

Heuer Grows To Provide Products To Farmers Everywhere

Hundreds Attend Heuer's Heartland Equipment Expo



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BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER
MidAmerica Farmer Grower

CAPE GIRARDEAU, MO.

It was standing room only in the main building on Customer Appreciation Day at Heuer Sons Implement Company as some 500 to 600 people were present to help Heuer Sons present A Heartland Equipment Expo. Equipment representatives from Massey Ferguson, Hesston, Sunflower, Rhino, Unverferth, Crustbuster, Fendt and many, many more were on hand. Max Armstrong of RFD-TV and Cousin Carl of Pure Country C106.1 were among those present to inform and entertain patrons. No one had reason to leave hungry as there was plenty of food.

Heuer Sons Implement was established as a Massey Harris Agency by the late George W. Heuer in 1919.

"Grandpa (George W. Heuer) had an office on Lorimer Street and he sold parts out of his car in front of the old Woolworth's building in downtown Cape," said John A. Heuer, the present president, who along with his mother, Eva Heuer Feuerhahn, secretary-treasurer, run the business today. "He kept his equipment on the family farm just north of town past the Jaycee golf course."

When the older son, Herbert Heuer, returned from military service in 1946 George W. Heuer turned the business over to his two sons, Herbert and younger brother Ervin. They bought a small corner lot on Morgan Oak Street where they ran a small equipment business. As the brick building housing Nehi Soda Company went out of business, they purchased that building and built offices and a parts and service department inside. Ervin did bookkeeping at first, then later Herbert's wife, Annis, was hired to manage the office.

"They were on Morgan Oak for many years," John added. "They did quite well and when the boys in the back shop ran out of work, Ervin would go out and buy a piece of old equipment and bring it in for them to work on, fix it up and then sell it. They did that for many years."

"In 1974 they remodeled the shop and moved the parts department," he continued. "All along in that time span, dad (Ervin) and Herbert bought all the houses around the shop. One by one they would become available and they bought them, tore them down and that's how we expanded the business there."

"We've got about a half a lot down there now and that's how we got them," Eva said. "He bought the houses and tore them down. Then in March of 1974 Ervin's brother, Herbert, passed away and the following June his wife, Annis, quit work and Ervin acquired the business. He did the office work himself for a couple of months and I remained at home raising our four children."

At the old shop in 1974, the Heuers built a big shop on the back for the mechanics. That enlarged the parts area, and provided space for the offices up front. Then the mechanics had a nice big room in the back, and that really helped out.

"We had many, many farmers, many, many customers all through these years," Eva said. "Massey kept us going and I was really fortunate to have my two boys. That's what kept us going because I really didn't know anything myself, I just was here. It was hard but we made it."

It was Ervin who decided his wife, Eva, could do the office work. They both went to the office one Labor Day when it was raining, and despite Eva's protests that she couldn't do it, Ervin insisted and insisted, until his wife realized her protests went unheard. Eva became the new bookkeeper.

"I finally got where I could halfway do the work, I did my best, and Ervin would not hire anyone else. He would not," she said. "So that's how it was for all of these years and he passed away in December of 1976. Then my oldest son, Ivan, whom we lost in January 2011, took over."

"Ivan was seven years older than John, so Ivan took hold from straight out of high school, and that's how we held on to the business," Eva continued. "All of us together managed to keep it going and then when John got out of high school he started here, and he's been here ever since."

His first real job was as the clean-up man. "As a small boy I used to get on all the peddle tractors and all the other tractors and just be a kid," he explained. "And then they got me cleaning things. I didn't really care for that too much so I kinda slid into the parts department and did whatever, just low end of the totem pole basically."

That, he admits, helped him grow in his knowledge of the business, but he insists no one ever knows it all.

"You never know all aspects of it," he said. "But that helped me a lot. I was very fortunate to have my brother there, and my uncle Glen Fornkohl had another man down there named Butch Moore. A lot of people liked him and the man knew his parts and he believed in stocking them. I learned a lot then and it really has helped me."

"When other people didn't have the parts, the farmers came to our shop because Butch always ordered everything and we always had it," Eva said. "So we acquired a good name for that and Heuer Sons now is spread worldwide, people know us from far, far away."

"When Ivan stepped in, he had my uncle Glenn as shop foreman and another man, Elmer Deneke in sales," John said. "My mother was in the office and that's how Ivan learned the business. Basically, he took the bull by the horns and ran with it."

Eventually a few more girls were added to the office to assist Eva, and then there was the news that a new Mississippi River Bridge was in the plans.

"Ivan and I realized that we had to get off of Morgan Oak Street because we would be on a dead-end street once the bridge was built," said John.

"We were trying to find a place to build and that's a national disaster here in Cape Girardeau," said John. "You can't go west because of the interstate, you can't go east because of the river. If you go south you're in Scott County, and you can't go north, you have no highway. We looked and looked and looked and, low and behold, we found this place down here on south Kingshighway and Southern Expressway. The lot was very, very crude and very, very rough but I think it looks pretty good now. So we built



this building in 2004. We still have parts and things at the old building, I haven't gotten completely moved out. But we've expanded our shop, we've doubled the size in 2010, put a two-ton crane in there which allows us to set up equipment a lot faster, more efficiently, and we've just done a lot of things. We keep improving all the time and that's what it takes."

John knows how lucky he is to have good employees, especially since the loss of his brother, Ivan.

"I have good employees but I also have a very good core employee, Denny Wessel, salesman here since 1977," he said. "I have Mark Holzum who worked here in the 1980s for a little while then he moved on a few years, serving as a mechanic truck driver. Then he came back in the early 1990s and has been a salesman every since. I have Jerry Tuschhoff, our service manager. He started in 1979 under my uncle Glenn Fornkohl, and then I have Barb Sander who has been here since about 2001. She is really good."

"As secretary, she's really good," Eva added. "I have other good employees, but if it weren't for those four, I mean that's what really helped us keep it together."

"Then Ivan and I had other plans for the future, like when we doubled the size of the shop in 2010. Agriculture is good right now. We had a good year last year and I sped things up a little bit, but Ivan and I had plans to do all these improvements. I may have jumped the gun a little and did them all at once, including our storage shed, our new dock, our outside lighting, cameras. I've got secure areas and try to make this place as professional as I can and we're always trying to improve our service and all the things we do, and we're getting there. We're going to get all the way there. Ivan and I had all these plans and getting bigger here and adding other locations, that is definitely on our radar and it's in discussion right now."

Heuer's reaches a clientele in a 100 mile radius, but that's not all. Now, through the internet and with computer communications they ship tractors to Canada, Minnesota and even the west, several other states and overseas.

"Just a couple of months ago, we had a combine sale out in Colorado and I got a Fendt tractor coming in, it's going to Canada," John said. "I have a new one coming, one guy is trading one in, His trade-in is going up there. I mean we ship stuff everywhere. Ivan and I always tried to keep our products here and ship the other odd items out of here."

With 18 employees, Heuer is looking to add a few more to the payroll.

"I'm working on getting a product specialist with GPS knowledge," John said. "I want to add another over-the-road service truck. There's another salesman I'm getting ready to add. So we have several things going."

While there's no young generation at this time picking up trash, there will be in the future, and there's hope the business will continue under the Heuer name for many years.

If there's one thing Heuer is proud of it's the local flavor of the business.

"We're locally owned, locally operated, we've been in business for 90 some odd years," John said. "A lot of businesses are here today and gone tomorrow, or some have multiple stores in multiple locations and I do not have a problem with that. What I do have a problem with is firms that come in from another state. Say they have a dealership in Louisiana or Texas and all of a sudden they come up here and put one real close to me in southeast Missouri or Northeast Arkansas. How close is that owner with his customers with all those dealerships? Here, I'm no one special, but still, I'll hook onto a truck to a piece of equipment and I'll come out to your farm and I'll deliver it to you. I think that is a big, big thing."

John and his mother, Eva, were quick to explain the history of the tractor in the lobby.

"That is my Grandpa's George W. Heuer's," John said.

"When he passed away about 1968 they had a sale out here and my husband, Ervin, bought that for \$25 at the sale," said Eva. "We've had it ever since. We had it in the basement on Morgan Oak Street for years and years and finally moved it down here. And then we have another real old Massey Pony out on our farm where Grandpa Heuer lived. We still have the farm and the house and barn and that tractor is still out there. It's antique also."

John explained the tractor is a 1919 model Indiana.

"The way I read there are about 10 or 15 known to be around and that's what my grandpa farmed with when he took on the Massey Harris Agency back in his day," John added. "I did hear a little bit from the Egypt Mills Antique Tractor Club, and that tractor was in the 1965 labor day parade and it went down Broadway."

"A lot of people would love to buy it," Eva said. John added: "My brother and I finally got it here, cleaned it up and had plans to get it running, haven't done that yet but I will."

The rain was coming down the afternoon of the event, but John was hoping his patrons would use his shuttles to move to the new building on the hill where the program for the day was underway. Max Armstrong of RFD TV and Cousin Carl of C106.1 were finishing their radio show with interviews with product reps and those who constructed the new building. Armstrong had prepared some words of wisdom for the crowd at 2 p.m. A presentation on all Heuer's new tractors took place at 3 p.m. The event ended with questions and answers until 4:30 that afternoon.

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