

# Our farming history at work one day a year

**T**o retired farmers, it's a close resemblance to Milton's agricultural museum.

To vacationing school children, it's a unique open-air country classroom.

Whatever the descriptive, tomorrow's old-style threshing bee, held on the property of Murray and Harry Lewis, is an antique classic geared to interest all ages.

The location is 10982 McCowan Rd., three wheat fields south of where the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville borders the City of Markham. Where rural tranquility collides with urban sprawl

This perennial project includes an assembly line of men and machines that would make Cyrus McCormick, Wm. Deering and Daniel Massey stop and stare.

It all began in 1985 when Harold Snowball, then president of Markham Fair, asked if an operating thresher could be set up on the grounds. Several local farmers responded.

However, Murray Grove, renowned Belgian horse-breeder, took the proposal a step fur-



## Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

ther. He suggested a community threshing display be established, similar to what he once knew as a boy. The rest is history.

Much of the equipment required, including six McCormick-Deering and International tractors, are accommodated on the Lewis farm, just north of the fairgrounds. This allows them to be conveniently pressed into service.

However, brothers Murray and Harry are never satisfied with the status-quo. They continually

upgrade their "fleet" by scouring the countryside for cast-off items.

These acquisitions are later repaired and painted in readiness for the mid-summer gala. The latest is a unique 8-16 McCormick-Deering, a steel-wheeled tractor popular back in the 1930s and similar to one once owned by the brothers' father.

Although dating back nearly 90 years, the machine's in excellent condition. Also being reactivated is a horse-drawn wooden roller, with one of three circular replacement sections, to match the other two, constructed by Don Miller and Grant Wells.

"I'd never seen a wooden roller before," said Grant. "It was a big job."

The three-hour bee, to begin at 1 p.m., will include no less than 17 antique implements, starting with a Frost & Wood binder and concluding with a threshing machine manufactured by Lobsinger Bros. of Mildmay, ON. The thresher will be powered by a 10-20 McCormick-Deering.

Between times, a host of vol-

unteer helpers will activate a tedder, dump rake, reaper, cultivator, riding disc, riding plow, disc plow, seed drill, corn binder and cutting box.

While "feeding" a threshing machine is something of a fine art, no one person is selected for the job.

"Whoever wants to give it a try," Don Miller says. However, two or three grain sheaves tossed in crossways can choke up the works, he cautions.

Excluding tractors, the horsepower required will be of the four-footed kind with teams provided by Steve Lewis of Cannington, Ted English of Sunderland, Mike Tavarus of Stouffville and Blair Purcell of Markham.

Admission is free with plenty of parking on site.

"We don't do it for money," says elder brother Gord. "It's a lot of fun." He admits, however, the physical labour involved "is beginning to tell on we older guys". Because of the event's ongoing success, he's hopeful an upcoming generation of farm families and friends will eventually take

over.

Tomorrow's crowd is expected to exceed 500, with viewers coming from as far away as Lindsay, Blackstock and Bolton.

None will go home hungry. More than 40 pies will be required, many provided by those wishing to stay. Ice cream is generously donated by Stouffville's Bill Brown and Grant Jones of Little Britain.

For the first time, a bake sale will be held on location with all proceeds going toward installing an elevator at Lemonville United Church. The elevator's cost has been estimated at \$190,000.

"None of us is getting any younger," says church board chairperson Bob Curgenvin. "Steps leading to the sanctuary and the basement are quite steep."

Construction's expected to begin next month.

But tomorrow, the Lewis Bros. farm, 10982 McCowan Rd., Markham, is the place to be to see farm history in action.

*Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.*

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