

# 2024 WATERTOWN WINTER FARM SHOW DEDICATED TO Merlin Bunde and Lynn E. Johnson



By Twila Schmitt, Contributing Writer

Merlin Bunde and Lynn E. Johnson are usually among the first to arrive and the last to leave each year at the Watertown Winter Farm Show. They will be honored for their leadership during the 79th Annual Watertown Winter Farm Show.

The Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce Ag Committee, which organizes the Watertown Winter Farm Show, annually recognizes individuals or families who have spent years contributing to its success by dedicating the Farm Show to their name. In 2024, two individuals and two families will share this honor – Merlin Bunde, Lynn E. Johnson, and the families of Scott Jensen and Alan Vedvei.

Merlin and Lynn have been instrumental in organizing and leading the State Crop Show, which has been held the Friday before the Watertown Winter Farm Show, for the past several decades.

"No one knows exactly how many years we've been doing this," said Merlin, who believes it has been at least 41 years. Lynn's participation has also been close to 40 years.

The 79th Watertown Winter Farm Show is scheduled for February 7-10, 2024, at the Codington County Extension Complex. Since the "early years" Merlin and Lynn have seen tremendous change in the Watertown Winter Farm Show.

"It has certainly expanded and has become larger in area, in number of commercial exhibits and there are more people involved," said Merlin, who remembers first attending the Farm Show as a high school student judging grain samples. "Now we have health clinics and informational classes, and the 4-H lunches get better every year."

Lynn's first memory of attending the Farm Show was as a youngster with this Dad—when it was still held in the city auditorium. His life has always been closely tied to agriculture. After

graduating from South Dakota State University in 1969 he taught ag classes in Watertown for five years. He started farming full time 22 miles northwest of Watertown in 1976.

Merlin started farming full time with his parents 11 miles north of Watertown after graduating from SDSU in 1964. He became directly involved with the annual State Crop Show, held during the Watertown Winter Farm Show, during his tenure as Treasurer of the Codington County Crop Improvement Association.

While Crop Show judging was originally held at the same time as the Watertown Winter Farm Show, Merlin and Lynn said it was quite chaotic. It is now held on the Friday before, with crops displayed during the Farm Show. Both men credit Lake Area Technical College for sending students to help with the show each year.

"Crops are now judged and displayed before the main Farm Show is set up, test weight and seeds-per-pound are determined and displayed," Merlin said. "Grain samples are displayed in clear plastic containers versus the old open cardboard boxes. Winning samples are displayed in a glass wooden box."

Merlin and Lynn have worked closely with the Chamber Ag Committee for several years. Even so, both expressed surprise that they had been selected for this year's dedication honor.

"When Keith (Mack) and Chuck (Langner) drove up, I was combining beans," said Merlin. "When they told me, I really was shocked. Others are far more visible, but it's a very nice honor."

Lynn echoed that being selected was the last thing he expected when Keith Mack showed up at his farm. "I thought he knew we were having tractor trouble," Lynn said. "I never would have expected this, but it is wonderful to be recognized."

Tim Sheehan, President and CEO of the

Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce, said honoring Merlin Bunde and Lynn E. Johnson reflects the very core of what the Watertown Winter Farm Show is about. "This dedication recognizes two individuals who have worked hard for decades at the Crop Show to preserve an integral part of agriculture."

Merlin and his wife, Darlis, have been on the same family farm since they were married 57 years ago, originally farming with his parents and now with his son. They have two grown children, Larin and Sharmell. His free time in recent years has included restoring a 1960 Plymouth Fury, which he now displays at area car shows. He and Darlis, now semi-retired, have also enjoyed traveling south for part of the winter.

Lynn and his wife, Ginny, have been married 53 years. They have three adult children: Marit, Adrian and Aaron – and six grandchildren. Johnson enjoys going to area basketball and football games and attending grandchildren's events. Lynn farms with his brother, John Johnson.

Both continue to be strong advocates for agriculture and the Watertown Winter Farm Show.

Lynn said the Farm Show -- and Crop Show in particular -- remain relevant as "people want to know where their food comes from." They help to educate the general public on what ag is doing and how it is for the most part, self-sustaining.

"The Watertown Winter Farm Show is important because it provides that personal contact," said Merlin. "There is lots of information out there with the internet, but it is nice to see and touch things and look someone in the eye. The Watertown Winter Farm Show provides an opportunity to see and talk with your neighbors and friends."

Congratulations, Merlin Bunde and Lynn E. Johnson!