**Diana:** Okay, it is January 23, 2018. What is your name?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** John Kellenberger.

**Diana:** And where do you live?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Ashland, Kansas. I'm a veterinarian.

**Diana:** And how old are you?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Forty-seven.

**Diana:** When did you first become aware of the Starbuck Fire, hereafter referred to simply as "the fire" in general?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Actually, when I first saw the smoke, I was within five miles of where it started, but then I ended up at Montezuma and then Greensburg when they started issuing the warnings.

**Diana:** The evacuation warnings?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yes.

**Diana:** So what were your first thoughts about hearing that they were evacuating?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** To start with, I was a little bit confused where I would find the location on the phone. I was trying to decide, "Okay is something evacuating at Greensburg? Or is something evacuating at home?"

But then shortly thereafter the school called and told me. Then I realized it was Ashland.

**Diana:** So, did you have something to do with...

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Mr. Wettig called me and basically told me that that's what they were going to do. You know, just so if people started questioning, I'm on the school board, and if people started calling us asking, we just knew what his plan was.

**Diana:** When you were in Greensburg, where was your family and what did they do?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** They were at school and home and as soon as that forced evacuation call came, I told them to get to Coldwater. So that's where they went and I ultimately ended up meeting them there because I was coming from Greensburg and they were headed that way.

**Diana:** So when you were at Greensburg or Coldwater what could you see of the fire from there and what are you hearing from people coming from Ashland?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Well, I stopped in Coldwater, and my plan was to get right to Ashland once I made sure the family was okay. Well, I was having trouble getting out of Coldwater. They didn't want us to leave Coldwater going towards Ashland. Right away, I started helping out with some of the elderly that were trying to get to the high school at Coldwater. Everybody was showing up with animals, so I helped kind of get an area in a 4-H building where we could get the animals.

But during that time, I heard from five different people that our house had burned, either via text or phone call. Somebody would call and say, "Hey, I'm sorry about your house." And then five minutes later, somebody else would call and say, "Well, as of right now, your house is okay." Then I would get a text ten minutes later that said, "Your house is burned."

**Diana:** What kind of emotions were you going through?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** It was a roller coaster. It was really hard on the kids, of course, because you know they had social media. I don't do social media, so it was all just phone calls and texts, but with social media the kids were hearing from a lot of friends who had heard secondhand that our house had burned. It wasn't until much later into the night that a friend actually finally sent me a picture of our house intact. That was when we knew for sure.

**Diana:** Did you spend that evening and the night in Coldwater and return on Tuesday?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** We ended up... you know I have a number of clients/friends over there, and ended up taking Angie and the kids out to one of their houses. You know, the high school was filling up fast. So we went out to stay there and then once I kind of got them all situated, I started trying to make my way to Ashland. I think I finally got to our house at about 4 a.m.

**Diana:** Were able to check in to make sure it was there? Did you have animals at your house?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** We did. You know, we have a number of dogs, a number of bird dogs, which are in kennels right there around the house. That was it. It was the dogs and they had one horse locked up in a trap. At about right before dark, I had a friend call and say, "Hey, I'm going by your house, what can I do?

I said, "Well, move the sprinklers," because we had the sprinklers set on the south side of the house. I said, "Drag those sprinklers to the north side and then just get out of there. It's not worth you..."

And as he was doing that, he was talking to me on the phone, and he said, "What about all these dogs?"

I said, "You'll never get those dogs loaded." You know, the bird dog wouldn't listen to him. I said, "But do me a favor, just throw their kennels open. At least let them out, so they have a chance." I said, "Leave that black gate open and that horse can get out. I don't know if he will, but he has a chance at least."

When I got there at 4:00, the horse was standing on the concrete in front of the house. All the dogs but one, I was able to find within ten minutes. It was three days later that one of the Giles girls found the last dog halfway between our house and their ranch.

**Diana:** Did you lose any outbuildings?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah. We had a barn that burnt; other than that, the house was okay.

**Diana:** Did it get pretty close to your house, the fire?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, within about two foot.

**Diana:** Do you have short grass around your house, or do you have a lot of trees? Or is it pretty bare?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** There's a lot of trees right to the north, and it burned into them and burned a lot of those. My understanding was there was a fire truck; you could see the tracks that went around our house, about an hour prior to the fire getting there, and foamed it.

Then a couple of other friends were there with garden hoses up until the point we didn't have water.

**Diana:** It that because of the lost electricity?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yes.

**Diana:** So are you on city electricity?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** We are.

**Diana:** And so if the city--- or was there a line down out to your house?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** There was a line down.

**Diana:** So were you without electricity for a long amount of time?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** No, it was back on by late the next day. We were out, you know, and I paused because I wasn't home, obviously, I was out doing other things. But if I remember right, Angie told me that it came on late in the afternoon on Tuesday.

**Diana:** So Monday night, did you get any sleep?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** No.

**Diana:** And Tuesday, once you checked on your place, what was the next thing that you did?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Well, Dr. Spare, who is my partner, and I met at the vet clinic first thing that morning. We decided that, not because we were so qualified, but somebody was going to have to kind of serve as the information source and to help people disseminate information through ranchers. So we decided to kind of make it, for lack of a better term, a command center.

**Diana:** So when did you start hearing about people who had lost cattle or had lost other animals?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Immediately. I mean, we knew that night that it was happening, but obviously, it needed to get daylight before we could do much about it.

**Diana:** Right.

**Dr. Kellenberger:** So then, once we decided that, he decided he would stay there and man the phones, at least temporarily. Unfortunately, I went home to get some weapons to humanely put cattle down. Then I took off to just go see where the biggest need was. Of course, I didn't make it very far.

**Diana:** So did you go west of town?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** No, I actually started off... Dr. Spare and I have a bunch of cattle right up by Bouziden's, and we had people coming to deal with that. But I went up there, and then that got me

involved in Bouziden's. Really for the first three or four days, I never got off Bouziden's, Miller's and Giles'. But we were fortunate with the other veterinarians in the practice, and K-State sent some other veterinarians down that helped us. We had some friends from Great Bend that sent a couple of veterinarians down at different times to help us in making sure we were getting to all the clients and the cattle in a timely manner.

**Diana:** So did you have--- Was your staff making calls to farmers or were the farmers and ranchers making the calls to you, to tell you that they needed help?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Initially, we were making the calls, but then kind of as the word got out, it was going both ways very rapidly.

**Diana:** So how soon did some of the veterinarians show up to help? Were they here before Tuesday morning?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** No, I think we had K-State veterinarians on Wednesday.

**Diana:** Talk about some of the things they did, like with horses. Things that they did at the vet clinic to help horses that survived, or cattle that survived.

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Initially the majority of the work was to define the animals that needed to be euthanized, that needed to be put down to end the suffering. Then there was kind of a stage process. You went through those and then you went back to the ones that you knew had some injuries, but could wait till we got through the initial push.

So to start with, that's what it was because, for the federal aid programs, somebody had to be there to document, to have pictures.

**Diana:** Did it have to be a certified person to do that documentation?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** They wanted it to be real, real quick. I mean, we couldn't be everywhere to look at every animal and we were dealing with a lot of pictures. I start telling some people, if a cow is obviously suffering and she can't get up, get two pictures of her, humanely put her down and get the pictures to us. We'll help compile them. That was something else that our office did.

**Diana:** Was it easy to identify the cattle, since they usually have tags or were the tags burned?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Most of them, if they went through the fire bad at all, the tags were melted out of their ears. So you know, some of them, you could you could still usually identify a brand. But the first few days, obviously the ones that we were dealing with were the ones that couldn't get out of pastures. So, with a few exceptions, they were in the pasture that the people owned. So you know whose cows they were, with a few exceptions. There were some pastures that were mixed. One fence got knocked down and you had two owners' cattle together.

**Diana:** So those first couple of days were pretty horrific.

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, yeah, they were. I mean, even with dealing with the Anderson Creek Fire, you know that covered a lot of our practice area. The total number of cattle killed in that Anderson Creek Fire, we saw more dead on one ranch in this fire than the entire number for all the places on Anderson Creek.

Nothing to the extent--- you know, the cows that were put down at Anderson Creek were not

burned--- nothing to the degree that these cows were. Some of them to the point that if you didn't really drive to each cow, you would have never believed they were alive. They were burned that bad.

**Diana:** Were they kind of huddled all together, or did you find them out all over the place?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** We found them scattered. I mean, down certain draws, you could tell the whole group of cows were going down the draw when the fire caught them. And then, totally depending on how bad they were, a lot of them, their problem was they were blind. They couldn't see, so they'd find each other and then they'd kind of stand together. Ultimately, what led to a lot of them having to be put down, was their feet got so hot that the toe caps were coming off. They were in just so much pain.

**Diana:** And that doesn't grow back?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** No, not when the hairline's damaged like that. It won't grow back.

**Diana:** So a lot of cattle were put down, and then once they were put down, how long did it take to get them recorded and buried so that they were dealt with?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** That's something that we worked very hard at with the KDHE and everybody involved. They did a great job. Sometimes they can be challenging to work with, in the sense that--- not that they're being a problem, but they've got certain rules they've got to follow. They made very quick decisions to bypass a few of those rules.

Normally, they don't want any more than a certain number of cattle buried. They've got to be so deep; they've got to have so much dirt on top of them, and it's got to be in an approved location. You know, it can't be anywhere low or anything like that.

They pretty much said "ranchers discretion," stay out of creeks... which obviously, nobody would do. And he said, "We don't want more than 40 in a hole. But we understand it's going to be pretty easy to lose count." And so, we were burying cattle within 48 hours.

**Diana:** So what would you say was the maximum? I mean, did they stay pretty close to 40 head in a hole?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, it's hard to say because I definitely didn't see all the holes, but I'm sure some of those holes had 100 cows in them.

**Diana:** So did they bury wildlife too? Deer?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** If they were convenient. I mean, that was one of the biggest labor forces, the first three to five days, where I was at. Anybody that came, we would tell them to bring a four-wheel drive pickup and bring chain because we were dragging cows to central locations.

**Diana:** About how far you have to drag?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Oh, we tried not to drag them more than a half a mile. You know, we'd make a new pile if we had to go much further than that. And if we didn't get it done real quick, they had been so hot that they were literally coming apart. That's why it was a blessing when they made the quick decision.

We got a hold of a number of large equipment operators, from everyone from the Clark County Road and Bridge Department to one company from Garden City and some different companies. They got large equipment in here and they started digging holes and getting them dealt with.

**Diana:** So about how many days did it take to find all the cattle, decide what condition they were in, to bury the ones that needed to be buried and to help the ones that needed help? Is that a couple of weeks, or more?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** The cattle that needed to be put down initially, most of them were done by day four. You know, there was an isolated case that a cow was in a real tough place to find or get to. But then after that, we started going back through those bigger groups of cows that had survived it, that went through it. We were going to them on those places about every three to four days. You know, the first time we waited three or four days, and then if we found quite a few problems we'd go back in two to three. If we didn't find many, we kind of put them down to go back through them in a week.

**Diana:** So what kind of treatment were the cattle that survived getting?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Mainly pain medication and antibiotics. Unfortunately, the pain is the biggest thing that they're going through. If the cattle were close enough to pens that we could get them medication without causing more suffering; you know, if you're gonna have to drive them two miles to get them somewhere--- because a lot of the pens were burned. You know, there used to be pens there, but if they were wood, they're not there. So that was another challenge.

**Diana:** And if you had a trailer with a wood floor in it?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** We had a number of people... In fact, we had people come to the clinic to pick up animals that ended up there that somebody else brought in and we had at least two different people back up to load their cow. When we opened the trailer, there was no floor. They hadn't even thought about that. The tires were good, so they figured everything else was good.

**Diana:** So did you see some miracles when you went out and were checking cattle? Were there some that you couldn't believe were still alive?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** I can think of two groups of cows that early on there, it just seemed like we were having to put down more of the cattle that we found than we weren't, if they weren't already dead. I can remember, I think it was late in the day on the second day, I had a guy call me, I was on his place, and he said, "There's a group of cows north in this pasture." He said, "I don't think anybody's went to them."

So it was late in the day, and you kind of had a belly full of the day, but I'm thinking, "Oh no, there's over a hundred cows in here." We went up there, and it was almost like they hadn't been through the fire.

Another place had probably about 100 cows and over 90 of them--- there was an area where a pond ran back into some short grass. Those cows, I don't think they were smart enough to go there, I think they just happened to be there. So you know, those two groups of cows, it was a real relief to drive through groups of cows that looked normal.

**Diana:** So are you still seeing some difficulties in the cattle from the fires now, since it's almost a year later?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** No, not so much now, but we did for a long time. We talked about the feet problems, but the other problem on all the cows was it burnt their udders. Some of them we thought were going to be okay, but it did enough damage internally, that the next time they calved they didn't produce milk like they normally do. Instead of having four quarters, they would have one or two that were functional. Short of just putting your hand on every cow and checking that, you know, it just---

**Diana:** Was there a lot of calf loss? Because this was calving season, did they lose a lot of calves?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yes, and a lot of guys didn't know for sure how many calves they lost. They kind of had to come into that number backwards, because March 6, there's a lot of places that are having somewhere between 20 and 30 calves every two day period. So you didn't know, had she calved? Had she not calved? So yeah, there was a sizable calf loss.

**Diana:** So about how many calves that had been born before, that no longer had a mother, were taken to Meade or somewhere else for care? Do you have kind of a number? And what did they do?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Well, the ones that went to Meade that started off as a 4-H project. They were going to farm those out. Well, it kind of got bigger than the number of 4-H kids were. But right, they did. There were a lot of people that took two, three, four calves in and then bottle fed them and took care of them. That way the ranchers didn't even have to worry about it.

A lot of them also went to a calf ranch, you know where they raise Holstein calves, and they took a bunch of them out there and they donated that service. They took all those beef calves in and then sent them back once they had them--- Not so much once they had the calves ready, but once the people that they left from kind had their feet back under them.

**Diana:** Did those calves have a lot of medical problems too?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** You know, they were gone through pretty hard prior to going, and the calves that needed to be put down were. But yeah, we still had calves that would sluff one toe cap or would end up with an eye problem or numerous different small problems.

**Diana:** Have their hide burned off and have no cover or something?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, you know, with most of those, if they were to the point where the majority of them was burned, for humane reasons they were put down. Anybody that's had a burn on your finger knows how painful it is, let alone to have 50 to 70 percent of your body burned. So for humane reasons, a lot of those calves were put down.

**Diana:** Do you have an idea how many veterinarians, cowboys, or game wardens came to help take care of the cattle situation?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Well, I know that on top of the veterinarians at our practice, we had multiple veterinarians coming in probably to the tune of seven or eight other veterinarians that came to our practice. Then obviously the veterinarians at surrounding practices were helping as well.

You know, from Buffalo to Dodge to Liberal. Probably not at the same level, but definitely helping. And the cowboy numbers were huge. I mean it was amazing, you know, doing what we do. We cover a big area out here and it was amazing. You'd be on a ranch, and you'd see a guy that was a hundred miles from home. He just showed up with a horse saddled in the trailer and just saying, "What can I do?"

The game wardens were a blessing because we work with cattle every day and we at times have to put cattle down. But when we put cattle down, it's one a month and it's for obvious reasons. After you put that many cattle down, I don't care who you are or what you do; it starts to wear on you.

When I got in contact with the game wardens, the first thing, I wasn't even thinking that they would be able to come help. I asked for ammunition because I was out.

I went through every personal... different guns, different everything. And you know, Tanner Dixson said, "Absolutely. I'll meet you."

So I went up there, and he hands me a thousand rounds. He said, "Can I get you a guy to help?"

And that was a huge help. I was still there, but I didn't have to pull the trigger every time. I could say, "That one," and just kind of look away. They were a wonderful help. I don't know for sure how many of them actually came and helped, but I know most of them from this area.

**Diana:** Were there any donations to pay for the bullets?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, you know later it was funny how people--- It's amazing how generous people were, as we all know. But it's also amazing when you get into a situation. People tend to think of everything.

You know, people were calling saying, "What do you need?" And you know, of course, fence and stuff. "We need labor right now; we need hay." And you know, people were backing up to the vet clinic, because to start with they were dropping everything off there.

And real quick, we decided this was going to overwhelm our space and our workforce.

**Diana:** Where were you putting it?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Well, on our new addition in the back we have a big storage area. So we were putting--- I mean, we had everything from milk replacer to clothes. Some ladies from Scott City pulled up one afternoon, and they said, "We didn't know what to bring, so we went and bought some feed, and we bought some feed buckets and kind of just everything we could think of that around the house people would have lost. Then we went to the local gun store and we bought all the ammunition they had."

And you know, that's something that nobody would ever thought to tell them to bring to bring.

**Diana:** So how many cases of ammunition did it take?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** There's no way I can answer that because I don't know what everybody--- You know, I wasn't everywhere.

**Diana:** What's a rough estimation of how many cattle were put down?  Do you have a specific number?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** There's definitely not a specific number. The number that's been thrown around is 6,000 to 9,000 adults and probably somewhere between half and that number again of calves.

**Diana:** And what about wildlife? Did you have any way to know?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** No, no way to know a number. I mean I know we saw a number of them those first few days from deer to coyotes to rabbits, you know, whatever it was that was dead or severely burned.

**Diana:** So you were out doing that around with the cattle and Dr. Randall was at the clinic. Did he have some help there too?

Did your whole staff come in and help and did they also go out in the field and help farmers and ranchers?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** The veterinarians did and most of the office staff. Real quick, they started building spreadsheets and trying to figure out ways to keep track. Then, like I say, we knew we were going to have to get help. At about the fifth day, we said, "Okay, we need to get a community group together."

And you know, that's when they started meeting and started breaking up. "Okay, these people are going to be in charge of volunteer help. These people are..." And we all know what the Feed and Seed did.

**Diana:** So what about the students that came down from Manhattan. I heard they had some things for equines? They did some things for horses?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, and you know, it was amazing. There weren't that many horses. The number of horses compared to cattle, of course just in the county, is so much lower. But there were not a lot of horses severely hurt.

**Diana:** What about the ones that people were riding to round up cattle? Did those horses have some injuries or have some effects from being in that smoke?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** We had a lot of irritated eyes. We had a lot of nasal discharge, coughing. We covered a lot of them with antibiotics. Drug companies helped there. We had all of the drug companies that we do business with offering free antibiotics to treat anything related to the fire. So you know, all of that was taken care of as well.

**Diana:** What's your most vivid memory of the fire?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Probably about two-thirds of the way through Tuesday, so the first day after the fire, I had had a friend/client from Liberal call me first thing that morning. He said, "What can I do?"

I had no idea. I said, "I don't know. I don't know where we're at yet. I haven't been out there."

And he said, "Well, I'm going to come." He said, "I'm going to stick my ATV in the back, and I'm going to stick a saddle horse on the front, and I'll be there."

He showed up with his Ranger, you know, four-wheel drive ATV, and he and I ended up in it all day putting cows down on two or three ranches. We'd been in this draw, we've been in a pasture where there was--- I don't remember the exact number, but it was 70 some pairs--- and we'd shot every animal. We'd come out of that pasture and were working up the draw towards the headquarters and coming across two cows here, three there, we come over a hill, and a coyote trots up on the hill on the other side. He stops and he says, "Do you want to kill him?"

The coyote looked healthy, and I said, "I don't have the heart." You know, none of us pass on shooting a coyote. I said, "No, I don't want to shoot."

He ran off and we figured out what he was doing. There's a cow in the bottom and he was down there harassing her. She was blind and her calf was blind and he couldn't get up. I've got a picture of it somewhere. The cow was literally standing over the calf fighting this coyote that she can't see. She could smell it and knew that he was trying to get to that calf. You know, you don't shoot the coyote. You drive down there and you have to shoot both of them.

**Diana:** It's kind of a reversal there.

You said you're on the school board. While you were out doing your job, did the school call and ask for some input about what they were planning on doing or how did you find out about that?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** They were trying and I'm going to be honest, I only used my phone when I had to. I would try to look when it was ringing, but I'd get home at 10 at night and my voice mailbox would be full and I'd have 180 texts. I'd try to look through them and answer the ones that were more than, "What can I do?" or "Thinking of you."

You know, I would talk to Mr. Wettig. I tried to talk to him once a day. But you know, everybody up there just did a great job. They just did what needed to be done. Yeah, he was calling, but it was more kind of like the day he was letting out. He was saying, "Here's what we're doing." And you know, giving us board members probably a chance to say if we thought there was a concern with it. But obviously, nothing that was done was wrong; they just met needs.

**Diana:** So did you take advantage of the meals that they were preparing up there or did you have time?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, I did probably, finally, on about day three or four. You know, I would when I came back through town headed to another place or something. I'd stop in and grab something.

**Diana:** Did you have time to go home and get a couple hours of sleep every night?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, yeah. After that first night, there wasn't a whole lot to do when it was pitch black outside. So we would go hard until dark and then after that, we just went and got some rest.

**Diana:** I'm going to backtrack just a minute because you said you were in Greensburg when they let out school. From there, could you see the smoke?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yes.

**Diana:** What did it look like?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Well, initially from there, I mean, I knew it was smoke. I knew it was a fire because I'd been hearing about this fire, but it looked more like a real bad dust storm from up that far. Then the closer you got, you know, you were smelling it.

I mean, you didn't have to get very close. I was probably halfway between Greensburg and Coldwater and I could start smelling it. And if you stopped--- I remember one time I pulled over on

top of the hill to talk on the phone and you could actually see ash building up on your windshield wipers, just sitting there, hitting the windshield. But initially, when I was just north of Greensburg, it looked more like one of those days when the dust is really rolling.

**Diana:** So talk about the smell, like after. During the week of the fire and then after, every day was kind of different?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** You know, we were fortunate enough to get the cattle buried quick enough that the smell of them never became an issue.

That was that was our biggest concern, that it was going to get to the point where it was a problem. But you know, when I think back, I remember it was well past two weeks. Finally, one morning I walked out and I was about halfway to my vehicle before I realized, "I'm not smelling the smoke." But I guess as far as the smells, that's what I remember. I mean, it just became normal.

You know, everywhere you went, no matter where you got out. And of course, after you'd been out in the pasture very long, you were covered. You couldn't tell if it was just me or if it was where you were at.

**Diana:** Because you were in ash and all that kind of stuff. So before this, when we've had fires, I mean you've been around grass fires and stuff like that. What's the main difference here between what's a normal grass fire and what this was?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Well, you've heard everybody refer to it as the "perfect storm." And the humidity, where it was at, as low as it can basically go. The amount of fuel we had in the pastures and the winds. And not just one wind. If the wind hadn't switched, you think about what the difference would've been.

I know we were so consumed with this fire coming at us from the southwest that a lot of people didn't even know that there was a fire up here to the north.

And then when that wind switched, and I still remember when I was pulling into Coldwater, a good friend that we have some cows with over at Meade called me and said, "I'm filling up with gas." He said, "Can we come move cows for you?" I said, "If you can get there, that would be great."

I said, "I'm not going to be there and I know Randall's not going to be there." He said, "Well, we're going to try to come in from the north because I'm pumping gas in Meade right now and in the last three minutes the winds went from 60 out of the south/southwest to 45 straight out of the north. I'm going to try to come around."

It wasn't 15 minutes later, he called me and he said, "There's fire everywhere." He said, "I can't get in." You know, he was trying to come down Bouziden's. He said, "I'm behind a huge fire here."

And that was the first time I knew about that fire. You know, when he said the wind switched out to the north it was almost like, you know, (whew) it's going to blow back into itself somewhat here. But that was the thing that I think everybody's learned as we've moved farther from that, is how many fires actually started that day.

**Diana:** Not only here, but all through the state. So who were some of the people or agencies that proved most helpful during the fire?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** I hate to mention, because I'll forget one and it's not that I'm trying to say they

didn't do a good job. But you know, to start with, the government livestock agencies that allowed these rules to be, and I don't want to say that the rules weren't followed, but that we put some common sense in place to get things done, just like we do when there's a tragedy.

So you know, from the KDHE to the Kansas Livestock Association to the Kansas Cattlemen's to the Kansas Veterinary Medical Association to all, of course, all the fire departments, and any emergency personnel, the game wardens, the local and non-local police departments. The list goes on and on. Everybody that was--- you didn't have to ask anybody.

They were beating you to the punch. You would think, "We need to get a drug company to donate antibiotics." They'd call and say, "How much do you want?"

It wasn't, "Can we do it?" It was, "Tell us when to stop."

So, you know, I can't say that we ever ran into an organization or a group that threw up big hurdles. Some of them had to stop and think about how they were going to do it, but it wasn't that they weren't wanting to help.

**Diana:** You mentioned that group of volunteers that got together because everything was starting to get overwhelming and somebody needed to be in control of the different parts. Were you part of that group?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** I didn't make it to the first meeting because I was still in the country. But I know that the clinic was intimately involved through Dr. Spare, Dr. Deewall, Dr. Tross, Deb Fox, Rhiannon Hazen... They were all, you know, because they had had their arms around most of that information and they were sharing it with people.

I know through Doctor Spare and Kendal Kay and the guys at Ashland Feed and Seed and the people at your business, the bank... I mean, everybody found people that were willing to ramrod things. The Christian Church Camp was a wonderful, wonderful, outlet.

Not only did all these people come in, but they were a lot more likely to stay and help multiple days and longer because they had a place to sleep, a place to shower, and they were getting not just meals but good meals.

**Diana:** So what were some of your thoughts and feelings about, oh like when you saw the semi-trucks full of hay coming in and you saw all these people. Did you ever go down to the camp and meet the volunteers?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yes, as we started to slow down, in fact, a number of nights I went down there and helped serve meals when our work was kind of caught up. Not back to normal, but to where we could do it more on an eight to five kind of deal. And that's what's amazing. You know, they came from everywhere. A lot of them were agriculturally based, but not all of them. Some of them just see a need and they go.

**Diana:** What effect did the fire cause most on you or the community? Was it more of a physical effect, financial, emotional or is it kind of a combination of all those?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** I don't think you can separate them because any of us, us included, we lost some cattle, but small numbers compared to a lot of these guys. They are livestock, they are production livestock, but these guys pour their lives into them. You know, they are more than a factory. When you've had that herd for that long and you lose almost all of it, you know there's no way for that not

to be emotional. Obviously, it's financial and then how do you separate those two? Because the finances lead to emotion and emotion leads to finances. So I think it's pretty much case dependent.

**Diana:** How much do you think the volunteers coming in when they did, asking to help, helped people start to recover from the fire?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** It was amazing and I know it was a long time before a lot of those guys had to be by themselves because there were volunteers here. It would have been pretty easy to go stick your head in the sand if nobody had come to help. But you had people that were there and people in that pickup with you and fencing crews that these guys were needing to kind of keep pointed in the right direction. I don't think that the volunteers realized how much emotional help they gave. You know, they weren't trying to be counselors, they were just there and they were keeping people's minds off of a lot.

**Diana:** Focusing on what needed to be done, so they weren't focusing on what they lost.

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Absolutely.

**Diana:** So did the vet clinic have any counseling after this was over? Did you bring in anybody to talk to your workers or take advantage of other people having something like that?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** We didn't. I know Dr. Spare and I both asked our employees if anybody needed anything, but it wasn't anything that we forced. Looking back on it, maybe we should have. I don't know, but once again I think how much love and support came in, helped with that more than any of us realized, especially at the time. Looking back on it, it's like, wow, that would have been a lot harder if I had been out there pounding T-posts by myself.

It would have just been overwhelming. If I had been out there by myself, I'd have been thinking, "Oh poor me." Instead, you're out there with people from Ohio or Illinois or eastern Kansas. I think that alone was counseling, whether we realize it or not."

**Diana:** So can you perceive of anything positive that's resulted from the fire?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Absolutely. I think first of all, if you were here, you were obviously involved. But if you were here and you were at all intimately involved in it, I don't know how you didn't see God. I think that's wonderful, first of all. Then second of all, the thing that kept coming to my mind was, we were shortly after the time where we kept hearing the slogan, "Let's make America great again."

I couldn't help but think that not all of America is bad. We saw a lot of good. We saw it and everybody knows the stories and probably knows who you're talking about when you mention it, but a lot of family relationships strengthened through this that either were nonexistent or at best not very close.

It's unfortunate sometimes that that's what it takes. But that's another way I saw God in it. It strengthened relationships and it made people realize that it's okay to ask for help.

**Diana:** So what can you do, or have you done, to prepare for another emergency, whether it's a fire, tornado or anything?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Well, are you asking me personally or as a business or as a community?

**Diana:** All three.

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Personally, I think that once again, going back to the God deal, it makes me realize that I'm not in control. A lot of times we like to think we are, but we're not in control. He is. We need to be prepared, but yet we also need to accept His will and live within it.

When these things happen, don't let it become an, "Oh, poor me." You have to find the good in it and move forward. Obviously, you try to have things in place that, first of all, your family is safe. Obviously, you start thinking about being a little more reactive to warnings. Because before that day, I think all of us would have laughed if somebody told us the fire had the chance of destroying Ashland or any of our houses for that matter.

You know, other than a fire that starts within the house, it's, "We're going to save the house." That's not a--- So you know, it's good that you think about things like that as we move forward. But you know that's more on a personal note. On a business note, I think we would be pretty hard pressed to find an emergency that we wouldn't be ready to help in one way or another and understand what needs to happen.

**Diana:** So do you have some kind of scenarios set up or have you talked through some things that you can do at the clinic?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yes, and you know, there's trainings all around the state now and they've asked us for input into those. "What did you guys see and what did you do that was good, and what did you do that was bad?"

The big thing is to ask for help, because there was no way for five veterinarians and what we had locally to cover in a timely manner what needed to be done.

**Diana:** What about the community? What do you think we could do to get ready or be more prepared?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** You know, I think the big thing is, overall, I think a great job was done. I really do know that even if we had one again this year, there would be mistakes made. But are the mistakes made by honest people working hard, trying to do with the information they had, what was best. And you know there will be, when you look back on it now, "I should'a did this instead of that." But the bottom line is to come together.

**Diana:** So did you go to any of those group meetings they had afterward to kind to get input from all the people, like they had the sheriffs and the firemen and the EMTs and emergency and some of that kind of get together and figure out what was good and what wasn't?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yes, we definitely went to some of those. Once again, not all of us went to of them, but we tried to get somebody to most of them.

**Diana:** Represented there.

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Right.

**Diana:** So what about your children? How did they come out of this emotionally?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** You know, especially for the two oldest ones, and I would have had a junior, an eighth-grader, and a fourth grader. The junior and the eighth-grader, once they knew the house was

okay, they seemed okay with it. Our youngest, who was a fourth grader, and I'm sure I don't know at what age that stops, it's probably not a magical age, it's different for each kid, but it really affected him. I mean, a fire whistle to this day bugs him a little.

If he hears red flag, you know fire warning, when he goes to school that day, he asks a lot more questions. You know, he doesn't say, "I'm scared," but he wants to know, "Mom, are you picking me up today?" Or you know, "Where are you going to be today?" You know, all those things that unfortunately we hope our kids don't have to worry about.

We've just tried to reassure them through it.

**Diana:** So I hear the school has kind of a text type thing that they send out to all of their students and the parents and staff. Did that come in handy during the fire and afterward?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Absolutely. I mean, that's a wonderful way to disseminate information like that. It can go e-mail and text and they can have the message out to everyone.

**Diana:** So did your kids help up at the school when they had the firemen here and fed people up there? Did they get to meet some of the firefighters?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yes, they did. Shortly after we had been engaged on rolling fence up and stuff at our place, we had volunteers show up to help and they worked side by side with them. So it was it was definitely impacting on them. I can remember numerous times them saying, "They came all the way from Ohio?" It really opened their eyes. I think most of us probably in the United States, not just Ashland, when we think of mission work we think of Africa. We think of South America. But mission work can be outside our door, and then it can be in the next state, or it can be in Ohio. You know, they really saw what it means to serve, because obviously, they're leaving stuff at home.

**Diana:** Do you keep in touch with any of the people that came and volunteered?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, I know I do. There was one veterinarian that came. He's a retired veterinarian and he's been back three or four times. We talk quite a bit and then a number of other volunteers get a text or an e-mail from time to time. You can see the networks that are being built that I guarantee you, if those people are in a jam and we know about it, there's going to be support going their way.

**Diana:** So I saw recently that the veterinary clinic received an award. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, we got an award from the KVMA which is the Kansas Veterinary Medical Association. It's just a Distinguished Service Award for mainly what we did during the fire. But like I tell everybody, we were put in a position. It would have been very hard to do much if you were in a practice by yourself. You know, if you were just one vet--- fortunately, we were blessed that we were a larger practice.

We could spread out when people were coming to help. You know, we could cover a little more ground. That allowed us to do more, because you could cover a few more bases and some people could be getting some rest while other people were burning the midnight oil. I don't think we did a whole lot different than a lot of people would have done. It's just where we live.

**Diana:** Circumstances.

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah.

**Diana:** So have you been to a lot of conferences or seminars where you've been the speaker and told what you've done?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** I did a few, Dr. Spare has probably done more. You know, it's more of A: people wanting information and B: people wanting to learn what are the do's and don'ts.

**Diana:** Have you gotten some good questions from people or had something asked that you didn't think about?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Yeah, you know, we've had great questions and some things that you've dealt with that you didn't even really think of and they kind of pointed out that you were dealing with. But the one thing that has come up is, "Can we can we figure out something to feed cattle to humanely euthanize them?"

So when you have the problem and that's a great idea and it needs to be looked into because if we get into some disasters, the cattle might have to be destroyed that aren't noticeably sick. If it's an infectious disaster or something, it would be a wonderful tool there.

You know, like I pointed out to them here, the cattle we were euthanizing we were not going to eat. They were in that much pain. It's not like we could, you know.

**Diana:** And they couldn't see, right?

**Dr. Kellenberger:** Right. So things like that, that are coming, that people are thinking about due to the numbers and the devastation that we saw. There are definitely going to be other good things and good questions that need to be looked at.