



## NEIGHBORS

by Heather Berry

**L**ester Martin passes by three feed stores to purchase what he needs from Kearney Feed for his Arabian show horses. And he relies on owner Kelle Brammer's equine knowledge as much as anything when it comes to his horses.

"Arabians are like high-performance athletes," says Lester, owner of L&B Farm in Lawson. "Kelle understands our needs, the horses' needs, how to get optimum horse health and show ring results.

"And the customer service is second to none," he quickly adds. "For that alone, we wouldn't go anywhere else."

Kelle runs Kearney Feed Store, a business started by her father 32 years ago. She's humbled by the customer loyalty and the fact that people ask for her advice.

"We're kind of a hub for information here," says Kelle, 45. "Most of the people who come here knew my parents and me for years. And they knew Dad would probably know the answer to any question they had or he'd know where to find out the answer."

Kelle says people call her about all types of things — what to feed their horse, basic vet care, where to find a good electrician to work on the electric fence, what seed to plant and even how to raise the baby chicks they just bought.

While they sell feed for everything from cockatiels to rabbits and chickens to dogs, Kelle says they're pretty much the headquarters for horse food and anything equine related.

"We also sell cattle feed, but not as much as we did 30 years ago," says the Platte Clay Electric Cooperative member. "There's just not as much land to run cattle on these days. It seems like everyone moved to Kearney, built a house on a few acres and bought a horse."

To help their growing number of horse owners, the feed store holds a free equine seminar each year, discussing everything from horse healthcare to how to read feed labels properly.

"People trust our judgment when it comes to the care of their animals, and I'm proud of that," says Kelle. "We are not going to just sell them something to sell it. We want to know it's what the customer needs and that it will do the job they need it to do."

Kelle says much of what she knows about horses and running the feed store she learned from her dad.

"The knowledge in Dad's head wasn't written down," she says, "but in the past decade, I think I've done a pretty good job of figuring out what I didn't already know."

Sadly, a tragic accident led to the career Kelle now leads.



Kelle Brammer and her husband, Eugene, took over Kearney Feed Store in 1999 after the untimely death of Kelle's dad and stepmother, Garold and Linda Webb.

# Carrying On

*A career change brought on by tragedy gave Kelle Brammer a new way of teaching in her community*

It was Labor Day weekend, 1999. Kelle was eight days into the school year as a popular fourth grade teacher in Lawson. She told her dad and stepmother, Linda, that she would cover the feed store for them while they went to a rodeo in Nebraska. The couple used a kerosene heater to heat their living-quarters horse trailer and died in their sleep from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Kelle, an only child, had big decisions to make. She had to sell her dad's 200 horses and other livestock — and she had to decide what to do with the business.

After talking it over with her husband, Eugene,



the family business much like her dad did years ago.

"True, I work more hours here and I don't get the summer off like I did when I taught," says Kelle, "But that's OK. I'm still teaching. I'm just teaching a different subject now."

*Kearney Feed Store is located at 300 W. Washington St. in Kearney and is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday, 8 a.m. to noon. You may contact Kelle at 816-903-4611, by e-mail at [kearneyfeed@uniteone.net](mailto:kearneyfeed@uniteone.net) or through the feed store's Web site at [www.kearney-feedstore.com](http://www.kearney-feedstore.com). Special orders welcome.*

Kelle took a leave of absence from teaching to run Kearney Feed.

"I wasn't ever motivated by the guilt of 'Dad would want me to do this,'" says Kelle. "I just had to decide if I wanted to do it or not."

Thankfully the feed store wasn't foreign to Kelle, since she'd worked there afternoons and weekends as a teen. With the help of her husband and son, Zac, she could continue to run the place. She'd grown up hearing her dad offer sage advice to customers, discuss feed and seed, horses and vet care. She knew the businesses her dad had dealt with for years. And she knew she could offer the same excellent customer service her dad was known for at the local feed store.

Kelle says the support of faithful customers helped make the transition from teaching to running the feed store much easier than it could have been.

"I've got one customer who comes in here every other week who was dad's first customer 32 years ago," says Kelle. "We really appreciate the loyalty we've seen from friends, both old and new."

Over the past decade, Kearney Feed has remained much the same as it did when Kelle's dad ran the business, although Kelle has made some changes to keep their store current with the times.

She now goes to market to meet with new suppliers and buy things like horse saddles and tack, Muck boots and a wide variety of giftware to offer customers who stop at the feed store — something Kelle says her dad never would have done. The feed store also has a Web site, as well as a new billboard recently installed along Interstate 35.

"I just started taking plastic two months ago," Kelle says, laughing. "So I think we're finally current with the times now."

Kelle and Eugene's son, Zac, is now 18 and helps his parents deliver feed. While Kelle is the second generation to run Kearney Feed, she doesn't want to push her son into taking on the family business later unless he knows that is what's right for him.

For now, Kelle is content to run the family business much like her dad did years ago.