

2022 WATERTOWN WINTER FARM SHOW DEDICATED TO Al Raeder



By Twila Schmitt
Contributing Writer

Not many farm families live nine miles away from their land and livestock. Even fewer farmers teach ag and finance classes full time. But this unique combination has worked exceptionally well for Al Raeder.

"I have always been involved in our farming operation," said Raeder, a long-time Ag Committee member and former chairman who will be honored during the 77th annual Watertown Winter Farm Show. "Part of our farm has been in our family for 130 years."

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. This year, two individuals will share the honor – Al Raeder of Watertown and Dennis Schmig of rural Stockholm.

The 77th Watertown Winter Farm Show is scheduled for February 9-12, 2022, at the Codington County Extension Complex.

Raeder's first memory of the Watertown Winter Farm Show was attending as a sophomore from Webster High School. At that time, the Farm Show was held in the City Auditorium. Raeder's ag instructor brought the class to Watertown because the Angus Association had a judging contest for high school FFA members.

"It was very crowded – and we had to sit in our bleacher seats and judge the animals," he recalled.

For the next 20 years, Raeder only attended the Farm Show occasionally as he was enrolled

at South Dakota State University, served in the Army and then moved to Minnesota, where he worked nine years as general manager for a Cenex Co-op in Minnesota, Minn.

While in Minnesota, he was "recruited" to work at Lake Area Technical College – where he taught ag and finance full-time for 25 years and then an additional 5 years as an adjunct instructor.

"In 1981, when I started to teach in the Ag and Financial Services departments at LATC, we instructors all helped out on the Ag Committee. That was just something we did," he said. As the Farm Show continued to grow in the mid-1980s, the Ag Committee realized they needed some order in the parking lot.

"Before that, people would just shut off their vehicles and park any place they wanted," he recalled.

For the next 20 years, Raeder and Bob Ellis would meet and decide how many students would be needed each day to direct traffic. Next, Raeder would meet with the ag instructors at LATC to decide which students would work each day.

"When I go to the State Fair now, I see many former students who may not remember what we talked about in class, but they usually make some comment about working in the parking lot at the Winter Farm Show," he said.

Since 2009, Raeder has been in charge of the parking lot duties. While "keeping order" is important, the bundled-against-the-elements attendants also collect valuable information about who is attending the show.

"By checking license plates, we can keep

track of where all the vehicles come from," said Raeder, who has seen many changes around the Watertown Winter Farm Show over the past four decades. In addition to far more people attending and significantly more booths, he said the quality of livestock continues to improve as well.

Tim Sheehan, President and CEO of the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce, said attending the Watertown Winter Farm Show continues to be a tradition for many families from Watertown and the surrounding area.

Raeder met his wife, Pam (they celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2021), when both were students at SDSU. They raised two daughters, Laura and Julie, in their home just a few blocks from LATC in Watertown. Al and Pam have three grandchildren who live in central Illinois.

"Thanks to modern technology, we are able to talk to them and see them on the screen nearly every day," he said. And while that is wonderful, the best times are when they visit South Dakota and spend time on the farm.

Now retired from teaching, Al continues his daily duties with a herd of beef cows on the farm. In the fall he enjoys doing guided pheasant hunts for nonprofits. And as soon as the new year arrives, his thoughts turn to the Watertown Winter Farm Show.

"Since we did not have any booths last year, as well as some other activities, I'm sure everyone will be excited to attend a full Farm Show again this year," said Raeder.

Congratulations, Al Raeder!