

Former FFA student realizes goal by opening his own business

By Dave Hanson

The letters "FFA" stand for Future Farmers of America, an organization of high school students aiming for careers in agriculture. These letters are a part of the history and heritage of many rural residents who carry on a proud tradition that will never change. But FFA is not just an organization for students who aspire to be production farmers; it also welcomes those looking at careers as teachers, doctors, scientists, business owners and more. For this reason, the name of the organization was updated in 1988, after a vote of national convention delegates, to reflect the growing diversity and new opportunities in the agriculture industry.

Kelly Ray's Service & Repair in Evergreen, MN, is a business born from the dreams and desires of a farm kid who grew up on the same acreage it is built on. If it weren't for the culture of hard work and persistence instilled in him by growing up on a farm, Kelly Schwarzrock may never have realized his goal of owning his own business.

Ed and Donna Schwarzrock owned and operated a successful dairy farm known as E&D Jerseys for many years adjacent to MN Highway 87 just east of Evergreen. That farm helped them to raise and shape each of their six children, three boys and three girls. Donna, now 83 years young, continues to live at the farm, but today shares the acres with youngest child Kelly, who is fulfilling a promise to his Dad to keep Mom from "the home!" Kelly and his wife Karen have five children of their own (Nathan, Angela, James, Samantha and Sara), that also have come to know the hard-working and wholesome lifestyle of life on the farm.

All through the years of their operation of E&D Jerseys, Ed and Donna were proud supporters of Future Farmers of America, opening their farm and operation to many FFA groups for visits and tours of their Grade A dairy business. Consequently, Kelly picked up that same affection for FFA and became involved as a member of the

group throughout his school years. In fact, it was a mention of his competing in FFA winter shows at UM Crookston as a student that precipitated this article. Kelly recalled how in addition to livestock judging, he also competed in Ag Mechanics.

Those FFA competitions fueled a passion that he had begun to realize at home on the farm when his Dad began showing and teaching him how to fix things around the dairy operation. That knowledge and ability led to an affection for automobiles and how they work, and eventually toward the idea of a career in auto mechanics or auto body work. That direction swayed slightly when, in a conversation about careers and his desire to own his own business, Kelly was encouraged by his Dad to learn to fix trucks. "If you can fix trucks, you can fix cars and tractors, too," is what Ed told him.

Armed with that knowledge and direction, Kelly enrolled in a two-year course at Detroit Lakes Area Vocational Technical College for Heavy Truck/Diesel Mechanics. That training gave Kelly much of what he would depend on to get him through his adult life, including his wife Karen, who is also an FFA alum and supporter. Her expertise is Equine Sciences, although she later returned to school at the UM Crookston for a degree in Civil Engineering. That degree eventually helped them design the business and property that today is Kelly Ray's.

Upon finishing school, Kelly was immediately offered a job by a man who admittedly expressed his belief and value in education, Marvin Daggett. Because Kelly had the education and a known background, Marvin placed him directly into the Engine Rebuilding department at Daggett Trucking in Frazee. While the department was technically titled Engine Rebuilding, there was a whole lot of other repair and rebuilding going on, which gave Kelly a lot of very valuable and diverse experience. He eventually moved on to a few different jobs and positions from there.

In 2004 Kelly's life and perspectives were forever changed when he was diagnosed with throat cancer. That diagnosis made him look at life just a little bit differently. He came up with a bucket list that included the dream that he and his Dad had discussed, of operating his own shop and repair business. Fortunately, Kelly has now been cancer free for 14 years, and his dream of his own shop is a reality.

That reality began to take shape while he was snowmobile riding with his son on the family farm. They stopped up on a hill not far off of Highway 87, facing back toward the barn and the rest of the farm. They both agreed that it would be a perfect spot for a shop, and the ball was set in motion.

Then, drawing on another tradition learned while growing up on the farm, Kelly, his family, friends, and some Amish neighbors (who came when no one else would), went to work logging trees for lumber, cleaning up that spot of land and preparing it for construction. It even included reclaiming some bricks from a quonset building from an old farm near Frazee. Kelly's Mom, Donna, eventually learned which farm the bricks had come from and realized that it was a farmstead that her father had once owned. Not only that, she remembered playing in that quonset as a 10 year old girl while growing up!

In 2015, with all of the



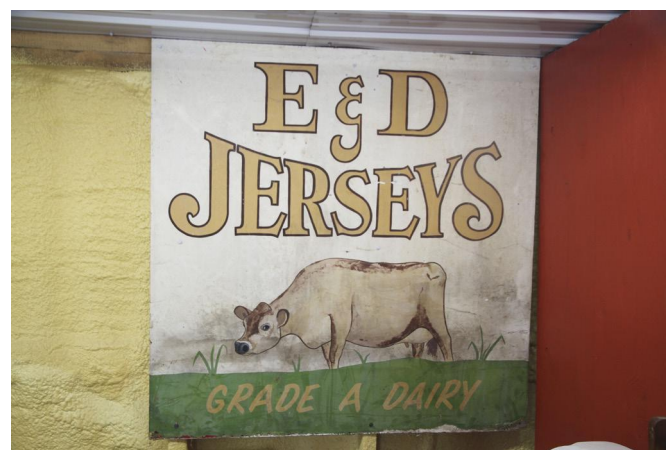
Kelly Schwarzrock brought farm and business together in 2015 when he opened his own diesel service and repair shop on his family's farmstead in Evergreen. Kelly Ray's Service and Repair specializes in heavy truck and diesel repair, service, and fabrication. Kelly is also certified for DOT inspection.

—Photos by Dave Hanson

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Kelly Ray's wasn't the first business on Ed & Donna Schwarzrock's farm, which they purchased in the late 1950s. E&D Dairy, a Grade A dairy farm, operated on the property throughout the 1980s. Kelly keeps the sign from that operation in his shop to honor his parents.

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March Weed of the Month: Resources for Weed Identification Management



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There are many resources for invasive weed management, including the Minnesota Department of Transportation's noxious weed guide.

Shane Blair, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Throughout Minnesota, new noxious weeds present themselves. Some become very problematic for landowners and managers. Weeds can be found growing around a home setting, in community areas, and in a variety of natural habitats on both public and private lands. When weeds invade native landscapes, they reduce biological diversity and degrade habitats.

Identifying weeds can be a challenging and daunting task, especially when you are not familiar with plants. In addition to published weed books, there are many resources available to assist with plant identification, especially for noxious weeds. Noxious weeds are regulated plant species.

One of the greatest tools currently available is the internet. In Minnesota, there are numerous agencies that have articles, pictures, keys, and other resources to assist with plant identification.

These agencies and organizations include the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), the University of Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC), University of Minnesota Extension, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Wild Flowers, and Midwest Invasive Plant Network (MIPN). There are apps that people can download for free. One app is called Great Lakes Early Detection Network (GLEDN) and is a great resource for weed identification. This app provides multiple pictures including the leaves, stem, bark and flower. There is also information about the plant's taxonomy and biology, and maps of where it has been confirmed. Another app is called Minnesota Wildflowers, currently only for iOS users and will soon be available for Android. This app has both native and non-native plants occurring in Minnesota.

Additional resources include agencies or local groups.

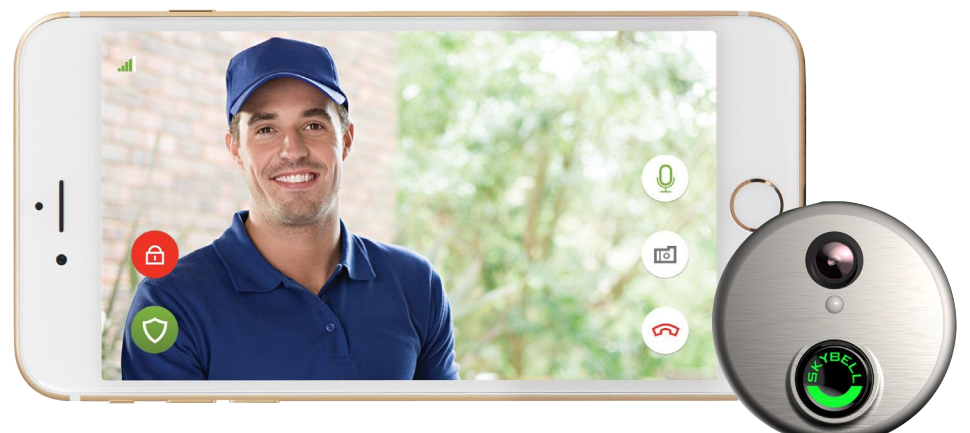
Examples include the Duluth Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA), local county agricultural inspectors (CAI), and the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Many agencies such as MDA, DNR, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT), and University of Minnesota Extension also help with weed identification. Contact them via email or phone, send pictures of the plant and they can help you with questions or concerns. Providing multiple photos that are clear and well-defined is the safest way to identify a plant because some plants may turn out to be toxic or listed prohibited noxious weed and transporting that plant for identification could result in new infestations.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation publishes an informative book that is filled with noxious weeds, scientific and common names, descriptions with comparisons to look-alikes, best management practices and treatment tim-

ing. This publication is updated annually with the current noxious weed law regulations. The link for the book pdf is <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/vegetation/pdf/noxiousweeds.pdf>

There are many routes that a person can take to identify a specific plant if they are concerned or just curious. If the identified plant turns out to be a noxious weed, there are management practices that can be put into place for control and/or eradication.

Feel free to contact the MDA's Noxious and Invasive Weed Program, DNR, MN-DOT, or your local CAI for help with plant identification and control advice.



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