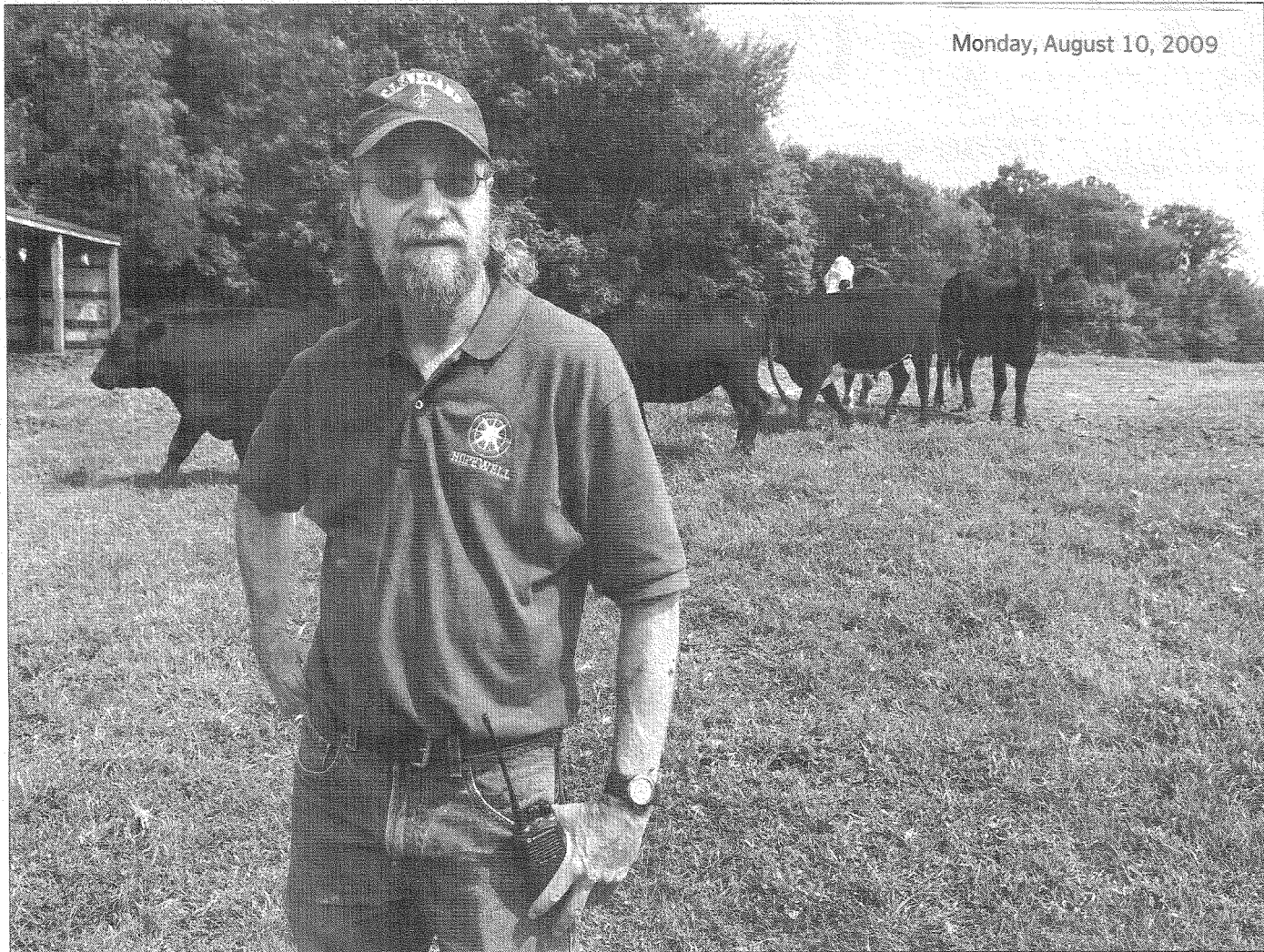


Monday, August 10, 2009



Bruce McAllester and some friends in the fields at Hopewell in Mesopotamia.

THOMAS ONDREY | THE PLAIN DEALER

Up on the farm

How old were you when you started drinking?

I'm not sure, like eighth grade. But it didn't become a problem until I quit Ohio State.

How much were you drinking back then?

The last six years before I got here, it was like all day.

What would you usually drink?

Drugstore vodka, a lot of beer. I'd go to the bar and drink a lot of whiskey, whatever. Anything, Mad Dog, you name it.

How many treatment programs were you in?

I tried a lot of places, a lot. If I was to sit down, I bet you I could come up with 15. Some out of state, Minnesota, Washington.

How long have you been sober?

April 30, 2003.

What was it about Hopewell that finally worked?

I think getting out of the city really, really helped. I was living at 150th and Puritas, and there were bars at every corner. You walk around, and all your friends are drinking. So I definitely think the change of environment helped me. And the counselors here. . . . I don't know why, if it was the rural quality, it must have been

Bruce McAllester, 57, was a city kid, growing up on Cleveland's West Side.

After dropping out of Ohio State, he began drinking heavily and hanging out on the streets. As life spiraled, he spent 20 years in and out of rehab — until he arrived at Hopewell, a 300-acre working therapeutic farm in Mesopotamia, 50 miles east of Cleveland. After a year of treatment — which can include six hours a day (or more) of farm work — McAllester was sober and ready for the world.

But he didn't leave. Today, he works at Hopewell as program facilitator and head of the farm crew. He recently took a break from helping residents harvest potatoes to chat with PDQ's **John Campanelli**.

something. I just got straightened out here. We have trails all over, through the woods. . . . It's very peaceful and healing.

What farm animals do the residents get to work with?

We have four horses, eight beef cattle, six mom sheep that gave birth to about 12 lambs. We have 60 Rhode Island Red hens getting ready to start laying. We've got four small pigs, two medium-size pigs and two big sows that are getting ready to give birth in a week or so.

What is it about the animals that seems to help residents?

There must be something peaceful about it. We had a girl in over the weekend. She just kind of balked at the whole idea. She was screaming and yelling. I don't know why that was. It could have been the streets calling her. . . .

She was screaming in the van as it was going down to the horse barn. When she went in there and saw the animals, she immediately walked up to a horse and started talking to it. She calmed down. There must be something about caring for animals. Something that's inside us innately, I guess.

Do you still consider yourself a city kid or are you a farmer now?

I like the city. I still come up to the House of Blues and go down to the stadium and to Cavs games. I love Cleveland.

And when you go to the stadium or concerts and see all these people drinking?

Yeah, that's hard. I went to the Willie Nelson/Bob Dylan concert a couple weeks ago. A lot of people were drinking. I just

made up my mind. I decided that I wouldn't know what it's like to quit unless I just do it and never go back. I just made up my mind: This is what I'm going to do.

Where would you be today without this place?

I just thought the way I was going, I could probably live for five more years, going through the shakes in the mornings and the middle of the night and partying hard with the guys in the neighborhood.

That was more than six years ago.

Yeah, I figure I wouldn't be alive.

For more information on Hopewell, which specializes in treating people suffering from schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression, visit Hopewell.cc or call 440-693-4074.