

Farm & Ranch Guide
October 24, 2008

Farm Rescue banquet has real feeling of family

By Dale Hildebrant, Farm & Ranch Guide

JAMESTOWN, N.D. – The first annual Farm Rescue banquet had an atmosphere more like that of a family reunion, as Farm Rescue personnel, volunteers, sponsors, families helped by the Farm Rescue program and media gathered in Jamestown on the evening of Oct. 17.

It was apparent from the very beginning that there was a special bond between all of those present – the Farm Rescue organization was a special glue that cemented a relationship between the sponsors and volunteers to those farmers who had suffered some type of misfortune and required assistance in either planting or harvesting their crops.

“Farm Rescue has had its most successful year ever, without a doubt,” said the organization’s founder Bill Gross. “We’ve planted or harvested for 36 farm families this year and a total of 67 farm families since we started just three years ago. These families are located in North and South Dakota and Minnesota and they all experienced major injuries, illness or natural disasters.”

Gross told those gathered there are three essential elements of Farm Rescue’s success: the volunteers, the sponsors and the media. He noted volunteers have come from all over the nation, before naming the volunteers from the region that were in attendance. He also said the number of Farm Rescue sponsors has grown to 107.

Ron Offutt was one of the first Farm Rescue sponsors and his RDO Equipment is the exclusive supplier of John Deere equipment to the program. In his remarks he credited his father with instilling in him the need to support friends, family and community in his business dealings.

Through the 55 RDO Equipment dealerships spread over nine states, Offutt said they have numerous opportunities to become involved in charitable operations.

“Farm Rescue is one of those non-profit organizations that we get behind and have supported extremely heavy,” Offutt said, “and that’s for a good reason – the values that Farm Rescue stands for.”

Offutt said that from the first moment Gross talked to the company about Farm Rescue, he knew they wanted to be part of the organization’s effort to help producers in need.

“Bill described Farm Rescue as a volunteer organization that had values and principles that we also believe in as an organization. It combines farming principles with vision, courage, integrity, community and entrepreneurial spirit,” he said.

“Tonight is further proof of the great vision that Bill had. Farm Rescue has affected people’s lives, by helping farm families that have had circumstances beyond their control who are in a crisis.”

Offutt also shared a few words with the Farm Rescue volunteers. “I want to thank the volunteers, because I know you don’t have to drive a tractor to have fun, it’s the giving and it’s a good thing coming from the Farm Rescue volunteers,” he said.

The RDO president also had comments for the other sponsors gathered in the room. “Fellow business sponsors, I want to take my hat off to you. For you believe in the strength of community and you are giving back. You are being responsible business owners and a viable business for your citizen customers. For these values the sponsors need to be commended.”

And finally, Offutt addressed the farmers and families that Farm Rescue has helped. “You had the passion to drive and to fight through the adversity that you have faced, and through your courage to do everything possible, to save you and your family in this way of life.”

It was evident Offutt feels strongly about the efforts of Farm Rescue, and about agriculture and those involved in the industry.

“My fellow sponsors, volunteers and farmers are working together to make sure that the great American tradition of farming will be here for future generations. It’s organizations like Farm Rescue that give me a deep sense of pride to be able to say, ‘I’m glad I live in the Midwest, I work in the Midwest and I’m proud to be a citizen of the Midwest.’

“The world will not remember what we have individually accomplished here on earth during our lifetime. Instead future generations will remember what we collectively did to advance and improve our respective communities – how we all worked together to leave the most positive footprint that we can,” he concluded.

Several of the farmers helped by Farm Rescue also had an opportunity to speak, including Martha and Damian Kappenman, who farm near Eureka, S.D. Their farmstead was completely destroyed by a tornado and Farm Rescue helped plant their crop this spring and assisted in the harvest this fall.

“When you see that green equipment with the flags on start coming towards your farm it hits you right in the heart.... It’s an awesome feeling,” Damian said. “And then when the volunteers come to help with the work... it’s unbelievable... and I can’t thank enough all the people who donate to this organization.

“Like I’ve told many people associated with Farm Rescue, ‘I sure hope you are around when I retire, because I want to work for Farm Rescue,’ the group is just awesome.”

Farm Rescue is currently taking applications for the 2009 growing season. For more information on the organization, or to become a sponsor, contact the organization at 701-252-2017, or check out the Web site – www.farmrescue.org.

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