

By Lexi Wright

Canada has been a destination of choice for European immigrants for more than a century, particularly for those with farming in their blood. In recent years, it has been possible for farmers to bring the proceeds from the sale of their property in Europe with them in order to establish themselves here in relative comfort. In earlier times, particularly post World War II, the amount of money that immigrants were able to leave Denmark with was restricted to a maximum of 50 dollars.

Such were the circumstances for Aage Iversen when he boarded a ship in Denmark in 1950. He landed on the docks at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, having endured a nasty storm, with his health and his dream of farming intact. "I arrived in Canada with two suitcases and \$45.00 in my pocket. The purser was ticked off when I only paid him \$5.00 but that was a lot considering it was one tenth of what I had," said Aage.

Aage's Canadian work experience began on a dairy farm in Ontario with a change of career eleven months later as a

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grounds keeper at a lodge for six months. In 1951 Aage headed west to Calgary to try his hand at custom harvesting and eventually started a concrete business. His connections in the construction business provided him with a chance meeting with his future wife Kristine (Stinne) in 1956. In 1958 Aage and Stinne were married and in 1962 while continuing their construction business they moved to DeWinton where they rented a farm and milked a few cows.

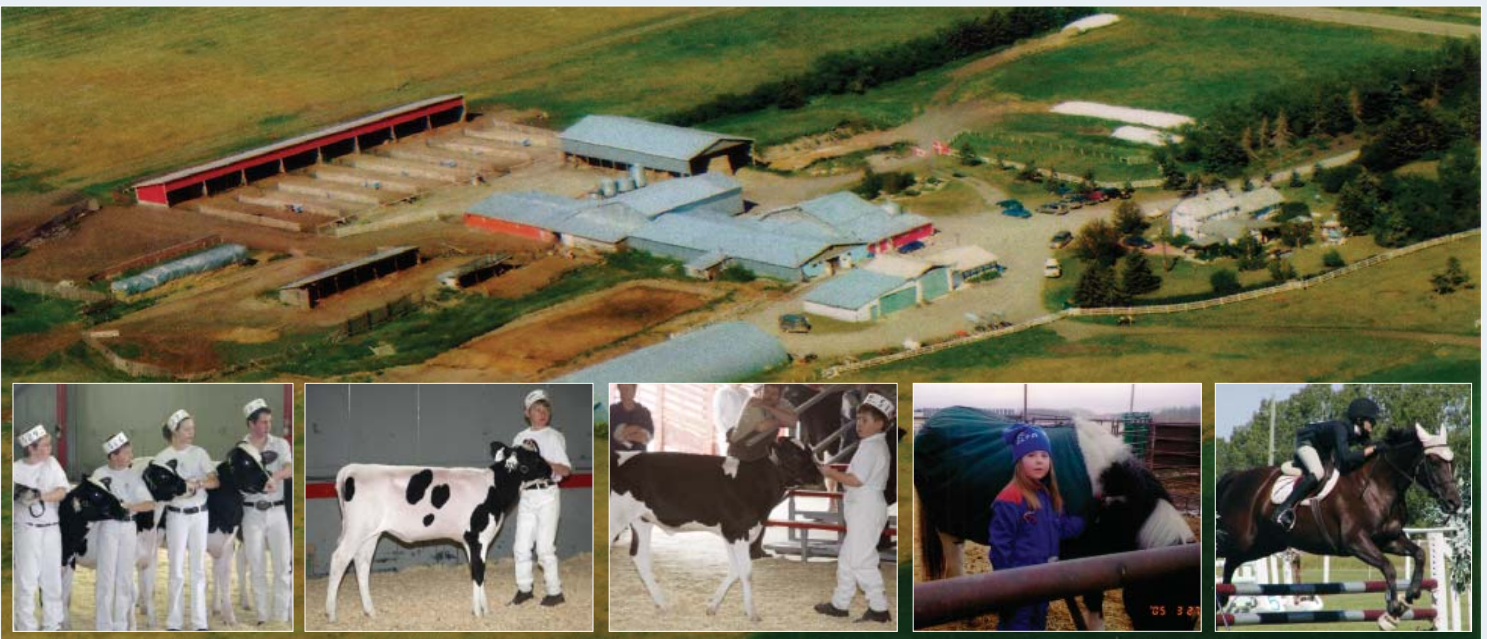
The move to their current location just outside of Olds, Alberta in 1967 would be the real beginning of the Iversen Family farm. One hundred and fifty acres of land with a stantion barn enabled them to ship cream from twenty five cows. Over the years the original barn has been renovated to a double-four herring bone milking parlour and calf barn. A new freestall barn was built in 1977 and stall upgrades were added in 1997. Over time the land base has increased to 500 acres as the herd has grown to 75 milking cows.

Aage and Stinne became members of Holstein Canada under the prefix Serevi (Iversen spelled backwards) in 1978 when their sons Eric and John began to show interest in the farm. During the years 1979 to 1982 both Eric and John worked part time off the farm. Eric was employed by Western Breeders Service (now Alta Genetics) from 1979 to 1982 as a sales representative in Alberta and Saskatchewan. John started part time for Western Breeders in 1981 and continues to work for Alta as an AI technician as well as being contracted as an instructor for on farm training. In 1983 a family partnership between, Aage,

Stinne, Eric and John was formed and would be later joined by Eric's wife Maya (1989) and John's wife Debbie (1993). This was the beginning of the trip toward their Master Breeder status under the Innislake prefix, named after a lake nearby.

The years working with Alta provided Eric and John with the opportunity to participate in some cow partnerships with Doug Blair, President and CEO of Western Breeders/Alta Genetics at the time. This connection gave the Iversens a chance to buy into some great cow families as well as owning some cows jointly with Doug. These purchases contributed to the improvement of their herd from 1980's to 1990's, culling out the remaining percentage and lower end animals while acquiring some top genetics.

Most notable among the original cows purchased by Innislake were HanoverHill Sheik Ann VG-86 2\* and Gillette L Cristal VG-85 5\*. Sheik Ann, owned in partnership with Doug Blair, came from two Excellent dams and produced seven Very Good and 1 Good Plus daughter which included one Star Brood cow Innislake Chief Anna VG-85 2\*. Cristal, a fourth generation VG or EX, "Lindy" from Maeford Starbuck Chrissy EX 17\* has produced four Very Good daughters with two, Innislake Bellwood Cindy VG 87 3\* and Innislake Mandel Christine VG-86 3\*, already achieving star brood cow status. Another favourite, homebred cow Innislake Count Karin EX-5E 5\* with 10 lactations and 132,115 kilograms of milk 3898 3.0% fat and 3989 3.0% protein has one EX-5E 2\*



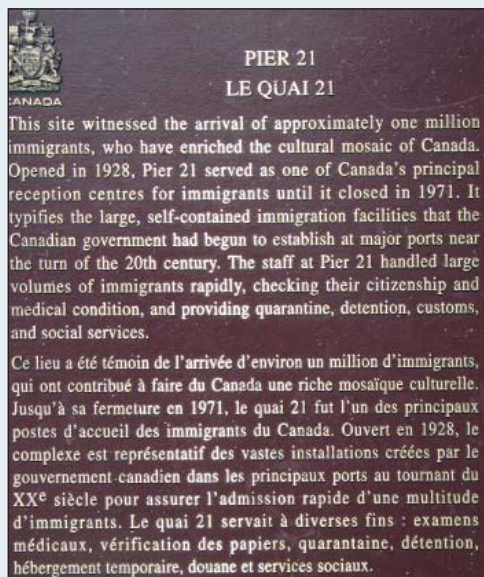
L-R-Lars & Laura Iversen Centre, Noah Iversen, Luke Iversen, Abbey Iversen with her horse and Laura Iversen Jumping with Gypsy (Photos 1, 4,5 courtesy of Iversens)

daughter, three Very Good plus and three Good Plus daughters to her credit. These three cows would be the main contributors to Innislake's Master Breeder Shield in 2006. Points based on 601 animals born from 1987 to 2002 came from 44 GP 83-84, 114 VG and 6 EX or Multiple EX, six 1\* Brood cows, seven 2 or 3\* Brood cows and one 4\* Brood cow with forty records of over 60,000 kilograms of milk, seven over 80,000 and six over 100,000 to help obtain their shield status.

The purchase of these cows provided numerous opportunities over the years to sell live offspring and embryos while retaining females for their own program with bulls going to AI. Over the years balanced breeding with 80% proven and 20% young sires has provided the Iversen family with a solid genetic base. Now walking through the Innislake herd you will find 3 Multiple Excellent, 4 Excellent, 30 Very Good, 41 Good Plus, 13 Good females. The main focus at Innislake has always been how to make the next generation better. "We are always trying to make a balanced cow with the use of

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top LPI, TPI or MACE bulls with +2000 for milk and plus deviations for fat and protein as well as double digits for type. There have also been times when extreme type and production have played a role in the program. We think the longer you do something the better you need to be at it. We always try to improve a cow or a family's worst trait. If you can improve on more than one it is a bonus," says Eric and John. The combination of the best information derived from Holstein Canada programs including registration, classification and Dairy Herd Improvement (DHI) - continues to play a role in the decision-making at Innislake. "We have some of the best tools available in the agricultural industry and a lot of Holstein breeders don't realize and



appreciate the value," says John. Solid herd management is the basis for continued herd improvement at Innislake with a Total Mixed Ration (TMR) fed to produce averages of 12077kgs Milk, 431 Fat 367 Protein BCA's 259-249-247. The majority of the feed is grown and harvested by the Iversens with some hay left over to sell on good years.

John admits feeding TMR makes it more difficult to show cows. However, the next generation, of Iversens are all actively involved in showing calves at both local and 4-H shows. Laura, Lars and Noah (Eric & Maya) and Luke (John & Debbie) are all members of dairy 4-H. Abbey, John and Debbie's youngest is too young for 4-H however she takes riding lessons. Laura and Lars both take riding lessons, both involved in hunters and jumpers with Laura riding her Canadian Warm Blood mare four days a week. Maya, from a horse background, takes the kids to numerous horse shows throughout the year as well as spending as much time in the barn feeding calves as possible.

Other help around the farm includes local college students for part time milkers and summer help. The day to day responsibilities are handled primarily by John and Eric. John's responsibilities include the herd health, feeding with mating decisions shared with Eric while Eric looks after the finances and the majority of the milking. Dr. Gordon Atkins has played an integral role for over twenty years as the Iversen's vet. "Gordon's contribution has been very instrumental to our success. His knowledge of animals, nutrition and pedigrees is amazing. If you have a cow with a problem and Gordon can't make it better, you're in trouble," says John. Aage and Stinne, now retired, still help out wherever needed in the barn or with the grand children. Debbie works full time at the Royal Bank in Olds and helps out on the farm whenever needed. Off farm activities include Ag Society, Natural Gas Coop, Agri Foods and Alberta Milk boards for Eric. John was one of the founding members of the Mountain View 4-H Dairy Club and this year, at the National Holstein Convention in Prince Edward Island, was elected President of Holstein Canada. "I can't thank my family enough for the opportunity to become President. It puts a lot more pressure on them with my anticipated 120-150 days on the road this next year," said John.

This family reflects back to that day in 1950 when Aage set foot on Pier 21 and credits hard work and determination with the success that they have enjoyed and the awards that they have received. A number of Milk quality awards, the 1999 Calgary Stampede Farm Family

award, Breeder of the Year for the Alberta Holstein Association in 2001, Breeder of the Year in 2003 for the Southern Alberta Holstein Club and recently the 2006 Olds Agricultural Society Distinguished Farm Family Award, have all been a part of their successes. The goals of someday building a new dairy facility plus an equine centre are on the horizon and will be reached with the same focus and drive that have gotten them this far.



From Top, Gillette L Cristal VG-85 5\*, John, Aage & Eric Iversen, The Iversen Family L-R-Maya, Eric, Kristine, Laura, Aage, John, Debbie, (Chantelle), Lars, Luke (holding shield) Abbey, Noah on Pascale Lemiere's knee. Aage & Kristine, Innislake Count Karin EX-5E 5\* Photo left, photo of Pier 21 plaque (photo courtesy Iversens)