

NewsWatch

BELOW: BILL Splinter travels throughout the world and volunteers at the Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum in Lincoln.



ABOVE: THESE are examples of some of the restored historical farm tractors that are on display at the museum.

Tractor museum displays the 'power' of agriculture

By JIM CARLTON

If you want to know something about the history of farm tractor power in Nebraska, stop in at the Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum on the University of Nebraska East Campus the next time you have business in Lincoln.

Chances are you'll find retired University of Nebraska agricultural engineer Bill Splinter, who spends a lot of his time as a volunteer coordinator of the museum when he is not away from Lincoln traveling. Splinter is more than willing to share his years of accumulated knowledge about farm tractor power and equipment history. If he isn't around, you can talk to any one of the other volunteers who ensure the upkeep and operation of the museum.

The museum is housed in the university's original Nebraska Tractor Laboratory facility built in 1919.

The American Society of Agricultural Engineers declared the building a historical landmark in 1980. The museum was dedicated in 1998 and is named in honor of the late Lester F. Larsen, the

At a glance

- Lester Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum is on East Campus.
- It houses 40 historical tractors that shaped ag's development.
- The tractor test lab is in an old building that's becoming overcrowded.

chief engineer for the Nebraska Tractor Test Laboratory from 1946 to 1975.

Today, there are more than 40 historic tractors on display in the museum. The tractor display has been designed to trace developments in tractor power, evolution in tractor safety and other innovations in tractors over the years. Some of the historic tractors include:

- a prototype of the 1909 Ford (not made by the Henry Ford Co.), whose poor performance on the W. F. Crozier farm near Osceola eventually led to the passage of the Nebraska Tractor Test Law in 1919

- a 1915 Waterloo Boy, predecessor to the John Deere line of tractors

- a 1915 Heider friction-drive tractor

- a 1917 Moline Universal, the first

tractor with a starter, generator, battery, lights and articulated steering

- a 1918 Fordson, an early tractor with an enclosed crankcase, transmission and differential

- a 1929 Allis Chalmers 'U,' the first tractor to utilize a farmer's innovation for using pneumatic rubber tires, instead of steel tires

- a 1943 Ford-Ferguson, the first tractor with a hydraulic three-point linkage lift

The museum also focuses on displays of original conservation-tillage equipment, early agricultural implements and hand tools dating to early Colonial days.

Splinter says a visitor can see the remarkable story of how agriculture has transitioned from an industry dependent on human labor and animal power to one using today's powerful machines that allow a single farmer to produce crops from thousands of acres.

More information on the museum can be found on the museum's Web site at tractormuseum.unl.edu.

Carlton writes from his home in Lincoln.

Volunteers consider possibilities for renovating tractor museum

THE Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum is outgrowing its current 87-year-old building, says Bill Splinter, one of the more than a dozen regular volunteers who help keep the museum open and guide tours regularly through the attraction.

The addition of several new displays is beginning to crowd things, Splinter says. Further, due to its age, the building has seen some deterioration. "This building was built in 1919, and as you look at the outside, it is

obvious," Splinter says.

There has been discussion about renovating the building, but the estimated cost of several million dollars is a big hurdle right now, according to Splinter.

In the future, there might be a fundraising effort for renovation, but there is nothing currently in the works, he explains.

Another possibility for helping to finance renovation might be to obtain some national grant money that is used

for improving select United States historical sites. One snag with that possibility, however, is that even though the museum building has been declared an official historical site, it is not on the National Historical Register, which is a prerequisite for obtaining grant money, according to Splinter. There have been efforts to get the museum site on the register, but these efforts have been delayed, adds Splinter, who hopes that these delays might be resolved in the near future.

Roger M. Hoy named head of Nebraska Tractor Lab

THE University of Nebraska-Lincoln's internationally known Nebraska Tractor Test Lab is getting a new director. He is Roger M. Hoy, a staff engineer with the John Deere Product Engineering Center in Waterloo, Iowa.

Hoy will assume leadership of the lab, which tests tractors to make certain manufacturers' claims are met. He replaces Leonard Bashford, who is retiring.

Ron Yoder, head of UNL's biological systems engineering department, says, "We are pleased that UNL successfully attracted an individual with Dr. Hoy's experience to fill the director position. In recent years, Dr. Bashford has broadened the areas of testing by the lab — for example, testing construction equipment and alternative fuels — and we know that Roger will continue to strengthen the testing and research that is done at the lab."

Hoy is involved in national organizations such as the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers and the International Organization for Standardization. He's also recognized internationally as an expert in Rollover Protective Systems and has broad experience as a project manager.

"He has an excellent background to take on the challenges of directing the Nebraska Tractor Test Lab," Yoder says. "The lab works closely with students with an interest in machine design and testing, and Roger's expertise and experience will be an asset for classroom instruction and for advising student research or design projects."

"We are certain this hire will continue to foster the strong relationship that has developed between the Nebraska Tractor Test Lab and our industry partners," Yoder adds.

Hoy has been with John Deere since 1999. He also spent four years as manager of product development at Hennessy Industries Inc. and four years as development manager at Jacobs Vehicle Equipment Co.

Hoy earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering from the University of Georgia and his master's and doctorate degrees in ag engineering from North Carolina State University.

In addition to serving as the lab's director, Hoy will also conduct research, work on standards development, and teach and mentor students.

The Nebraska Tractor Test Lab was founded in 1920, spurred by state legislation that required any tractor sold in Nebraska be tested to make sure it met its maker's claims. The lab's importance grew as tractors made in other countries also began to be tested there. In the 1980s, the lab became an official testing station for the Paris-based international organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, increasing the lab's prominence.

This spring, the lab distributed performance reports for 84 tractor models.