George Eger's parrot Pinot is one really smart bird, and, yes, she blushes when she gets a compliment

Wherever George Eger goes in his house and often in his car, Pinot is likely to be sitting on his shoulder.

Pinot is an African Gray parrot who spends much of her time in Eger's home office for Ozaukee Insurance in Saukville. She's the company's official mascot, appearing on its Web site and on grocery carts at Pick 'n' Save in Saukville.

"When people come here, the first thing they say is 'Where's Pinot?'" Eger said. "Then they talk to me."

The bird does not like to be alone or have Eger out of her sight for long.

"If I leave the room for two minutes, she'll say, 'George,' 'George,' 'Hey, George,'" Eger said, mimicking the bird's voice as Pinot turned her head and blushed.

"She blushes when people talk about her."

Eger said he used to discount the assertion that a parrot must be treated as a companion rather than a pet, but he's changed his mind after living with Pinot.

“Parrots live in flocks, and we’re her flock. She’s very attached to her family,” he said.

Pinot’s flock includes Eger’s daughter Katie Hansen, her husband Bill and their two sons, Matthew, 4, who Pinot calls BooBoo, and Mikey, 2.

Eger’s wife Ann and Pinot tolerate each other.

“Ann says, ‘Hello, Pinot,’ but she won’t touch or hold her. Pinot refuses to say her name,” Eger said. “Birds have a pecking order, and they can sense when someone is afraid of them.”

African grays are considered the most intelligent parrot and will live 60 to 70 years, Eger said.

“They say they’re more intelligent than a dolphin and have about the same intelligence as a 3-year-old,” he said.

“People think they mimic you, but they certainly do have a thought process.”

Pinot has been taught to nibble Eger’s ear when she needs to go potty. When she had an accident, he scolded, “B-a-d Pinot.”

Pinot loves to be ruffled on her head. When Eger did that, then stopped and walked away, Pinot said, “B-a-d George.”

In the eight years since they got Pinot — when she was 4 months old — the Egers’ children John and Katie have married and started their own families.

A month ago, the Egers moved to a condominium and Katie and her family moved into their home. Pinot stayed at the big house, content to be in a 3-by-4-foot cage that overlooks a woods.

Perches for her are throughout the house.

“It’s worked out wonderful. I was worried how she would react to moving to the condo,” Eger said. “I’m her No. 1 man, but Bill is second. She’ll sit on his shoulder and watch TV. With two boys, 4 and 2, there is always activity.”

Pinot eats what the family eats. She can eat anything except chocolate and avocados, which will make her sick.

About 50% of her diet is parrot food with the remainder people food.

“If we don’t bring her for breakfast, lunch and dinner, she’ll call to us,” Eger said. “She sits on a perch by the table and whoever is closest gives her food from their plate. I snack a lot, and she has to have a snack also.”

Katie, who works for the family business, often brings Pinot to the office, saying the bird needs

her “George fix.”

However, Pinot cannot be left alone in the office for long.

“I’ve probably bought 10 keyboards,” Eger said. “She’ll peck at the keys, and that beak can do a lot of damage.”

So far, she hasn’t typed a message.

Although he loves parrots, Eger noted the birds are a longtime commitment and not for everyone.

“People often buy them because they’re expensive and exotic, but not many people have home offices, so they’re left alone all day and get into trouble, become nasty or the owners lose interest,” Eger said.

“There are parrot mills like puppy mills. That’s why there are so many parrot rescue organizations.”

Because parrots often outlive their owners, arrangements must be made for someone to take the bird.

Katie was going to take Pinot anyway, so the transition is being made now.

“Who knows, maybe she will live with Matthew or Mikey someday,” Eger said.