

LANIER ORR EXPERIENCED FIRSHAND THE BIG BANG-LIKE EXPLOSION of Forsyth County.

The area grew from a few thousand people, during Orr's childhood to today's 175,000, many of whom commute to the nearby metropolis of Atlanta.

Orr, 69, grew up in Forsyth, on the same land where he opened Orr Animal Hospital in 1975. The property also housed the county's former animal shelter, which Orr and his wife, Annette, ran for more than three decades. Their son Nathan and daughter Aaron are vets in the family practice, along with three other doctors.

"In the 1960s and '70s, this was a chicken-growing area," says Orr, who worked with poultry straight out of the University of Georgia veterinary school in 1969 until he opened his practice. His then one-man operation began by primarily serving large-animal patients. Now, the practice virtually sees only small animals. "All of the pastures where I used to deliver cattle now have houses on them, and all the chickens have moved out," he explains.

Although he loves veterinary medicine, working with small animals is indoor work, and "I hate sitting in an office." Growing hay and raising Red Angus cattle satisfy his fresh-air inclination. The veterinarian owns and leases more than 400 acres in Forsyth, and adjacent Dawson and Elbert counties. At least one day a week, Orr travels 170 miles round trip to his land in Elbert.

"I met more tractors on the road the first day I went than I did cars," he says of that day in 2004. "I thought, 'This is where I need to be.'" The area remains rural. He rattles off his Massey Ferguson® grouping: "I've got a 240, 253, 362, 6280, 5455, 5465 and a 4609." Roger Harrod at Georgia Deer Farm & Agri-Center in Roopville, Ga., is his dealer.

Orr recalls the time he and a fellow with a comparable-size John Deere were working the same field. "His new tractor kept running hot and he'd have to stop. He wanted to know what I was doing differently." Simple, replied Orr: "The grass is green. Tractors are supposed to be red."

—Nancy Dorman-Hickson

Gone to the Dogs... and cats

Veterinarian Lanier Orr recounts how his formerly rural county transformed into an urban area—and how working the land satisfies his inner country boy.