

Kearney The Courier

17th Billing
Lawson
64062



SECD #293840 KEARNEY, MISSOURI 64060

SINGLE COPY PRICE 60¢



Courier Photo/Jeff Adkins

Kelle Brammer, left, assisted a customer at Kearney Feed and Supply on Friday afternoon. Brammer gave up one passion — her love of teaching — to carry on a family business she feels equally strong about.

Preserving the family store

A year after tragedy, Kearney Feed is in daughter's hands

JEFF ADKINS

Editor

Friday afternoon brought a steady stream of traffic to the counter at Kearney Feed and Supply.

Besides business transactions, Kelle Brammer fielded inquiries ranging from backyard bird feed to a customer's uneasiness about the small cut on his horse's hoof. A veterinarian had already checked out the horse, but the man was worried about an infection so he sought out Brammer's opinion, too.

Others came by to visit about upcoming events on the rodeo circuit as a friendly card game ended inside the store.

"It's kind of like a hub of information," Brammer said. "Most of these people have known me for years. When I was a young kid, our family used to go to horse shows. That's how I knew how to help that guy who asked about the rodeos. I know where all the high school rodeos are."

In some ways, Kearney Feed has been the center of the area equine community since Garold Webb became owner 22 years ago. But this tight-knit community was devastated a year ago when Webb and his wife, Linda, died at a rodeo event in Nebraska over Labor Day weekend.

The future of Kearney Feed was uncertain

◆ see **KEARNEY** on page A11

◆ Kearney: Daughter takes on business

■ continued from page A1

until Brammer, Garold's daughter, decided to forego one passion — a teaching career in the Lawson School District — to carry on a family business she feels equally strong about.

"This was his love," Brammer said. "It's still a piece of my dad. I don't think he would want me to do it out of guilt and I don't. I like it. I like doing it a lot."

Garold and Linda set out to enjoy a weekend with friends, not unlike other trips they had taken to rodeos across the Midwest. Garold loved the rodeo, and continued roping well into his 50s.

The couple's death was the result of a tragic accident. While asleep in their trailer with a propane heater running to keep them warm, they died from asphyxia.

Brammer, who often ran the store on weekends when the couple traveled, was working when she learned of the accident.

"I was here that Saturday when the accident happened," she said. "I opened the store that Labor Day weekend so they could go."

Brammer learned the ropes — in the rodeo and feed business — directly from Garold. In high school, she competed in team roping events, while also earning a paycheck working summers and weekends at Kearney Feed.

Garold had been a produce manager and fork lift operator before starting Kearney Feed. The previous business, McQuerry's Feed and Seed, had been closed for a few years before Garold purchased the facility.

"He wanted to be his own boss," Brammer said. "He was so gung-ho about it. He always loved animals and had horses his entire life."

Brammer was in eighth grade when Kearney Feed became a family business. Brammer never anticipated that she would one day run the business, and now says the weekends spent working with her father were part of a larger plan.

"To a degree, I enjoyed working here when I was younger," she said. "I was still a kid and had to get up on Saturday mornings and go to work. Now I feel it's God's grace that made me do that, because I wouldn't have been able to do what I've done in the last year."

Brammer says faith has guided her in the last year — from dealing with the deaths of Garold and Linda, to maintaining the business, and the decision to leave her teaching career.

Brammer was just starting her third year of teaching fourth grade in Lawson, a dream job in her hometown school district where she "was teaching the kids of classmates I went to school with." A graduate of Lawson High and William Jewell College, she also spent nine years teaching second grade in the Kansas City, Kan. school district.

Eight days into the school year, Brammer took a leave of absence to run the day-to-day operations at Kearney Feed. Her teaching contract was due in April, giving her eight months to decide whether to sell the business and return to teaching, or continue operating the business.

Parents and students in Lawson urged her to return. Long-

time customers at Kearney Feed asked her to stay.

"It was hard because I love teaching," Brammer said. "The Lawson community didn't want me to quit teaching which made the decision harder. They were saying you can't stop teaching. People here were saying please don't sell it ... keep it the same."

"I think I knew in my heart I wasn't going to sell it. I just didn't verbalize it until April."

The store has remained much the same over the last year, though Brammer has not hesitated to add new products or emphasize a different level of customer service.

In later years, Brammer says Kearney Feed was as important to Garold as a social gathering place than as a business operation. Her father also had a successful horse breeding business as an income source.

Since Brammer was raised around the business, she's familiar with most of the long-time customers. She said anywhere between four to 10 people will still stop in every day.

With population growth in rural areas, she's also seeing more new faces every week.

"It's important to me to make sure every customer is treated right," Brammer said. "I want this to be a good business, and still be that place where people can hang out. There are a lot of ropers who used to hang out with dad who still come in to see where (events) are this weekend. People still come in, hang out and talk like it was before."

"It's still very much a center for the horse community."