

Speckhart

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The Quincy Herald-Whig and Farm & Home Supply.

The win took the elder Speckharts by surprise, but it's one the judges said is well-deserved for the couple with strong ties to agriculture and the community.

Both grew up on the farm, with Speckhart spending most of his life on the "home farm" along Ill. 57 where the couple still live.

He remembers his father farming with horses and the purchase of the family's first very small tractor when he was 10. After a stint in the Army, Speckhart came back home to farm with his dad.

"I had no other choice. I had a family. I had to make a living," Speckhart said, but he's had no regrets. "There's something about when you get out in the spring and smell the grass growing, even the smell of the dirt."

At 75, Speckhart still farms full-time, enjoying what he calls both his occupation and his hobby. "When you get up in the morning, there's always something to do," he said.

Husband and wife spend time wondering, and worrying, about crop conditions. They've seen dry conditions hurt yields and the Great Flood of 1993 claim newly-sprouted fields.

"Sometimes we think it's too wet or too dry, but you have to wait to fall to find out what the results are. It's tough, I tell you," Speckhart said. "Probably the most difficult time is when you're without rain at the most critical time."

Understanding landlords through the years helped the family adapt to the changing practices in agriculture, including the switch more than 15 years ago to no-tilling soybeans.

"It's changed a little bit over the years. We used to have live-

stock, but we don't anymore. We had hogs, and a lot of years ago, we had cattle too," Gary Speckhart said.

What happens this year with higher-than-anticipated corn prices also will be challenging. The Speckharts plant about 60 percent of the acreage to corn. Prices are higher than Speckhart's ever seen except in 1995 when he sold some "leftover" corn for \$5 per bushel.

"We try to start planting by the 10th of April. Usually by the first of May we've got the corn in, but we've been holding off on beans the last couple of years," Speckhart said.

"There are stressful seasons when several members of the family are needed to get the crops planted or harvested. This is when we look to other family members to help in the business of farming," the nomination letter said. "Three generations are usually in the fields working side-by-side, which is a blessed sight to see."

Gary Speckhart had no intention of farming, preferring to work in ag finance. But he graduated from the University of Illinois with an ag degree, joined the farming operation full-time in 1975 and now works part-time for Central State Bank.

Three generations — Speckhart's father Earl, Speckhart and Gary — farmed together for about 10 years. Three grandsons have an interest in farming, and maintaining the family's ties to the land "especially the home farm was important to me," Speckhart said.

Parents and son differ only slightly on what it takes to keep the farm successful. "Give and take I guess," Mrs. Speckhart said.

"You have to be flexible and be willing to listen to another point of view," Gary Speckhart said.

Family's roots run deep

Richard Speckhart's roots run deep in farming and in Fall Creek Township.

His great-great-grandfather John "came from Germany in about 1838. He was one of the first German settlers right in this area," Speckhart said.

"We've been here ever since." A treasured family photo shows Speckhart's great-grandfather Friedrich and his grandfather George, barefoot at the time, with the wagon for the family's fruit operation. "My great-grandfather would take fruit to town and sell it," Speckhart said.

Speckhart enjoys genealogy as much as farming — and he shared both interests with his five children and 18 grandchildren.

"Richard loved to have his children beside him in the fields. His objective was not only to remove the weeds, but to spend time teaching his children how to appreciate the fruits of their labors," his four daughters said in a letter nominating Speckhart and his wife Juanita for the Farm Family of the Year Contest.

"Days included a lot of grumbling and conversation as we moved from one end of the field to the other. He recalls this activity with such fond memories, but we tend to focus on our wet dew-covered jeans and the 10-cent soda waiting for us after four hours of work."

Speckhart's son Gary said he and his four sisters had a typical childhood on the farm. The young Speckharts learned early on "you have to put time in certain times of the year. Very long days are just part of farming," Gary Speckhart said. "Saturday and Sunday are just like another day. We'd always take time off to go to church."

The family has long-standing ties to Bluff Hall United Church of Christ, school activities with



H-W Photos/Amelia Baugher

ABOVE: Richard Speckhart leans in to hear a confidence whispered by his granddaughter, Kaelyn Spratt, while the family gathered to watch television Sunday. BELOW: Juanita Speckhart smooths back her granddaughter Karley Spratt's hair.

grandchildren in Liberty, Payson and Marion County R-1 in Missouri, township activities and farm organizations including Adams FS and Adams County Farm Bureau.

Along with the farm work and activities, "we had a lot of fun," Speckhart said, and the grandchildren say he's "half kid and half grandpa" because he shares in so many fun activities.

Favorite activities were a Ferris wheel, fashioned from old hay rake parts and welded together by Donnie Dingerson, and a strawberry patch launched by grandpa and the grandkids.

"We started out with the idea of a co-op for the grandkids. All of them would have a share, and I would be the general manager," Speckhart said.

"After two or three years, the general manager was doing all the work."

The whole family worked together to rebuild John Speckhart's cabin, which had stood for years on Quin-sissippi Island and now stands behind Bluff Hall Church. The cabin had deteriorated on the island, "so a couple of years ago, we dismantled it, loaded it up and brought it down," Speckhart said. The project kept the family together and the sense of history alive.



Contact Staff Writer Deborah Gertz Husar at dhusar@whig.com or (217) 221-3379

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Family involvement sealed pick for judges

Choosing a farm family of the year provides a way to recognize the importance of agriculture in West-Central Illinois and Northeast Missouri, but the panel of judges say choosing just one family to honor is a difficult task.

This year's judges — Karen Brinkman, Natural Resources Conservation Service area conservationist in Marion County, Mo.; Amanda Daggs, Adams County Farm Service Agency executive director; David Hill, University of Missouri Extension program director based in Palmyra, Mo.; Brad Smith, resource conservationist with the Pike County Soil and Water Conservation District; and Herald-Whig Staff Writer Deborah Gertz Husar — reviewed four nominations for the 15th annual award.

"We had some very qualified

and exceptional families to choose from," Brinkman said.

But Richard and Juanita Speckhart stood out because of the emphasis they put on family in their farming operation. The Speckharts highlight "the importance of a supportive family to be able to keep a farming operation together. It's the whole family," Smith said.

"One thing that stands out is they go the extra mile to make sure all generations are involved. They find something everyone can be involved in," Daggs said. For Hill, the Speckharts provide a good example of a philosophy he's heard from others. "They're working not just to make a living. They're making a life," Hill said.

That way of life is increasingly unfamiliar to people generations removed from the



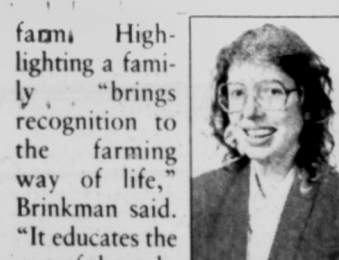
Brinkman

Daggs



Hill

Smith



Husar

farm. Highlighting a family "brings recognition to the farming way of life," Brinkman said. "It educates the rest of the public on the hardships, the ups and downs of the farming way of life."

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