

2023 WATERTOWN WINTER FARM SHOW DEDICATED TO John K. Weismantel



By Twila Schmitt
Contributing Writer

John K. Weismantel has been a behind-the-scenes fixture at the Watertown Winter Farm Show since 1983. This year, he will be honored during the 78th Annual Watertown Winter Farm Show.

The Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce Ag Committee, which organizes the Watertown Winter Farm Show, annually honors an individual or family who has spent years contributing to its success by dedicating the Farm Show to their name. In 2023, two individuals will share this honor – John K. Weismantel and Jeff Heesch.

Weismantel, Owner/Operator of Weismantel Rent-All, followed in his father's footsteps in the rental business. The senior Weismantel, who managed a successful business in Aberdeen, saw growing opportunity in the Watertown area.

"In 1983, my dad and I approached the Watertown Chamber and Winter Farm Show committee, asking for the opportunity to provide pipe and drapery curtains for the exhibit booths," said Weismantel. "Fortunately, they allowed us to provide our product and it's been a great marriage for 40 years."

The 78th Watertown Winter Farm Show is scheduled for February 8-11, 2023, at the Codington County Extension Complex.

Over the past four decades, Weismantel has seen incredible growth at the Farm Show. He has served as a member of the Ag Committee, bringing expertise on booths, advertising, lifts and signage.

"They went from 50 booths in the beginning to 200 booths now," he said. "When the Ag Committee sees additional growth coming, they always give me advance notice – and we've always been ready to accommodate."

The pipe and drapery – weighing more than

15,000 pounds, are loaded in two trucks and brought to the Extension Complex just ahead of the Winter Farm Show each year.

Tim Sheehan, president and CEO of the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce, said honoring Weismantel with the Watertown Winter Farm Show Dedication is a perfect choice due to his long-time involvement in the Ag community. "John knows so many people by name, and they know him as well. He's truly become part of the Watertown Winter Farm Show tradition."

Weismantel credited his father with teaching him how to relate to people.

"When I came to Watertown with my dad in 1983, he took me around and introduced me to many of the Chamber and Farm Show Committee members. He was proud to know them and develop a friendship with all of them," said Weismantel.

"Years later, I would have my wife and three kids help set up, tear down and everything in between. I found myself taking Becky, Jared, Josh and Jenna around and introducing them to the Chamber and Committee members just like my dad did with me," he said. "We have created friendships and memories with many of the Chamber and Committee members."

When two current committee members (Chuck Langner and Keith Mack) stopped by his business recently to "ask a few questions" about the upcoming Winter Farm Show, Weismantel said he was caught off guard.

"When Keith and Chuck stopped by here in person and asked if I would have the pipe and drape ready for this year's Winter Farm Show, I was kind of startled. Then they told me about the dedication," he said. "I was very humbled. And I asked if the other four they asked before

me didn't accept."

All joking aside, Weismantel takes his role in the Watertown Winter Farm Show very seriously. One suggested "improvement" over the years was the result of the frigid temperatures that grip Watertown each February. After several years of setting up ice cold pipe and drape, Weismantel had an idea! He asked whether his trucks could be parked inside the building for a few days prior to set up day.

"Now we drive the vehicles right in the building and park them under the hanging furnaces. This makes set up much more pleasant," he said.

Another wonderful change happened when dozens of students from Lake Area Tech began to help unload the trucks and set up the booths. Since each of the metal base plates weighs 25 pounds, having some young volunteers is a bonus.

Weismantel and his wife, Becky, have three grown children and one grandchild (another expected soon). He says his "free time" includes anything with family, building projects and sports – in that order.

A native of Aberdeen, Weismantel earned his degree in business and accounting. Following graduation, he worked several years in the Twins Cities.

"When I turned in the suit for wrenches, it raised a lot of eyebrows," he said. "I went from 40 hour weeks to 70, but I've loved every minute of it."

Weismantel said the Watertown Winter Farm Show holds a close place in his heart as it was his first customer in Watertown. "I took note of everyone I met, as this was going to be home," he said.

Congratulations, John K. Weismantel!