

Stop and Stare

Have you ever driven by a home that causes your head to turn every single time? You have to remind yourself to focus your attention back to the road, but your curiosity always gets the best of you. You never know what has made its debut, and it would be a shame to miss it. We've been taught while growing up that it isn't polite to stare, but for homes such as these, it's okay to break the rules.

My quest for an Oakdale Electric Cooperative member with an interesting story to be told initially had my head spinning, not turning. But after probing the minds of my outdoorsy co-workers, I kept hearing the same response. They informed me of a charming farm, four miles south of Mauston, with handmade wooden tractors, horses, and an airplane on display. From the enthusiasm in their voices, I knew this was a must-see destination.

The moment I pulled into the driveway, I was immediately taken aback by the vibrant colors and the meticulous landscaping. A lot of time and sweat had clearly been devoted to this property. My eyes then caught sight of the John Deere and International wooden tractors, and I understood why heads have been turning to this place. Each tractor was carefully crafted and hand painted, with no detail left out. Although he claims to be "a long way from it," there is no denying that Dennis Flemming is a gifted and talented artist.

A member of Oakdale Electric Cooperative for 17 years, Dennis relocated to rural Mauston with his wife, Margaret, to be closer to their children's families. They were attracted to their current farm due to the beauty of the landscape and the rich history of the home. Additionally, Dennis needed a home that would accommodate his six-foot-plus stature, and thankfully the ceiling heights were a perfect fit. The decision to live in a rural community was



Dennis Flemming created unique wooden sculptures on display at his Mauston farm. Below are a John Deere and International tractor that he built.

easy: It was the only life the Flemmings knew or desired. As prior cooperative members, they felt there was great value in remaining with an electric co-op due to the efficient and reliable service. Getting an annual capital credit check is another great benefit of belonging to a co-op.

To this hard-working couple, family is everything, and the main inspiration behind the wooden lawn creations. Dennis and Margaret will have been married for 50 years this coming October. They have three adult daughters and seven grandchildren ranging in ages from 7 to 20. The inspiration for Dennis' first project didn't come from his grandchildren, but from Margaret. Dennis grew up farming with John Deere tractors and wanted to purchase a new one in 2006; however, the budget—and Margaret—wouldn't allow for it. To Dennis the solution was simple: "I'll make my own." And he did, along with a lot of firewood.

The lawn has slowly become a gallery for Dennis' works of art. In addition to the green tractor, there is now a shiny red International tractor sitting proudly on display, welcoming visitors to the farm. When Dennis' grand-





Dennis Flemming built these horses (upper left) for his granddaughter and the Star Wars airplane (upper right) for his grandson. At right are birdhouses designed by his grandchildren, and below is the first tractor he designed and built.

daughter yearned for a horse of her own, he built her two, complete with a hitching rail. He recalled when she first laid eyes on it; her face lit up and she had to climb up immediately. It was love at first sight and nothing could convince her to climb down, not even the rain. Always the impartial grandfather, Dennis built his grandson a Star Wars airplane using the sketches drawn by his grandson. It turned out to be much larger and heavier than expected, and both Dennis and Margaret laughed while reminiscing how much muscle they used to move the plane.

Having their grandchildren visit the farm is as much a treat for this handy duo as it is for their grandchildren. You never know what idea Grandma or Grandpa will come up with next! At the last visit, they built individual birdhouses, which allowed the children to express their own artistic flair by painting the exteriors. Those works of art are now proudly displayed on the side-yard fencing. If Margaret or the grandkids can dream it, Dennis will build it, and he does so with pride and joy.

“I have a hard time sitting still, and I enjoy projects,” he stated simply.

When I asked Dennis how he came up with his design plans, he answered “by guessing and trial and error.”

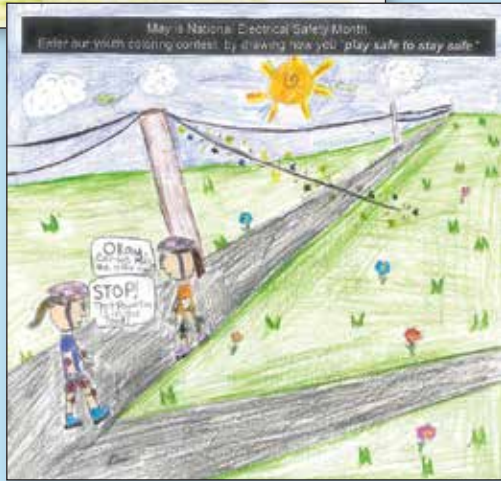
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Congratulations to our Coloring Contest Winners!



Ellie Mittlesteadt, 6-8



Valerie Williams, 9-plus

Thanks to all youth for entering!

Welcome, Bryce Trzesniak!

Summer is an especially busy time of the year at Oakdale Electric Cooperative, so an additional employee was hired for the summer. Bryce Trzesniak, from Friendship, Wisconsin, graduated from Chippewa Valley Technical College this past May in Electrical Line Distribution. His role this summer will be to assist the crews and maintain the building and grounds.



Mark Preuss Awarded Lineworker Scholarship

Mark Preuss, Royall High School graduate, was the recipient of the 2015 Lineworker Scholarship from Oakdale Electric Cooperative. He received a \$1,000 scholarship to apply towards his post-secondary education at Chippewa Valley Technical College, where he will begin studying electrical distribution. Mark was selected based on his scholastic achievement, school and community involvement, and essay submission. This scholarship was funded directly through the Federated Youth Foundation by unclaimed capital credits. ■



What would you do with an extra \$50?

Members signing up for paperless statements between April 1 and May 31, 2015, were entered into a drawing to win one of two \$50 bill credits.

The winner of May's paperless billing statement drawing was **Connie O'Neil**.

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You will not find a single set of formal plans anywhere in his workshop. He may print off a picture from the computer and use a caliper to work out the dimensions, or he may not. Every piece he has ever built is unique and cannot be replicated.

Years of farmwork honed his skills, when it was just expected “you would figure it out.” Running into town was not an option, and it still isn’t for Dennis today. He still uses some of the same equipment from years ago; the only difference is that he now has power tools. Shopping locally, he scours for the best deals he can find to restock the lumber supply, and little goes to waste. The grandkids love going through the scrap piles and “just building something.”



Above: A tractor in progress. Below left: Flemming with his beloved dog, Beagle.

A smaller tractor project would typically take a week to make if there were no interruptions; however, Margaret claims she breaks things a lot. As of right now, Dennis has not given much thought as to what he will create this winter, but he has the summer to figure it out. He is currently working on a larger-scale tractor for his daughter. A lot less firewood is created now, compared to when he first started in 2006. Dennis stated his work taught him, “If you decide to build something, you can do it if you put your mind to it.” The proof is definitely in the pudding at this farm.

Next time you’re in the Flemmings’ neck of the woods, don’t just turn your head. Stop by if they are outside working, and chances are, they will be. Dennis enjoys talking about projects and sharing his art with others. These one-of-a-kind pieces aren’t all for sale; however, a few of the small tractors will be set out at the Flemmings’ annual garage sale.

“It’s nothing to get rich on, just to keep busy,” said Dennis. When as much time and love go into a project as Dennis puts into his, he wants to see his art go to a home where it will be cherished and the owners will have fun with it. But the one piece that he will never part with is his original John Deere tractor. That is one you will only be allowed to stop and stare at. ■



Oakdale Electric Cooperative

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Oakdale Electric Cooperative’s office
will be closed Friday, July 3.

Have a safe and happy July 4 holiday!