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## 50 YEARS OF MOWING

Celebrating what John Deere has brought to the industry.

For the past 20 years or so, when late July arrives and I can sense the tough days of summer on the golf course were rapidly diminishing, I started to think about Badger and Packer football, apples and pumpkin harvest, and an actual weekend off.

I also started dreaming about which steam and antique power shows I would attend, always hoping to make it to half a dozen.

These shows are a step back in time in American agriculture, often a reminder of the way we farmed in my youth. Binders and threshing machines, straw piles and stationary balers, and lots of old tractors are among the most popular exhibits at these antique power shows. And of the old tractors, the two-cylinder Johnny Poppers are about the favorite, a tough confession for a Ford and Oliver man like me.

At any show the thumping of these engines can be heard all over the park grounds.

John Deere created the start of quite an industrial empire more than 175 years ago when he put his blacksmithing skills to work and fashioned

Illinois, in the 1830s. He needed the Mississippi River to transport steel and coal in, and finished product out to markets.

University of Illinois archeologists unearthed much of the Grand Detour site in 1962, and it is an extremely interesting historical preservation. I have seen his big house in Moline and stood at the foot of his grave there as well.

A number of years ago I was invited to attend a two-day event at Deere headquarters planned for grass guys, including a large number of superintendents. It included a tour of the headquarters building and the museum.

Years later I managed a tour of the John Deere Horicon Works. That's the Wisconsin factory that for the past 50 years has been building consumer products and grass machinery.

The plant is located on the edge of the Horicon Marsh, the largest freshwater cattail marsh in the U.S. It is well known to both bird watchers and hunters – 350 species of birds have been seen there, and huge flocks of Canada geese come and go each year.

The factory was built in the 1860s



It was a very successful mower, and many of the first year machines still run today. It featured a 7-horsepower Kohler engine (yes, that Kohler!) and a three-speed tranny with variable speed drive that made for fast mowing and slow tilling.

So, this year collectors and staff at the Horicon Works decided to celebrate John Deere's 50th anniversary in the grass mowing business.

The three-day event was held at the Dodge County fairgrounds, a few miles from Horicon. Many of the early engineers, designers and production staff from 1963 returned. The event included factory tours (Gators and LGTs are made there now), Deere LGT collectors from all over the country, a tractor cavalcade each noon hour, and demonstrations. There was a swap meet, a flea market, and toy tractor and toy implement peddlers. The chatter all day long was about serial numbers, wiring harnesses, carburetors, and memories of days gone by.

I thought about how the Model 110 had influenced the career of a former employee at our golf course – Emily Buelow. Her father was an engineer at

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a self-scouring plow out of a broken saw blade. It was just what pioneer Midwest farmers needed to turn over the sticky prairie soils.

My interest in John and his life have taken me to Middlebury, Vermont where he had a blacksmith shop, and to Grand Detour, Illinois, on the shore of a big bend on the Rock River. He lived and worked there for a number of years before moving to Moline,

to build the Van Brunt grain drills. It was a successful line of Ag seeding machinery, and Deere & Co. bought it in 1911 and put their name on the seeders. It has operated continuously since then under Deere's name.

In 1962 Deere execs saw the potential in the lawn mower/garden tractor market and designed one of their own. They called it the Model 110 and started production in 1963.

Horicon Works and worked on mowing equipment. Jerry Buelow passed away earlier this year, but he surely would have attended. Emily chose turfgrass science as her major at the University of Wisconsin – Madison based on how much her father enjoyed it.

Frank Rossi was her major professor in grad school and today she is a lecturer in the NC State two-year turfgrass science program, and the Associate Director of the Turfgrass Center.

I was surprised when I drove in, thinking it was early on the first day and figuring not that many people

could be interested in old JD LGTs. But the fairgrounds was packed.

I spent the whole day in lectures, tours and fun. I had the pleasure of visiting for quite a spell with a man from Baltimore, a former JD branch employee, who had the Model 110 with the serial #1 – the first machine off the line and the first mower John Deere built. It still works fine, and the cost, including 3 percent sales tax, was \$632.81! Only 1,000 Model 110s were built in 1963, and about 100 were there at the celebration. The five millionth mower came off the line in April 2010.

I had a great time, and a few questions came to mind. Will Jacobsen or Toro, each with such a rich history in our grass management business, host or sponsor such an event for collectors and customers?

Will John Deere plan a similar time for only golf turf machinery? For Deere & Co., it could even be planned as part of their sponsorship of the PGA tourney at Deere Run – wouldn't that be great!

In the end, I enjoyed it so much because I loved the career I had for almost 50 years, and I love history. What could be fairer than that? **GCI**

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