



Sabbaticals.

Those highly coveted opportunities to get away, tackle something new, regroup and recharge. Tony Jilek was awarded one for the 2004-05 academic year. He spent the year in Guadalajara, Mexico, working with livestock producers. Here he talks about the sabbatical experience.

Vocabulary Builder

sab.bat.i.cal (n) 1 : a year of rest for the land observed every seventh year in ancient Judea 2 : a leave often with pay granted usually every seventh year (as to a college professor) for rest, travel, or research — called also sabbatical leave.

Q. What is the sabbatical application process like?

A. There's a formal application you need to fill out. You submit your proposal with all the documentation to a sabbatical committee, and they rate it and select the ones they deem the best.

Q. Is it for research?

A. No, the sabbatical can be for many things. It's personal development and you can pick what you want. It needs to be within the realm of your contract here at the university. In my particular case, I wanted the flexibility of working with livestock producers since there's a real need for this in Mexico. There are some who are comparable to producers that we have here in the United States, but there are others who are anywhere from 50 to 100 years behind us.

Q. Did you base your request on what you had seen on your visits to Mexico?

A. I based it on what I had seen and also on the requests I had from two friends who live in Guadalajara. One, Gerardo Garcia, was an exchange student. UW-River Falls has had a memorandum of agreement with the Autonomous University of Guadalajara (UAG) for 25 years, since 1980. In 1985-86 Gerardo came here on that exchange program and put in an academic year with us, and since then we've maintained contact. He has been after me for some years to come down and help. The other was a student I met there in 1991 who had never worked on a dairy farm and was willing to work for room and board. I arranged for him to work on two dairy farms just east of Elmwood. With their request and using them as resources, I put together a sabbatical proposal. And I think we were successful.

Q. What was your typical day like?

A. Each day was different. I did have an office at the UAG, but I was doing a lot of consulting work with both of the universities [Jilek also spent time at the University of Guadalajara (UDG)] in their animal production areas. I gave

some presentations to faculty and students. I also visited farms and I went to communities to give presentations to the cattle producers association.

In addition, Governor Doyle was in Mexico in March leading a trade mission for which I was named official representative for UW-River Falls. The University of Guadalajara has 13 four-year campuses, so there are some similarities between UW and UDG. The agreement between UW and UDG includes student and faculty exchange. I have four students working on their



documentation right now to do internships on dairy farms up here. I also worked with three of their campuses in agriculture and worked with cattle producers, government organizations, the Secretary of Agriculture's office, the Secretary of Rural Development office, and some private organizations like the Cattlemen's Organization and also public organizations that deal with cattlemen.

Q. It sounds like you were incredibly busy.

A. At times. Since my area is livestock breeding, we tried to establish a project in that area. We spent a lot of time in the fall talking with the people who were familiar with the cattle industry to see what was needed. About 80 percent of the cattle producers are medium to small size in terms of number of cattle, and of those, very few have any production records. We tried to set up a pilot project

where we could gather some data and show the advantages of using that data in a selection program.

Q. Do they use any computer technology?

A. Oh, yes. In fact, Gerardo and a friend set up a company using satellite imagery for use when consulting with producers as to the quality of the land and so forth. They use a lot of computers. The universities had computers just as good as what we have in our offices.

Q. What are their universities like?

A. The public university is the UDG and the private is UAG. Between the two there's a difference in terms of the students. The private university tuition is high, just like it is here, so it's the wealthier people who go there and, consequently, if they come here on exchange programs, they have the family funding and the resources to pay room and board. The public university tuition is really cheap, and it makes education available for students in the upper lower class, from an economic standpoint.

Q. Do a lot of students take advantage of that?

A. A fair number. It depends on the parents. There are a lot of very poor people in Mexico who cannot send their kids to the schools that are going to get them into college, but some of them do. Even though tuition is cheap in the public universities, when those students come here they do not have the means for room and board. One of the things we're looking at is how we can supplement them and perhaps get some funding for them.

If any faculty member is interested in participating and going down there, we can line them up with the appropriate department. If they're a visiting professor as I was, the university will provide housing. There's a lot of work that needs to be done, but there's tremendous opportunity.