



Photo: Rachel Ray

Susan Henry, her family, and Duke presenting her book, "The Amazing Chinese Goose" and coloring book to Devin Black at the Tuscola Public Library. Henry said she "was honored to donate my books to the Tuscola Library in my hometown. And to dedicate the book to Kevin Daugherty and his fur baby (support dog) Duke, who visited the library often. Kevin loved books, and he could read an entire book in one day. I'd also like to add that Duke is doing good and loves to go for lots of rides! The coloring book is dedicated to my great-grandsons - Lucas, twins Ethan and Kyler, and my family pictured with me today." Pictured in front from left to right are Lucas Martin, Duke, Susan Henry, and Devin Black. Pictured in back are Breanna Martin, Kyler Martin, Jaclyn Henry, and Ethan Martin.



Submitted Photo

Susan Henry and one of the co-authors Dennis Gire presenting her books, "The Amazing Chinese Goose" and coloring book to the Camargo Township District Library. Henry dedicated the book to Gire for his thirty years of service to the Villa Grove Police Department.

Tuscola's Henry tells the story of "The Amazing Chinese Goose"

By Kendra Hennis

Tuscola's Susan Kelley Henry and the Friends of the Crystal Lake Park Goose in her book, "The Amazing Chinese Goose"

Goose's story began in 1986 when he was left at Crystal Lake Park in Urbana, Illinois. Goose is a Chinese Goose, rather large and white, tan, and brown with a brown stripe that ran from the tip of his beak to his back. He also had gold colored eyes and bright orange

feet. Henry noted that he "caught their attention right away" when she saw him for the first time in 1995.

She said that "because Goose was a Chinese Goose, he was heavy breasted, which prevented him from flying long distances. This made it impossible for him to fly off with his goose family as winter approached. We believe it is why he ended up staying at Crystal Lake Park for so long. He knew that he had people who would take care of him and that he

would have food and friendship throughout the winter season."

Henry began writing the story of Goose in 2008, after his passing and the loss of her mother. She said that the story took a long time to write and publish because she and the other storytellers wanted to tell Goose's story properly. In addition, Henry created a coloring book for readers to go through as they read Goose's story. She said the inspiration came to her when her great-grandson, Lucas,

was born, as she wanted something for him to be able to enjoy and follow along with in her book. Henry said, "We can all learn something from Goose. He had nothing, yet he had everything. He did not earn his rewards in life because he was wealthy or earned higher degrees. He earned them all because he opened his heart to those around him and shared his life with them."

In her introduction, Henry says, "As authors of his book, we hope to tell

you how much we enjoyed "Goose" with our memories of him and how animals are a passion in all our lives. Our strong friendship and love for Goose, Patience, their goose family, and their duck friends have created a bond between them and us—their human friends. Because of this bond and our love for Goose, we have formed a group that we now call "Friends of Goose." God's plan for Goose's life brought us all together. He opened our eyes to the love of ani-

mals, nature, and friendships that we would never have had without him. He touched our lives and changed us all for the better. We hope our words convey the amount of love that we still have for our "Goose."

"The Amazing Chinese Goose" and coloring book can be purchased from Amazon. The book is also available at the Tuscola Public Library, Camargo Township District Library, the Champaign Public Library, and the Urbana Free Library.

Combine fire puts farm safety during harvest in whole new light

By Daniel Grant

The excitement for the start of harvest went up in flames in a matter of minutes on Ropp Farms near Normal in McLean County.

And it left veteran farmer Ken Ropp and his farm manager, Brett Yoder, thankful there were no injuries or major losses to their farm, other than a burned out John Deere 9600.

"First off, safety first when it comes to harvest," Ken said while removing the corn head from the destroyed combine on Sept. 28. "We hear that year after year, and sometimes you take things like that for granted."

"I think the first 24 hours (after escaping the combine fire Friday, Sept. 24) I was just in shock. Then, I woke up that Saturday morning, and it just hit me," he noted. "It makes you look at friends, family and your business from a whole new perspective."

The day of the fire began innocently enough. Ropp was excited to start harvest a little earlier than he previously expected, due to rapid crop dry down in recent weeks.

But, after harvesting the first 3.5 acres of corn, the excitement quickly changed to panic, fear and a rush of adrenaline.

"The wind was real strong that day, I noticed it coming straight out of the south," Ropp said. "So, as I was running north-to-south rows, of course when I headed north I had a lot of stalks and stuff swirling around the cab. I thought this was strange—this much wind and this much dryness. Then, I got to the north end of the field, and Brett was flagging me down to get out."

That's because Yoder could see what was transpiring behind the combine, without Ropp's knowledge at the time.

"I was coming back from the elevator and I thought I smelled a whiff of smoke. I got around the end of the field and saw flames coming out of the back of the combine," Yoder said. "I wanted to get (Ropp) out of the combine first and foremost, and then see what we could do to save grain and equipment."

Once the two were out of their vehicles, they called the fire department and began stomping the flames to prevent the whole field from going up in smoke. They also managed to pull a grain wagon out of harm's way.

"Trying to hook up the wagon while I was on the phone with the 911 operator was just a crazy time," Yoder said. "I didn't think we'd get (the wagon) out, but we did somehow."

Local fire departments arrived on the scene within minutes and extinguished the combine fire without any

other damage to the field, the nearby home of Ray and Carol Ropp, or the Ropps' dairy, famous for its Ropp Jersey Cheese.

"Kudos goes to Carlock and Hudson Fire. They had three vehicles here — it always seems like an eternity when it's happening — but within just 15 minutes they had three hoses on it and put it out," Ropp said.

He immediately filed a claim with COUNTRY Financial, which arranged to remove the remnants of the combine. Cross Implement of Minier quickly located a recently traded John Deere 9760. Ropp sent his existing corn head and bean platform in for modifications and planned to get back in the

cab to harvest soon.

"The first three tickets the corn was about 18% (the day of the fire), so there's no doubt it's dry enough," Ropp said. "We were about a week to 10 days behind everybody else getting the corn in, so I figured we'd have more lead time. But, those 90-degree days and strong winds we had changed everything."

As for the cheese business, the Ropps expected about 4,000 people for their annual Ropp Round Up festival Oct. 2, the week after the fire, and sales remain strong.

"I appreciate the public. We had a customer base that really supported us (throughout the pandemic)," Ropp said. "We're milking almost

70 cows right now and supply and demand right now is nip and tuck. So, it's one of those things that we're maybe looking at more animals because things only get progressively bigger, sales-wise, now until Christmas."

Ropp Farms consists of four owners and includes Ray and Carol, Ken and Becky and their daughter, Leah. They started making their own cheese on the farm in 2006 and, since 2007 use 100 percent of their milk for their famous cheese.

This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.



Photo: Ken Ropp

Ken Ropp's combine burst into flames in a matter of minutes just 3.5 acres into corn harvest on Sept. 24. He escaped without injury.



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