

# A Change in Plans

District 4 OYDC John & Christina Lehman's plans to start a dairy from scratch changed when a neighboring dairy facility became available



Christina Powell's life has changed since she was featured in the February 2006 *Messenger* as MMPA's District 4 OYDC. Back then, she and her fiancé, John Lehman, were putting together a dairy from scratch on John's farm with used equipment they had purchased. Today, they are working to upgrade a neighbor's existing dairy facility.

Less than a month after Christina's story appeared in the *Messenger*, an early-morning fire took the lives of the couple's neighbors, MMPA member Bruce Lindauer, his wife, Cathy, and two of their children, Steven and Jessica.

Later that morning, several neighbors, including John and Christina, were on hand to milk and feed the Lindauer's dairy herd. Neighbors cared for the herd until family members were able to arrange for their sale. John and Christina also assisted the family with getting the machinery and equipment ready for sale.

"We were just part of a group of neighbors that helped," Christina says. "Everybody pitched in and did what needed to be done."

The Lindauer's remaining family members wanted to see the dairy farm stay operational, but none were able to rearrange their lives to include running a dairy farm full time. They knew of John and Christina's goals to have their own dairy farm and the families discussed leasing the facilities while preparing for the machinery auction.

"It works out well for both parties," John says. "They were looking at paying taxes on empty buildings

that would just start deteriorating and offered us the opportunity to utilize them. We will save quite a lot on start-up construction costs.”

John and Christina’s first-hand knowledge of the facility from helping to care for the animals after the fire coupled with the farm’s location – less than a quarter mile away from their own – made their decision to lease a simple one. The barns and parlor were useable but needed some updating and maintenance, so John and Christina went to work right away to make improvements. Soon after signing the lease, the couple moved their young stock to the transition barn located on the farm.

“We sincerely appreciate the Lehman’s commitment as work continues to get the dairy farm fully operational once again and we look forward to a mutually beneficial long-term business relationship,” says Carolyn Putzig, Bruce’s sister and personal representative to the Lindauer Estate.

Planning their September 2006 wedding, being the sole employees of Carland Elevator (which they also own) and helping Christina’s parents on her family’s 50-cow dairy in Williamston has made working on the new dairy a challenge. The couple works evenings and weekends on the facility and aims to reach a goal of moving milk cows in by early 2007.

The farm’s double 5 herringbone parlor is well-worn but operational. The cement in the parlor needs repaired, a project the Lehmans plan to tackle in the spring. In the meantime, John is creating a 4 stall flat parlor in the farm’s old maternity pen area, which is adjacent to the parlor and milkhouse, making it convenient to hook up to the existing milking system.

“Once we got into the barn and started looking around, we were really impressed with the way things were set up, considering the facility was built in the late 70s,” Christina says. “I think the design was ahead of its time.”

The flat parlor will be used to milk sick and fresh cows once the Lehman’s finish their improvements to the main parlor.

With the memory of the house fire not far from their minds, John and Christina had much of the electrical replaced in the barn and milking areas. They also plan to install a second bulk tank, which was purchased when they had planned to start the dairy on their own farmstead.

The Lehmans are hopeful that they will soon be milking cows in the leased facility. Christina owns 7 cows that are currently housed at her parents’ dairy farm. John and Christina plan to purchase some additional cattle when the facility is ready and have several heifers due to freshen in 2007. The couple hopes to have the herd up to 40 cows by the end of 2007.

## A closer Look



PHOTO BY FAUCETT PHOTOGRAPHY

### OLR Holsteins

John and Christina Lehman had milk mustache photos taken while holding their new MMPA sign at their wedding this past September.

**Location:** Elsie, Michigan

**MMPA Members of:** MMPA District 4 and the Ingham County Local

**Herd Size:** 40 is the Lehman’s target herd size by the end of the year.

**Replacements:** 12

**Acreage Farmed:** 270

**Milking set-up:** 4 stall flat parlor while remodeling a double 5 herringbone parlor.

### Agriculture and dairy involvement:

Christina is a Dairy Communicator for MMPA’s Ingham County Local. She has also served as a District 4 delegate and is the Michigan Red and White Association President.

### The thing that makes a difference on

**our farm is:** Starting out small and expanding in time. We have to watch for every little thing that could go wrong and hope it doesn’t.