



Will County Thresherman's show about family — and farming

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By Erin Gallagher Correspondent July 21, 2014 6:48PM

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Tractors, like a favorite hot rod or grandma's brooch, can be passed down and treasured through the generations. Taking their grandfather's 1949 International H to the Will County Thresherman's show last week was especially moving for the Shepherd family.

Originally from Lockport, now living in Minooka, Chuck Shepherd, and his son Bryan, worked on their grandfather's red tractor together. While they were in the midst of restoring a 1958 Super Oliver 99 together, Bryan, now 29, was diagnosed with an aggressive form of Leukemia. Lane's wife, Ashley, was five months pregnant when he started chemotherapy.

With their 13-week-old son, Lane, the entire family brought both their tractors to the 52nd Annual Antique Tractor, Steam Engine and Gas Engine Show.

"Last time we were out here and we couldn't believe what was right around the corner, and (Bryan) ended up getting (cancer)," Chuck Shepherd said.

With many tragic and heroic stories to tell about Bryan's journey, they were all relieved to be at the show again together, Ashley said. The men were proud of the work they did together, and proud of their family legacy in the H.

"This one here has never left the family," Chuck Shepherd said, adding that it will one day be baby Lane's. "This can never leave the family."

Tractors may have been the reason, but for many, the real theme for the four-day event was about family. Just ask Joseph and Danielle Snare. They drove over an hour and a half from Cary, Illinois, to Manhattan's Round Barn Farm to spend a day exploring with their children, Colton, 2, and Quinn, 18 months.

"We love tractors," Joseph Snare said.

Like the Snares, people drove great distances to see the impressive display of farming history. A Wisconsin man said he collected tractors and came to see more.

Many parents there weren't farmers, but brought their children to climb on the tractors. Others, like Manhattan's Bob Yerkovich, stared at a cherry red 1961 Mac truck.

"I worked on Macks for over 40 years," the mechanic said.

Yerkovich wasn't the only one walking down memory lane. Thomas Peterson of Grant Park, brought his father, Chuck Peterson. They talked about the "olden days" and what farming used to be.

There were many events happening across the event sight. Dennis Christiansen, one of the organizers, ran the mill. He, Tom Runty and John Ross loaded large trees onto a saw blade that was turned by a steam engine belt. The saw milled the tree into wood planks, which Clint Ritchie and Bob Schuler carefully removed.

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