

An Allis Chalmers Collection For The Ages

By Lorn Manthey Contributing Editor

George Nesbitt “seriously” began collecting Allis Chalmers tractors and equipment in 2012, even though he already owned about 100 of them at that time. By the spring of 2016, his amazing pace of collecting, restoring and maintaining old equipment has grown into a museum, now housed in 3 immaculate hoop buildings, each about 1/2 acre in size. The buildings are home to more than 300 tractors and 100 pieces of farm and construction equipment.

Nesbitt says he was about 7 years old when he started admiring tractors and farm implements. “I looked at lots of pictures in farm magazines and, unknown to my dad, one day filled out a request for literature on Allis equipment. Awhile later the AC dealer, Bill Larwell, showed up and asked my dad where I was, not knowing I was just a kid.” Nesbitt thought his dad would’ve been upset, instead they all just had a good laugh. Larwell gave Nesbitt literature that he practically wore out reading. “That hooked me on Allis right there,” Nesbitt says.

Nesbitt started farming when he was 20 and bought his first AC equipment from Larwell, even though the dealership was 70 miles away in Ottawa. His purchase included a D17 gas tractor, a loader, a 12-ft. disk and a 3-bottom plow. Later he bought other AC tractors and implements, but then a fire on their farm gave his family’s life a completely new direction.

“We lost all our cattle in a barn fire and had very little insurance,” Nesbitt says. “The silver lining was that when we buried the cattle, we found high quality gravel.

That developed into a specialty aggregate business, and soon we were selling decorative stone all over Eastern North America.” The aggregate business continues today.

Nesbitt bought industrial AC equipment for his business and in 1995 he started farming again, growing 1,000 acres of hay. His equipment lineup grew slowly until 2012 when he quit farming, sold some of his land and started what he terms “really serious collecting.” By then his former hay shed was filled to overflowing. Eventually he built the hoop buildings to store his ever-expanding collection. He’s purchased tractors and implements from practically every state in the U.S. and several Canadian provinces. Employees from his aggregate business repair, restore and refurbish Nesbitt’s collection. His oldest tractor is a 6-12 and nearly every AC built up to the 7000 series in 1985 is represented in the collection.

Nesbitt says people around the country have heard about his museum and during the summer months the farm holds private bus tours. He doesn’t charge for admission, but free-will offering over the years has provided thousands of dollars for a local hospice. “I’m not in this to make money,” he says, “I do this because I enjoy it and I’m glad to see the dollars benefit an important charity.”

Nesbitt’s collection includes AC models from 1918 to 1985, with several rare production units and prototypes. Wide front, narrow front, single wheel, gas, diesel, LP models, open station models and several with cabs and 4-WD are shown. “Most of the tractors in the collection have been taken



Photo shows one of 3 large 1/2-acre hoop buildings that holds George Nesbitt’s collection of Allis Chalmers equipment.



One of the implements in Nesbitt’s collection is this 1949 Allis Chalmers small round rotobaler (left). His Sheppard diesel was the first diesel tractor made in the U.S.



apart, refurbished and put back together in “like new” condition. We have a sign in front of every one with its production year, model number, engine, where it was obtained and other information.” He also has Ford, Minneapolis Moline, Earthmaster, Oliver, Cockshutt, Farmall, Case, Deere and other model tractors.

Nesbitt says he attends many Allis shows and always enjoys meeting great people with whom he shares a common interest. He’s not sure how long he’ll keep adding to his collection, but says there’s still tractors and

machinery available that he doesn’t have. “We have a wide range of age, power and design in our tractors and machinery that really gives quite a story of how Allis served the agriculture and commercial equipment industry. It’s been fun doing this and I hope to keep at it,” says Nesbitt, who’s now in his early 70s.

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Amazing Eiffel Tower Replica

“Unbelievable” is what Arnie Lillo’s wife Jan said when she saw his Eiffel Tower tribute to her. The powder-coated tower is 11 1/2 ft. square at the base and 45 ft. tall with a wind vane fitted with his wife’s family crest.

“I built it for her to enjoy as she battles cancer. Her family background is French,” says Lillo. “I had a lot of support.”

His metal supplier, Minnesota Iron and Metal, Mankato, Minn., furnished more than 7,000 lbs. of steel. D and K Powder Coating of North Mankato, Minn., donated the paint job. Boeing Brothers Construction, Mapleton, Minn., transported it to and from the paint shop. Local farmer Doug Hager of

Good Thunder, Minn., set it in place with his crane and equipment.

Lillo did all the design, cutting and welding. The tower consists of twenty-eight 4 by 10-ft. sheets of steel cut up with the aid of Lillo’s plasma cutter, a CAD program, and an internet photo of the original tower. Once individual struts were cut out, Lillo welded them into place in five 8-ft. sections and one 3 1/2-ft. section. He used 2 by 2-in. angle iron in the corners for support legs similar to windmill designs.

“I made it 43 1/2 ft. long because D and K Powder Coating had just installed a new 45-ft. long furnace,” explains Lillo.

Lillo assembled the sections on the ground and welded them together, avoiding the need for scaffolding. The entire process took about a month and a half working time. Once complete, he lowered it onto a lowboy trailer and had it brought to D and K.

“They started in the morning and finished at 9 p.m.,” recalls Lillo. “They washed it, sprayed on powder, baked it, took it out, recoated with a finish and baked it again.”

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Arnie Lillo made this Eiffel Tower tribute to his wife Jan. Tower is 11 1/2 ft. square at the base and 45 ft. tall.

Stained Glass Adds “Bling” To Metal Garden Art

Welding farm equipment parts together and adding stained glass results in some unique garden creations.

Welder Mike Rositas begins the process with cultivator discs, shanks, steel wheels and other metal parts he picks up at auction sales, farmers’ scrap piles, and salvage yards. Math teacher Sherri Kruger adds the “bling” with pieces of stained glass artfully arranged.

Rositas, who welded for a snowmobile factory for 27 years, says he started making the garden art with his wife, Linda, about 15 years ago. Kruger saw the work and wanted a metal table as a base for a stained glass table. The artists have been blending their talents ever since.

“When people see a birdbath they think it’s glass. Then they see that it’s a cultivator disc,” Rositas says. Farmers also recognize that his water bugs are upside down drinking

cups. The pieces are heavy, and the stained glass holds up well during the summer. But Rositas makes the birdbaths detachable so they can be taken inside during the winter because cold expands the metal, which can pop off the glass.

Kruger’s concrete paving stones with stained glass can be left out year-round. She customizes all her work for customers’ initials, mosaics and other design requests.

The artists have teamed up to do a variety of challenging pieces including a swan made out of a motorcycle gas tank. A physician also requested a bubbler (two discs, one upside down) for his office.

“A lot of people bring the bubblers inside their houses during the wintertime,” Rositas says.

The artists sell their pieces at art shows,



Mike Rositas welds farm equipment parts together and Sherri Kruger adds pieces of stained glass to come up with decorative creations for gardens.

in Artists On Main, a consignment shop in Roseau, Minn., and through Kruger’s Winding River website.

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