

Justin Kastner – Beef Book

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

What do you get for the man who has everything? That question seems to come up persistently around birthdays and holidays. In one case, that question led to a special gift which provided support to a special project which is celebrating 150 years of our state's vitally important beef industry. Specifically, this gift supported the creation of a wonderful book titled 150 Years of Kansas Beef. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Dr. Justin Kastner is assistant professor of food safety and security and Director of the Frontier program in K-State's College of Veterinary Medicine. The Frontier program is an interdisciplinary historical studies unit at the vet school.

In 2007, Dr. Kastner was meeting with Dr. Dan Thomson, Director of K-State's Beef Cattle Institute. They discussed the idea of a project to honor the beef industry.

"I commented that the sesquicentennial of Kansas was four years away, and that was how it got started," Justin said. The idea was to create a book which would honor the Kansas beef industry in conjunction with 150 years of Kansas statehood. The Beef Cattle Institute provided the initial financial support.

"This book is intended to celebrate the people of our industry and celebrate the state of Kansas," said Dr. Thomson. "When we celebrate the beef industry, this truly is a celebration of years of labor, heritage, and a humble work force within our state."

Dr. Kastner and a team of students set out to do the historical research to produce this book. His co-editor was Blair Bryant Tenhouse, a research assistant with the Frontier program who grew up showing cattle in south central Kansas. They put in countless hours of research and miles on the road, studying the rich history of Kansas beef as well as the stories of the families who are engaged in producing it.

This was envisioned as a coffee-table style book, with attractive photos and high quality workmanship. Unfortunately, that meant there were substantial production costs. But through the vet school's development office, key financial support for this project came from the Vanier family.

Jack and Donna Vanier are long-time ranchers, entrepreneurs, and rural philanthropists. They come from the CK Ranch near the community of Brookville, population 257 people. Now, that's rural.

Donna Vanier was wondering about a special Christmas gift for her husband. She hit on the idea of supporting this book project as a special gift in his honor.

"I don't have the opportunity to surprise Jack very often," Donna said. "This is why I want to honor his legacy as a prominent cattleman and astute businessman who has worked tirelessly for the state of Kansas."

The book was printed during the summer of 2011. In September, K-State held a book-dedication event honoring Jack Vanier. The book expresses thanks to Donna Vanier whose gift made the book possible.

"There have been many books about Kansas beef," Justin said. "What makes this book unique is that it combines the economic and social history of the industry with the family histories of those involved."

The first chapter of the book is about cowboys, cowtowns, and cattle trails. The book goes on to chronicle international agricultural investment in Kansas, cattle

production practices, the growth of livestock exchanges and cattle trade, families of the Kansas beef industry, and K-State's Department of Animal Sciences and Industry. Those families featured include the Bragg and Coffman families of Dodge City and Overbrook, the Fink family near Manhattan, the Gardiners of Ashland, Schlickaus of Haven, Schulers of Chapman, the Perriers of Eureka, and more. Much more material is found on the podcasts which accompany the book.

For further information or to purchase the book, go to www.vet.k-state.edu/features/beef.htm.

So what do you get for the man who has everything? In the case of Donna Vanier, she made a surprise gift in her husband's honor to a project that very fittingly celebrates 150 years of Kansas beef. We appreciate the Vaniers, Justin Kastner, Blair Tenhouse, Dan Thomson, and all those producers who have made a difference with their hard work through the years. In the end, what matters is not what we get, but what we give.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.