

# UPFRONT

## City farmers

### On the edge of Downtown Albuquerque, you'll find a country menagerie

Toby Smith

A chick-chick here and a moo-moo there and a gunshot here and there. Like Old McDonald, but on the edge of Downtown Albuquerque, the Grant family tends all God's farm creatures great and small. The Grants used to own a rooster, but those 4 a.m. wake-up calls were just a tad too early for nearby homeowners.

If this sounds familiar, a year ago on this page Journal readers met Kara and Steve Grant, their four children and their neighborhood mascot, Bessie Sue, a reddish-brown heifer, all residing happily two blocks off Central Avenue.

The Grants got into the ag life because Kara grew up in rural eastern New Mexico, where she was active in 4-H. Kara wanted her kids to have the responsibility of raising animals and showing them. To Steve, who grew up in the Bay Area of San Francisco, a silo was a sound of contentment. The couple compromised by bringing the country to their home in a city where the nearest barn sells pottery.

Bessie Sue is gone now. But in her place are enough critters to fill a north forty.

At the end of last summer, Bessie Sue went back to tiny Elida, N.M., where Kara's parents, Ronnie and Charlotte Eaton ranch when they're not in Clovis. Seems Bessie Sue did not play well with others, having spent a high old time on High Street in Albuquerque with twolegged beings. So Ronnie Eaton last winter put her out to pasture, letting her graze until breeding time.

The Grant kids — ages 14, 12, 10 and 8 — had nursed the born-sickly Bessie Sue with a bottle in Albuquerque. She became like family. They missed her. Last March, the little Grants went to Elida to stay with their grandparents. When one of Ronnie's mama cows became ill and died, the Grant offspring wanted her baby.

"Can we keep her?" Jacob the eldest telephoned his mother. "Can we?"

Can a pig eat potato skins?

Before they left Elida, the Grant young'uns accompanied their grandparents to a music fest in Floyd, N.M. There they heard a band perform "Elvira," the funky song the Oak Ridge Boys turned into a hit some years back.

The kids laughed till they hurt at the band's pronunciation — EEL-vay-ruh. But they had a name for their new cow.

The Eatons brought Elvira to Albuquerque in a pickup, she being too small for a trailer. She lay on the bed of the truck, with a hay bale for company.

Up to 120 pounds now, Elvira is the new High Street neighborhood mascot.

When you're a member of the Grant family, a cow is not enough. Not nearly. The Grants wanted more animals the way Alexander the Great wanted more continents.

It may come as a surprise, but you can't walk into a Wal-Mart and find the livestock aisle near housewares. Thus, in May, Steve and Kara packed up everybody and drove to Roswell, where they bought four lambs.

They sent off to Webster City, Iowa, and purchased 16 chickens. The baby chicks came in a box with little holes in it. When the shipment arrived in the mail, the post office called the Grants and said, "You got a package here and it's chirpin'."

They then ordered 12 turkeys from the same outfit. Because baby turkeys look and sound like all young fowl, the P.O. called and said, "You got more chickens."

Steve and Kara next bought two rabbits from a local breeder. The breeder lived at the other end of the city but made a special trip in and the exchange with the Grants took place in the parking lot of an Office Depot at San Pedro and Paseo NE.

During a trip to a North Fourth Street feed store to buy powdered milk for Elvira, the Grants couldn't resist throwing into their shopping cart a mixed breed rabbit.

The Grants don't own an actual spread to put all these animals. There's no High Street corral, OK? But there is a barnyard, which is a side yard, which is a dog run on the north flank of the family home.

"We get to clean it up," says Jacob, 14. They get to do that because next door to the house are two bed-and-breakfasts that Steve and Kara operate. Behind those two historic buildings is a parking lot where the Grant kids exercise animals. Neighbors with grandkids in tow frequently stop for a pet. A class from A Child's Garden, a preschool up the street, showed up for a recent sheep shearing demo.

The lowdown on High Street is that Bessie Sue, all 600 pounds of her these days, is back in Albuquerque — at the South Valley farm owned by the Lowrys, a family the Grants know from 4-H. Danielle Lowry, 16, will show her at the Bernalillo County 4-H Fair, to be held the first week in August.

At the same fair, the Grants will show their chickens, rabbits, turkeys and sheep.

Oh, and Elvira will be there, too. You'll recognize her easily. She'll be the only animal at the fair who responds to the name "EEL-vay-ruh."

UpFront is a daily front-page opinion column. You can reach Toby Smith at 823-3832 or tsmith@abqjournal.com



RICHARD PIPES/JOURNAL In a metropolitan version of Green Acres, the Grant family of Albuquerque displays a few of their animals. From left: Hannah, 10, Ethan, 12, father Steve, mother Kara, Jacob, 14, and Abbey, 8. Elvira is next to Jacob.



ROBERTO E. ROSALES/JOURNAL animals at the Grant house are magnets for neighborhood children. Here, Riley Epstein, who attends a Child's Garden, a nearby preschool, pets Blue Jay, a sheep. Behind Riley is her teacher, Shana Drake-Lavelle.