

reported that Carr had a dryer fire contained to the dryer and not affecting the elevator. Page 87 of the 1981 Yellow Pages has an advertisement for Carr Elevators Inc., Don Carr owner and Chuck Martinson Manager. Finally, according to his obituary, Warren Kenneth "Ken" Nelson became involved with the Carr Elevator in 1975. Eventually, Nelson bought the Carr elevator and owned it until 2009. On December 11, 2009, Nelson and his wife Irene sold the former Ollmann elevator to a partnership of Ted & Kristi Weydert and their two sons, Nicholas and Kyle.

Ted had farmed for forty years and during the last 13 years, he farmed organically. After selling part of his land, he decided to invest in the elevator with the idea of extruding and expelling soybeans and other oil seeds for the food and feed markets. He had big ideas that required a lot of hands-on renovations. Working on a shoestring, the three Weydert men set out to make the changes and additions necessary to start their Northern Illinois Soybean Processing business. They worked weekends and any available spare time they had to make the necessary changes. The hopper bottom overhead bins were free for the moving but required modifications. Nick says, "We used portable welders and battery-powered tools. We were quite an attraction for town people who often stopped by to visit and assess our progress. That's how it is in small towns, where people care about each other and cars yield to kids on bikes and people driving golf carts." In 2017, Northern Illinois Soybean Processing was ready to operate. Nick, who had been a high school chemistry and physics teacher since 2008, quit teaching and went to work full-time with his Dad in the business. Kyle, though not involved in the day-to-day operations, is available when needed.

Today, the old concrete elevator and the office look exactly like the elevator and office looked in 1921. The manual manlift is still in place, and it is weighted for Ted. (Nick prefers to use the ladder.) An 80-ton truck scale replaced the original 10-ton scale; the dump pit has been modified, since Malta's water table is so high. A side belt conveyor from the new scales delivers the soybeans to the bucket elevator. The original elevator belting and buckets have been

replaced, although the concrete enclosure prevents using wider belting and larger buckets. Nick says, "I remind farmers when they comment how slow the elevator is, 'Hey the elevator is 100 years old. We are proud to be using it.'"

During any conversation with Ted or Nick, it is impossible not to be infected by their enthusiasm for their community, their customers, and their 1921 concrete grain elevator. They process soybeans bought from local farmers and store the beans in their vintage elevator. They sell the meal they produce to local pork producers and the oil to a local biodiesel company. Nick says, "We want to keep the local money local." Other than doing basic upkeep, they have no other plans for the old elevator other than to keep using it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Grain Elevators of North America Fifth Edition published in 1942 by Grain & Feed Journals of Chicago, IL, describes the construction and features of the Malta 1921 concrete elevator on page 289.

—Barbara Krupp Selyem

MEET OUR MEMBER ROGER HARRIS

Most weekdays, about noontime, Roger Harris will be having lunch at Michael's Tavern on Main Street in Atwood, IL. He and other friends who also come regularly, could be discussing the weather, antique trucks and new ones, and local and sometimes international news. They will likely add an anecdote now and then from their personal experiences that seem pertinent to the discussion. Roger, who has lived most of his 88 years within seven miles of Atwood, has a lot of anecdotes to share.

Ora V. Harris, Roger's father, had been a barber at a hotel in Champaign, IL before he and his wife Wilmina Cordts Harris bought a farm in Douglas



County, Garrett Township in Illinois in the early 1930s. Roger was born in the family home on that farm. Although an only child, Roger was raised doing farm chores. The 230-acre farm supported chickens, pigs, cows, horses and sheep as well as producing corn, soybeans and hay. The hay was used as feed for the farm animals and by the time Roger was 6 or 8 years old, he was driving the neighbor's Model T truck between the bales that were to be loaded. (He remembers that everybody used that truck.) Other chores included feeding the chickens and slopping the pigs.

When he was old enough for grade school, he rode his bike the $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles to and from the one-room country school. There were ten children, a mix of all grades. High school was a bus ride seven miles to Atwood. There were about 20 children in each grade level there, enough for sports teams, and bands. Roger played the drums in the band for home games. He also participated in the Future Farmers of America FFA and 4H. His future wife, Glenna Butler, was a year behind him in school, and they became high school sweethearts.

When Roger graduated from high school in June 1954, he immediately enrolled in the Institute of Aviation at the University of Illinois in Champaign, and one month later he had his pilot's license. He always wanted to fly and considered it a challenge to learn. However, though having his pilot's license would be useful in his future business, flying wouldn't be his career. Two months later, in September 1954 he entered the University of Illinois College of Agriculture and graduated in 1958 with a degree in Agricultural Engineering. For the next two years, Roger worked as a diesel mechanic for the International Harvester Farm store in Arthur Illinois.

Meanwhile, after her high school graduation in 1955, Glenna Butler enrolled in the Burnham School of Nursing in Champaign and graduated in 1958. The couple was married on August 8, 1959, and lived in Arthur. Their first son, Scott, was born in 1960 and that same year Roger started his own business doing electrical wiring on grain dryers. He and Glenna decided to move to Atwood as it was more centrally located to his dryer customers. They only lasted one year in their first Atwood home as it

was built in a low spot and flooded. They moved to a new home in Atwood, where Roger is still living in 2024. Stan, their second son, was born in 1963, and their daughter Sandy in 1970.

Roger enjoyed working on grain dryers, and gradually his business expanded to outside the Atwood area. In the 1970s and 80s, taking advantage of his pilot's license, he often flew his plane to make calls on farmers and grain elevator customers. He liked the challenge of the work and though there were problems at times there were no problems he couldn't fix.

Roger and Glenna were familiar faces at grain conventions like the Illinois Grain & Feed Association's annual conventions and the Grain Elevator & Processing Society GEAPS conventions. In the 1980s, Scott and Stan, who had joined the business, became regular faces as well; Sandy became the company's bookkeeper.

Roger and Glenna were also involved in their community. Unwilling to let Atwood's Main Street die, the couple bought buildings one at a time, renovated them, and then rented them out to various businesses. Eventually, they had 10 or 11 buildings, but happily those have all been sold and the Harrises are out of the landlord's business. It was never a moneymaker; it was their way of preserving the town.

They started the Harris Agricultural Museum in 2000, an idea that ballooned after Roger acquired an antique tractor that needed to be overhauled. As he removed the pieces, he carefully laid them out in order so that he could replace them easily. Scott, not knowing his Dad's method, dumped all the pieces in a box. The tractor had to be taken to a dealer to be rebuilt. The whole incident led Roger to build a place for the collection. The Harris Museum fills two buildings — one is 110 x 105' and the other is 110 x 60'. Parts of the buildings have upper levels.

Roger and Glenna were avid collectors. Some things were acquired at auctions. Roger would scout things out ahead of time and have someone else bid on his behalf. People also donated things - a tractor might be a pile of rusty bolts to be reassembled or occasionally, someone would donate a tractor that ran. Most things needed to be repaired. Glenna's collecting involved farmstead creations, like her



kitchen before electricity and the kitchen after electricity. Roger is convinced that Glenna had more bedpans than anyone anywhere. Displays include 1922 to 1937 antique tractors, a 1919 Model T Ford grain/dump truck, and a 1922 Keck-Gonnerman steam engine. There are also exhibits of soil, tillage, harvesting and planting equipment, a grain elevator office and a blacksmith shop.

Sadly, Glenna passed away in May 2023. Roger still lives in the family home with Sandy and her husband, Rick. He goes to the museum or the company break room every morning at 6:30. He reads newspapers and magazines, pays bills, visits

and sometimes shows guests around the museum. He goes to the tavern for lunch and then comes back to the office until 5 o'clock. Roger no longer goes to job sites, as Scott and Stan won't let him climb a ladder; he doesn't do electronic stuff, and he doesn't have the licenses required to work on equipment at the big grain companies like Cargill and ADM. He still owns the Harris family farm but leases it out. Even though his routine has evolved, he is still not afraid to go on an adventure. In late October 2024, he traveled to India for his grandson's wedding. It was interesting, and he is really glad he went. His next adventure isn't planned yet.

—Barbara Krupp Selyem



Saunemin, IL

Courtesy Bruce Selyem Collection

