included Peter Kappelman, Linda Hodorff, Alan Koepke, Joe Draxler, Pete Giacomini, Mike Brown, Lynn Johnson and Dr. Terry Smith.

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*“We threw money in a pot and said ‘let’s start with this and see where it goes.’ When we started, we said ‘if we ever hit 500 members, it would be an absolute miracle.’ It’s been rewarding to see how this has taken off. I really looked forward to PDPW meetings, because the people were assertive, positive people in the dairy industry. It was rewarding to be part of a group like that. It wasn’t, ‘Can we do it?’, but ‘How can we do it, and what do we need to do to make it happen.’”*

*Joe Draxler, PDPW Founding Member, PDPW Board Member 1992-1997*

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By the next month, after an April 7, 1992 organizational meeting in Plover, Wisconsin, the fledgling group distributed a press release announcing the creation of the “Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin.” It identified a five-pronged mission:

- to promote a positive and professional image of the dairy industry.
- to promote profitability in the dairy business.
- to provide the educational programs for its members.
- to provide a forum for interchange of ideas.
- to identify challenges facing the dairy industry and look to possible solutions.

The press release introduced officers of the as-yet unofficial organization: president, Pete Kappelman, Manitowoc; vice president, Doug Urban, Milladore; and secretary-treasurer Linda Hodorff, Eden. Other board members included: Joe Draxler, Glenwood City; Steve Faber, Richland Center; Alan Koepke, Oconomowoc; Lloyd Holterman, Watertown; Eugene Stauffacher, Mineral Point; and Gary Tauchen, Bonduel. Others participating in the organizational meeting were: Pete Knigge, Omro; Allen Kohn, Krakow; John Kappelman, Manitowoc; and Dwaine Sievers, Cambridge.

Smith assisted the provisional board in establishing a structure and writing bylaws. With seed money thrown into a hat by many from the original group, the PDPW leaders planned to function as an independent organization, while partnering with other dairy-related groups and businesses to offer educational

resources and assisting Wisconsin dairy farmers in building and operating profitable businesses.

Organizers created a brochure to help promote PDPW, and AgSource added it to a statewide Dairy Herd Improvement mailing in time for the 1992 World Dairy Expo. PDPW paid for the extra postage (\$800), spending all of its start-up capital.

Educational programs were planned, and PDPW joined the University of Wisconsin-Extension to conduct a two-day Professional Dairy Producer seminar in Madison, Appleton and Eau Claire in January. Topics included transitioning from labor to management, improving communications between farm family members, financial standards and analysis.



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

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*“We knew we had all of the basics here. We had good weather for growing good forages, good cow weather and open spaces. We had a lot of dairy producers willing to invest their lives and their family’s lives into it – but we were missing some pieces. We identified producer attitude. Dairy producers in general were not positive, and being a producer was viewed negatively. We also didn’t look at our farms as businesses. The talk finally came around to forming an organization focusing on business and management expertise, creating a producer network to share ideas, build self-esteem and improve attitudes. If we could get producers out of the daily grind to view their business from the top down, they could stop wondering how they would get to tomorrow, and start thinking about what tomorrow was going to look like.”*

*Pete Kappelman, PDPW Founding Member, Board Member 1992-1999, President 1992-1996*

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## *1992-1993: The First Statewide Meeting*

During the winter of 1992-93, PDPW leaders set their sites on outreach.

With farmers hungry for information, a regular newsletter was launched in January 1993, produced by Pam Selz-Pralle. It featured news about upcoming events, messages from board members and brief articles on production and business management topics.

With a small but passionate planning committee and a supportive allied industry offering guidance and essential sponsorships, preparation began for the organization's first statewide annual meeting.

The group approved bylaws and conducted an official election. In addition to officers Kappelman, Urban and Hodorff, an unanimous ballot elected Draxler, Koepke, Faber, Tauchen, Holterman and Selz-Pralle to the board.

The small organization with big ideas faced financial hurdles. It started the year with a bank balance of \$173. Thanks to trade show sponsorships and membership dues, PDPW reported a pre-meeting balance of \$5,296.58. Total-year income was optimistically expected to reach \$17,804 with expenses projected at nearly \$12,000. Membership fees were

\$10 for producers and associates, and \$100 for company/group members.

Seeking additional funds, the organization prepared three grant proposals to the Kraft Dairy Trust. By summer, the organization was notified it had been awarded a \$7,500 grant to create a Temporary Dairy Employee Bulletin Board, designed to help farm families get off the farm for short periods while covering labor needs. Launched the following January, the free listing provided names of people offering temporary labor, along with the geographical areas and the types of services they offered.

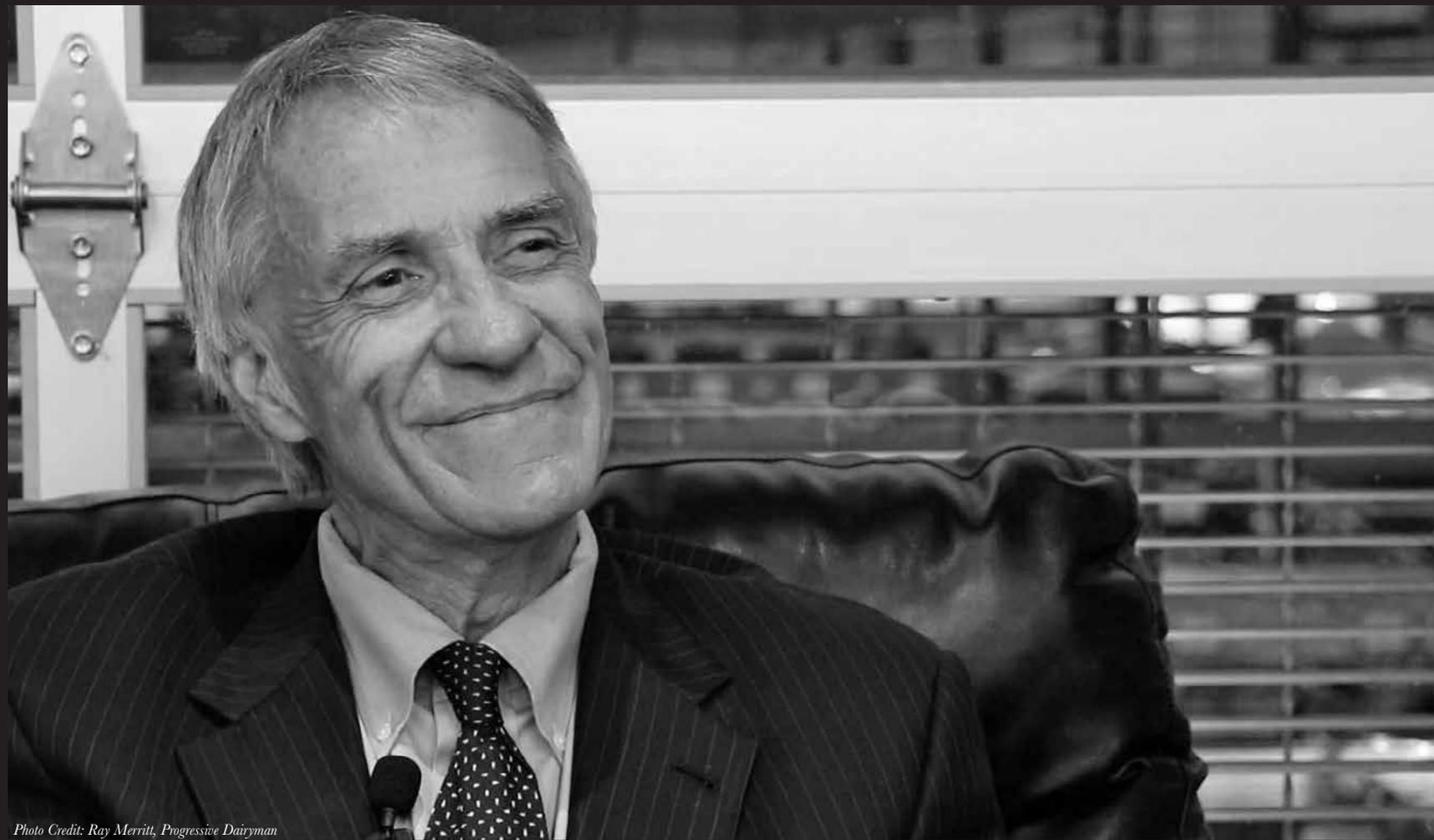
During the organizational year, 150 producer members, 50 associate members and 30 corporate members had joined. By November, membership renewals had been sent to more than 300 members.

Started as a grassroots, herd-size-neutral organization, PDPW was intentional in its aim to appeal to all farmers who sought education and networking opportunities and resources. Nonetheless, in its early stages, PDPW fought the impression the group was only for large-herd dairy producers, and leaders sought to reach a broader population.



*“Since I farmed near Wisconsin Rapids, I did a lot of the planning for the first Business Conference. I met with the Mead Inn sales staff to arrange meeting rooms and rates, planned meal menus, was interviewed by local media and contacted agribusinesses about participating in a trade show. I believe that our choice of informative, enthusiastic speakers made the meeting a success. Many of the 38 people who attended the first conference mentioned the positive vibe that was felt at the meeting.”*

*Doug Urban, PDPW Founding Member, PDPW Board Member, 1992-1994*



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

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*“My history with PDPW started with a phone call from Linda Hodorff. She asked me if I would kick off an initial meeting because there were some visionary dairymen in Wisconsin who wanted to increase their financial and business acumen. Our first meeting was in Wisconsin Rapids, and we had 38 people. It’s amazing how that’s evolved to conferences of over 1,500 people from all over the world. It’s been exciting to see where we started, and where we are today. Whether you are a 40- or 4,000-cow dairy farmer, whether you are a beginning producer or a ‘vintage’ producer, there’s a program for everyone.”*

*Dr. David Kohl, Professor Emeritus  
Virginia Tech*

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*“I was impressed by PDPW from early on because of their inclusive attitude. Our family ran a smaller farm and the members of PDPW were very inviting in bringing us into the organization. At that time there was a certain amount of tension among Wisconsin’s dairy farmers having to do with herd size. PDPW was able to relieve some of the tension by the progressive attitude it shared with everyone in the dairy business.”*

*Brian Costello, Fond du Lac, PDPW Board Member 1999-2002*

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*“I attended the first annual meeting out of curiosity. I was inspired by the infectious enthusiasm and intellect present. It provided an exciting mix of business and production management – an inspiring entrepreneurial soup. People acquire the confidence to make bold decisions by associating with like-minded successful individuals. Capital-intensive small businesses like dairy farms require tremendous strength and peer support. PDPW was an incubator for this mentality.”*

*Ralph Bredl, PDPW Board Member 1995-2001, President 1996-1998*

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Early PDPW membership stood in contrast to the perception of a Wisconsin dairy farm population that was aging and exiting the industry.

Younger – and with can-do attitudes – PDPW members brought the energy to fight through setbacks and frustrations, intent on guiding the state’s dairy industry into the future.

Although the early leaders had vision and passion, they were also everyday, hands-on dairy farmers, with limited time to do some of the day-to-day organizational and administrative duties such as answering phones, maintaining membership lists and mailing newsletters and promotional pieces.

After approaching several entities about contracting those services, new board member Selz-Pralle contacted her former employer, Al Deming at East Central/Select Sires in Waupun, who agreed to add a designated phone line for PDPW’s use, and allowed EC/SS employee Julie Gabris to manage incoming requests.

Later, when additional management and creative talent was needed, PDPW again reached out to EC/SS, subcontracting the services of another employee, Shelly Mayer.

Having a home base of operations and dedicated people to work on organizing PDPW meetings and manage administrative duties proved beneficial. Those early personal relationships with Gabris and Mayer would also write another, even bigger chapter in the organization’s history less than a decade later.

With limited resources and an emphasis on quality over quantity of programming, early PDPW boards scheduled no more than two or three educational events a year, prioritizing financial management, people management and improved farm management practices to increased productivity and efficiency. Initiatives were pragmatic, addressing the immediate dairy farm family needs through educational programs and networking opportunities.

*“Anyone who has gone through a modernization project understands how challenging the transition is. PDPW was there in the early 1990s to help with education and networking. These leading-edge producers took significant risk in hopes of significant rewards. Many went from high equity positions to 30 percent equity in order to prepare for the future. They went from both managing and doing all the work to a dairy business where financial management, employee management and profitability were the focus.”*

*Gary Tauchen, PDPW Founding Member, Board Member 1992-1998*



*Photo Courtesy of Office of Wisconsin State Representative Gary Tauchen*

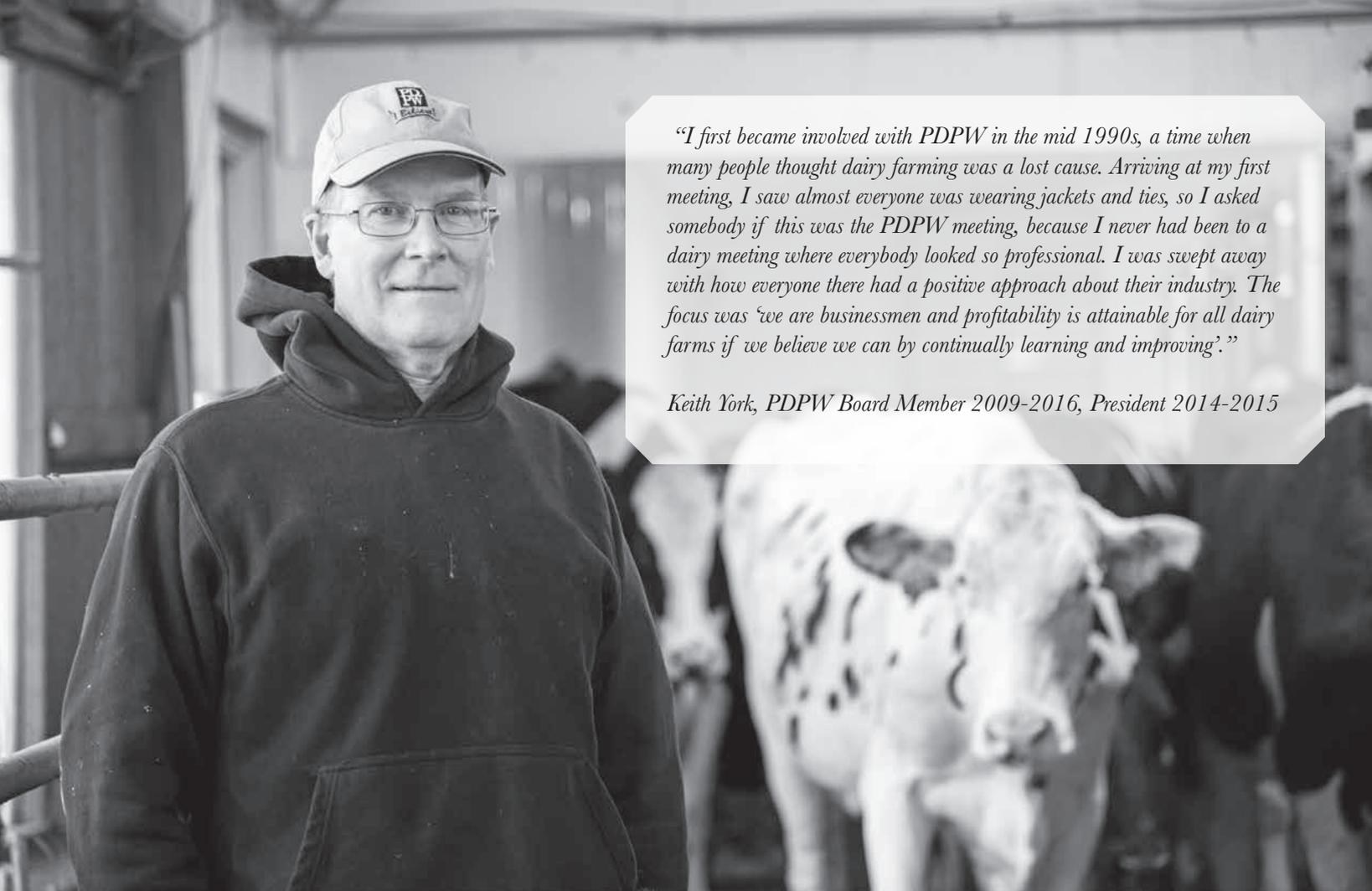


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*“PDPW drew people and organizations with varying objectives to one table for the purpose of promoting the image of agriculture and the idea that farmers can make a profit and sustain a good standard of living. We promoted ourselves as an organization with a unique purpose at the time: to help producers improve their bottom line and achieve greater self-satisfaction from their profession, seeing themselves as dairy businessmen. We then aimed at providing dairymen with tools to help them make better business decisions. PDPW’s growth stemmed from people wanting to be associated with positive people excited about the dairy industry. Our original mission was quite simple: To make dairy farmers better at what they do.”*

*Pam Selz-Pralle, PDPW Board Member 1993-1999,  
President 1998-1999*

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*“I first became involved with PDPW in the mid 1990s, a time when many people thought dairy farming was a lost cause. Arriving at my first meeting, I saw almost everyone was wearing jackets and ties, so I asked somebody if this was the PDPW meeting, because I never had been to a dairy meeting where everybody looked so professional. I was swept away with how everyone there had a positive approach about their industry. The focus was ‘we are businessmen and profitability is attainable for all dairy farms if we believe we can by continually learning and improving.’”*

*Keith York, PDPW Board Member 2009-2016, President 2014-2015*

## *1994: Growing Appeal and Adding Resources*

Entering its second full year, PDPW kicked off a 1994 membership drive. Annual dues for individual members were raised to \$20; \$100 for groups or companies. Producers with inquiries about membership or other programs could now call a new toll-free telephone number – 1-800-WIS-PDPW – to get information.

The pattern of educational programs – replicated for years to come – included regional Dairy Skills Workshops and Professional Dairy Producer Seminars each January. Topics were presented in practical, efficient formats, utilizing peers as examples, role models and mentors.

The educational crown jewel, the Business Conference, was planned each March, and PDPW’s growing appeal was evident when the organization met on March 23-24, again in Wisconsin Rapids. Attendance doubled from the previous year’s meeting. The theme: “Milk - Your Business for Personal Financial Success.”

With finances and profitability the emphasis, 1994 keynote presenters included Dr. Thomas Frey, from Illinois-based Frey Financial, with his session “Taking Charge of Your Finances”; and Don Rogers, with the Farm Credit Bank of Springfield, describing how the top 25 percent of Northeast U.S. dairy farmers successfully managed “The Business Side of Dairying.” A panel of Wisconsin dairy producers, including Ralph and Sharon Bredl, Charles and Shirley Optiz and Timm and Helen Johnson shared “Business Planning Decisions We’ve Made that Affect Profitability.”

The newly released Temporary Dairy Employee Bulletin Board was popular, starting with 33 names and updated every six months. Connecting farmers across the state with relief milkers and other temporary suppliers of dairy labor, inquiries came in almost daily.

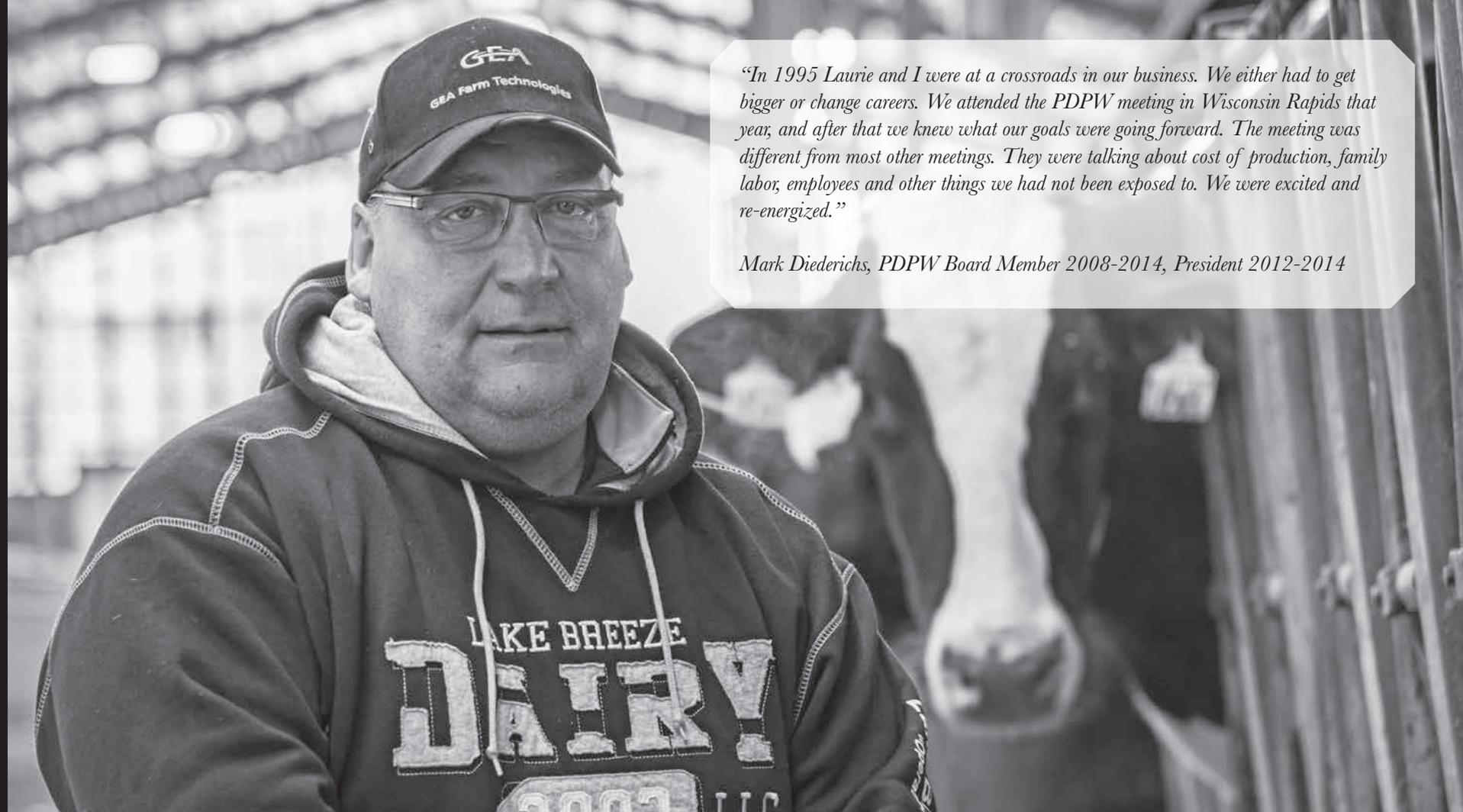
## 1995: Staying Focused on Peers

With growing membership helping build critical mass, PDPW was frequently asked to take positions on political issues. To preserve its credibility, leaders made the intentional decision to stay true to their roots and avoid lobbying, instead serving as an informational resource for policymakers. The year's education program kicked off with regional Dairy Skills Workshops at Fond du Lac and Wausau, featuring Dr. Gordon Jones, discussing cow health and heat detection, followed by sessions on nutrition, feeding, TMRs and bunker silos.

With a theme of "Catch the Wave into the Future of Dairying," the PDPW Business Conference was held March 22-23, again in Wisconsin Rapids. Cost was \$70 for members; \$90 for non-members.

Topics included "New Tools for Coping with New Realities," with discussions on dairy futures and options markets. Member willingness to share information with peers was evident: Board member Alan Koepke led a discussion on "Zooming in on the Big Picture with Enterprising," describing how producers could evaluate individual enterprises within their overall operations. Other panels and presenters addressed contract heifer raising and custom forage harvesting.

As a follow-up to the 1995 meeting, PDPW offered videos of speakers to members, at \$30 per set. The organization continued that practice through the 1999 annual meeting.



*"In 1995 Laurie and I were at a crossroads in our business. We either had to get bigger or change careers. We attended the PDPW meeting in Wisconsin Rapids that year, and after that we knew what our goals were going forward. The meeting was different from most other meetings. They were talking about cost of production, family labor, employees and other things we had not been exposed to. We were excited and re-energized."*

*Mark Diederichs, PDPW Board Member 2008-2014, President 2012-2014*

## *1996: Finances and a Heifer Growers' Resource*

With the belief that success comes from using information and not the information itself, PDPW leaders hoped a regular interchange of ideas would encourage participants to do self-analysis of their dairy businesses, while developing a positive attitude about themselves and their industry.

The 1996 PDPW Business Conference moved to Stevens Point, March 19-20. The theme: "Financial Guidelines to the Future."

Program highlights included a presentation by Bruce Jones, UW Center for Dairy Profitability, outlining the Midwest advantages for dairy production's future. A panel of dairy lenders discussed financial analysis, cash flow and business plans and estate planning, urging attendees to evaluate production costs and compare financial benchmarks for forage, grain, heifer raising and milk production.

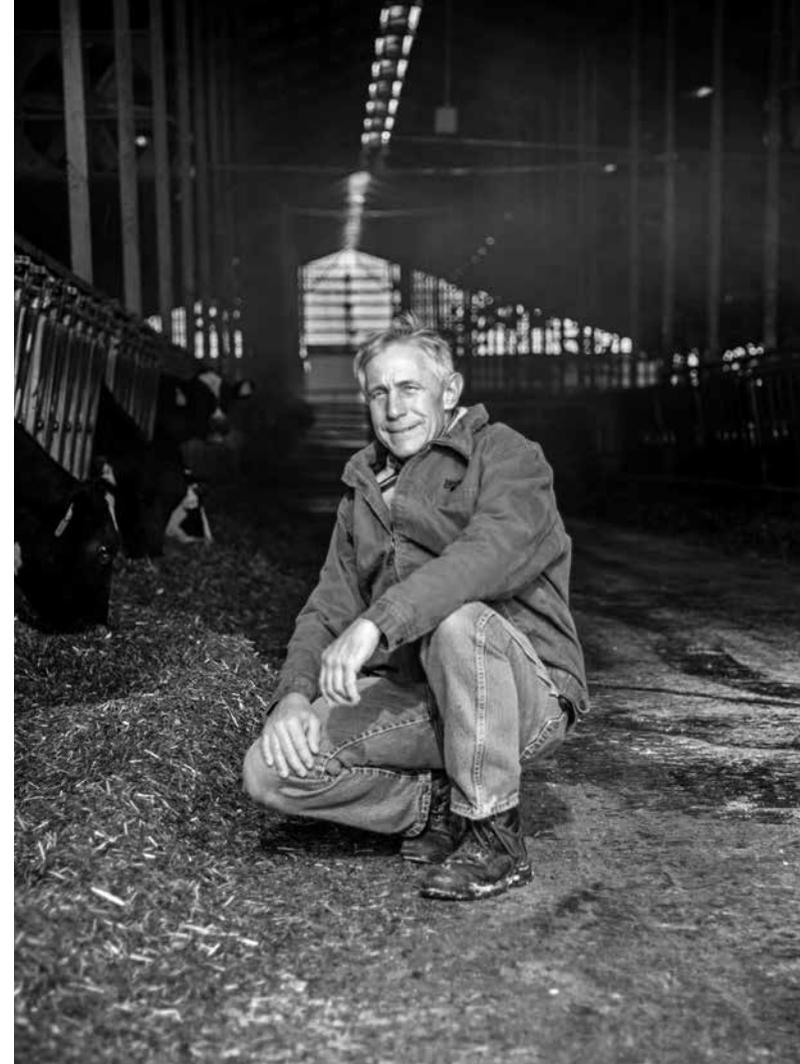
With dairies getting larger, many farms were turning to custom calf/heifer growers to outsource and manage that enterprise.

Late in the fall of 1996, PDPW published its first Custom Heifer Growers List.

As PDPW grew and matured, leaders turned to even weightier issues – future generations. A lesson learned in the 1980s and 1990s was that the dairy industry had lost some of its best and brightest Wisconsin talent, a generation of young people who were pulled away to other careers and jobs.

PDPW recognized that while its members produced milk, meat and crops, the future depended on an investment in young people who would grow into the next generation of dairy producers and leaders.

In 1996, it launched the PDPW Mentor Program, connecting college students with active dairy farmers, providing on-farm experiences and new perspectives about dairying.



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*“My wife Karen and I really credit PDPW for helping us decide to stay in business after a 1996 barn fire. Being with other producers helped us think through what we wanted, and whether to rebuild. Talking about what you do, and listening to what other members do – you learn something and maybe you can come up with an even better solution. Many of us were in the first expansion phases of our dairy businesses and learning how to cope with growth. I remember many in-depth and personal conversations with fellow board members on the daily struggles of being first-time managers of larger dairy businesses. The time together makes you realize that you’re not alone in your struggles to make money in this business.”*

*John Ruedinger, PDPW Board Member  
2001-2006*

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*“At the start of the mentorship program, each school was responsible for selecting students they thought would benefit from the Business Conference and the mentorship program. Recently, I reviewed the University of Wisconsin-River Falls students that participated in the mentorship program, and was struck by the high percentage of past participants who have become dairy farmers or are actively involved in the dairy industry.”*

*Dr. Steve Kelm, PDPW Advisory Board 2014-2016*

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## *1997: An Early Look Ahead to a New Millennium*

Dairy producers attending PDPW events obviously saw a high return on their investment, and enjoyed gathering with positive peers: they kept coming back.

The January Dairy Skills Training Workshop expanded to four locations: Marshfield, Melrose, Prairie du Sac and Appleton.

PDPW's 1997 Business Conference returned to Stevens Point, March 18-19. The theme: "Prepare Your Dairy Business for the New Millennium."

In 1997, PDPW created a formal Public Policy Committee to begin working more closely with regulators, local elected

officials and fellow dairy producers to help define the future direction of the industry on issues such as the environment, land use and animal health issues. At the time, farmers were often not invited into the regulatory agencies or educational systems making decisions that directly impacting their livelihoods.

*"I was a young woman who had married into dairying, actively involved in the day-to-day production and management of our small 80-cow dairy with my husband, Dave. As a woman in a male-dominated industry, PDPW gave me the opportunity to cut my teeth to learn credibility, to do my due diligence before I went into a meeting and earn the respect of my male colleagues. It gave me opportunities to learn to speak more effectively about our industry; opportunities to be on the PDPW board and learn to be a leader; opportunities to look into the future of the dairy industry and discover its needs down the road."*

*Deb Reinhart, PDPW Board Member 1998-2005*



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

## *1998: Changes Become Measurable, Political*

Changing the course of a dairy industry the size of Wisconsin's doesn't happen overnight. Statistically, the state's milk production continued to slide, but the speed of decline slowed. What had changed, however, was the producers' mindset. Milk per cow began to make larger, incremental improvements. The number of dairy cows steadied and began to grow, as did herd sizes.

Outside forces fought that change, pressuring PDPW members to take an extraordinary step at its 1998 Business Conference, attended by a record 620 people, March 10-11, in Appleton. The theme: "Charting Your Course for Success in the Dairy Business."

Throughout its early development, PDPW had worked hard to remain out of the political arena. However, a bill introduced in the State Legislature in 1998 called for the prohibition of any new dairy operations of more than 750 animal units, or about 575 cows, not including calves or replacement heifers. The bill's authors believed herd-size limits would protect small farms. Ironically, the bill's introduction came at a time Wisconsin dairy processors were "importing" record volumes of milk to meet production capacities.

Following its belief that Wisconsin needed dairy farms of all sizes and types to be successful, PDPW members opposed the

bill, calling it a misguided political smokescreen designed to pit one size against another. After lengthy discussion in a special session, members unanimously passed a resolution opposing the bill.

That experience was the first (and possibly the only) time PDPW took an official stance on a pending political issue. It also awakened organization leaders to the importance of becoming participants in the development of regulations and policies impacting the dairy industry.

Aspiring to take producers out of their "comfort zones," PDPW leaders continued to challenge themselves to provide educational topics and forums that would tackle tough issues. To do that, PDPW initiated a "Committee Day" in 1998, bringing members of all action committees together in Wisconsin Dells for planning and discussion, seeking to identify synergies and explore how the organization could grow to meet dairy farmer and industry needs.

Later in the year, PDPW stepped onto a broader stage. Its first mini-conference, "The Global Dairy Business," was held in conjunction with the 1998 World Dairy Expo. About 220 producers and industry representatives attended.

## *1999: Becoming More Proactive*

PDPW leaders rolled up their sleeves in the final year of the millennium to build a platform for the 21st Century.

In 1999, the seventh annual PDPW Business Conference moved to Middleton, March 10-11, attracting a record 1,040 attendees. As a special outreach to students, PDPW offered 35 Business Conference registrations at no cost, thanks to a grant from Land O' Lakes. Highlighting the program were Temple Grandin, an assistant professor of animal science at Colorado State University, and Cornell University's David Galton.

To increase reach, PDPW's direct-mailing newsletter was discontinued, replaced by a regular insert in Agri-View, a weekly agricultural newspaper. It was called "PDPW Dairy's Bottom Line."

Later that year, the PDPW Public Policy Committee launched the first-ever environmental forum in Wisconsin Rapids. The conference brought together dairy producers, policy makers, agency officials, university leaders, researchers and producers to discuss ways to better care for natural resources.

That same year, PDPW began regular meetings with deans in the University of Wisconsin system and other institutions to discuss the educational needs critical to sustain and build Wisconsin's dairy future.

The year also marked the launch of PDPW's first Human Resource Management Workshop.



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

*"I believe PDPW is one of the factors in helping 'turn around the Titanic' of a declining Wisconsin dairy industry in the 1990s to today's growing industry with a positive outlook for the future. PDPW sets the gold standard for dairy education in our industry, both in quality and innovation. When I hear people talk about the thriving Wisconsin dairy industry or the leadership Wisconsin shows around the country, I have to point to many PDPW members. The boards and staff of PDPW have taken this organization way beyond what any of us could have ever dreamed of at the beginning."*

*Linda Hodorff, PDPW Founding Member, PDPW Board Member 1992-1995*

## 2000: A New Century

In a sign of continued growth, the 2000 PDPW Business Conference moved to the Exhibition Hall of the Dane County Alliant Energy Center. The theme: Capturing Dairy Profits in the New Millennium.

Other highlights of the year include PDPW's first Feeding Strategies (Feed and Nutrition) Conference. Additionally, a Land Use/Biosecurity Workshop featured an international slate of presenters.

*“My wife and I hadn't grown up on a dairy farm. We started with 35 cows. Considering a dairy expansion, I joined PDPW at the suggestion of our loan officer. PDPW was exactly what we needed to get out of our 'box.' Tours and programs were valuable, but it was the friendships I made that had the biggest impact. People would share not only their successes, but also their failures. Friendships helped me think bigger, they made me dream bigger, and those dreams became our goals.”*

*Doug Knoepke, PDPW Board Member 2006-2011, President 2009-10*



## 2001: A Frank Assessment; Hiring Staff

Nearly 1,200 people attended the 2001 PDPW Business Conference, March 6-7, in Madison. The theme: “Controlling Our Destiny.”

A year into the new century, PDPW leaders intensified efforts to equip PDPW members to do just that. First, however, it required an in-depth look at both the internal health of the industry, and a look at the outside forces affecting it.

PDPW released its first “State of the Industry” report. As outlined by Ralph Bredl, the initial report contained three key messages for Wisconsin dairy farmers:

1. Produce milk at a total economic cost competitive with other regions of the U.S.
2. Protect individual profitability point through risk management tools, including forward contracting, futures and options.
3. Develop creative, non-traditional methods of enhancing the value of dairy production from the farm to the consumer.

Release of that report created a whirlwind of discussion – and some controversy from those steeped in Wisconsin's dairy tradition. It also served to reinforce PDPW's commitment to

share ideas, solutions and resources to strengthen individual dairy farm businesses and the industry as a whole. The first “Profit Symposium” was held later that year in Appleton.

*“At the time, consistent below cost-of-production milk prices were causing all manner of financial pain and distress. Grain prices were extremely low as a result of government policies, fueling Western dairy growth. California milk production was exploding while Wisconsin's continued to decline. It was obvious the economic table had tilted. I thought it was prudent to inform PDPW members that Wisconsin was no longer in the driver's seat. We could continue as we had and ignore the major shift in production economics, or identify and acknowledge the realities in an effort to guide decision-making at the producer/processor level. I have always been a firm believer in using the facts and reality of the moment to make tough decisions.”*

*Ralph Bredl, PDPW Board Member 1995-2001, President 1996-1998*



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*“The board understood we needed to make a major change in order to keep growing and live up to the professional image of the organization. Hiring staff wasn’t an easy decision, because we didn’t know how to finance it. The board also realized we could not – nor should we have to – micro-manage the day-to-day operations of PDPW. The overwhelming reason it became possible was the board truly believed we had the people who would make this work.”*

*Carl Theunis, PDPW Board Member 1999-2005*

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# Board of Directors and Advisors

## 1992-93

\*Pete Kappelman  
Linda Hodorff  
Gary Tauchen  
Joe Draxler  
Steve Faber  
Lloyd Holterman  
Al Koepke  
Eugene Stauffacher  
Doug Urban

Advisors:  
Terry Smith  
Dwayne Sievers

## 1993-94

\*Pete Kappelman  
Linda Hodorff  
Gary Tauchen  
Joe Draxler  
Steve Faber  
Lloyd Holterman  
Al Koepke  
Pam Selz-Pralle  
Doug Urban

Advisors:  
Dan Gorton

Mike Berg  
Jane Fyksen  
Bruce Jones

## 1994-95

\*Pete Kappelman  
Linda Hodorff  
Gary Tauchen  
Joe Draxler  
Steve Faber  
Dan Natzke

Advisors:  
Al Koepke  
Pam Selz-Pralle  
Steve Fest

Advisors:  
Dan Gorton  
Mike Berg  
Jane Fyksen  
Bruce Jones

## 1995-96

\*Pete Kappelman  
Ralph Bredl  
Gary Tauchen  
Joe Draxler  
Jeff Opitz  
Dan Natzke

Al Koepke  
Pam Selz-Pralle  
Steve Fest

## Advisors:

Dan Gorton  
Mike Berg  
Gary Sipiorski  
Carla Gunst

## 1996-97

\*Ralph Bredl  
Joe Draxler  
Pam Selz-Pralle  
Jeff Opitz  
Gary Tauchen  
Pete Kappelman  
Dan Natzke  
Julie Larson  
Mike Opperman

## Advisors:

Charlie Benz  
Matt Joyce  
Gary Sipiorski  
Carla Gunst

## 1997-98

\*Ralph Bredl  
Hank Wagner  
Pam Selz-Pralle  
Jeff Opitz  
Gary Tauchen  
Pete Kappelman  
Dan Natzke  
Julie Larson  
Mike Opperman

## Advisors:

Charlie Benz  
Matt Joyce  
Dwayne Sievers  
Bob Meyer

## 1998-99

\*Pam Selz-Pralle  
Ralph Bredl  
Hank Wagner  
Jeff Opitz  
Todd Doornink  
Pete Kappelman  
Dan Natzke  
Deb Reinhart  
Mike Opperman

Advisors:  
Mike Opperman

## Advisors:

Arlin Brannstrom  
Joel Hastings  
Dwayne Sievers  
Bob Meyer

## 1999-2000

\*Hank Wagner  
Ralph Bredl  
Brian Costello  
Jeff Opitz  
Todd Doornink  
Timm Johnson  
Dan Natzke  
Deb Reinhart  
Carl Theunis

## Advisors:

Don Berg  
Gary Frank  
Dave Dickson  
Jim Harsdorf

## Advisors:

Arlin Brannstrom  
Joel Hastings  
Dave Dickson  
Jim Harsdorf

## 2000-01

\*Hank Wagner  
Ralph Bredl  
Brian Costello  
Jeff Opitz

Advisors:  
Ben Brancel

Todd Doornink  
Timm Johnson  
Tammy Weiland  
Deb Reinhart  
Carl Theunis

## Advisors:

Don Berg  
Gary Frank  
Dave Dickson  
Jim Harsdorf

## 2001-02

\*Hank Wagner  
John Ruedinger  
Brian Costello  
Jay Richardson  
Todd Doornink  
Timm Johnson  
Tammy Weiland  
Deb Reinhart  
Carl Theunis

## Advisors:

Don Berg  
Gary Frank  
Deb Boyke  
Ben Brancel

## 2002-03

\*Todd Doornink  
John Ruedinger  
Hank Wagner  
Jim Kruger  
Jay Richardson  
Kevin Griswold  
Tammy Weiland  
Deb Reinhart  
Carl Theunis

## Advisors:

Dennis Frame  
Pete Kappelman  
Deb Boyke  
Ben Brancel

## 2003-04

\*Todd Doornink  
Kevin Griswold  
Jim Kruger  
Deb Reinhart  
Jay Richardson  
John Ruedinger  
Carl Theunis  
Dean Strauss  
Tammy Weiland

Advisors:  
Ben Brancel

Advisors:  
Pete Kappelman  
Dennis Frame  
Doug Simon  
Jim Rainey

## 2004-05

\*Kevin Griswold  
Jim Kruger  
Deb Reinhart  
Jay Richardson  
John Ruedinger  
Carl Theunis  
Dean Strauss  
Tammy Weiland  
Ellen Killian

Advisors:  
Doug Simon  
Jim Rainey  
Bruce Jones  
Roger Larson

## 2005-06

\*Kevin Griswold  
Tammy Weiland  
Dean Strauss  
Ellen Killian  
Jim Kruger  
Jay Richardson  
John Ruedinger  
Marion Barlass  
Joe Thome

Advisors:  
Roger Larson  
Eric Liebetau  
Frank Friar  
Jim Rainey

## 2006-07

\*Kevin Griswold  
Dean Strauss  
Doug Knoepke  
Ellen Killian  
Jim Kruger  
Jay Richardson  
John Ruedinger  
Marion Barlass  
Joe Thome

Advisors:  
Eric Liebetau  
Frank Friar  
Pete Giacomini  
Jim Loefer

## 2007-08

\*Kevin Griswold  
Marion Barlass  
Doug Knoepke  
Jim Kruger  
Dean Strauss  
Joe Thome  
Eric Hillan  
Russel Strutz  
Gary Rueggegger

Advisors:  
Pete Giacomini  
Jim Loefer  
Floyd Sutton  
Debbie Crave

## 2008-09

\*Dean Strauss  
Marion Barlass  
Mark Diederichs  
Patty Endres  
Kevin Griswold  
Eric Hillan  
Doug Knoepke  
Gary Rueggegger  
Russel Strutz

Advisors:  
Debbie Crave  
Jeff Riechers  
Floyd Sutton  
Doug Wilson

## 2009-10

\*Doug Knoepke  
Marion Barlass  
Mark Diederichs  
Patty Endres  
Eric Hillan  
Gary Rueggegger  
Russel Strutz  
Keith York  
Walter Meinholz

Advisors:  
Jeff Riechers  
Doug Wilson  
Le Luchterhand  
Chuck Adami

## 2010-11

\*Eric Hillan  
Marion Barlass  
Mark Diederichs  
Patty Endres  
Doug Knoepke  
Russel Strutz  
Keith York  
Walter Meinholz  
Kevin Krentz

Advisors:  
Doug Wilson  
Le Luchterhand  
Joan Behr  
Steve Bodart

## 2011-12

\*Eric Hillan  
Mark Diederichs  
Doug Knoepke  
Kevin Krentz  
Russel Strutz  
Keith York  
Walter Meinholz  
Charlie Crave  
Kay Zwald

Advisors:  
Joan Behr  
Steve Bodart  
Gary Sipiorski  
Dennis Frame

## 2012-13

\*Mark Diederichs  
Charlie Crave  
Eric Hillan  
Kevin Krentz  
Walter Meinholz  
Russel Strutz  
Linda White  
Keith York  
Kay Zwald

Advisors:  
Dennis Frame  
Gary Sipiorski  
Roger Swigart  
Tom Vander Heiden

## 2013-14

\*Mark Diederichs  
Mitch Breunig  
Charlie Crave  
Brian Forrest  
Marty Hallock  
Walter Meinholz  
Linda White  
Keith York  
Kay Zwald

Advisors:  
Roger Swigart  
Tom Vander Heiden  
Matt Repinski  
Richard Wallace

## 2014-15

\*Keith York  
Mitch Breunig  
Charlie Crave  
Jeremy Natzke  
Brian Forrest  
Marty Hallock  
Walter Meinholz  
Linda White  
Kay Zwald

Advisors:  
Dennis Frame  
Gary Sipiorski  
Roger Swigart  
Tom Vander Heiden

## 2015-16

\*Mitch Breunig  
Charlie Crave  
Brian Forrest  
Marty Hallock  
Walter Meinholz  
Jeremy Natzke

Linda White  
Keith York  
Kay Zwald

## Advisors:

Matt Repinski  
Richard Wallace  
Steve Kelm  
Steve Schwoerer

## 2016-17

\*Mitch Breunig  
Charlie Crave  
Brian Forrest  
Marty Hallock  
Jay Heeg  
Jeremy Natzke  
Dan Scheider  
Linda White  
Kay Zwald

## Advisors:

Eric Cooley  
Steve Schwoerer  
Chad Staudinger  
Richard Wallace

\* Indicates Board President



PDPW founded by dairy farmers

1992

- Business Conference Theme: “Milk-Your Business for Personal Financial Success”
- Toll Free number established 800-WIS-PDPW
- 1<sup>st</sup> Dairy Skills Workshops
- Temporary Dairy Employee Bulletin Board begins

1994



- Business Conference Theme: “Financial: Guidelines to the Future”
- Forms committee for youth programming
- 1<sup>st</sup> Mentor Program
- Begins Heifer Growers List

1996

- Business Conference Theme: “Charting Course for Success in the Dairy Business”
- Holds 1<sup>st</sup> Committee Days
- 1<sup>st</sup> political stance taken to stop livestock ordinance prohibiting growth
- Holds 1<sup>st</sup> Educational Session at World Dairy Expo

1998

### Enhanced Internship

- Business Conference Theme: “Capturing Dairy Profits in the New Millennium”
- Conference moves to Alliant Energy Center
- Issues 1<sup>st</sup> State of WI Dairy Industry white paper
- Develops Enhanced Internship Program

2000

- Business Conference Theme: “Leveraging our Strengths”
- Starts Professional Dairy Producers Education Foundation
- Charter member of WLIC (Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium)
- Provides grants to 50 farms with first nutrient management plans
- Staffed National Dairy Challenge

2002

1993

- 1<sup>st</sup> Business Conference
- 1<sup>st</sup> Board of Directors elected
- 1<sup>st</sup> Newsletter Published



1995

- Business Conference Theme: “Catch a Wave into the Future of Dairying”
- Reconfirms PDPW stays focused on education and works collaboratively with existing lobby groups
- Offered VHS Speaker Recordings

1997

- Business Conference Theme: “Prepare your Dairy Business for the New Millennium”
- Forms Public Policy ad hoc committee to increase communications with State Agencies

1999

- Business Conference Theme: “Reaching Beyond”
- Begins regular meetings with Deans in UW System
- 1<sup>st</sup> Environmental Conference (later called Public Policy Summit)
- Begins Dairy’s Bottom Line publication
- 1<sup>st</sup> HR Management Workshop

2001

- Business Conference Theme: “Controlling our Destiny”
- Forms Public Relations Committee
- Industry’s 1<sup>st</sup> Effective Communications Training developed
- Publishes State of the Dairy Industry white paper, part 2
- Shelly Mayer hired as Executive Director

2003

- Business Conference Theme: “Implementing Strategies for Greater Profit”
- 1<sup>st</sup> Calf Care Connection\*
- Establishes ACE with WI Towns and Counties’ Associations
- Places 3 students from Mexico through intern program





- Business Conference Theme: “Soaring to New Heights”
  - Expands programming by 40%
  - 1<sup>st</sup> PDPF Silent Auction raises \$4,658
- PDPW pushes to have dairy cow on state quarter
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Youth Leadership Derby\*
- 1<sup>st</sup> Managers Academy for Dairy Professionals™

**2004**

**2005**

- Business Conference Theme: “Fueling Your Profits – Igniting Your Passion”
  - Identifies dairy well-being as #1 priority issue
  - Leads National Dairy Well-Being Initiative.
- Voted *Top 10 Companies/People Most Influential in Agriculture*
- Finalizes education contract with Franklin Covey Group
  - Works on stakeholder work group for Livestock Siting

- Business Conference Theme: “Daring By Design”
- 1<sup>st</sup> Business Transition Workshop
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Transition Cow Workshop
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Bilingual Calf Care for Spanish-speaking employees
- Charter member of Center for Food Integrity

**2006**

**2007**

- Business Conference Theme: “Redefining the Milky Way”
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Hoof Care Training Session
- Develops *Dairy Connect* speakers bureau
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Commodity Marketing Class
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Nutrient Management Tours

- Business Conference Theme: “Solving the Profit Puzzle”
  - 1<sup>st</sup> ACE Regional Meeting
- Develops with WMMB Dairy Crisis Communications plan for industry

**2008**

**2009**

- 1<sup>st</sup> Milker training for Spanish-speaking employees



**Dairy's Visible Voice®**

Leadership development through effective communication

- Business Conference Theme: “Pathways to Profit”
- Dairy's Visible Voice® is Launched
- 1<sup>st</sup> APPs (Agricultural Professional Partnerships®) training given to DNR

**2011**

**2010**

- Business Conference Theme: “Imagine Dairy”
- PDPW offers Microsoft Computer Training
  - 1<sup>st</sup> ACE On-the-Farm Twilight Meetings
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Blogging 101 Webinar
- 1<sup>st</sup> World Class Webinars led by Dr. Kohl
- First Management Assessment Program



**WORLD CLASS WEBINARS**

- Business Conference Theme: “Recharge”
- 1<sup>st</sup> Barnstorming and Haymaking Sessions

**2013**

**2012**

- Business Conference Theme: “Innovation”
- PDPW proactively forms working partnership with WVMA and leads the What Matters® initiative and to ensure safe milk and meat now called Food Armor®.
- Began providing CEU Credits (UW-SVM, ARPAS, CCA)

- Business Conference Theme: “Connections”
  - Increased educational programming to 84 days
- Introduced Hands-On-Hub at business conference
- Held Calf Care Connection in Iowa

**2015**

**2014**

- Business Conference Theme: “Exceeding Excellence”
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Cornerstone Dairy Academy™ held in conjunction with business conference



- Business Conference Theme: “Mission Driven”
  - Celebrated 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
  - Launched Dairy AdvanCE™
  - Launching Financial Literacy (Fall 2017)
- International Dairy Tour to Ireland

**2017**

**2016**

- Business Conference Theme: “Inspire”
- 1<sup>st</sup> International Dairy Tour to New Zealand
- 1<sup>st</sup> Water Quality Tours with Discovery Farms

## *PDPW Interns*

**2003**

Moriah (Morris) Brey

**2004**

Jen (Weier) Staudinger

**2005**

Susan (Orth) Rieden

**2006**

Annette (Zwald) Schalla

**2007**

Rachel (Herschleb)  
Christensen

**2008**

Evan Schnadt

**2009**

Adam Geiger

**2010**

Darci (O'Brien) Daniels

**2011**

Claire Ohman

**2012**

Lauren (Holterman) Brey

**2013**

Cassandra Mayer  
Taylor Fritsch

**2014**

Rachel Hartlaub

**2015**

Kayla Kreuger

**2016**

Sydney Endres  
Sarah Witt

**2017**

Jessica Pralle



*“I truly have the best job in the world...I work for farmers. It’s the people that make PDPW special and unique. I have been able to watch people learn, grow and excel in so many different ways. From generation to generation, no matter what farm style you have, you never stop learning. This organization is the combination of some the brightest minds you will find in any profession and also the most caring, selfless people you will ever meet. Time flies when you are having fun and working with the world’s greatest people.”*

*Julie Gabris, PDPW Member Resource Manager*

Established in the organization's bylaws, a unique feature of PDPW's structure includes short board term limits – a maximum of two three-year terms – with a belief it is better to develop new leaders rather than continuously recycle experienced ones. By bringing new board members, PDPW sought to stay young and nimble, with the philosophy that growing and empowering new leaders would ensure change.

However, while bringing in new ideas and styles of leadership, board turnover created challenges to organizational consistency and historical perspective. Increased PDPW programming and other initiatives demanded full-time attention.

To address that need, the board decided to hire Shelly Mayer as executive director in November 2001. A partner with her husband Dwight and three children in a registered Holstein farm near Slinger, Mayer brought 14 years of experience in dairy industry marketing, journalism and public relations.

Shortly thereafter, Mayer added two other women with dairy farm backgrounds to the staff.

Julie Gabris, the East Central/Select Sires administrative assistant who had devoted time to PDPW, was hired as events coordinator and member service manager. She is credited with enhancing PDPW's culture of welcoming and hospitality, remembering that no matter how large the organization grew, every individual member should know they are the most important member.

Kim Brown-Pokorny, with experience as a former Sheboygan County Extension dairy and livestock agent and an agency marketing specialist working with the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, was hired as program specialist.

With a staff guiding day-to-day operations and devoting full-time attention to initiatives and educational efforts, the succeeding years were a time of continued growth in membership and programming. The organization also began to look outside Wisconsin's borders, and at national issues.

*“My roles were strategy, program development, and execution. My first project with PDPW was the mentorship program, and I helped form the Professional Dairy Producers Foundation and create PDPW's very first national program, the Managers Academy. I admire the passion every PDPW employee has for the dairy industry, working side-by-side with dairy farmers to ensure the industry thrives and the hard-working families on our farms have the tools they need to be successful.”*

*Kim Brown-Pokorny, PDPW Program Specialist, 2000-2008*





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*“I am always amazed at the quality of the people we had and continue to employ at PDPW. It is a testament to the strength of the organization, to the leadership skills of our executive director, and it is a key reason why PDPW has continued to have such credibility and respect throughout the industry. Because of its growth, I remember many boardroom discussions about the mission and vision of our organization. There was some thought that PDPW needed to grow in scope and responsibility. In the end, those discussions would prove that our mission and vision were good, and that educating members was a large task that was continually evolving.”*

*Kevin Griswold, PDPW Board Member 2002-2008, President 2004-2007*

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## *2002: Increasing Empowerment; a Foundation for the Future*

Taking the next step, the theme for the 2002 Business Conference was “Leveraging Our Strengths,” as PDPW leaders sought to empower their membership.

The second installment of the “State of the Industry” report was released, built on an economic impact campaign launched by the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board and county dairy leader groups, as well as key messages included in a Discover America’s Dairyland television program.

Within months, and with the assistance of Tom Thieding, director of communications with the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, PDPW unveiled a new training program and public relations curriculum to help producers become effective communicators when talking to the media or the general public about the economic impact the dairy industry. “Effective Communications Training for Dairy Producers” sessions were held in Appleton and Madison to help dairy producers weave facts into their own personal stories about why every Wisconsinite should care about dairying.

In 2002, PDPW created an avenue for people to invest in far-reaching educational initiatives. The Professional Dairy Producers Foundation was established as a stand-alone 501(c)(3) charitable organization to raise funds and award grants for dairy education initiatives. As PDPW’s charitable arm, the Foundation’s role is to ensure funding for education programs that prepare producers for issues that will impact the way they do business. Its efforts focus on training dairy producers in public affairs, leadership and communications skills and preparing youth for careers in dairy.

The Foundation walks beside PDPW, but also works with other groups, like Indiana Dairy Producers and Maryland Dairy Shrine, funding programs in one of two ways: A grant program provides funds to organizations seeking to create new, innovative education and outreach programs. It also supports dairy programming across the country through sponsorships.

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*“We want to work with dairy producer professionals and groups across the country because we know what worked in Wisconsin. We want to fund those kinds of programs because our industry is getting smaller; we need to agree on those non-competitive issues like water quality, food safety, animal well-being, employee health and training. Those are things that, as an industry, if we don’t get them right, are going to be huge problems for the dairy community. We’re only as strong as our weakest link.”*

*Deb Reinhart, PDPW Board Member 1998-2005; Executive Director, Professional Dairy Producers Foundation*

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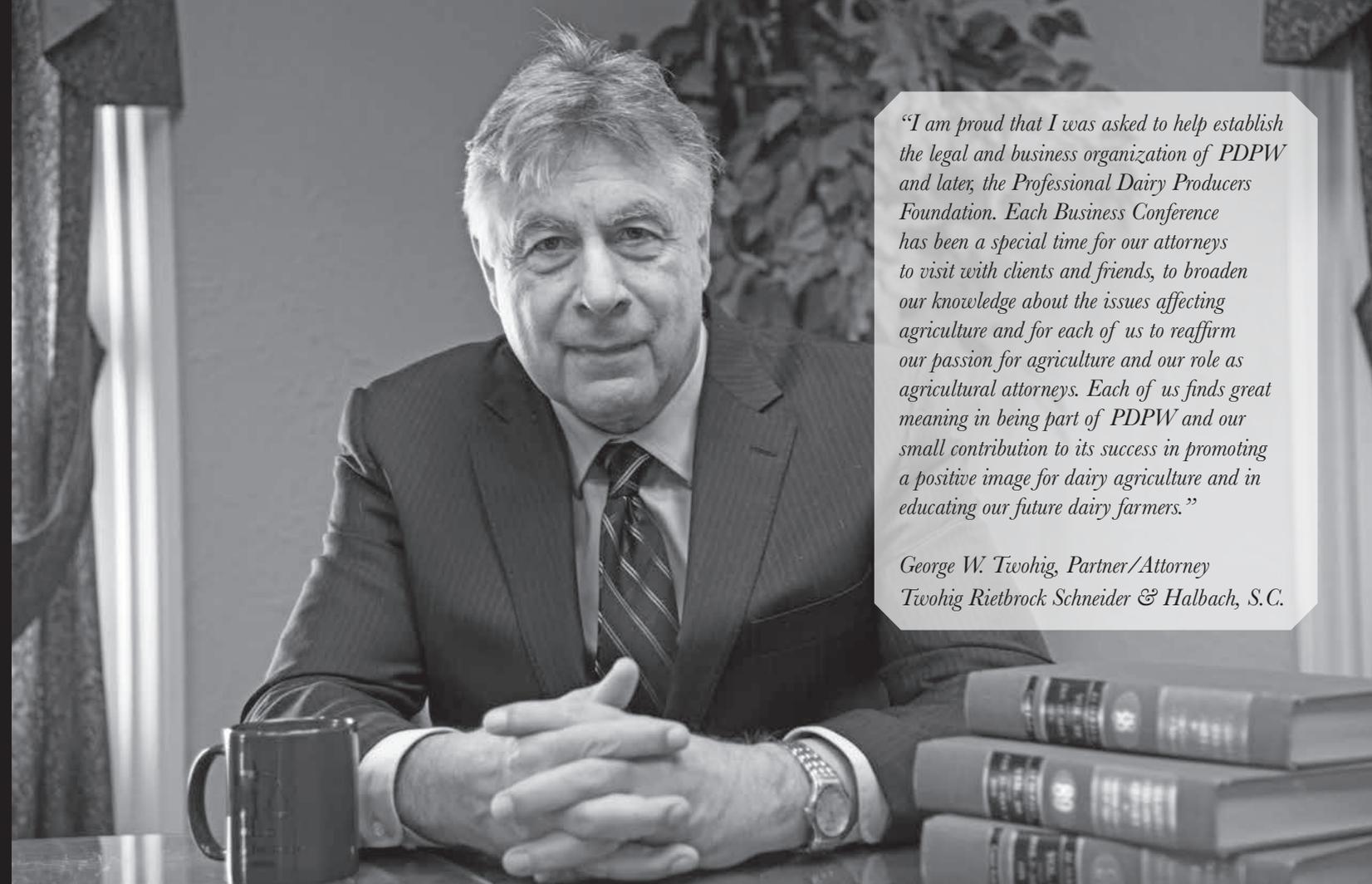


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*“I began working with PDPW as a volunteer when the organization was very young. When this organization of farmers wanted to help each other problem solve, continue their education, act professionally and claim some credibility for their chosen profession, I knew I wanted to help build it. I served on several committees, including the Education Committee. At one meeting we discussed how to sustain the organization and educational programs for years to come. It was at this meeting that the idea of the Professional Dairy Producers Foundation was born. Because I have a public relations background, I was able to help get some of the basics of the Foundation put together.”*

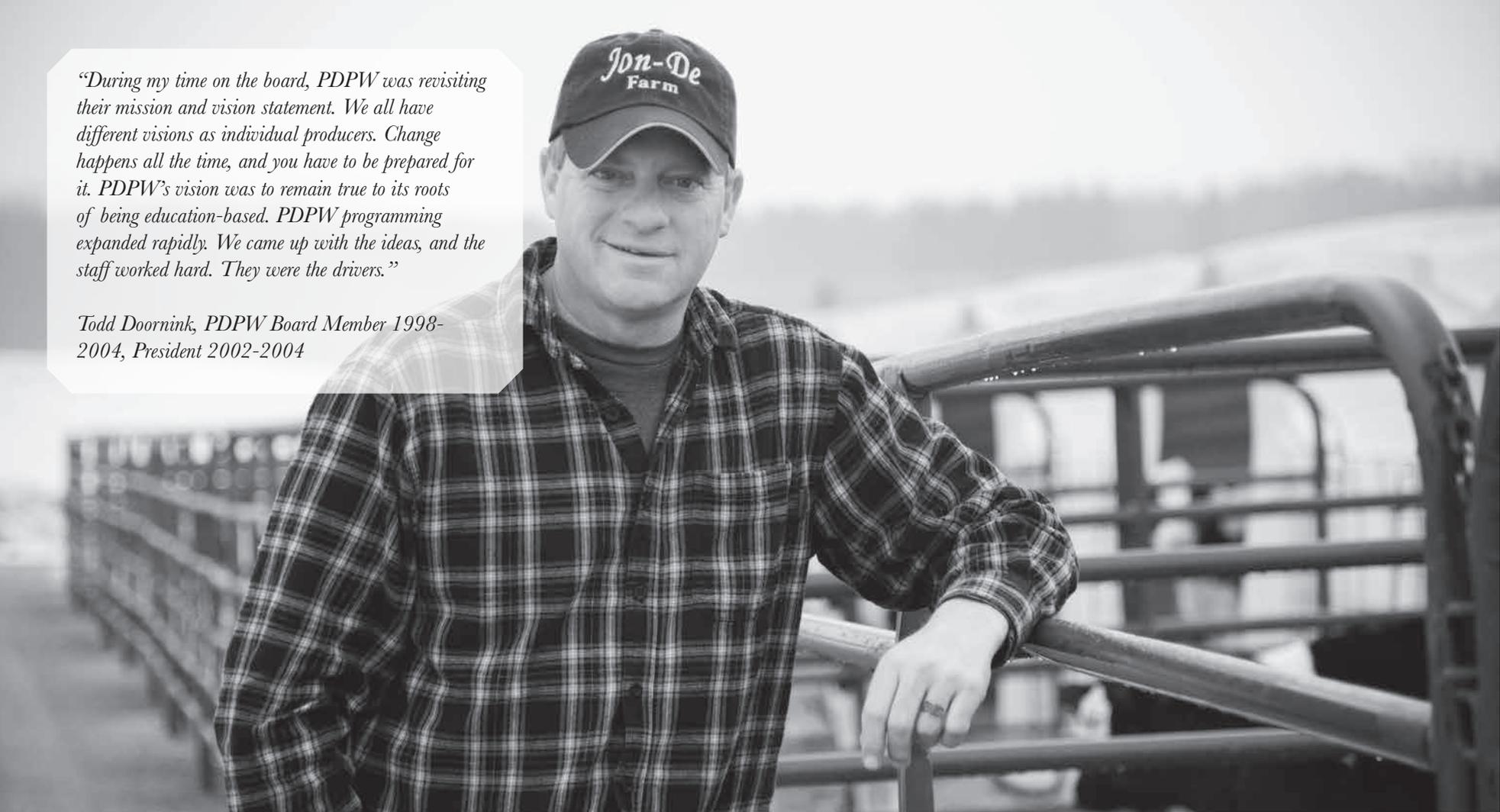
*Angie Molkentin, Freelance Writer Consultant*

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*“I am proud that I was asked to help establish the legal and business organization of PDPW and later, the Professional Dairy Producers Foundation. Each Business Conference has been a special time for our attorneys to visit with clients and friends, to broaden our knowledge about the issues affecting agriculture and for each of us to reaffirm our passion for agriculture and our role as agricultural attorneys. Each of us finds great meaning in being part of PDPW and our small contribution to its success in promoting a positive image for dairy agriculture and in educating our future dairy farmers.”*

*George W. Twohig, Partner/Attorney  
Twohig Rietbrock Schneider & Halbach, S.C.*



*“During my time on the board, PDPW was revisiting their mission and vision statement. We all have different visions as individual producers. Change happens all the time, and you have to be prepared for it. PDPW’s vision was to remain true to its roots of being education-based. PDPW programming expanded rapidly. We came up with the ideas, and the staff worked hard. They were the drivers.”*

*Todd Doornink, PDPW Board Member 1998-2004, President 2002-2004*

## *2003: Pushing Beyond the Comfort Zone*

Low milk prices and stressful economic conditions were the backdrop for the 2003 Business Conference, held March 11-12, in Madison. The theme: “Implementing Strategies for Greater Profit.” While many in the dairy industry were looking to the government for economic solutions, PDPW challenged the 1,200 members attending the conference to look at themselves. The conference included release of a third PDPW “White Paper” and panel discussion: “Wisconsin’s dairy industry needs profitability.” Published accounts of that conference indicated the discussion pushed some attendees beyond their comfort zone.

PDPW saw several “firsts” in 2003: The first “Dairy Policy Summit®” was held in Appleton; the first “Midwest Profit Symposium” was held in Middleton; and the first “Calf Care Connection” workshops were held at three locations in the state.

By its 10th anniversary, PDPW had firmly established itself as a unique organization for all dairy producers, run by dairy producers.

While meeting the educational needs of members remained the primary focus, PDPW also reached out to people in other leadership positions, agencies and institutions. Those relationships gave PDPW members a platform to interact with various levels and segments of government.

Critical decisions at local, state and federal levels related to environmental, transportation, animal care, antibiotic use and other issues had the potential to significantly impact the dairy industry. Some wanted PDPW to adjust its vision and mission.

## *2004: Reaching Higher, Further to Open Doors*

The theme for the 2004 Business Conference, “Soaring to New Heights,” was appropriate for what was to come. At the request of membership, PDPW expanded its overall educational programming by 40 percent.

The year brought the first Managers Academy, a high-level management-training course, held in Chicago.

For the next generation, PDPW held its first Youth Leadership Derby, in Fall River. The annual event introduced high school students between 15-18 years old to the potential of dairy-related careers.

An Enhanced Internship Conference was also held in Chicago, and the PDPW Enhanced Internship Program offered a platform and resource for collegiate-level students to partner with an active dairy farmer, in order to participate in an educational, hands-on, on-farm professional experience.

By sharing a transparent, firsthand look at the realities of dairy farming, PDPW helped facilitate a unified industry outreach to key government and opinion leaders, consumers and the media to build and protect the fragile “trust” asset for dairy farmers.

By working with those entities, PDPW also forged partnerships to protect and advance the interests of dairy producers and the dairy industry.

One of those partnerships was the Agricultural Community Engagement (ACE) program, established in 2003; with the formal work group meeting in June, 2004.

As the boundaries between urban and rural areas became less defined, conflicts over land use and farming practices arose. Working in conjunction with the Wisconsin Towns Association and the Wisconsin Counties Association, ACE opened communication channels between PDPW members and elected officials, many who did not have agricultural or dairy roots. The idea was to build dialogue, helping each side identify and understand each other’s policy needs and encourage informed decision-making.

The relationship started with annual seminars on topics important to the agricultural community and local government officials. Over the years, the program covered issues such as livestock siting, highway weight limits, implements of husbandry and working lands/Farmland Preservation.

*“My first experience with PDPW was at the second or third Managers Academy. Managers Academy stretches me and makes me learn and do things. Here in Pennsylvania, I helped found the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania, kind of a sister group to PDPW.*

*With dairy a national and international business, we need to learn from each other and work together, especially on educating the consumers, our legislators and neighbors. We’re such a small part of the population that is actively involved in agriculture that people forget or don’t know what it takes to get food on their table.”*

*Walt Moore, PDPW Member from Pennsylvania and Co-Founder of Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania*

*“PDPW has always been on the forefront of building relationship with people at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and the University of Wisconsin. Their quarterly meetings bring together dairy farmers and agency secretaries and staff to communicate what challenges both farmers and agencies are facing. Those relationships are extremely valuable, because when something goes wrong in the field, you know somebody to call. And, most farmers probably don’t understand that when those agencies have questions, they go to PDPW. It’s really important to have a voice for the industry, and PDPW has really filled that role.”*

*Dennis Frame, Former Director, UW Discovery Farms Program*



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

*“PDPW has always been very instrumental in trying to work with people.*

*I had the opportunity to speak at the Wisconsin Towns and Counties Convention through PDPW’s Agricultural Community Engagement (ACE) program. It gave us a seat at the table, where we could talk to county and town’s chairpeople and address areas where agriculture has gotten a bad rap and show we were trying to mitigate problems. That dialogue also helped county and town officials hear our concerns.”*

*Dean Strauss, PDPW Board Member 2003-2009, President 2008-2009*



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

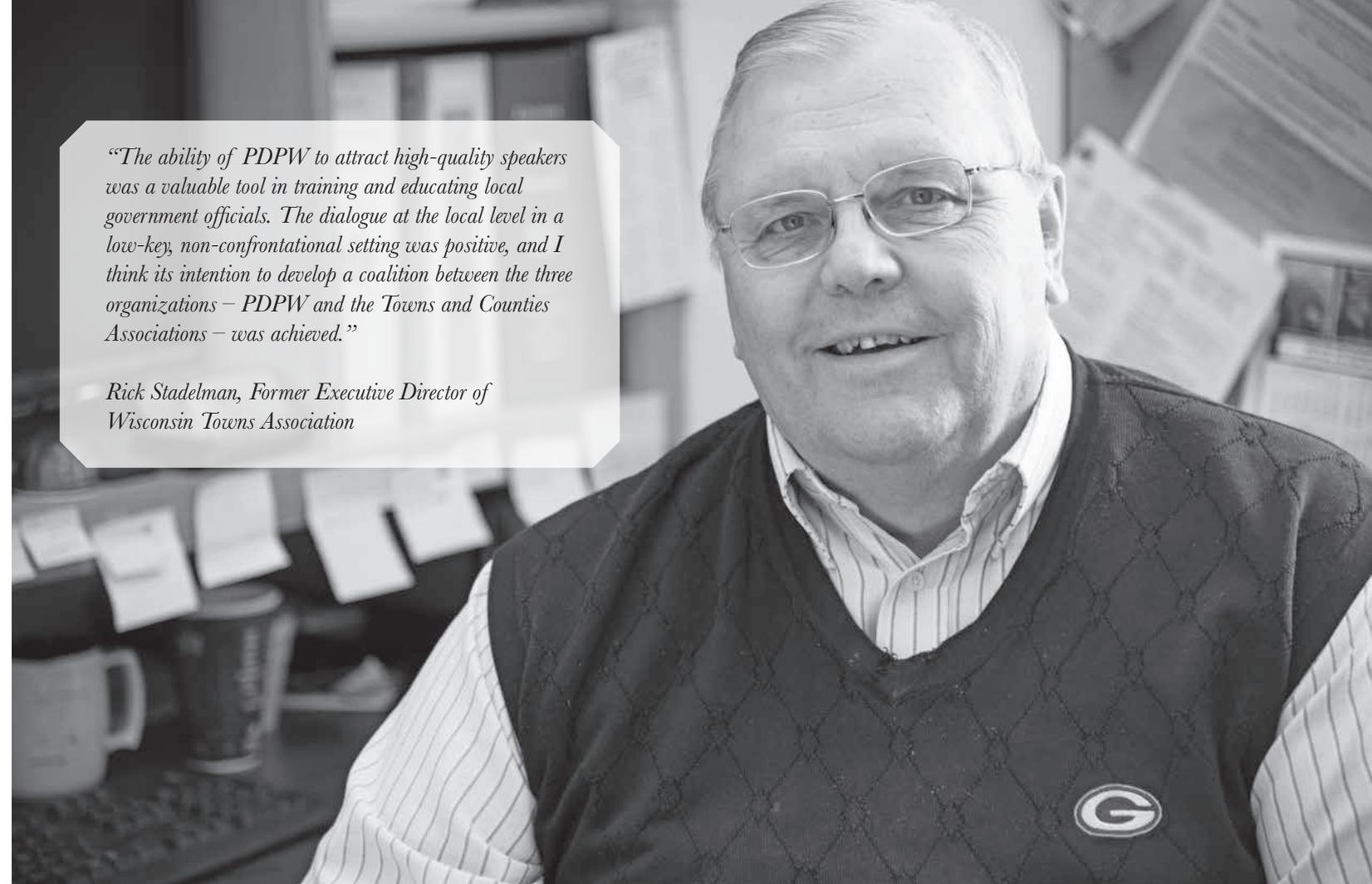
ACE grew to include regional meetings, and then on-farm twilight gatherings. Those social settings featured tours, ice cream and one-on-one or small-group discussions. From the standpoint of elected officials, they got a comfort level for some of the modern dairy farm practices and heard directly from PDPW members. PDPW members gained the opportunity to learn first-hand the challenges faced by elected officials.

One area where PDPW brought its influence to the table – without lobbying – was on livestock siting. It was an important issue for dairy producers in Wisconsin and beyond, an effort to help inform government officials about the needs for predictable policies as producers sought to expand and/or locate new dairy farms. Wisconsin’s siting legislative package was the work of many local elected officials and agricultural organizations, with PDPW dairy producer members playing critical roles.

Through seminars, farm tours and community twilight meetings, ACE continues to foster ongoing communication about the current and future role that dairy farms play in local communities.

*“The ability of PDPW to attract high-quality speakers was a valuable tool in training and educating local government officials. The dialogue at the local level in a low-key, non-confrontational setting was positive, and I think its intention to develop a coalition between the three organizations – PDPW and the Towns and Counties Associations – was achieved.”*

*Rick Stadelman, Former Executive Director of Wisconsin Towns Association*





*“More than 25 years ago, when dairy farmers knew they needed to evolve their farms beyond a way of life to a sustainable business, PDPW leaders had the foresight to create what today has become dairy’s professional development organization. PDPW is unique. It’s a servant leader. It is truly producer-led and relentlessly focused on enabling success for dairy farmers through education. Its legacy of leadership is refreshing, and I look forward to what it can accomplish for dairy farmers in the next 25 years.”*

*Linda Wenck, Director of Corporate Affairs and Social Responsibility and Principal, MorganMyers*

## *2005: State Recognition, with Sites on National Issues*

The 2005 Business Conference featured the theme “Fueling Your Profits – Igniting Your Passion.” Among the year’s “firsts,” PDPW hosted a “VIP Training – Develop Your Business Team,” in Wisconsin Dells.

In fall of 2005, PDPW was recognized as one of the “10 Most Influential Organizations or People” during the past 30 years of Wisconsin agriculture. Although just a dozen years old, PDPW earned that recognition in statewide voting conducted by Agri-View.

During the 2005 PDPW Managers Academy, members identified dairy animal welfare as one of the most critical issues facing the industry. It would become a major initiative, putting PDPW in the national spotlight.

## 2006: Designing a future

The theme for the 2006 Business Conference was “Daring by Design.” Educational highlights for the year included workshops on business transitions, transition cow management and a financial analysis workshop, featuring a PDPW favorite, Dr. Dave Kohl. The year also featured the organization’s first “Bilingual Calf Care” workshop for Spanish-speaking employees.

*“PDPW leaders had genuine passion, care and concern that ‘we do the right thing’ for our animals, our families and employees, our products and our consumers.’ An excellent example of doing the right thing was PDPW’s leadership role in the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative and drafting the animal well-being principles and guidelines, which became the foundation for the National Dairy FARM program. This has helped protect consumer trust and confidence in the U.S. dairy industry.”*

*Joan Behr, PDPW Board Advisor, 2010-2013*



## 2007: PDPW Takes National Animal Welfare Stage

The theme for the 2007 Business Conference was “Redefining the Milky Way.” The year featured a number of “firsts,” including a hoof care training session and a commodity marketing class. PDPW held its first “National Dairy Issues Forum,” and conducted the first “Nutrient Management Dairy Tours.”

More than two years earlier, members identified dairy animal welfare as one of the most critical issues facing the industry. The PDPW Board agreed animal welfare was not a state or even regional issue, but a national issue that had to be addressed.

With the majority of Americans at least three generations removed from the farm, people no longer knew how their milk, meat and eggs were produced. When they

were exposed to production agriculture, they questioned some practices as cruel or unnecessary.

*“I’ve had the privilege of working with the PDPW team for more than a decade on a variety of programs and projects. The most memorable was the creation of the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative (NDAWI). PDPW led the effort to create the NDAWI to bring uniformity to animal care standards throughout the dairy industry. It ultimately became the foundation for what has become the National Dairy FARM program, supported by the National Milk Producers Federation. Today, FARM is the leading nationally recognized program.*

*What was most impressive to me was that PDPW was willing to serve as the catalyst and invest the time, energy and financial resource to make NDAWI a reality without any consideration or concern about how it would benefit PDPW.”*

*Charlie Arnot, CEO Center for Food Integrity*

While those in animal agriculture had come to lean heavily on “science” to answer those questions, customers and consumers didn’t want data and scientific, jargon-laden explanations. They wanted to know producers cared.

PDPW developed a pilot project to help producers position the industry as proactive in managing the health and well-being of their animals. Serving as catalyst and facilitator, In 2005, PDPW brought together a broad-based group to create principles and guidelines for animal care that producers could implement on their farms, designed to provide consumer assurance that the entire industry was meeting its animal care

obligation. The “National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative” was published and introduced at the 2007 World Dairy Expo.

## ***2008: Putting the Pieces Together***

Theme for the 2008 Business Conference was “Solving the Profit Puzzle.” Carrying that theme into the year, PDPW programming grew to 28 days, including a Production Management Symposium and a two-day Management Accounting Conference, with follow-up session two months later. “Firsts” included an ACE Regional Meeting, “Dairy Herdsman” training, and spokesperson training.

*“The thing that was always the most exciting to me as the organization was growing was the optimism, even in poor economic times. There was optimism for the current generation, and the future generation being part of the business. It was always a positive environment. The thing that sustained PDPW and still does today is that realistic, but positive outlook.”*

*Terry Smith, PhD, Former Director of the University of Wisconsin Center for Dairy Profitability*



*“I served as an advisor to the board in 2007-2009. One issue on the agenda at that time was whether to expand the outreach of PDPW. I believe we had the first board meeting outside of Wisconsin in Freeport, Illinois during my tenure. During some of the planning discussions we talked about removing Wisconsin from the vision statement. PDPW has developed a more regional approach working with producers in surrounding states. This has allowed the organization to grow and thrive even though dairy producer numbers have decreased.”*

*Floyd W. Sutton, PDPW Board Advisor 2007-2009*

## ***2009: Values Rise to the Top***

The theme for the 2009 Business Conference was “Adding Passion, Multiplying Profits.” PDPW leaders couldn’t have known it at the time, but it would take every ounce of passion for many producers to survive what would be one of the most challenging economic years in dairy farming history.

In many ways, the financially trying year for individual producers brought them closer together under PDPW’s umbrella. When times are tight, programs and relationships that bring the most value, rise to the top.

“Firsts” for the year included milker training for Spanish-speaking employees and Heifer Facility Tours.

## 2010: Reaching Beyond

Theme for the 2010 Business Conference was “Imagine Dairy.” “Firsts” for the year included Microsoft Computer Training and an on-farm ACE twilight meeting. The Education Calendar added new formats, adding a “Blogging 101” webinar and a “World Class Webinars” featuring Dr. Dave Kohl. A pilot management assessment program, Spanish-speaking training and a “middle managers” program rounded out the offerings.

Also starting this year was the Agricultural Professional Partnerships (APPs) program. This curriculum is an on-farm educational experience designed to help educate people whose employment puts them in contact with farmers and others engaged in agriculture.

*“What makes PDPW so special is that the agenda is set by the members, and the organization empowers individuals with good ideas. Our son has been on committees with input to create programming that meets the wants and needs in his stage of life, and they’re different from the wants and needs for my wife and me. PDPW stays relevant because there’s a multi-generational approach, and every generation has buy-in.”*

*Eric Hillan, PDPW Board, 2007-2013, President, 2010-2012*



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

## 2011: Enhancing Profitability, Communications

Still recovering from the effects of low milk prices in 2009, the theme for the 2011 Business Conference was “Pathways to Profit.”

PDPW firsts included a Human Resources workshop to meet the needs of managing Spanish-speaking workers. The Managers Academy was held in Albuquerque, NM. The education calendar expanded to 32 days of programming.

PDPW also launched the Dairy’s Visible Voice curriculum, providing leadership development through effective communications. Five hands-on training sessions supported dairy producers as they lived, worked and engaged their communities. Dairy’s Visible Voice modules include: *Leadership Through Active Listening, Sharing Your Message with the Media, Social Media Strategy, Building a Proactive Communication Plan for Your Farm, and Preparing for a Crisis Before it Happens.*

The bedrock of PDPW has always been a commitment to lifelong learning and continuous improvement. Programming has grown to incorporate classroom-type settings, hands-on experiences, tours and more, year-round. Educational opportunities are offered for every member of the farm team and family, with several topics also offered in Spanish.

That exponential growth in programming is not only because membership has grown in terms of numbers, but membership is also more diverse in terms of generational and managerial experiences. While some members are preparing to transition out of their dairy businesses, a new generation of young people are just getting started, with a different set of resource needs and wants.

*"I became involved with PDPW while I was attending college at UW-Madison. I started as a student volunteer for the Business Conference. As an intern in 2009 to 2011, I managed the Youth Leadership Derby and Mentor Program where college students are placed with a PDPW member to get on-farm experience."*

*Darci Daniels, PDPW Intern 2010, PDPW Member*

*"I haven't missed a Business Conference in years. I have producers who I look up to, and every year I look forward to talking to them to see how they are doing, how they put up their crops or the new things they did in their barns. The breakout sessions keeping our mind open on new topics. It keeps us dreaming for a better future."*

*Justin Daniels, PDPW Member*

*Darci and Justin were introduced to each other by a mutual friend at the 2010 Business Conference. Sharing a passion for the dairy industry and cows, they were married about two years later.*



*Photo Credit: Ray Merrill, Progressive Dairyman*

## *2012: Meat Matters, What Matters, Food Armor*

The theme for the 2012 Business Conference was “Innovation.” Highlighting innovative producers and leaders, the year featured an out-of-state dairy tour to Pennsylvania, and an in-state “100-Pound Dairy Facility” tours. Educational programming expanded to 65 days during 2012-13.

The year also elevated an initiative designed to eliminate an issue seen as a detriment to dairy’s future. In 2010, the Wisconsin dairy industry had been listed as the top state with repeat drug violative residues in cull dairy cows. In a meeting with USDA Food Safety Inspection Service officials, the agency representative warned that if something wasn’t done, the government would start regulating until the problem was solved.

PDPW and the Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association (WVMA) took over the process of solving the problem by developing the “Meat Matters “ program. When it became

apparent that the answer to residues, not only in meat but also milk, could be solved by the “Meat Matters” program, PDPW changed the title to “What Matters.”

The “how” part of the “What Matters” program is a six-step Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) program which was further developed and named “Food Armor;” used by farms to develop their own animal drug and health protocols, records and oversight with the shared responsibility of their veterinarian, with the goal that healthy animals are the only animals that should go on the truck to be slaughtered.

PDPW did not stop. With help from John Freitag and the Wisconsin Beef Council, PDPW helped convince the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and National Milk Producers Federation to add standards of Beef Quality Assurance into the FARM program, so that now all dairy farmers that become FARM certified are now BQA certified.

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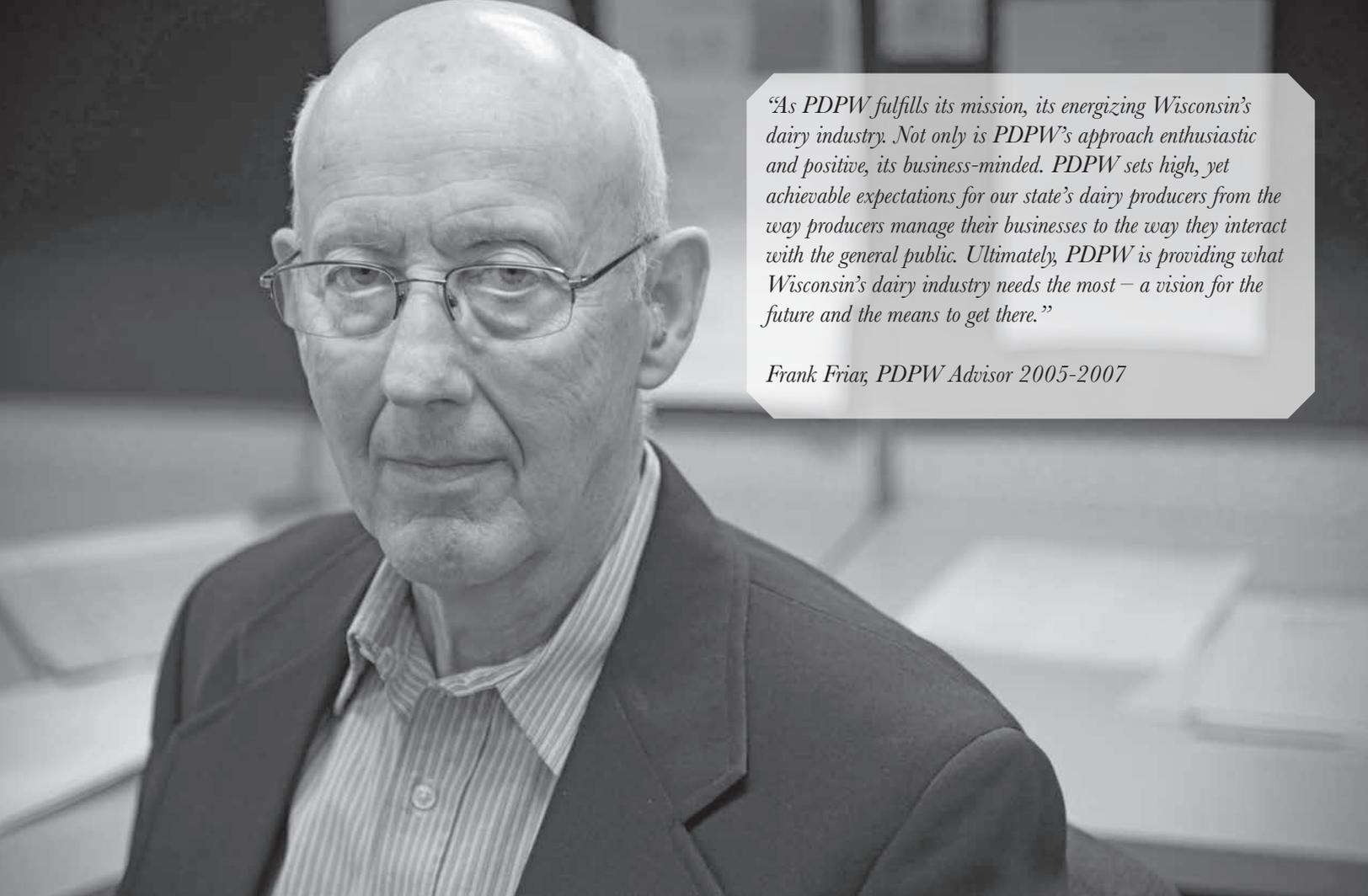
*“It was typical for PDPW board members to be part of other organizations to develop relationship with other stakeholders. I was nominated to be the PDPW representative on the Wisconsin Beef Council (WBC) board. “Meat Matters” evolved to “What Matters,” adding a six-step, on-farm program called “Food Armor.”*

*Working with the WBC, PDPW helped convince the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and National Milk Producers Federation to add standards of Beef Quality Assurance into the FARM program. What started as a chance to develop a relationship with the beef industry at the state level is now impacting not only the dairy industry, but the beef industry nationally.”*

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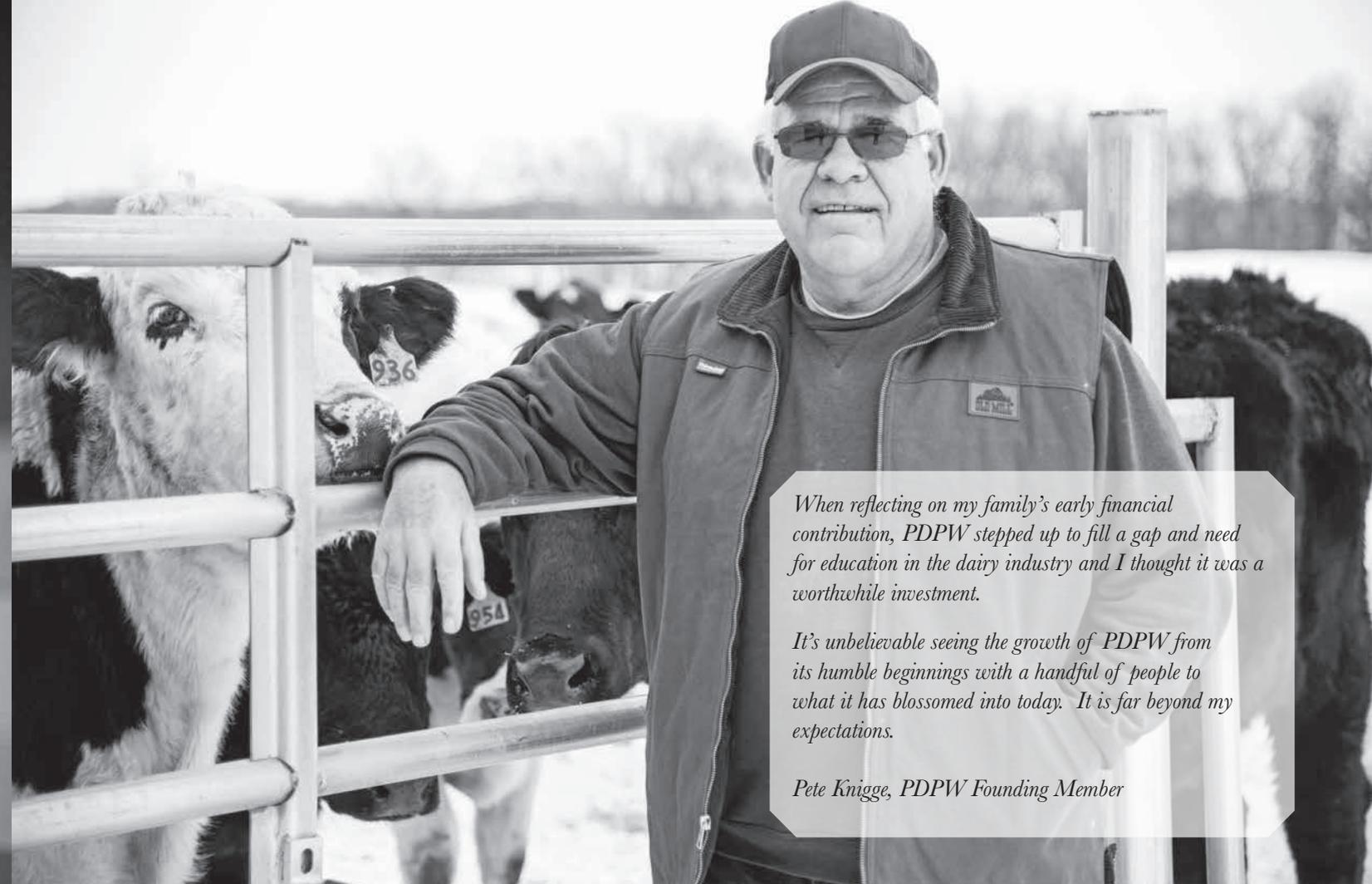
*Keith York, PDPW Board Member, 2009-2016, PDPW President 2014-2015*

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*“As PDPW fulfills its mission, its energizing Wisconsin’s dairy industry. Not only is PDPW’s approach enthusiastic and positive, its business-minded. PDPW sets high, yet achievable expectations for our state’s dairy producers from the way producers manage their businesses to the way they interact with the general public. Ultimately, PDPW is providing what Wisconsin’s dairy industry needs the most – a vision for the future and the means to get there.”*

*Frank Friar, PDPW Advisor 2005-2007*



*When reflecting on my family’s early financial contribution, PDPW stepped up to fill a gap and need for education in the dairy industry and I thought it was a worthwhile investment.*

*It’s unbelievable seeing the growth of PDPW from its humble beginnings with a handful of people to what it has blossomed into today. It is far beyond my expectations.*

*Pete Knigge, PDPW Founding Member*

## 2013

The theme for the 2013 Business Conference was “Recharge.” The Managers Academy journeyed to New Orleans, while the out-of-state Dairy Tour visited Idaho. The Educational Calendar featured 45 days of programming

*“I worked as an intern for PDPW from 2012-14. When I started with PDPW, I really didn’t feel as though I had clarified my own career goals. Because PDPW was willing to invest in me, my internship became more than a “job”—it became the growth experience I was looking for (and needed) at that time. I learned important lessons about true servant leadership, dedication and passion. While I had the chance to work on projects that were meaningful and significant to the organization, I also had the opportunity to interact with some of Wisconsin’s truly elite dairy leaders. My time with PDPW taught me the value of trust, and how to build lasting relationships with other leaders in the dairy community.”*

*Taylor Fritsch, PDPW Intern*

## 2014: PDPW’s Excellence a Cornerstone

The theme for the 2014 Business Conference was “Exceeding Excellence.” Nearly 1,500 people attended, with representatives from 21 states and four countries.

In conjunction with the 2014 Business Conference, PDPW hosted the first Cornerstone Dairy Academy, focusing on leadership and communication training. Originally designed for young people, it now encompasses participants of all ages, those eager to learn how to adapt their communication and leadership skills to new situations, whether its managing people in a multi-generational team, bringing in that next generation, communicating with Spanish-speaking labor, or the college student seeking to broaden their education. Through 2017, the Cornerstone Dairy Academy has had over 200 participating dairy leaders from 19 states and two countries.

The Education Calendar featured 62 days of programming. “Firsts” for 2014 included a Dairy Technology Tour of Wisconsin and a “Special Edition Webinar: The Farm Bill – What’s in it for Dairy,” featuring Mark Stephenson.



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

*“This industry would have a big hole in it without PDPW. It brings people with a common interest together to build something and rely on one another. PDPW’s impact is all over the U.S., especially where there’s a lot of dairy people. If I mention PDPW just about anywhere, in any semi-professional meeting of any kind, people know about it. It’s one of the pillars, a reference point for what other organizations would like to be.”*

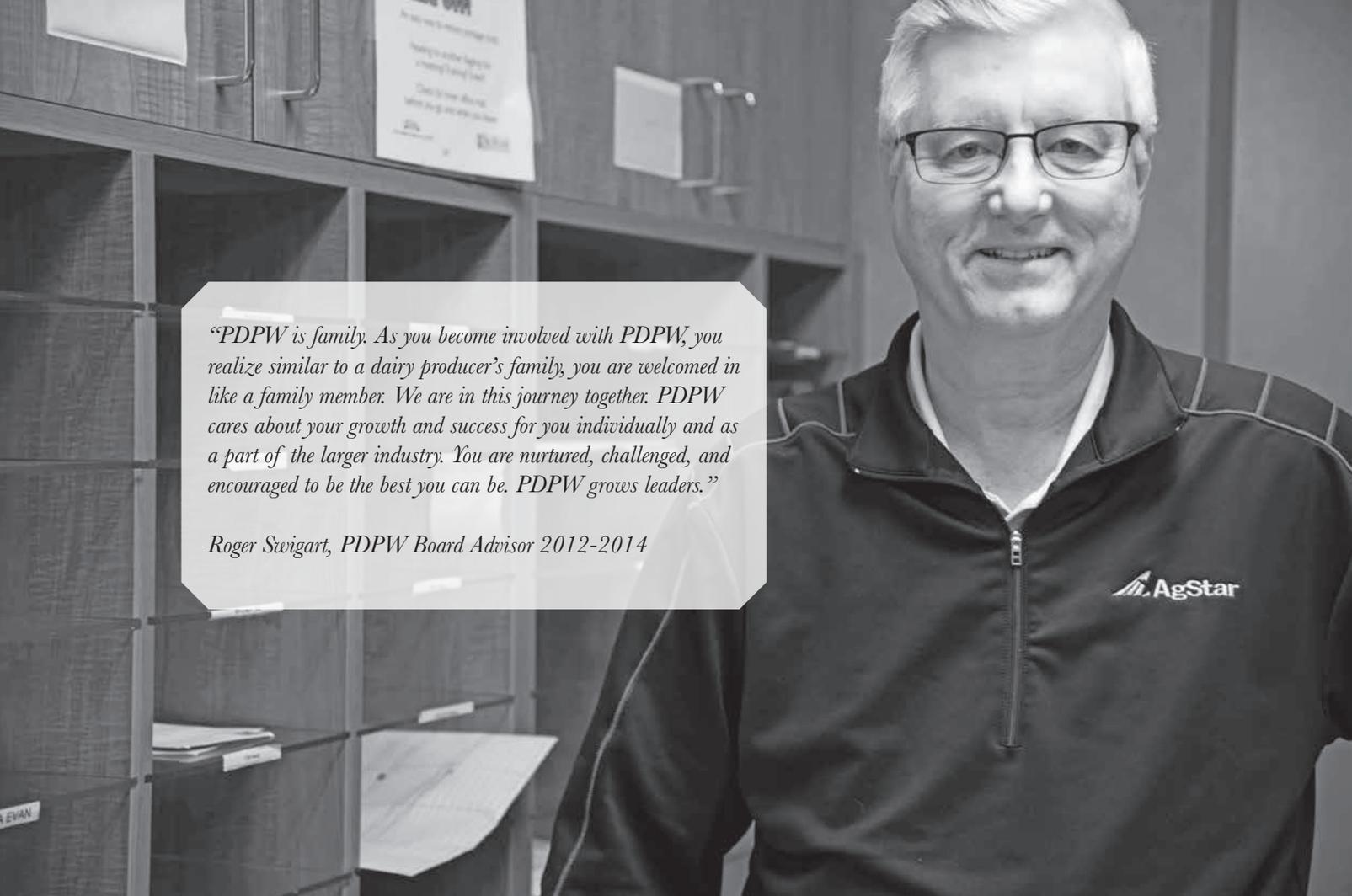
*Steve Faber, PDPW Founding Member, PDPW Board Member 1992-1995*

## 2015: Education Moves Beyond Borders

Educational programming hit another milestone in 2015. A “first” included offering programming in a neighboring state, when a Calf Care Connection was held in Iowa.

The Managers Academy moved to Charlotte, North Carolina. The year also featured a Dairy Animal Handling and Safety Workshop, in Spanish. The 2015 Business Conference offered a new component, “Hands-On Hubs,” small-group learning laboratories.

Theme for the 2015 Business Conference was “Connections,” a reminder of the importance of relationships with fellow producers and others in the dairy industry. While the PDPW board was made up of active dairy producers, industry representatives served the organization, with several as ex-officio advisory board members each year, providing resources to help grow not only grow the organization, but also aid in the professional development of individual board members.



*“PDPW is family. As you become involved with PDPW, you realize similar to a dairy producer’s family, you are welcomed in like a family member. We are in this journey together. PDPW cares about your growth and success for you individually and as a part of the larger industry. You are nurtured, challenged, and encouraged to be the best you can be. PDPW grows leaders.”*

*Roger Swigart, PDPW Board Advisor 2012-2014*

## *2016: Inspiration Continues*

As the theme of the 2016 Business Conference illustrated, PDPW continues to “Inspire.” As of 2016, PDPW had members in 18 states, representing every type and size of dairy operation. Educational programming expanded to 80 days. The Managers Academy traveled to San Antonio, Texas, and an international Dairy Tour journeyed all the way to New Zealand. Among its “firsts,” PDPW hosted Water Quality Tours.

*“PDPW is much more than an organization. PDPW is a group of people that are dedicated, determined, focused and passionate about our industry and about individual producers like me. I do really love PDPW – not just what they’ve done for me, our family, and our business, but what they do for so many other individuals, organizations, businesses and our whole industry.”*

*Hank Wagner, PDPW Board Member, 1997-2003, President, 1999-2002*



*Photo Credit: Ray Merritt, Progressive Dairyman*

## *2017: Remaining True to Its Mission*

As PDPW members meet for the 2017 Business Conference, the theme, “Mission Driven,” harkens back to its creation. The PDPW of today is very different from its origins, but the same basic principles exist: provide dairy producers with a forum where there is a positive exchange of ideas and opinions, and equip them with the tools to make them successful, profitable business owners.

Its strategic plan has evolved into three buckets: professional development of individual members; relations with stakeholders who have a direct or indirect impact on PDPW members and the entire dairy sector; and industry unification, recognizing that the only borders are limits on imagination and learning.

*“When you look back, returning to the farm was one of the least likely things our parents wanted us to do. Now, you see a switch, and I think PDPW has been one of those organizations that’s led to the realization dairying can be a wonderful career. One thing that excites me about PDPW is we’re seeing multiple generations of members, from the grandfather or father and now the children. There’s a place for everybody in our organization, whether you’re the grandfather transferring the farm to the kids in the next generation, or the first-generation farmer who’s just trying to figure it out on their own, we’re a one-stop shop for all of those different entities.”*

*Mitch Breunig, PDPW Board Member beginning in 2013, President 2015-2017*





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*“The reason I love PDPW so much is because I believe in it. With lifelong learning, PDPW helps enable its members to grow as leaders. Leadership is the building block for strong families, strong communities, strong churches and strong schools. Leadership is the fabric of our country.*

*PDPW’s results are real. To have an opportunity to see fellow dairy farmers set goals, grow intellectually, develop their communication and business skills, become better cow managers, and realize their dreams: that is the greatest gift I’ve received during my career. PDPW means so much to me.”*

*Shelly Mayer, PDPW Executive Director*

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**“To lead the success  
of the dairy industry  
through education.”**

**PDPW Vision**

