Some things are worth waiting for, others need a nudge

By Annette Tait

Wilbert Mosbrucker spent most of his life on the farm. "I was only off the farm for about six weeks, when I worked for an implement dealer," he chuckles. But we'll get to that later. Wilbert and his wife Marie (Friedig) were selected as honorary Old Settlers for this year's annual event.

Wilbert was born on the family farm about seven miles southwest of Center, roughly halfway between Center and Hannover south of present day N.D. Highway 25. The second of Martin and Eva (Barnhardt) Mosbrucker's children, Wilbert entered the world on Jan. 12, 1933, while the snow swirled and a frigid winter wind howled outside. A tiny 3 pounds at birth, Wilbert's aunt tucked him into a little shoebox and set it on the oven door to keep him warm.

"No hospital, no isollette," Marie said. "My dad's older sister was there. [To help out]."

Wilbert added, "she kind of knew about that stuff."

He grew up on the family farm and attended the rural schoolhouse there with about 15-18 children from nearby farms. "I went to first through eighth grade there," Wilbert said. "After that, I worked on the farm. Dad was sick, so I didn't go to high school. I would have liked to, because I did like school. I probably wouldn't have farmed if I'd gone to high school through 12." Wilbert liked to work with his hands. Given the choice, "I'd rather work on equipment than run it," he said.

The Mosbruckers had a small dairy, raised beef cows, pigs, chickens, oats and barley. With 100 Holsteins, we had to put everything into grain to keep the cows fed," Wilbert said. "We can do almost automatically that used to take manual labor. Wilbert met the woman of his dreams while he was still a teenager. In fact, he'd already traveled to Oregon and Seattle, Wash., with her ... and their parents. Martin and Eva Mosbrucker were good friends with Joseph and Magdalena (Hoffman) Friedig.

"My parents bought a brand-new 1949 Ford, and our families went on vacation together," Wilbert recalled with his ready grin. "We knew each other all along, but I had to wait until she got old enough. I was 16, but she was only 10 [and attending grade school at Center Consolidated]."

Wilbert considered himself working on the farm and biding his time until Marie completed high school. She graduated from Center High School in the spring of 1957; the couple was married that fall. They started their own place about three miles south of the family farm, but Wilbert still helped his dad on the home place. With marriage behind him, the waiting part was over. Now it was time for Wilbert to give the next phase of his life a little nudge. He took his place, even to his son.

"So I went to work for an implement dealer in Mandan," Wilbert said. "It lasted six weeks—that was all it took for dad to be ready to rent the farm. He couldn't do it alone."

Wilbert and Marie started renting the farm from Martin in fall of 1960. At that time, Wilbert bought his dad's machinery. "Then there was a big drought in 1961," Wilbert said. "The crops were bad, and we had to borrow more money."

Such is the life of a farmer, as fickle as the weather. Wilbert and Marie raised their seven children on the farm, five girls and two boys: Kevin, Julie, Jeff, Linda, Sherry, Tracie and Toni. Two are still close by in Center, two not too far away in Fargo, and one other is scattered across the country in Boston, Mass., Portland, Ore., and Phoenix, Ariz.

"The cows convinced the girls to go to college," Wilbert said with a smile. "Our oldest daughter finished high school and headed for college so she wouldn't have to milk them."

After 37 years on the family farm, Wilbert and Marie started to slow down just a little. In 1998 they bought a house in town where they lived during the winter, still farming their land in the summer time.

The following year, Wilbert had a heart attack and underwent bypass surgery. "It was in the middle of harvesting, he'd just got done with the barley," Marie said. "Our sons from Port-land and Fargo came out, and our neighbor came over, and they finished harvesting for us."

"A kid that had worked...for us over the summer for several years heard about my heart attack," Wilbert said. "He quit his job in Minnesota to come out and help."

Wilbert tried to farm one more year after that. "All the cattle were gone, so I didn't have too much to do, just the farming," Wilbert said. "I was 66 years old, and probably would have farmed a couple more years if it hadn't been for that [heart attack]. But I decided it was time."

By then, BNI Coal had been trying to purchase the farm from Wilbert and Marie for about five years. They sold the property to BNI in 2001 and auctioned off the equipment.

When asked about how farming had changed during his lifetime, Wilbert responded, "I think it's changed more since I quit than it did before."

"The biggest improvement was the round bales," Marie added. "You don't have to handle those little ones."

The Mosbruckers enjoy spending time with their children, grandchildren, family members and friends, and are looking forward to a combined party for grand-children who graduate from high school this month.\n
Wilbert Mosbrucker's smile shows that any day fishing is a good day, no matter what's on the hook when you reel it in.

Wilbert Mosbrucker gives some young friends a ride on an ATV at the farm.