

Dairy farm is about people as well

By **DAVE LEDER**
For the Capital Press

Adam Dolsen has always had a soft spot in his heart for cows.

The president of The Dolsen Companies in Yakima, Wash., grew up working with his father and grandfather at the Cow Palace dairy in nearby Granger, not realizing that he would one day be managing the entire operation.

Nearly four decades later, Dolsen still has a strong affinity for Holsteins. And even though he spends more time in the office than he would like, he still visits the Cow Palace a few times a week to check up on his heifers.

“I had a lot of hands-on experience as a kid, and I really grew to love working with the animals,” said Dolsen, 36, who succeeded his father, Bill, as president in early 2016. “I believe a lot of my value to the company is in getting out to our facilities, not looking at spreadsheets all day.”

Dolsen’s grandfather, Bob, started The Dolsen Companies in the mid-1960s when he purchased a local Coca-Cola bottling plant that is still in operation today.

He then launched a side business, leasing out his beef cows to farmers around the Yakima Valley. Out of that love for cows came the dairy, which opened in 1972.

Today, the Cow Palace is one of the largest open-lot dairies in the state, milking 7,200 cows and producing more than a half-million pounds of Grade A milk every day.

The company also grows its own feed crops, maintaining about 700 acres of farmland, as well as a 50-acre apple and pear orchard.

Despite its size, the dairy is able to maintain an intimate, friendly culture for its employees.

“We’re still a family farm,” Adam Dolsen said. “It’s definitely not a corporate gig. We care a lot about our people, and we’ve been rewarded with their loyalty over the years. Providing good wages and benefits

to give our employees a good life is really important to us.”

Cow Palace has 85 full-time employees, many of whom have been with the company for 25-plus years. Dolsen says having so many dedicated, dependable employees is what allows him to focus on the big picture.

“These people have made a career out of this, and that continuity has contributed greatly to our success over the years,” he said. “I grew up working with a lot of these guys, and they’ve taught me so much. They definitely make my job easier.”

Dolsen credits his father for focusing on the people side of the business. Taking care of his employees and setting them up for success provides Dolsen with as much satisfaction as he gets working with the cows.

“I saw my dad commit to building up our people and that really inspired me,” he said. “I have a passion for working with people, and seeing others succeed is what really drives me.”

Dolsen added that he still seeks regular advice from his father, though Bill Dolsen, 66, is no longer involved in the day-to-day operations. Adam Dolsen said it’s too early to know if the company will one day be run by his children — ages 12, 6 and 5 — but he intends to keep the door open.

“I want them to find something that makes them happy,” he said. “I mainly want to teach them the strong work ethic I learned from my dad and grandfather because that is what made all of this possible.”



Dave Leder/For the Capital Press

Adam Dolsen, president of The Dolsen Companies in Yakima, Wash., comforts a calf that was born about six hours earlier.

On the cover

Josh Webb and his family at Heglar Creek Farms have a dairy and beef operation, farm several crops and have other enterprises near Declo, Idaho.



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