

## VETTER

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Midwest as an example, Hawthorne said the Vetter World documentary could open some eyes as to how soil not treated year after year with chemicals is better able to soak up excess moisture. One piece of the film documented how the Vetter farm soaked up most of a six-inch rain overnight, while fields across the road farmed with more conventional methods remained flooded for more than a week.

"People are starting to look at the fact that climate change is real and we're going to have to change some of our farm management systems," Hawthorne said. "I think the model David has been experimenting with for 45 years is a good one, and it's something people should look at. As time goes by I feel like more and more people are realizing that the Vettters are on the right side of history."

Sunday's showing drew a crowd of more than 100 to the 12th Street Cinema in Aurora. Guests were then invited to a question and answer session at The Ivy, which allowed Vetter and a guest panel to talk about the growth and challenges facing organic farming on a broader scale. A more detailed report on the Q&A session will appear in next week's edition.

### A personal story

Allison Vetter returned to the family farm for Saturday's farm field day at The Grain Place and Sunday's film screening. She knows the story well having lived it personally as the Vetter's oldest child, and said it was moving to watch a local audience hear the story in great detail, many for the first time.

"In terms of viewing it and seeing my family on screen it's emotional because it's not only about the success of the farm, it's a personal story," she said. "My parents have been really good role models teaching us to leave your world wherever you are better than you found it. One thing you can say about my dad is that he is one person who lives the way he believes."

"It makes me very proud," Allison continued. "I feel that farther away from Nebraska and in the organic community people know my dad and my grandfather, but their story and everything that happened in The Grain Place isn't as well known locally. This film may be satisfying people's curiosity a little bit about what's been going on at The Grain Place all these years. Now there is a way to access that."

David Vetter admitted that watching the film again and again is emotional for him, but for different reasons.

"I still have a hard time watching the piece about my wife," he shared, referring to Rogean's battle with Alzheimer's. "In some respects it's kind of hard to watch over and over again on those points."

Vetter has made several trips across the country since the film's debut showing last July in Lincoln. He's attended screenings in California, Ohio and Arkansas, speaking each time to the audience.

"Things have come a long way in the last couple years and it looks like there will be more programs coming out of the university with cover cropping and things like that," he said. "The more of that we have going out there the better it will be for everybody."

Another observation Vet-

ter made is that many of the questions from the audience are dealing with policy issues on a broader scale, not just specifics about crop rotation on the Vetter farm.

Hawthorne made that observation as well.

"The high profile lawsuits involving glyphosate is one good example," she said. "Farmers were told in part that glyphosate was safe and now there are lawsuits where juries are deciding that people haven't gotten the whole story from big industry. There is growing general awareness these days about a lot of different things."

### A four-year process

Hawthorne, the film's director, cinematographer, editor, writer and narrator, became enthralled with David Vetter's vision for organic farming, so much so that she "put her life on hold" and spent four years researching, filming and editing a story centered around the

Vetter family farm and Grain Place Foods.

"I met David at a conference in California and I just found him fascinating," she explained last year when the film was first shown. "He was really instrumental in

getting organic farming up and running and I always wanted to shoot my own film, so that's kind of how this happened."

Hawthorne tells the story of the family's decades-long experiment with a self-renewing farm management system, beginning with the late Don Vetter's decision to re-evaluate the way he was going about his business.

"The story begins with Don returning home from World War II and being an early adopter of the new agricultural uses of chemicals that were developed during wartime," Hawthorne said. "Don (who died in 2015) did a lot of custom spraying and he decided after a few years of using these things that they didn't do what they claimed, and secondly he was starting to see real damage. He knew the soil was a living thing and it bothered him that he was putting what he called poison on the soil."

David Vetter rejoined the family farming operation in 1975 and has since become a visionary leader in the organic realm.

"David to this day calls what they do an experiment," Hawthorne said. "It's an experiment that's been going on now for 45 years. It's successful, and it's a model of how other people could farm if they chose to."

### New podcast

Hawthorne conducted interviews with 38 other organic leaders, local farmers and scientists. In fact, she announced Monday that many of those interviews didn't make the cut, but will soon be aired on her podcast, available at thepetunianchronicles.com.

"You can't put everything into one film," she said. "It was already 77 minutes long. The web posts will dive much deeper into all of this stuff."

The Vetter World documentary has been shown at 27 different events from California to New York, with more scheduled in the weeks ahead. The film has won two awards, including Best of Fest at the Oneota Film Festival in Decorah, Iowa, and the Special Award for Ecological Responsibility from the Common Good Film Festival in Claremont, Calif.

**'As time goes by I feel like more and more people are realizing that the Vettters are on the right side of history.'**

Bonnie Hawthorne,  
Film producer



William Feely won top honors in the animal category with this photo of a large Osprey (also known as a fish hawk) grabbing lunch out of the Gulf of Mexico. He took the picture while on a family vacation near Tampa, Fla.

## PHOTOS

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just decided to start snapping photos."

The image Stevens captured, taken with a Canon Rebel, featured water trickling through a large irrigation pipe, creating what judges agreed was an award-winning perspective of a common rural Nebraska scene.

"It's just so much fun to have a way to express what you are seeing in the world," she said. "Some people can draw. Some people can sing. There are so many different ways to show creativity. Luckily we've got these great cameras now that manage to catch some of the beauty of the world."

Stevens admitted that her lens is usually pointed at her children during all their activities. There are days she'll take 500 or more photos, which she plans to save as a means of documenting their childhood. This is the fourth year she has entered the ANR contest.

"I don't have a ton of pictures from my childhood just because it wasn't such a big thing," she said. "I have a terrible memory so I like to have photos to look back on and I think my kids will too. I want them to say, 'I remember that day.'"

### Feely's 'Catch of the day'

William Feely of Aurora won top honors in the animal photo category with a dynamic photo he aptly titled "Catch of the day."

Feely was on a family vacation last year near Tampa, Fla., where he was watching closely as birds flew around them near the Gulf coast. He noticed a large Osprey swooping down near the water and grabbed his Canon 70D and to start taking pictures in continuous shutter mode.

"I must have had 15 photos of him prior to going into the water and then he came up with a fish," Feely said, adding that the bird was able to carry the large fish to dry ground about 50 yards away. "It's hard to tell in the back of a view finder if it's going to be crisp and clear and you just hope you get a good shot of an event like that. I was hoping for a photo like that so I was pretty pleased with it."

As were the judges. As a claims adjustor by trade



Photo by

Hannah Preissler  
Hannah Preissler was on the way home from a street vault competition in Kansas when she spotted a train car covered in graffiti and decided to take a closer look. Her resulting photo won first place in the "Any subject" category.

who moved to Aurora two years ago, Feely said he takes a lot of photos of farm buildings and is often on rural area roads. He said he often sees things he would like to capture on camera so often carries his equipment with him.

"It's just kind of a hobby for me -- an artistic release," he said. "I started taking pictures when our oldest son when into high school and now I like to play with not only sports photos but scenes and wildlife. I also enjoy editing the pictures and seeing what I can do to make the photos more appealing. This is probably the only way I can be an artist."

This is Feely's second year entering the ANR contest, and his first as a winner.

### Preissler wins a first

Hannah Preissler has been the subject of many, many photos through her sporting activities at Giltner High School, including three state track championships in the pole vault. The soon-to-be senior

also likes to spend time behind the lens and was a winner in this year's "Any subject" category.

The winning image captured an artistic view of a train car which caught Preissler's eye.

"We were on our way home from a street vault somewhere in Kansas," she explained. "I like to get out and take pictures and that was one of my favorites. I just really liked the colors of it and I thought the graffiti on the train was really cool."

Rather than take a straight-on shot of the train as it sat by an empty adjacent track, Preissler tilted the camera, also bringing into view an ominous set of clouds looming overhead.

"It's just fun to mess around with whatever looks the coolest," she said.

Preissler, who also uses a Canon Rebel camera, enjoys taking pictures so much that she is considering some sort of photography minor in college. For now, it's just a fun hobby.

She has been competing in the ANR contest for many years and this year submitting 11 entries.

To view more entries from this year's amateur photo contest, which was sponsored by Hamilton Telecommunications, view the highlight video at auroraregister.com, on our social media or on Cobalt channel 509. More award winners are featured on page C1.

### Contest results

**Nature category:** Kady Lockmon, first (overall grand prize winner); Priscilla Balasa, second; Tina Patrick, honorable mention.

**Ag category:** Tiffany Stevens, first; Tiffany Stevens, second.

**Animals category:** William Feely, first; April Franzen, second; Caleb Smith, honorable mention.

**Any subject category:** Hannah Preissler, first; Kris Yockey, second; Melissa Weedon, honorable mention.

## FCCLA members attend national conference

Aurora FCCLA was part of the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America's largest National Leadership Conference in Anaheim, Calif., June 30-July 4. More than 8,700 attendees gathered to expand leadership skills, sharpen talents, explore career pathways and listen to inspiring speakers.

This year's conference theme encouraged participants to "Believe in Yourself" through competing in competitive events, running for office, partaking in Leadership Academy, and continuing to make a positive impact within their families, communities, and careers.

The four members of the Aurora chapter who attended

were Marah Hinrichs, Hailey Hanneman, Grace Ziegler and Noah Ziegler. The group attended Disney's Youth Education Series in addition to the workshops offered.

Grace Ziegler and Hailey Hanneman joined over 4,700 FCCLA members who competed in STAR (Students Taking Action with Recognition) events. STAR events are competitive events in which members are recognized for their proficiency and achievement in chapter and individual projects. The duo competed in life event planning and received a gold medal. In order to advance to the national level in a STAR event, members first compete at the district and state level. Grace and

Hailey placed ninth overall at the national competition.

Family, Career and Community Leaders of America is a nonprofit national career and technical student organization for young men and women in Family and Consumer Sciences education in public and private school through grade 12. Everyone is part of a family, and FCCLA is the only national career and technical student organization with family as its central focus. Since 1945, FCCLA members have been making a difference in their families, careers, and communities by addressing important personal, work, and societal issues through Family and Consumer Sciences education.



At left, the Aurora FCCLA members who attended the national conference included (from left) Marah Hinrichs, Grace Ziegler, Hailey Hanneman and Noah Ziegler. At right, Aurora's gold-winning duo of Hailey Hanneman (left) and Grace Ziegler earned a medal for their efforts in their national STAR event.

Courtesy photos