



Hill with his Deere MT tractor that has more than 200 different signs and assorted antiques has delighted crowds for more than 30 years.

Iowa Farmer Spreads Cheer With His Hillbilly Vehicles

Bob Hill has been a successful Iowa farmer for nearly 7 decades, but you'd never know it when you see him dressed up as Hillbilly Bob on the county fair circuit. He entertains visitors with humor, stories, and the world's most unusual vehicles, either "Old Ruthie" or "Johnny," his putt-putting Deere MT tractor. Both are dressed up with more than 200 knock-knacks, signs, and assorted antiques that bring smiles to everyone who lays eyes on them.

"I've trailered them more than 350,000 miles in the past 30 years and probably driven them more than 7,000 miles at county fairs, state fairs, and other events around the

country," Hill says. "I've cashed checks from 29 states and several provinces of Canada." Hill started the business by accident when he and his antique 1929 Ford were invited to a local event where his son and other FFA members dressed in tuxedos were milking cows. "They wanted a vehicle to drive through, so I put a few signs on an old car, and people loved it," Hill says. "A booking agent happened to be there, and I contracted with him for other events."

He named his first vehicle Old Ruthie. "The name is a tribute to a neighbor of ours growing up. She drove an old car, raised hogs in her backyard, cracked walnuts on the front

step, and used a cake pan for an ice cube tray, breaking the ice into pieces with a hammer. When someone needed food, she'd bring a whole chicken over in a roaster. Ruthie was a kind, gentle, and loving person, so my vehicle is named in her honor."

Like the old car in the 60's TV show "Beverly Hillbillies," Old Ruthie is loaded with small treasures. Look closely to see a large snapping turtle shell, wire egg baskets, a food strainer, a motorized bike, several metal clamps, toolboxes, product signs, antlers, mailboxes, old suitcases, fake flowers, ice skates, ram's horns, a school bell, cowboy boots, stirrups and much more. She pulls a two-wheel trailer that carries antique tools, an array of kitchen utensils, old camping/fishing gear, and what might pass as a coffin. Whenever he locates an item of interest, he finds a place to hang it.

"Over the years, I just kept adding stuff that makes people smile," Hill says. "Fair boards want something that really attracts attention for kids, so I put in an old goat skull with an air tank to blow up balloons. I idle through the fairgrounds for an hour at a time, stopping often to hand out balloons and dispense happiness. It's the best job I've ever had."

He later added a small Deere MT tractor that has items wired, bolted, or glued in every

possible space. An old Coca-Cooler hangs on a crude hitch, toolboxes with stickers are mounted everywhere, pails hang from hooks, and a Deere umbrella keeps the sun off Hill as he carefully idles around fairs. Like Old Ruthie, Johnny has an air compressor to blow up balloons, and clever signs such as "Plan ahead, it wasn't raining when Noah built the ark" and "Blessed are the young for they shall inherit the national debt." Hill says, "My whole mission being Hillbilly Bob is to share humor, goodwill, and make people smile, especially kids."

Hill and his wife made 20 to 26 4 to 10-day appearances annually for 15 years with Old Ruthie, hauling her in an enclosed trailer behind his dually pickup. "About that time, my wife had seen plenty of the country, so she stayed home with grandkids, and I kept going."

"I've been Hillbilly Bob for the last 30 years, so I've had an exceptional life," Hill says. "Farming has always been a great way to make a living, but being an entertainer with my two vehicles has spread goodwill to thousands of people. That's a blessing to me and them."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Bob Hill, 3353 Hwy D-65, Dysart, Iowa 52224 (ph 319-290-5073).

Antique Hay Equipment Collection Spans 100 Years

For Loran Ellingson of Park River, N.D., being raised on a farm and attending equipment auctions made him realize from a young age that his focus would be on antique machinery, specifically hay equipment and dump rakes.

"When I'd go to auctions, I began seeing hay dump rakes, sometimes not even in the sale but just sitting in the grass somewhere," says Ellingson. "So, I'd buy them for a few bucks here and there. I just enjoyed how simple they were made, with only three moving parts."

Beginning with his first purchases in 1976, Ellingson gathered about 80 pieces of hay equipment, including 63 hay dump rakes, paying between \$5 and \$25 for most. Fifty of the 63 rakes are in working condition.

Ranging in age from 70 to 100 years old, the collection features Adrian Platt & Co., Case, Cockshutt, International, John Deere, and Minnesota brands. Most sit in Ellingson's yard for curious onlookers to view. Four of his prized Internationals measuring from 8 to 14 ft. are displayed front and center along his driveway.

Since many of the oldest hay dumps were designed to be pulled by horses, he is replacing some of the wooden hitches with metal



Ellingson has been collecting hay equipment for more than 40 years and has equipment that's up to 100 years old.

bars to pull with a tractor.

"My first Minnesota ones had wooden horse pulls, with some being quite brittle," he says. "At times, the wood would come apart when I was loading them at a sale or during the ride home."

Ellingson is still looking for unique dump rakes and would like to find a 12 or 14-ft. John Deere with oblong spokes to match his 10-ft model.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Loran Ellingson, 117 Harris Ave. N., Park River, N.D. 58270 (ph 701-284-7025).

Mailbox Art Made From Scrap Metal

Curly Leiker of Hays, Kan., has a lifelong passion for creating sculptures from scrap metal. He's been perfecting the craft since the 1960's when a rainy day on the farm led him to experiment with a welder his dad had bought. "I just made an itty-bitty thing, but I was hooked," says Leiker. "I have something in me; I look at junk and see what it could be."

Leiker's specialty is mailboxes; he's made more than 250. They can be found across the country and even as far away as South Africa. "I made my first mailbox when my brother-in-law challenged me to make him one like no one else had," he says. Since then, Leiker has made mailboxes that look like full-sized cowboys, Native American chiefs, tennis players, and numerous other athletes. Most of Leiker's business comes from word of mouth. He explains, "My mailboxes are usually on main roads, so they were essentially billboards. Drivers would stop and ask the homeowners about them, and then I'd have a new customer."

Most of Leiker's pieces are made from discarded materials. He used to take monthly walks through the salvage yard to find inspiration and frequently had farmers call with offers to pick up their scrap.

galleries, including the Grassroots Art Center in Lucas. Over the years, he's made many notable pieces, including a chrome horse and longhorn bull made from car bumpers and a 3D geese water fountain prominently displayed in front of a condominium complex.

While Leiker now considers himself retired, he's still working with metal and happy to take on smaller projects that customers commission from him.



Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Curly Leiker, 1678 230th Ave., Hays, Kan. 67601 (ph 785-628-8161).

Battery-Powered Heated Blanket

Makita's heated blanket is a new way to stay warm at football games and in duck blinds or deer stands this fall.

It's powered by fast-charging Makita 18V batteries. The camo-green blank stays warm for up to 35 hrs. at the lowest setting. Snap buttons let you wrap it around your waist or over your shoulders, so it stays secure. Measures 55 by 28 in. Uses the same batteries used in some Makita power tools.

Sells for \$150 on Amazon, not including battery and charger.



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