

A PEAVEY MART PUBLICATION | FALL 2017

# CONNECTED

*to the Land*

 COVER CROPS:  
CANADA'S  
**SWEET**  
ADVANTAGE

**SECRETS**  
OF ANIMAL  
HANDLING

On The Road  
— TO THE —  
**CANADA**  
WINTER GAMES

**Peavey** Mart

**WINTER**  
**BIRDING TIPS** ❄️





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2000	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1900	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1500	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1200+Odour	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1000	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
800	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
300	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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The filtration level chart is a Filtrete™ Brand rating system that compares relative particle capture performance for several important categories of airborne particles that may pass through your filter. The bar is rating the level of particle capture performance of this filter compared with other Filtrete™ Filters.

\*Source: [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

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# TAKING A BREATH

## A MESSAGE FROM PEAVEY INDUSTRIES PRESIDENT DOUG ANDERSON

*Top photo by Drew Kenworthy. Left side photo by Jest Sidloski.*

**W**elcome to the second issue of Connected to the Land, Peavey Mart's magazine of farm and ranch information and practical know-how. It's another way we want to connect with you. Connecting with our customer is important to us and we hope the articles we have assembled are relevant and informative to you.

We have covered many subjects in this issue, including tips on evaluating electric fencing (page 10), gun safes (page 28), wintering your poultry (page 12) and attracting birds to your backyard (page 35), to name a few. As always, we encourage your feedback and suggestions for future articles and information.

Most of all, I would like to thank you for being our customer and for supporting your local Peavey Mart. 🍁

*Doug Anderson*





# MANAGING COVER CROPS

## “ENERGY-DENSE” PLANTS FOR CATTLE IMPROVEMENTS, SOIL HEALTH, SOIL STRUCTURE & PROFIT

Story and photos by Clayton Robins.

**M**any years into my career as a 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer and former forage and beef researcher, during a fact-finding mission in Argentina, I was presented with information that demonstrated how important plant sugars were to live-weight gain in beef cattle. It was a pivotal moment in my life.

From that moment on, the more I learned about plant sugars the more I realized that their benefits extended far beyond plant composition and animal gain. I realized that Canada has one of the most ideal environments in the world for cover crop plants to accumulate high levels of sugars, especially at certain times of the year.

Three key factors influence elevated accumulation of sugars in plants: long days, cool evenings, and solar intensity. These factors describe a large portion of Canada to a tee, showing we have a distinct advantage over other parts of the world.

On our farm near Rivers, MB, we are focused particularly in the early to late fall period where the potential for sugar accumulation in plants is the highest.

Our cover crops strategy is to utilize the grazing of high-sugar species (Italian ryegrass and herbs like chicory and plantain are key components of the model) at a time when forage quality for grazing traditionally tends to be low. Usually at this time of year, producers are grazing perennial forage plants which are trying to store sugars and other nutrients below-ground, to make them as healthy as possible going into the winter.

This is called the acclimation period, and applies to all perennial plants in any

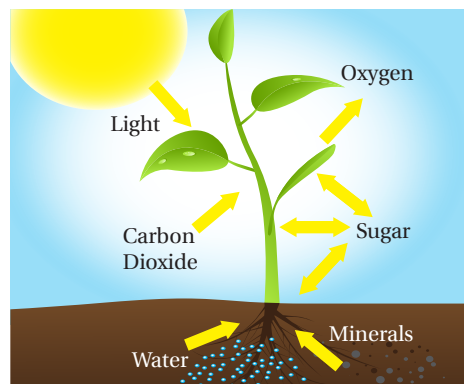
environment (rural and urban) where winter dormancy occurs. Providing rest to these plants at that time is, I feel, critically important to their health and the health of the ecosystem they are a part of. Therefore, we aim to graze these high-sugar forages, as annuals, during September and October to provide as much rest to our perennial pastures as we can.

The results have been overwhelming. We have measured plant sugar levels as high as 38.5% (via lab test). These very high levels of sugar intake by our cattle are very beneficial to their rumen (stomach) health and their performance (gains in meat and milk and fat production). They can also help to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions from these systems, in particular methane and nitrous oxide.

However, it is the impacts on soil health and water efficiency that we have seen some of the biggest gains. The species we work with tend to accumulate a great deal of plant sugars both above and below ground.

The below-ground sugars feed all the little critters that live in the soil. One teaspoon of healthy soil can contain more bugs and microbes than there are people on earth! These organisms, in turn, contribute to building soil organic matter and improving soil structure.

Our organic matter has increased from 5% to 7.2% in just five years, fifteen years quicker than I anticipated was possible. With every 1% rise in organic matter the soil becomes more of a sponge and can hold up to an additional 27,000 gallons of water per acre (roughly the size of a football field), which helps us in times of hot, dry, windy weather. Not only that, we have pulled a significant amount of carbon out of the atmosphere and stored it underground.



## PHOTOSYNTHESIS

Photosynthesis is converting solar (light) energy to plant (chemical) energy. The result is the formation of a molecule that becomes simple sugars which are readily used by the plant for a variety of functions. Although very dependent on environmental conditions, plant species, stage of growth, etc. these simple sugars tend to quickly convert to other compounds in the plant like complex sugars and various forms of fibre. The sugars tend to be very volatile and unstable in the plant, moving readily throughout and existing for a very short period of time before being converted to something else the plant needs to grow or develop. They can also be moved down through the plant into the roots for either longer-term energy storage or to be passed out of the roots into the soil as part of an exchange process whereby plants take in soil nutrients.





Our soil structure has also improved immensely. We have observed significant improvement in water infiltration in these soils, in both our special forage species ground and our perennial forage ground. Infiltration is the ability of the land to absorb water from major rainfall events or from overland flooding.

As a livestock producer, I would like to be credited for the millions of gallons of water that we capture on a regular basis. Additionally, the act of grazing in these systems has been shown to speed up improvements to soil health and soil structure. This is information that needs to become more widely known.

Just Google “cover crops” and you will see the benefits happening all over the world. 🍁

*Clayton Robins runs a mixed farming operation in Rivers, Manitoba that has been in the family for 125 years, with his son Quinn (5th generation of Robins) now taking over part of the operation. He spent over 2 decades involved in Ag research and is currently the Executive Director of the Manitoba 4-H Council. His report on the impacts of “energy-dense” plants was published in 2015 and can be found at the Nuffield Canada website.*

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# THE SECRET TO HERDING

## TRAIN ANIMALS TO EASE HANDLING – AND BOOST RETURNS

Story by Helen McMenamin.

**T**aking the time to work with animals – rather than trying to force them to go where you want – can help you work them much more easily, and complete any tasks in less time, with fewer rodeos. Recent research shows that cattle worked quietly have better feed intake, higher gains, earlier puberty, less sickness, better responses to vaccines, and leave you more cash at the end of the year.

Most of the research has been done on cattle, but it applies to all herding animals.

The first thing is to recognize the animal's view of the world. The position of the eyes on the sides of their heads means they have two blind spots – a small one directly in front of them and a bigger one directly behind them. Anything in those blind spots alarms the animals.

If you move towards an animal within its field of vision, there is a point where it becomes more alert, stops what it's doing, maybe lifts its head and focuses on you. That's the edge of the flight zone, the animal's "personal space."

If you keep moving towards it, the animal moves away. You can control the animal from the edge of the flight zone with just a few steps, sometimes even an arm movement.

The flight zone isn't static. Excited animals have a bigger flight zone, and they're more sensitive to the pressure of handling. Loud noises, shouting and running frighten cattle and other prey animals. That's not the time to call in reinforcements: instead, the animals need 20 minutes or more to calm down.

If the animal is facing in the direction you want it to go, you can move it forward by walking parallel to it in the opposite direction. If you move forward, on the same track, it will back up or stop.

The point of balance – where a step forward or back changes the speed or direction of the animal – is at (or a little ahead of) the animal's shoulder. With cattle, you can work from this point to control them in an alley from outside, or give a group time to get through a squeeze point. It doesn't work so well with sheep, because they hate to be separated from the flock.

You can turn an animal with a very small movement or arm direction.

Temple Grandin, who has led the world into understanding safe and humane livestock handling, advises carrying a flag on a light 4-foot cane, at first, for situations such as stockyards.

The same movements work for a big herd, a small bunch or a single animal. Species and herds differ in their sensitivity but the same principles apply. Grandin and stockmen around the world have found that as animals become accustomed to handling that matches their natural instincts, they and their offspring become much easier to work.

Many stockmen move animals from one pen to the next a few times, to get newly-weaned or newly-arrived animals used to being handled, and confident in the handlers. As the cattle become accustomed to quiet handling, they become calmer and more relaxed around people – and horses, if you work from horseback.

Once handling cattle is less stressful for people and animals, it's easier to try management tools: weighing calves, running animals through a chute for vaccinations or fly treatment, or splitting off calves and penning them overnight a week or so before weaning.

### HERDING VIDEOS

Temple Grandin has pioneered livestock handling techniques anybody can use.

You can see her videos at [Grandin.com/behaviour/principles/flightzone](http://Grandin.com/behaviour/principles/flightzone)

The Australian government has produced Weaner Education – a training video that shows clearly how the flight zone and handler movement works.

If you want to see more of what you can do with watching cattle behavior and practice, check out "Loading cattle into trailer on pasture," on YouTube.

The move from pasture to a busier environment can be stressful, so some feedlots take 15 or 20 minutes a day after calves arrive to let the animals out of their pen into an alley where a crew blocks their path.

Each day, the animals come closer to the people – their flight zone gets smaller and smaller as they become accustomed to people. After about a week, they're calmer, and people can walk by or through their pen without disturbing them.

Relaxed cattle are less prone to hide any symptoms of illness or injury, so they can be treated sooner, and treatment is more likely to be effective. 🍁

*Helen McMenamin is a freelance writer and editor for various magazines.*

*Connected to the Land*



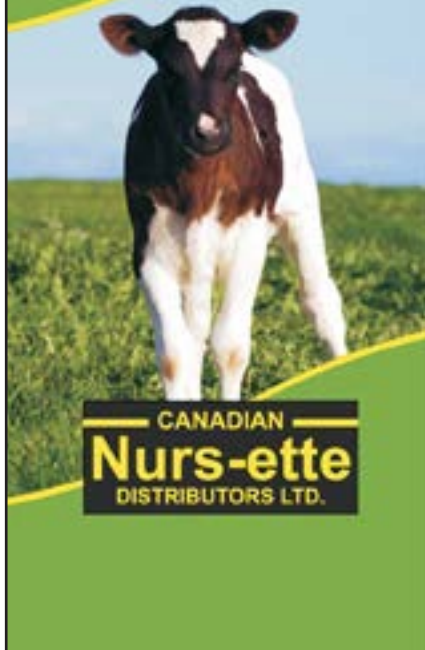
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# CREAMY, WHITE GOLD

## HOW TWO COWS AND FORTY DOLLARS BECAME A LIVING

Story by Marion Mutala.

I still remember the process. It is ingrained in my memory, like my name. My mother would walk down our little valley from our old wooden yellow house to the big red barn, carrying two silver metal pails; then she'd get her three-legged stool and balance on it like a person practising the treetop pose in yoga. She would then proceed to milk both Bossy and Brownie. The cows sometimes co-operated and sometimes did not, being moody.

I was the observer and I watched my mother start to squeeze the cow's teats ... squish, squish, the milk hitting the metal pail. The first few drops create a remarkable unique sound, almost indescribable – a tin-like tinkle. I can still hear that sound today.

Swish, swish went the cow's tail and soon our black cat, Toby, came for her share of the feast. My mother, Sophie, so in tune with her strokes, without looking up or a rhythm change, squirted our cat in the face and then continued milking, her job just beginning.

Our cat, loving and hating every minute of the milk dripping from her face into her mouth, was happy for the warm, frothy milk but maybe would have preferred it in a dish. Her milk bath running down her face, she loved the opportunity to lick her paws and face.

The pails full, mom would give the old cows a gentle tap on their backs and we would walk back to the house carrying two pails of that frothy looking white gold.

Yes, gold it was, as the pioneers lived off the income from the cream that came from that

milk. "Pin money" it was called in the old days, as women pinned the money to their bras and kept it for rainy days. It was often the only cash that a woman had to her name. The men in those days controlled the bank accounts. Yet my mom and dad, Sophie and August Mutala, used cream money to buy staples like sugar, fresh fruit for canning and preserves, and many extra items that the farm did not produce but were needed to raise their 10 children.

Our farm was eight miles east of Hanley and eight miles north of Kenaston, Saskatchewan. The separator room was an old room connected to the porch of our house. My parents were married on November 2, 1940. They received two cows and forty dollars as gifts. Wise farmers that they were, they invested in a cream separator. The cost was forty dollars. They used their wedding money.

The separator, with its two separate spouts, was fairly large and it sat on the floor. When you poured the milk into the large silver bowl and turned the wooden handle, out came the milk from one spout and the rich, pure cream from the other. Mmmm, is there anything as tasty as the one hundred per cent pure, rich farm cream with no additives or preservatives?

The cream was then placed into two metal cans, labelled with a number and our name, and sent from our farm to Saskatoon by train. A man picked up the cream cans from the farm each morning that the cans were to be shipped; we set the cans on the road by our farmhouse. In winter, the cream was stored in an old shed that had been converted to an ice shed. Ice was cut from the slough with an old pick, and

the ice was placed in the cement-floor shed. Sometimes wood chips or straw were added to insulate the ice. In summer, the cream container was placed in a dirt hole; the ice melted into ice-cold water, keeping the cream cold.

We also made butter from the cream. We usually used day-old cream, placing it in a glass quart-sealer jar and shaking the jar until the cream churned into butter. A little salt was added for flavour at the end of the process.

Homemade bread and butter that melted in your mouth, cream cake or chocolate cake with caramel icing made from brown sugar and cream. My mom was an excellent cook.

Nothing went to waste. Cottage cheese, using the skim milk, was often cooked slowly on the back of the wooden stove in a pot. Yes, good income, very hard work, but well worth the effort as we were never hungry growing up.

Liquid gold, cream was how the pioneers survived their many years on the farm, sometimes receiving twenty-five dollars for a big can of cream. My six sisters, three brothers and I were the grateful recipients of that frothy gold. 🍁

*Marion Mutala has a master's degree in education administration and taught for 30 years. Author of Baba's Babushka: A Magical Ukrainian Christmas, and winner of the 2010 Anna Pidruchney Award for Best Selling Children's Book.*



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# GROUNDING:

## THE KEY TO A GOOD ELECTRIC FENCE

Story by Helen McMenamin.

**W**hether you're a seasoned user or a newbie to electric fencing, grounding can trip you up. They are the most important part of the system, but it's easy to think of them as "just the ground," and focus on the energizer and the live wire.

"Poor grounding is the number one reason for electric fencing issues," says Jason Williams, Western Canadian Manager for the Tru-Test Group – which includes Patriot, makers of electric fencing materials. "The ground rods complete the circuit from the animal to the energizer.

"When an animal contacts a live wire, the current flowing through the wire travels through its body to the ground, but that doesn't shock it," he explains. "The current has to flow through the ground to the ground rods and to the energizer to complete the circuit and shock the animal. It takes only 3 milli-seconds, but without good grounding it doesn't happen."

Before you think about a site for your ground system, make sure you're at least 10 meters (33 feet) from house, shop, pump-house or other electrical systems, underground power lines, and phone lines. Siting ground rods too close to phone or electrical systems can cause stray voltage issues.

The ideal spot for a grounding system is in a swampy or shady area, where the soil stays moist. Moisture reduces the resistance of the soil to electricity, but dry, sandy or gravelly soil is not such a good energy conductor. To allow

for soils that are poor energy conductors you may be able to move the ground system, make the ground more effective by adding more rods, or use one hot and one ground wire in your fence.

Each rod in a ground system can focus current from about 5 feet away, so at least 10-foot (3-meter) spacing is needed for the full length of each to contribute to the grounding effect. The number of ground rods (or their total length) depends on the output of the energizer. Bigger energizers need more ground rods.

Williams advises using ground rods at least 6 feet long, with 4 inches (10cm) of rod left above the soil surface, for connections. For small projects – powered by energizers with outputs under 0.5 joules – short ground rods about 3-feet long can be used and pushed into the soil, about a foot.

Use insulated cable to connect the ground rods (in series) to the energizer. All the metal and wire in your system should be the same. Don't use aluminum or copper wire – electrolysis between different metals corrodes one of them entirely. And keep connections above ground, to cut corrosion.

To test your ground system, short-circuit the fence 100 meters or more from the energizer (turned off), with a steel rod. Turn the power back on and measure the fence voltage. It should be under 2kV. If not, add more rods and drive them into the soil about a foot. Once fence voltage reads under 2kV, clip the

### GROUND SYSTEM CHECKLIST

- All wire connections are securely joined.
- Ground rods are at least 3 meters (10 feet) apart.
- Ground rods connected to each other with the first one connected to the ground post of the energizer.
- The number and length of ground rods is at least as many as recommended in your user manual (or 1 meter of rod per output joule).
- All parts of the system are made of the same metal.
- None of the rods are within 10 meters of electrical wiring or grounding – sometimes grounds are some distance from the building.

If you have questions about your individual electric fencing project, send an e-mail to [feedback@peaveymart.com](mailto:feedback@peaveymart.com).

voltmeter to the last rod of the grounding system and insert the probe into the soil at the full length of the leads. A reading of 0.3 kV or less, means your ground system is adequate. If it's more, you need more ground rods, or a better site. 🍁



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# CHICKENS IN WINTER

## HOW TO MAKE SURE THEY ALL THRIVE THROUGH THE SEASON

Story by Helen McMenamin.

**Y**ou can keep your chickens through the winter – even let them outside – but you do have to ready your chicken coop, and be prepared for some extra work and fewer eggs.

The first thing is to insulate your chicken coop. This is more important than your heating system. You may not even need a heater: that depends on the size of the chicken house, and the number of birds you have. Each chicken generates about 10 watts of heat, so 25 can match a 250-watt lamp, and they huddle together on the perch at night. Generally, chickens prefer cooler temperatures than people do. Most of our domesticated animals are happiest at about 5°C.

If you plan to let the chickens outside, put plastic or some other wind protection around the fence. You may also want to change the orientation of your chicken coop to suit your area's wind patterns.

Experts – such as the small flock poultry staff at the University of Alberta – advise interior insulation with fiberglass, urethane foam, and the like. It's important to cover the insulation with plywood or other material, to prevent the chickens pecking it. Pay particular attention to nest boxes, to prevent eggs from freezing.

While you're modifying the coop, consider making a wider perch for winter, so the birds' toes don't hang over the edge, where they can get frostbite. A droppings board under the perch also makes for easier cleaning, and allows you to see any early warning signs for disease.

The most important thing to check before winter is that you have good ventilation, which doesn't create drafts for the birds. Good ventilation is crucial, to limit moisture, CO2 and ammonia: all of these can cause

illness and disease. Keeping the chickens dry matters more than providing warmth.

Keep predators and pests out of the coop by covering the vents with metal mesh. Wild birds can bring in parasites and diseases, while predators like weasels and rodents can squeeze through very small openings and reach places you think are inaccessible. Raccoons are amazingly strong.

*(Continued on second page following)*



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# BORED CHICKENS

Without the stimulation of foraging outside chickens can get bored, and peck at other birds' feathers. A dust bath of peat or sand, and music (soft jazz or classical apparently preferred) can give them some stimulation. Hiding treats or toys encourages chickens to forage as they would in summer.

If pecking becomes aggressive – causing bruising or drawing blood – it may stem from too little space, too little feed, too few nest boxes, too much heat or light, boredom, or mixing of flocks... especially if birds are different ages or colours.

Sometimes chickens in moult may pull feathers from other birds. This is a sign of a lack of protein. During moult, the bird rejuvenates its reproductive tract after a season of egg-laying, and replaces its dirty old feathers. It needs high levels of protein, vitamins and minerals. There are special feeds, but old-timers sometimes used dry cat food. If birds moult in winter, they need to be kept in a warm place, separate from the other birds, and handled as little as possible, since this can be painful.

Chickens drink about 2 kg of water for every kilo of feed they consume. Either you need a system to prevent drinking water from freezing, or you need to deliver fresh water at least twice a day. The other issue is keeping the litter dry. Nipple drinkers with a cup underneath to catch drips and spills are ideal and easily kept running with a waterpipe heater.

Most of the water the birds drink goes out in their droppings, which also contain urea (a nitrogen fertilizer, the reason chicken manure burns plants until it's been composted). Urea breaks down into ammonia and CO2. You can monitor ammonia levels in your chicken coop with inexpensive paper test strips.

Sawdust or wood shavings are better litter material than newspaper or other materials that work well in summer. You can either replace the bedding every week, or use deep litter, essentially composting the litter in place. The litter must be thoroughly turned every week, and fresh litter added on top. The composting bedding provides warmth, but you need to manage it diligently, keeping it well aerated, with clean litter on top.

Expect your chickens to eat more in winter, as they use energy to keep warm. Check that your feed supplier brings in chicken feed year-round. You may have to buy enough feed for the entire winter and store it. Many chicken owners give their birds "scratch" – cracked corn and whole cereal grains – as a treat, last thing in the evening. The grain energy keeps them warm overnight. But nutritionists warn it should only be given as a treat: eating too much scratch lowers the birds' consumption of complete feed, and can lead to malnutrition.

The need for heat lamps depends on each situation, but don't use just one – the sudden big drop in temperature from a bulb burning out or a power failure is more harmful to the birds than living in a chilly coop. Be fire-aware in setting



*(Continued on second page following)*

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# CHICKEN BREEDS FOR WINTER

Chickens with loose feathers have better insulation than smooth-feathered breeds. Those with rose combs (little crumpled-looking top-knots) and small wattles are at less risk of frostbite. Birds with feathered feet and legs or fancy crests may also have some problems with ice build-up on their feet and legs.

Some chicken owners rub petroleum jelly on exposed combs and wattles. Waterers that minimize spillage help protect silkies and similar types from ice problems.

up any electrical equipment with GFI plugs: feathers and bedding are very flammable.

If you would rather not have to head out to check on a few chickens at least twice a day, or do weekly chores whatever the weather, you can often find someone who has a warm barn or other place to keep them. In places where backyard chickens are allowed, rent-a-chicken and chicken wintering services have developed. 🍁



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# STACK THE ODDS

## PROTECT YOUR PLACE AGAINST WILDFIRE

Story by Helen McMenamin.

**F**ire can strike any time, but a wildfire is a particularly ugly threat – it's beyond your control and comes with very little warning. The risk is growing, with higher temperatures, easier access and more people living and playing in forested areas and farmland. But you can mitigate the risk of losing your home and other buildings.

FireSmart Canada aims to prevent fires and lessen their damage. Much of the work falls to provincial and municipal government, but communities and residents have a big part to play, says FireSmart President, Laura Stewart.

"Homes are most often lost before or after the main fire front has passed," she says. "A firebrand or embers blow onto the roof or a fuel close to the house and up it goes. Living in natural or farmed surroundings puts you close to fire – it's a part of nature here. Whether you're building new or maintaining an existing home, keep fire in mind."

Stewart and her team focus on homes, but their advice applies at least as much to other buildings that may house livestock or store equipment vital to your livelihood. If firefighters are on the scene, they may focus on saving a house at the expense of other buildings.

FireSmart Canada advises keeping the first metre – preferably three (3 to 10 feet) – around a house or important building, including under decks, totally free of fuel. Tall grass and evergreen shrubs are particularly hazardous. She calls junipers "gasoline tanks – they can explode and carry fire up the side of a house like a torch." Leaves and evergreen needles, bark chips or other organic mulch or bales around the house or in eavestroughs can be fuel for a spark or they can smoulder for days then ignite and be whipped around by the wind into a vulnerable spot.

Woodpiles stacked against the house are another thing fire prevention specialists hate to see. Even if the wood doesn't catch fire immediately, air spaces can nurture tiny sparks into real fires.

FireSmart advises crushed rock around a house or scraping soil away to expose the mineral soil below around a house. They're okay with grass

if it's kept short and free of flammable debris like fallen leaves. If you must have plantings close to your house, put them on the side of the house that retains the most moisture, Stewart says.

Piles of leaves are a concern anywhere, because piled leaves don't decay into the forest floor the way natural leaf falls do. The winds around a fire can blow up burning leaves and start new fires.

Evergreen trees are another concern. FireSmart advises having none within 10 metres of your house, or at least pruning them so no branches overhang buildings. If it's a forest area, they suggest thinning the trees for 30 meters around to prevent crown fires, where flames go from tree to tree in the canopy. Take out dead trees in that area. In a fire, a dead tree can act as a chimney, spewing burning pine cones and other firebrands. If they hit a rain gutter with flammable debris, they can set off a fire in the roof that's very difficult to control.

On steep slopes, manage vegetation for a longer distance downhill. The goal is to reduce "ladder fuels," where fire burning uphill preheats and dries the fuel in its path.

Wildfires are more destructive in forested areas, but if your yard is in the path of a fire on grassland or farmland it can be affected too and the fire can hit with even less warning. Standing stubble and trash in direct-seeded fields can spread as fast as a grass fire. Those can move fast but unwatered drought-tolerant deciduous shrubs can explode, and dry manure burns well.

### MAINTENANCE FOR FIRE PROTECTION

Stewart wants everyone to build and maintain their property with fire in mind.

If she had her way, everybody would spend the next weekend cutting the combustible materials right around their house.

Move the woodpile away from the wall of the house. Sweep off the deck and take any flammable materials stored under the deck out and store them somewhere else. Ideally,

close in the space under a deck so leaves and pine cones and needles can't accumulate there. Failing that, sweep out the spaces under decks. Burning embers can blow in there just as easily as the debris you sweep out.

Add cleaning out the eavestroughs – even those that don't seem to clog up – and mowing and trimming the grass around buildings to your regular chores.

### OVER TIME:

Remove as much flammable material as you can from areas within 10 metres of your house and buildings. Stewart suggests gravel rather than wood or other organic mulch in gardens, and getting rid of juniper foundation plantings.

Think through and talk about emergency plans. The most sensible of us can make errors when we're rushed into action without thinking things through. If you have livestock, make sure your premises identification is up to date. In the event of a fire or other disaster, ensure that first responders will be aware of the animals, and be prepared for them on the road as they approach. A plan for each pasture could help too.

Prepare an emergency pack, maybe one for each family member, and keep it near the door. Include cash, medications, water and comfort items, maybe clean socks and underwear, a special toy.

If you're doing renovations or putting up a new building, Class A fire-rated shingles are a good choice. Metal roofs are fire resistant, but can sustain hail damage. Concrete, stucco, brick or Hardie Board siding are all fireproof, and better choices than vinyl siding that burns.

### EVACUATION:

If you are threatened by fire, put things you need in your vehicle and move it to the driveway, facing out. Make sure you have your credit card, medications and important papers. Close doors and windows before you leave. Don't forget the garage door: many fires enter houses through the garage. 🍁



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# GOOD MAINTENANCE

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF FARM EQUIPMENT

Story by Helen McMenam. Photos by Drew Kenworthy.

**J**oey Hildebrandt hates sending stuff to the landfill. So, he's happy with his position as Peavey Mart shop mechanic for small engines in Red Deer. He has many years of experience with this type of equipment, and is certified by the engine and equipment manufacturers to do warranty and other repair on any equipment Peavey Mart sells. "If I can get parts for it, I can fix it," he says.

In some cases, the bill to fix things may be more than the price of a new one, or the customer may simply prefer to have a new one right away. But whenever he can, Hildebrandt fixes the machine economically, and returns it to the customer or back to the store for sale. "One less thing to go to the landfill," he says. "And, the used equipment in the stores will have been checked right through to make sure it's good to go."

Hildebrandt has some suggestions to save yourself having to send equipment for him to fix. The first thing is to buy equipment sized for the work you have for it, and consult a knowledgeable person before you buy.

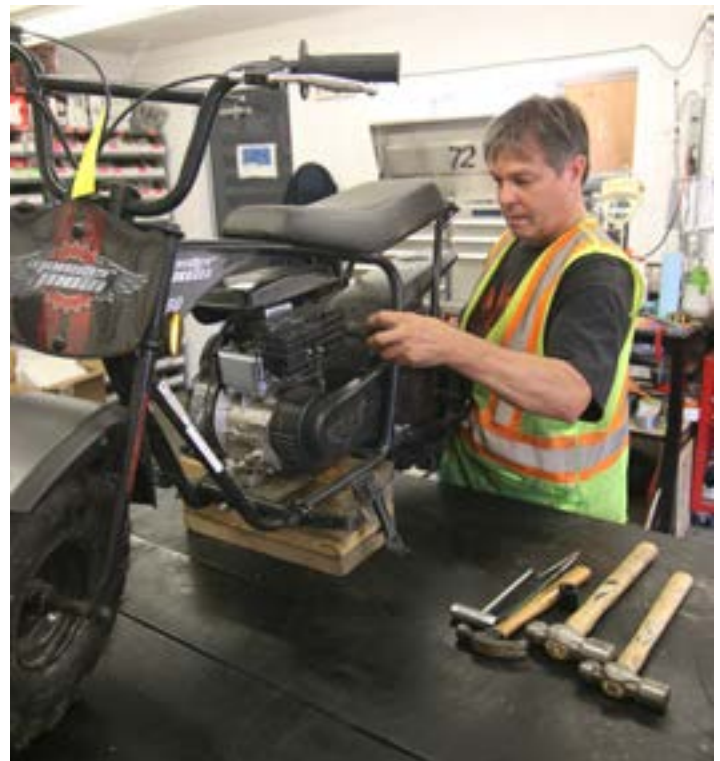
"The big box stores may seem to have better prices, but you don't generally find anyone who can advise you about the machine you need. Go to a store where the staff can advise you on the best machine for your job. A machine that's matched to the size of your job makes the work easier, and makes the equipment less likely to break down – and if it does, it can probably be fixed."

No matter what the equipment, Hildebrandt has the same advice: keep your fuel fresh. Gas deteriorates, because it includes 10 % ethanol, and ethanol acts as a magnet for water.

"Add a fuel stabilizer every time you put gas in a small-engine machine," he says. "Small engines are finicky about fuel. Keep extra fuel in self-sealing cans that don't allow any air to get in, or add a stabilizer. Even practice this when a vehicle should have a fuel stabilizer – especially if it's not driven much, or if it's going to sit for any length of time. If you put the good stuff in when you buy fuel, it will last 5 years."

"To help all sorts of equipment and vehicles run better for longer, drain the water-fuel mixture in the bottom of your farm fuel tank every year," Hildebrandt says. "Ethanol may be good for the environment, but it's terrible for engines."

Maintenance is the same for all small engine equipment, according to Hildebrandt. "Once a year, change the oil, clean the oil filter, replace the spark plug and sharpen the blade, if it's a mower.



"Electric motors make things easier: the only maintenance is sharpening the blade. Cold is the only enemy for a lithium-ion battery, so keep it inside, and charged up over winter."

Shaun Howard, Peavey Mart store manager in Leduc, sees the small engine and equipment repair services within the company as an important part of Peavey Mart customer service.

"It's convenient for our customers. And when they buy equipment from Peavey Mart, they can trust the company to look after them. We're growing the 'we service what we sell' ethic, so people can have confidence that the small-engine equipment they buy will perform well for a long time." 🍁



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# RESPECT IS...

## THE KEY TO CHAINSAW SAFETY

Story by Helen McMenamin. Top photo courtesy Husqvarna.

**P**eople become way too comfortable with a chainsaw. They forget to respect it.” According to Delani Bissell, Husqvarna certified small engine mechanic at Peavey Mart in High Prairie, taking a saw for granted is behind 90 percent of chainsaw injuries.

“Most often, the problem is a kickback due to trying to force the saw,” she says. “Usually, the saw hasn’t been properly sharpened or the saw is not performing at full capacity. It flies out of the operator’s hands, and then it can do terrible damage. Always, always hold a chainsaw with both hands and a firm, but not rigid, grip.”

Regular maintenance, at least every day you’re working with a saw, is Bissell’s mantra. Sharpening the chain every day (even twice a day for some work) and holding at the correct blade angle is working smart, she says.

Husqvarna has some helpful YouTube videos showing the correct sharpening techniques. Bissell recommends the Husqvarna guide tool to help you get the right blade angle for your saw, as well as the right height for the rakers that control the amount of timber your chain has to cut through. She and other Husqvarna technicians are always ready to show you the right tools and help you ensure you have the right technique for sharpening your chain.

Blade angle and wood type affect the size of wood chips the saw kicks out. If it’s fine sawdust, it can block the air filter, so check it – you may need to wash it often. The air filter can be so clogged the engine stalls, or sawdust can get into the carburetor and clog all the little passageways.

Regular maintenance is essential to keep your saw working up to its full capacity so it

performs as you expect, says Bissell. Make sure your bar is clean. Starting at the sprocket, scrape oil towards the chain and clean the oil ports. If you can’t get clear the ports you can give them a squirt of brake fluid. Clean the groove where the chain runs, so the oil can reach the chain. It runs at more than 8,000 rpm with the bar at 100°C, so keeping oil in all the right places is vital. Make sure the chain is tightened correctly. If you’re not sure how to do routine maintenance, talk to a technician and have them show you the right tension and the best way to do each step.

The other part of chainsaw maintenance (and the thing that’s most often ignored) is to measure the 50:1 gas/oil 2-stroke fuel mix as accurately as possible. It’s the most common problem that Bissell and her fellow small engine technicians see. It leads to poor performance and saws not lasting nearly as long as they should.

Husqvarna has its own ready-to-use fuel. The company is so convinced of the importance of properly-mixed good quality fuel to performance and longevity that the warranty period is extended by a year for buyers of three cans of their fuel.

With your saw maintenance done, it’s time for you to get ready for work. At the absolute minimum, PPE (personal protective equipment) includes chaps, gloves, boots, and eye protection. Bissell would prefer to see everyone with a chainsaw also using ear protection, a mesh or plexiglass faceshield, and a jacket as well.

“Husqvarna has done amazing things with their clothing,” she says. “I’ve seen a couple of chains derail, and they’re scary – the chain is traveling



Photo by Kevin Stock.

at over 80 feet per second. The Husqvarna jacket catches the chain and stalls the saw.” Rather than working through a heavyweight fabric, the jacket has cut-retardant pads that reduce the severity of injury, because they’re designed to rip apart when they come into contact with a moving chain, and to clog the sprocket and stop the chain within a fraction of a second.”

Bissell has one last piece of advice. “Talk to a professional before you buy a saw, so you can pick the right one for you and get some safety tips.” 🍁



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## WORK WEAR CHANGES WITH TECHNOLOGY

# WESTERN STYLES: WHAT'S NEW AT PEAVEY MART?

Story by Helen McMenamin. Photo courtesy of Panhandle.

**P**eavey Mart is stocking Western wear – and not just the sturdy work wear you expect, but fashion jeans you can wear into town to show off your two-step, or for looking good in the show ring. Now, you can pick out clothes for the whole family where you go for feed and hardware... or charge your electric vehicle.

Peavey Mart is working with Panhandle and its related brands – Rock & Roll Denim and Powder River – to bring in up-to-date western casual styles that appeal to people of all ages, for all sorts of occasions.

“Working with Peavey Mart, we can offer the same stylish designs and quality of clothing as you find in western stores,” says Gina Chancellor of Panhandle. “We’ll have the fashion-forward styles people want. We have lines that have the fit and appeal to the younger crowd, and others that suit more mature people.”

The companies will work together to create displays very different from those you expect at Peavey Mart. There will be complete outfits showcasing the latest colours and styles, or new ways to wear pieces to give a new look. Sometimes they’ll include outerwear, such as a vest or jacket, adding polish to an outfit.

Peavey Mart clothing and footwear manager Jason Desjarlais is really excited about the new clothing lines.

“Our customers come into our stores wearing clothes like these,” he says. “We should be able to offer them clothes of the quality and style they want when they come to town. I’m with them: these are the kind of clothes I want to wear.”

The demand isn’t just coming from the younger crowd – everybody wants farm and ranch clothes. He’s especially enthused about the Powder River line.

“The whole line is very practical for outdoors. It’s at the higher end for quality, and the jackets and vests are very stylish, and in some great colours. The sherpa-lined wool vests and sweater-knit jackets will be great for chilly mornings and cool evenings anywhere – they’re not just for on the farm. It’s more fashion-conscious than anything we’ve ever carried before. I think this is a really exciting move for Peavey Mart.”

Panhandle has stylish farm and ranch clothing, too. It’s a line that’s tough enough to meet workplace codes for electrical linemen, welders and oilfield workers, but it’s also perfect for bankers, and trips to town. “You can wear it anywhere, from the field to the bar,” says Chancellor.

All Panhandle’s western wear is of great quality, and good value for money. They use ring-spun denim – that’s the traditional, durable type that

The work wear coming to Peavey Mart this fall incorporates technology that makes dependable, quality clothing more comfortable for tough situations. Carhartt has a new technology they call Full Swing.

“It’s a night and day difference from the traditional work coat,” says Jason Desjarlais, clothing and footwear category manager at Peavey Mart. “They’ve built extra stretch into the jackets so they don’t ride up. The jacket still fits the same, but if you’re working with your arms up high, the sleeve doesn’t slide up your arm. You can get the job done and be more comfortable in any weather. They’ve even made some advances with odour control fabric.”

Technology is changing footwear too. Work boots are much lighter and warmer this year, as steel toecaps and steel-belted soles are replaced by composite materials.

The boots and shoes still meet the CSA and Green Patch standards and pass all the same tests, to be sure your feet are protected. But instead of being extra wide and weighing 4 or 5 lbs each, the metal-free boots can be close to regular width and weigh 1.5 or 2 lbs per boot. Lighter boots can mean less fatigue at the end of a workday, and metal-free boots can be warmer too.

Technology in winter work boots and hunting boots is making these warmer too. Browning is making boots with Thinsulate insulation. Desjarlais tried them, and says they were the lightest, warmest hunting boots he’d ever worn.

lasts and lasts, fades naturally, feels soft from the first time you wear it, and gets softer over time.

“It’s durable, looks vintage and less rigid than some fabrics from the time it’s new,” says Chancellor. “We have it in light and dark washes, as well as black and white – white is becoming increasingly popular among 4-H clubs in the US.” 🍁



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## GROWING A FAMILY BUSINESS

Panhandle was started by two brothers who immigrated to the US during the 1930s. First they learned the business then started a shirt company that their family has grown into one of very few privately-owned western apparel companies. The family attributes their ongoing success to creating fresh styles for customers in the ever-changing western fashion world. That history makes the Texas company well-suited to working with the privately-owned, western Canadian Peavey Mart. The companies have a little history in common too: they both had their origins in Minneapolis. ♥

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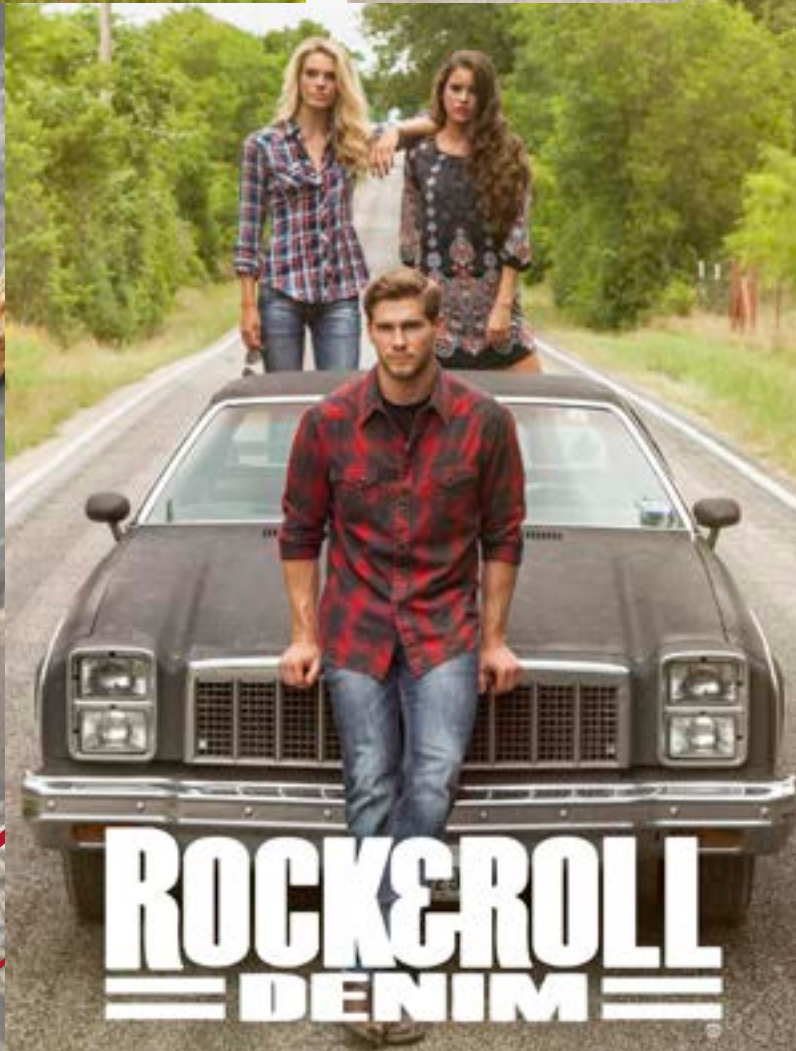
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# SECURE STORAGE

## IT'S NOT JUST FOR GUNS

Story by Helen McMenamin. Top photo courtesy of Stack-On.

**G**un regulations may force us to look for secure storage, but guns aren't the only things that need to be kept safe and out of the wrong hands.

"Once you start thinking about security, there are more and more things you want to store safely," says Chris Sydor, Marketing Manager with Stack-On Products, the most popular maker of secure storage in North America. "Of course, you want firearms where they're safe and kept out of the hands of children, guests or burglars. But, business records, technology backups, family treasures, passports, and more go in, as time goes by."

Secure storage is available in endless types and sizes, but Sydor advises a simple approach. "Choose a secure cabinet at least twice as big as you think you need. Apart from security, it's a great place to put those things you want to locate quickly. When I take my passport out of my gun cabinet for travel, I put my pocket-knife in there, so I can find it when I get home."

Even a basic gun cabinet, costing less than \$200, is enough security for most people. The heavy-gauge metal construction and live-action locking bolts that slide behind the cabinet frame as it's locked will keep most burglars from prying the safe open. The locking bolts are made of 1- to 1.5-inch diameter steel, and depending on the cabinet, there can be 2 to 12 of them.

Any safe should be bolted in place, says Sydor. "A small personal safe or handgun carrier might

weigh only 30lbs, so it needs to be bolted to something. A gun cabinet should be bolted to the floor, preferably in a solid corner so it's difficult to pry it. And a transport container should be bolted to the vehicle."

"No safe is impenetrable," he says. "But the harder it is to get into or take away, the more likely crooks will give up in frustration. At the very least, it buys you more time."

The choice of key, combination or electronic locks doesn't affect security, he says. Electronic or biometric locks are an option in most of his company's safes. Biometric locks can store up to 20 fingerprints and allow quick access – handy for vehicle containers. The premium is around \$50 (US). An electronic lock with a code you choose is about \$20.

Sydor has some advice for using secure storage: If you have a keyed lock, don't keep the spare inside the safe. For safety, Stack-On, and most safes, have air vents and the company can help in a crisis, but make sure children know it's not for playing around, and put a light inside.

For protection from the elements as well as humans, fireproof (tested to withstand 30 minutes at 1400 F – hotter than most house fires) and/or waterproof cabinets offer the ultimate defence. The safes may be damaged by the event, but Stack-On replaces them under a lifetime warranty. Claimants tell them that amid the trauma and loss of fire, flood or water damage, the tiny bit of relief of finding items in the safe unharmed is priceless. 🍁

## CANADIAN REGULATIONS

Under Canadian regulations, most long guns only need to be stored unloaded in a container or room that is difficult to break into, or disabled with a trigger or cable lock, or the bolt removed. Ammunition must be kept separately or locked up. Handguns and automatic weapons (restricted and prohibited weapons) must be stored in a specialized cabinet and disabled with a secure locking device. Ammunition must be safely and separately stored. Some cabinets have different locks for each door, so one side can be used for ammunition and the other for guns.

According to a Forbes report, this summer – in US states which regulate gun ownership, storage and transport – 19 children are injured or killed by guns every day on average, two of them under 11 years old. And, according to one study of survivors of suicide using firearms, over 40% were spur of the moment decisions, considered for less than 5 minutes.



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# GAME RECIPE:

## VENISON GOULASH

*Story by Tu Le.*

**G**rowing up, I was never really a fan of game meats. It wasn't until one of my employees from the Czech Republic introduced me to a wonderful venison dish, that really open my eyes to the deep rich flavor of the meat. For me, the gin in the dish is what really makes it pop. The juniper notes compliment the venison extremely well.

### VENISON GOULASH

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 large yellow onions, chopped
- 3 lbs stew venison in ½ inch cubes
- 4 tbsp sweet paprika
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 3 tbsp flour
- 2 cups low sodium beef broth
- 1 tbsp gin
- Salt and pepper to taste

Place cubed venison in a large mixing bowl, and coat with flour, paprika and a generous pinch of salt and pepper.

Warm the oil in a large pot on medium heat, and add the onion and garlic. Cook until the onions are translucent. Remove onions and garlic with a slotted spoon.

Add the venison into the pot, and cook until brown on all sides. Return onions and garlic to the pot, and add tomato paste and gin. Cook for another 3 or 4 minutes, until all ingredients are incorporated with one another.

Cover with beef broth, and season with salt and pepper.

Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer on low for about three hours. The sauce will gradually thicken, and meat will become tender and fall apart. Once the sauce is thick and meat is tender, it is ready to serve.

I enjoy this goulash on buttered noodles or rice, and a hunk of crusty bread. 🍁

*Tu Le is chef and co-owner of Jack's Burger Shack and Cerdos Tacos and Tequila, in St. Albert, Alberta.*





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# A LIFELINE

## ... MUCH MORE THAN A FRIEND

Story by Helen McMenamin. Photos courtesy of Michelle Douglas, Dogs With Wings Dog Assistance Society.

**A**bout 40 percent of Canadian homes include at least one dog, and most of them provide physical and mental health benefits – but a growing number of dogs are a lifeline for their humans, giving stability, independence, and even safety.

Service dogs, once limited to working with blind or visually impaired people, now work with people with limited mobility, deaf people and those with mental health issues. Receiving a service dog can be life-changing, whether the dog frees a person from the need for a constant human helper, or acts as their eyes or ears.

Developing a service dog is not quick or easy. Dogs with Wings (DWW) has a specialized breeding program and a 2-year training program. It's been operating from Edmonton since 1996, when they started training guide dogs for the visually impaired, but now their dogs mainly help people with mobility issues and families with an autistic child.

“The dog gives autistic children an anchor,” explains Elisa Irlam, a co-founder of DWW, and now director of client services. An adult controls the dog, but its harness has a tether attached to the child's waist and a handle. If the child lets go of the handle, the dog stops and the child is held within reach of the parent by the tether.

“The dog is calming for the children,” says Irlam. “Autistic kids don't show affection, but sometimes they do with the dog. The dog becomes their buddy – that's huge for them – and helps them meet others more easily. And taking their dog for a walk can give a sense of independence. It's an incredible relief for parents who have felt locked inside their own house.”

Support dogs fetch and pick up things for people who don't have the mobility or balance to do that without a caregiver's help. One support dog saved her person's life when he dropped the dowel he uses to control his car in the running vehicle inside a closed garage. The dowel was jammed under his wheelchair, but the support dog scabbled and scabbled until she retrieved it, and gave it to him as he was very close to losing consciousness from the carbon monoxide.

Support dogs turn on lights, open doors – even get a bottle of water from the fridge, close the fridge door, and bring it to their person. They don't need to call a caregiver to do that for them. It's huge. It's dignity.

### MAKING A SERVICE DOG

There's a lot involved in putting the right dog and person together. Dogs with Wings breeds their Labradors for service, using semen from groups in the US or Australia to minimize risk of genetic disorders, and emphasize service qualities.

Puppies spend their first year in foster homes where they're socialized and learn house manners. It's a full-time commitment for volunteers, and includes a weekly obedience class, currently only available at Calgary, Edmonton and Grande Prairie.

“Puppy-raisers are our biggest need,” says Irlam. “But our dogs have to be bomb-proof, and not phased by any environment.”

At a year old, dogs move to new foster homes for their higher education. Some volunteers enjoy always having a puppy – others find it hard to return “their” dog. “I know it's worthwhile: someone needs this dog more than I need a pet,” says one. “And when you see them in their service roles, you realize the difference you're making in peoples' lives.”

Young dogs attend training sessions every day. Their raisers drop them off each morning, just like doggy daycare.

For the first week or so, trainers assess each dog's aptitude and decide on its career track. About 60 percent of DWW dogs go on to become certified service dogs, entitled to wear service dog vests and be guaranteed public access under Alberta's Human Rights Act. Dogs that can't meet this standard become skilled canine companions for people with a disability who can't put in the time to train and socialize them.

All the dogs receive professional training that includes specific skills for their future career. Besides support and autism dogs, Dogs with Wings trains facility dogs that work in schools for special needs children or in victim services to help people deal with trauma. Some become guide dogs, negotiating obstacles, indicating road crossings and finding stairs or elevators – one client refers to his guide dog as an extension of his left arm.



## FUNDING

Volunteers are vital to Dogs with Wings' work, but the charity's cash outlay for a single dog is around \$40,000. Professional skills are needed for training, to match clients and dogs and to help clients train and socialize their dogs. The group is accredited under the widely-recognized standards of Assistance Dogs International.

Dogs with Wings retains ownership of all dogs, and from 8 years of age on, they check the dog's health and fitness to ensure they can keep on working. Almost all their dogs retire by age 10.

The demand for service dogs is so great, Dogs with Wings' waiting list for autism dogs is closed – but a \$1.5-million fundraising campaign aims to “Ditch the List,” and provide more families with dogs.

BC and Alberta have a certification and ID system for service dogs helping people with physical disabilities. The ID guarantees them public access under provincial Human Rights law.

Rather than working directly with clients, the Canadian Foundation for Animal Assisted Support Services (CFAASS) is building resources and services for the whole fragmented animal support sector.

“It’s the wild west out there,” says Joanne Moss, cofounder and CEO of CFAAS, noting that this has resulted in less-than-scrupulous offers on the internet: dogs for sale, dog and trainer certificates, accreditation, but few standards. “People looking for support animals are vulnerable to exploitation. And, it’s hard for philanthropists to donate their funds wisely.”

CFAASS has recently worked with Veterans Affairs to develop standards for funding service dogs. The group has a speakers bureau, and is working to build a national funding system and a virtual gateway to help people understand and navigate the support animal sector. They’re also working with Justice Canada on research to canine support in victim services. 🍁



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# CANADA WINTER GAMES

## UNITY THROUGH SPORT, IN RED DEER, ALBERTA

Story by Jessie Young. Photos supplied by Canada Winter Games Society.

**T**his summer, thousands of people were on the edge of their seat, as they watched Canada's most promising young athletes perform in the Canada Summer Games, an event comparable in size to the Winter Olympics.

Originally hosted in Quebec City, in 1967, as part of the Centennial Celebrations, the Games are held every two years, and alternate between summer and winter sports. For many, the Canada Games are an important stepping stone on the way to the Olympics. 48% of Team Canada Athletes who made it to the podium in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi had previously participated in the Canada Games.

In winter 2019, Canada's eyes will be on Red Deer, as more than 3,600 athletes and coaches come to participate in what has become the largest multi-sport competition in the country, the Canada Games. This will be the biggest event ever hosted in Red Deer, and the biggest in Alberta since the 1988 Winter Olympics. The competition will last 17 days, and is estimated to have an economic impact of approximately \$132 million.

Not just about the athletes, the Canada Games are also about leaving a legacy that will benefit the community long after the games have finished. Improvements will be made to existing venues that will be used in the Games, such as Canyon Ski Resort and Great Chief Park. There is also a brand new facility: the Gary W. Harris Canada Games Centre is being built at Red Deer College.

Each province and territory will be sending a team of athletes to compete in each of the 19 sports of the Games. Of course, the Games would not be what they are today if it wasn't for these 13 teams. What might be less obvious is

that there is a 14th team that is also absolutely critical to the success of the Games: the community. Without community involvement, the Games would not be possible. Putting on an event of this magnitude requires the financial support of many businesses, as well as approximately 5,000 volunteers who donate their time to ensure that the Games are as exceptional as they can be.

Excited to ignite the spirit of the 2019 Canada Winter Games, Peavey Mart has proudly become a Gold Sponsor, and will be presenting cross-country skiing, and biathlon, a sport where cross-country skiing is combined with rifle shooting.

"When Red Deer's bid was successful, we knew from the start we wanted to support the Games," said Doug Anderson, president of Peavey Industries LP. "The Winter Games speaks to many of the things that drive us at Peavey – personal commitment, the sense of being a part of something bigger, volunteerism, and celebrating excellence in Canada. We also appreciate the legacy projects that will stay in Red Deer to benefit the community."

Peavey's community spirit shines brightly in Red Deer, where the company gets involved in many Red Deer events: the free, all ages Peavey Mart Barn Dance street dance, held the day before the Westerner Days parade, Friday Family Dance series, Canada Day celebrations, and other City events.

Peavey Mart will also be supplying hundreds of items needed for the Games events – from extension cords and cable ties, to shovels and cleaning equipment, to ice melt and power tools.



"We are proud to welcome Peavey Mart to the 2019 Games team as a Gold Sponsor," said 2019 Games Board Chair Lyn Radford. "This is an exciting opportunity for both organizations. Their dedication to strengthen the communities they serve aligns well with our mission to deliver a life-shaping Games experience for all participants."

As the Games get closer, it might also be possible to meet the mascot or athletes at the Red Deer Peavey Mart store. ❄️

*Jessie Young is a freelance writer and graphic designer based out of Kamloops, BC. For the 2017 Canada Games, she worked as a community relations assistant. She studies communication and public relations at Thompson Rivers University, and enjoys snowboarding, longboarding, and going on road trips in her spare time.*





# WINTER BIRDING

## ATTRACTING AND CARING FOR BACKYARD BIRDS

Story and photos by Ken Crebbin. Top: Bohemian Waxwing.

**T**here are many varieties of birds that call the Prairies home year-round. In fact, many can be attracted to bird feeders. With a little luck and basic understanding of birds in your area, some can be attracted to your backyard feeders.

Creating a good bird habitat in your backyard is essential to attracting birds. Naturalizing your backyard with native trees and shrubs from your area is necessary. You can check with a local nursery to discuss what trees and shrubs would be good. Spruce trees provide excellent shelter and protection for birds. Mountain Ash and fruit trees also provide a reliable source of food for birds as well as nesting sites in the spring and summer.



Northern Flicker



Pine Grosbeak

Water is essential to all birds. In the winter, a heated bird bath/waterer can be used. Eating snow can lower the bird's temperature, so having a source of water is beneficial to the birds.

I like to place my bird feeders so they can be easily viewed from my house, but within easy access from nearby trees and shrubs for the birds. Hanging feeders can be hung with wire and suspended from a tree. Raised ground feeders can also be used for birds that prefer to forage for food closer to the ground. I use tube feeders, tray feeders, and suet feeders.

Keep the area clean by dusting snow off the feeders. Picking up shelled and spilt or discarded seeds is important as these can attract unwanted guests, such as rodents.

I place sunflower seeds in tube and tray feeders, Nyjer seeds in a tube feeder, and suet in a wire suet holder. Holes can also be drilled in dead trees or large branches for suet plugs. A Christmas tree holder can be used to support the tree or branch, or you can make your own support. I find some of the woodpeckers prefer to feed off a dead tree limb rather than the wire suet feeder.

Winter can be a challenging time for birds as food sources are scarce. By feeding the birds in winter, it helps them survive and they have a better chance of breeding successfully in the spring and summer.

Attracting birds to your backyard can be a slow process. It can take years to establish a suitable habitat for the birds so they will return year after year. I have been feeding birds in





*Purple Finch*

our backyard for years, and this last winter was the first time a Pileated Woodpecker came to feed from the suet, which was thrilling.

We live in southern Alberta, and there are many varieties of birds that frequent our feeders. Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, Blue Jays,



*Downy Woodpecker*



*White-Breasted Nuthatch*

Chickadees, White-Breasted and Red Breasted Nuthatches, Downy Woodpeckers, Hairy Woodpeckers, and Northern Flickers are attracted to feeders with sunflower seeds. I try not to use the mixed birdfeed, as this attracts the English House Sparrow; however, it can attract Collared Doves and Song Sparrows, which can come early in spring, and stay later into fall.

There is also the occasional bird that decides to spend the winter, rather than migrating south. Last year, we had some American Goldfinches winter here for the first time. They like Nyjer seed, as do the Redpolls and Chickadees.

Suet blocks with seeds can be heated in the microwave until soft and then dried mealworms can be added. This is excellent for all varieties of woodpeckers, which may be why the Pileated Woodpecker started visiting my feeders. I use a small amount of mixed seed and mealworms in tray feeders for collared doves and chickadees.

Feeding and attracting birds can turn into a very enjoyable lifelong hobby. For me, a lifelong interest in both birds and photography were a great combination.

These photos were all taken in my backyard. 🍁



*Common Redpoll*

*Ken Crebbin is an amateur photographer living south of Calgary. Ken uses Nikon equipment and enjoys nature photography, especially birds.*

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