

The green translator

Just a short walk from the Atlantic Ocean but almost 14 miles from the nearest power line, translator Sara Brown lives and works in harmony with her environment. Judy Jenner finds out more about her remarkable lifestyle



Judy A Jenner MBA is a German and Spanish translator in Las Vegas. She runs Twin Translations with her sister, Dagmar, who works from Vienna. She is the Vice President of the Nevada Translators and Interpreters Association and is a frequent speaker on marketing topics.

Do you print your projects on recycled paper? Do you refill your ink cartridges at your local office supply store? Do you drive a hybrid car, walk, or ride a bike to appointments and interpreting assignments? If you do, then you are on your way to being an environmentally friendly linguist. But before you think you deserve the environmental medal because you feed your organic waste to the neighbour's pet iguana or buy carbon footprint credits online, I'd like you to meet a fellow translator. She has achieved what many of us dream of: living an almost completely energy-independent lifestyle in a remote area and still working full-time as a linguist. Her routine includes collecting rainwater for cooking, driving her gas oil car into town for an occasional errand, and firing up her wood-burning stove for heat.

Let's play the travel game: where in the world is 40°42'22.86"S, 62°16'32.03"W? It is North Patagonia, Argentina, and it is home to Sara Brown. As I watch Google Earth zoom in on her farm, I can't help but marvel at the deep-blue sea, pristine-looking beaches: it looks straight out of an Al Gore save-the-environment plea.

Sara fulfils all of her electricity needs with wind power. Her hens feast on the ranch's organic waste. She works using a satellite internet dish that also features a phone line. What might sound like a high-tech version of an eco-friendly utopia is a blissful reality for Sara on her ranch.

A committed environmentalist

Even though she was born, raised, and educated in Argentina, just like her parents, Sara considers herself to be an Anglo-Argentine. A British and Argentine dual citizen, Sara has two native languages and spoke English at home. While in veterinary school, she got her start in medical interpretation and pharmaceutical translation and has been working as an interpreter and translator since 1993. There aren't many interpreting assignments in her remote corner of the world, so she has focused on translation since moving her office to her ranch. Her areas of specialisation are a natural fit: veterinary medicine, general medicine, animal breeding and, not surprisingly, ecology.

Sara answered my questions using her wind-power-generated electricity and satellite internet connection, which was installed on the 3,000ha farm she shares with her husband, fellow veterinarian Alejo Zamora, earlier this year. That was the last piece of her eco-puzzle, enabling her to live and work on the farm full-time. The closest power line is almost 14 miles away.

Her environmental commitment

'There aren't many interpreting assignments in this remote corner of the world, so Sara has focused on translation since moving her office to her ranch'

stems from a lifelong exposure to the damage we are doing to our planet. 'There was a terrible drought here last year, the worst that's ever been recorded in the history of our country. Also, there's a fairly large ozone hole here, and my children have already put on more sunscreen than I ever needed to. Further south of here, when lambs are born, they very quickly get sunburn on their ears. If everyone did a little something to help the environment, it would really make a difference.'

She recognises that many people's environmental commitment might be economically motivated in the short term, but she'll take it: 'One of my neighbours realised it's cheaper to produce power through windmills than generators. Inspired by my windmills, he had some installed at his farm as well.' There's plenty of wind in Patagonia.

Judy Jenner: What does it mean to you to be a 'green' or eco-friendly translator?

Sara Brown: To carry out my professional activities, ie translation, in a way that has as little negative impact on the environment as possible. Also, to have a positive impact on the environment, whenever it can be managed.

How did you decide to go green? Was it a matter of necessity, idealism, or both?

It was both idealism and necessity. I make my living as a translator and own a farm on which I wanted to live and which power lines do not reach.

How much did you have to invest in your current set-up?

Roughly £8,000 on the two windmills or aerogenerators (they have a capacity to generate 1,300 watts) and the battery bank (12 batteries that store 660 amps) plus the cost for installation. The house was already wired and had a generator that is now my backup when there is no wind.

Could you briefly describe the



eco-friendly aspects of your home and home office?

My house was built in the 1950s. It is located in the middle of a tree plantation, where tamarisks, eucalyptus and pine trees have been raised since 1900. These trees were planted around the homestead and some mills and pens far from the house to protect from the Patagonian winds. Only planted trees grow here. There is natural prickly brush vegetation of about 1.50m in height on some parts of the farm. We use the trees that either dry up, or fall down, or have branches broken off by winds or, in the case of the tamarisks, are pruned to provide firewood. We are hoping to have the farm certified as organic in the near future; this process is under way with a local certifier. I have a wood-burning fireplace in my office – which was already there – and that I use to burn firewood and pine cones. I have an aluminium door to the outside with two glass panels and a top hopper window all with double glazing. Next to the office there is a

Sara's drives to the local town in a gas oil-powered Toyota Hilux pickup

bathroom with glass blocks and a small window with double glazing to cut down on the need for heating.

What kind of a car does an environmentalist drive?

I use a gas-oil-powered Toyota Hilux pickup to travel from the farm to the local town, where we still own the house I'd lived in for many years, and I have a gas-oil-powered small car (Ford Fiesta) to move around town.

Do you have any advice for fellow linguists around the globe who would like to work in a more eco-friendly way, even if they live in big cities?

Absolutely. If possible, recycle all paper used. Also, if possible, have an independent garbage container for organic waste and turn it into garden compost or recycle in some way (earthworms, poultry, etc).

Are eco-friendliness and environmental awareness big trends in Argentina?

People are gradually becoming more aware of the need to protect our natural heritage; this is positively affected by tourism. Farmers are

interested in certifying organic. There is also the possibility of obtaining carbon credits for natural/planted forests. Any economic benefit is a great driver.

What did you learn while making your home and business eco-friendly?

First of all: the importance of being organised, and also that it's great to get something for free, such as power courtesy of the wind!

What's your everyday work day like? Does leading a green life require substantial extra effort?

Wood heating requires a bit of work, since ashes have to be removed and fires have to be lit. I usually collect firewood at midday when it is warmest, and find this hour or so of exercise very refreshing. I also usually take the organic waste to the henhouse at this time of day and feed and water the hens, which takes about 15 minutes.

What do you like the best about your green lifestyle?

Living on a farm that is only a short walk away from the Atlantic Ocean.

PHOTOS: SARA BROWN, ULF BUCHHOLZ.

What is the most interesting translation and/or interpretation project you have worked on in the last few years?

The most interesting venue was Doha, Qatar, where I interpreted at the Sixth International Conference on New or Restored Democracies in 2006. Probably the most interesting translations I am currently working with are medical research papers from Spain that I am translating from Spanish to English. I am also doing a fair bit of medical trials. It is always nice to feel one is part of the business of producing new drugs and medical procedures that will reduce disease, or the consequences of disease, and save lives.

Sara's ranch, named Las Olas (Spanish for 'the waves') was the brainchild of her father's Irish uncle, Harry McCorry. He didn't particularly like people, and was afflicted with a terrible stutter. He started looking for a remote property and bought the land that became Las Olas from sailors in the late 19th century.

The area remains as remote today as the day Harry McCorry first set foot in it. The closest town is Carmen de Patagones, hardly a big town with roughly 20,000 people, and it is 56 miles away. On a good day, it takes two and a half hours of driving through mud and sand to get there. Carmen de Patagones is located more than 600 miles from the country's capital, Buenos Aires. The



ranch lies between a sea inlet and the Atlantic Ocean and includes over three miles of beach access. It is very much a working ranch, producing organic beef, mutton, wheat and oats. Sara and her husband work the farm full-time with only one employee.

When Sara mentions her next-door neighbour, I naively picture him being as close as my own neighbour in suburban Las Vegas (I could comfortably bounce a tennis ball off his house without too much effort). But this is rural Patagonia: the next-door neighbour lives more than three

Windmills provide all the power needs of the ranch – including internet access

'I am not a fanatic about saving the environment, but we should all do what is within our possibilities'

miles away. While they own a house in the nearby city, Sara and her family spent as much time as possible on the farm while raising their children. There were no schools either Sara or her children could attend, so she went to boarding school and, after getting married, raised her four children in Carmen de Patagones to allow them to attend public schools. With her four adult children now living in different parts of the world, Sara was yearning for the quiet life she had enjoyed as a child, and decided to live on the ranch.

So what is next for Sara and her eco-friendly life and work? Firstly, she's currently replacing all the windows and doors of the ranch and installing double glazing to help reduce draughts and heating needs. Next up: planting 300 eucalyptus trees, courtesy of the Argentine government, which will help her exceed her annual goal of planting 50 trees. In December, her daughter Carolina, an aeronautical engineer currently living in Germany, will return to Patagonia to give birth to her first child. She plans to stay for three months, and perhaps Las Olas will see another environmentalist grow up on its pristine lands. The love for the environment runs in the family: Sara's oldest daughter also collects rainwater in her suburban Sydney yard.

What is Sara's hope for the future of our profession? Through more than 6,000 miles, through a VoIP (Voice over IP) connection powered by satellite internet, she summarises: 'I hope many translators can find a way to use clean electric power in the future and so help decrease global warming. I am not a fanatic about saving the environment, but we should all do what is within our possibilities.' The final lines of Sara's email signature sum up her environmental attitude: 'Let's not forget that our grandchildren will inherit the environment we leave behind us.'

AN OVERVIEW OF SARA'S ECO-FRIENDLY LIFE

Power: All the power on the ranch is completely wind generated.

Internet: Via satellite. And yes, even Skype works just fine.

Fresh water: Fresh water is collected from rainwater that collects on rooftops. During times of drought, water needs to be brought in from the closest town, which gets its fresh water from the local river, the Rio Negro.

Drainage: All drainage cleverly goes into covered cesspools that have earthen walls and bottoms. These never fill completely because the roots from tamarisk and eucalyptus trees suck them dry.

Heating: All heating is done with wood. The sources are cypress, pine, and eucalyptus trees. When those trees need to be pruned, the

branches are used as firewood, and wastepaper is used to light the fires.

Cooking: Gas cylinders are currently being used for cooking, but Sara is about to start building either a Russian stove or masonry heater with an oven.

Recycling: All organic waste is fed to the farm's hens. Paper that is not used for heating is taken into town to the rag and bone man, who also buys plastic and glass bottles for a few coins.

Showering: The piped water is underground water from the water table, which is a bit salty. It reaches the house via a windmill-operated well and sturdy pipes. The highest-quality water is found in the sand dunes on the coast, which makes for long pipelines.