

SAANICH SCHOOL DISTRICT JUMPSTARTS STUDENT CAREERS

Alexandria Walter

Dairy Production Technician

by Stu Rhodes

Cows have been turning grass into milk since the beginning of time, and we've been drinking it. The animal

husbandry that goes along with the craft of dairy production is probably one of the oldest trades, but it wasn't until recently that it became Provincially certified. BC Dairy Foundation, in partnership with Industry Training Authority of BC teamed up with Greenbelt Veterinary Services to develop and offer formal training and certification in this field of work.

So who's interested in this sort of thing? Farm kids, or 4-H kids, right? Well don't be so sure. Enter Alex(andria) Walter. Alex had always talked about agriculture, but never really been exposed to it, other than visiting her Granny's farm in Nova Scotia. She is a talented artist who loves to work in all sorts of media including dying and spinning wool. Well, spinning wool is about as close as she had come to a live sheep, much less a dairy cow, until one day when her mother, Katherine, picked up a brochure at Parkland Secondary's open house.

The brochure described the Dairy Production Technician program available to Saanich students. "When I heard about this, I jumped at it," said Alex. Career counsellor, Colleen McNamee, contacted Mike Holst (yes, like the cow, HOLSTein) from Pendray Farms and asked if he would be willing to take a student on a work experience placement. After 100 volunteer work experience hours Mike immediately transitioned Alex to paid employment and indentured her as an official apprentice. "I was so impressed with her commitment, dedication, and work ethic," said Holst. "I was a little guarded about taking on a student with no prior farm experience, but she took to it like a duck to water. She's a natural; she's got what we call 'cow sense'."

You'd never know Alex is this good at dairy farming by talking to



her though. She is a quiet, modest, if not determined young woman who clearly enjoys what she is doing. So far this year she has managed to complete a comprehensive technical training program with Greenbelt Vet while at the same time maintaining a full course load at Parkland, as well as working over 30 hours per week at the farm. She gets up at 2.30 a.m. on the weekends so she can pull a double shift to catch the morning and afternoon

milking, and goes to the farm almost every day after school.

Holst said she's pretty much in charge of the calf-barn, which is their most valuable resource, and he even has her operating tractors now that she has her "N".

Dairy Production Technician has only been an official trade for a few years but it takes old fashioned pioneer spirit to be good at it. Alex admits she could have enjoyed living the harsh life of a farm settler in the 1800s but everyone around her sees her as a shining star of the 21st century! She is living proof that you have to go after whatever it is you are seeking in life. She encourages other youth to be positive risk takers and try anything they've been dreaming about.

Contact Stu Rhodes for more information on how to get involved as a student apprentice, or as an employer sponsor in this, or any other career program in Saanich School District. 250.415.9211. View the promotional YouTube video, "Jump Start Your Career" at www.youtube.com/user/saanichcareers ✨

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