

## NewsWatch

# 'Alice' enjoys telling ag's story

BY FRAN O'LEARY

**A**NN O'Leary, the 69th Alice in Dairyland, says she is enjoying the opportunity to promote Wisconsin's \$88 billion agriculture industry. Since being selected Alice last May in Watertown, O'Leary has been busy crisscrossing the state.

Throughout the year, she makes visits to classrooms, agribusinesses and farms, as well as agricultural events including dairy breakfasts, Wisconsin Farm Technology Days, the Wisconsin State Fair and World Dairy Expo. She also writes regular features for several publications, conducts media campaigns and uses social media to promote Wisconsin agriculture.

## Humbling experience

O'Leary says she is humbled to be serving as Alice. "I love everything that I do. I like the travel and the places that I go to. It's a constant reminder of how diverse our agriculture is in Wisconsin."

Her favorite part of being Alice, she says, is meeting people. "The people I get to meet are so excited to share their stories," O'Leary says. "It is fun to talk to them about agriculture. They want to tell you about their farm or their business. I've learned so much."

Growing up in Evansville, she was active in Rock County 4-H and the Junior Holstein Association, and showed dairy cattle at the county and state fairs, but O'Leary did not grow up on a farm. She says that is helping her as Alice.

"I'm able to connect with consumers because I didn't grow up on a farm either," she says. "We bond over our nonfarm backgrounds, and then I'm able to share what I have learned. They are always surprised by how many people without farming backgrounds are involved in agriculture."

She recently toured an ethanol plant near Freisland and then spoke to 400 kindergartners through fourth-graders at an elementary school in Spooner. She read the book "My Field Trip to a Dairy Farm" to the first-grade class and answered their questions about farming. She spoke to fourth-graders about the nine essential nutrients in milk.

While she was in Spooner, O'Leary also visited Crystal Creek Natural, a swine, poultry, dairy and equine nutrition business, and spoke to the business owners.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM PLANSKY

**DOUBLE HONOR:** Alice in Dairyland Ann O'Leary, with Oconto Mayor Lloyd Heier, cut down the state's first official Christmas tree of the season on Nov. 15. The tree is also the National Christmas Tree that will stand in the Blue Room of the White House. It was grown at Whispering Pines Tree Farm, owned by Mary and Dave Vander Velden, Oconto.

"I'm really learning about lots of the different agribusinesses in Wisconsin," she says. "I've been to quite a few farms, too. I like that I am getting to experience Wisconsin agriculture firsthand."

Another part of O'Leary's job that she enjoys is doing television and radio interviews. "I especially like speaking about all the different agriculture careers that are available on and off the farm," she says.



**AGRIBUSINESS TOUR:** Alice in Dairyland Ann O'Leary (left) recently toured Crystal Creek Natural in Spooner. Pictured with O'Leary are Ryan Leiterman, director of technical services; Jan Leiterman, vice president and CFO; and Dan Leiterman, president and CEO.

On trips across the state, O'Leary drives a flex-fuel Ford Explorer provided by the Wisconsin Corn Promotion Board. "I've only filled it up with E85," she says.

O'Leary says one thing that has surprised her is the driving. "They said I would be traveling 40,000 miles this year as Alice, but until you actually drive about 3,500 miles a month, you don't realize how much driving that is," she says. "It's a big state, and we have agriculture everywhere."

From February through May, O'Leary will primarily be making visits to schools across the state, talking to students.

"I will be leading the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board presentation called Mapping a Healthy Wisconsin. I'll talk about food we grow and produce in the five food groups in Wisconsin. It includes

a trivia game where I give two clues about the product I am talking about. For example, I tell them Wisconsin is home to nearly 9,800 farms producing this official state beverage. And then they guess. Most of the students guess milk. After the presentation, I give them all cheese sticks and they receive materials they can take home and show their parents."

O'Leary graduated from Carthage College in Kenosha in 2014 and worked for two years as a recruiter at Epic in Madison before becoming Alice. After she finishes her year as Alice in June, she plans to work in ag communications or public relations.

"I really want to continue promoting agriculture," she says.

**Editor's note:** Ann O'Leary is Fran O'Leary's niece.

## Accelerated Genetics offers scholarships

**A**CCELERATED Genetics is helping to ensure a bright future for agriculture by offering six scholarships to youths.

■ **Youth scholarships:** Accelerated Genetics will award four \$500 scholarships to high school seniors planning to major in agriculture at a short course, vocational technical college or four-year university. Any high school senior who has participated in FFA, 4-H, any of the

various breed organizations or any other agricultural organizations is eligible to apply. The application deadline is Feb. 15.

■ **Collegiate scholarships:** Two \$1,000 scholarships will be awarded to students currently enrolled in a short course, vocational technical college or four-year university degree program. Supported by Accelerated Genetics, the collegiate scholarship is available

to individuals who are currently in their freshman, sophomore or junior year and are majoring in any agricultural field. This scholarship program is run by the National FFA Foundation. The application deadline is Feb. 1.

For more information on Accelerated Genetics' scholarship offerings, go to [accelgen.com](http://accelgen.com), call 800-451-9275, or email [scholarships@accelgen.com](mailto:scholarships@accelgen.com).