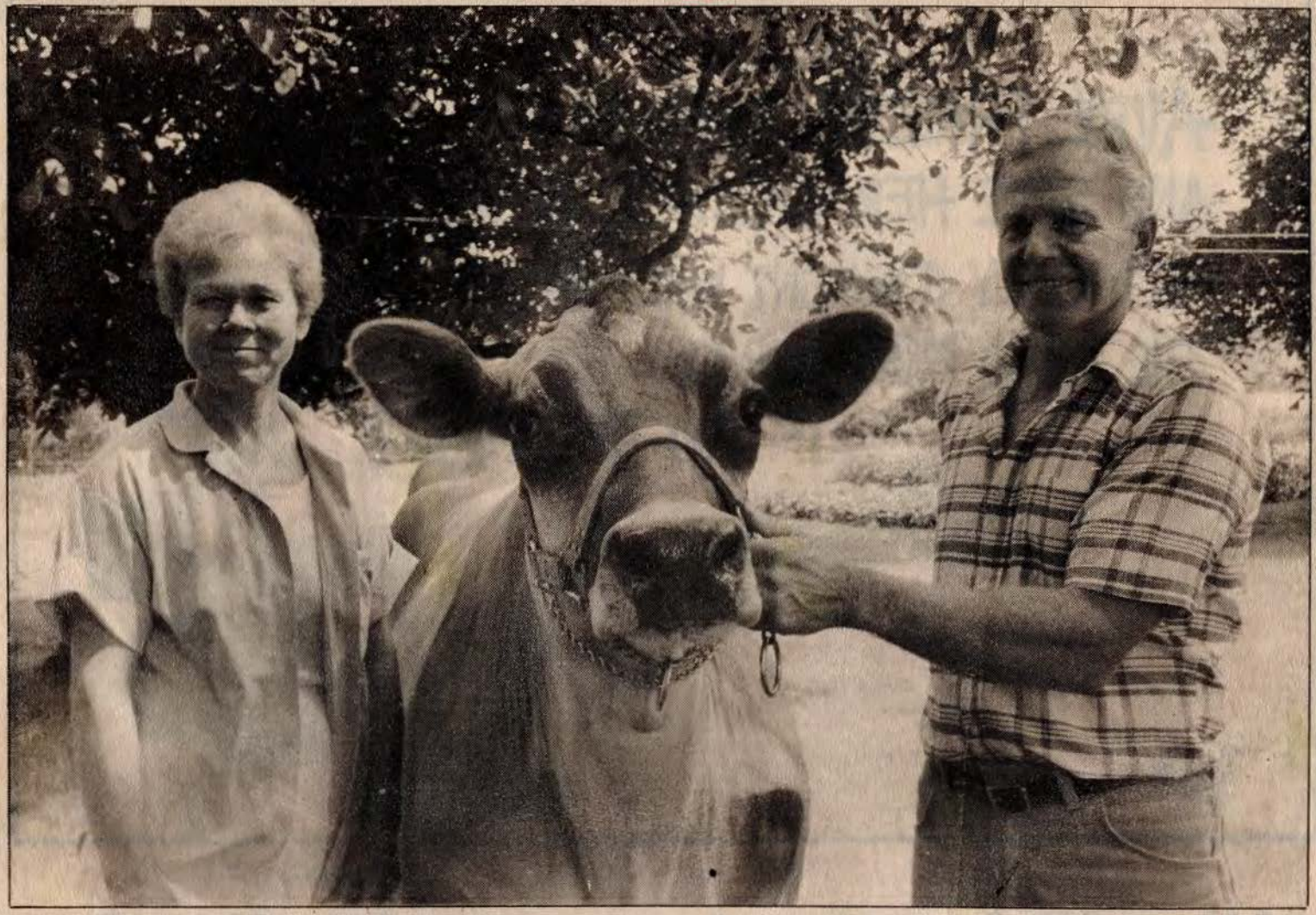
1993


(T-J PHOTO)

***BEST JERSEY COWS...*** **John and June White show off one of the 100 head of cattle they have at their jersey farm in Mapleton.**

1993



**CHAMPION JERSEY** - John and June White pose with their record-breaking Jersey cow named Hilda. Hilda produced more than 30,000 pounds of milk this year in a 365-day period, the highest record in Jersey Canada's 92-year period. A special day to commemorate Hilda's achievement will be held this Friday at the couple's Valleystream Farm near Mapleton.

July 29, 1993

# Three Generations of Growing Apples

In 1914, my father C.C. Rokeby, started growing apples near the Village of Port Rowan Ontario. As a graduate of the Ontario Agricultural College at the University of Guelf, He was eager to practice the most up-to-date methods of farming which at that time consisted of spraying the trees once a year. The whole family was involved at harvest time. Apples were packed in wooden barrels and hauled by wagon to the railroad station for distribution to Ontario markets.

By 1936 C. C. Rokeby was ready to expand his operation and purchased the orchard of Dr. Lancaster on the south edge of Tillsonburg. C. C. believed that Tillsonburg would provided an established market for his apples as well improved educational opportunities for his seven children. The orchard boasted 1,000 apple trees: 50 % of which were Northern Spy. At that time, we had only one Macintosh tree.

In 1956 the business expanded again with the purchase of the Dick Hamilton orchard north of Aylmer which was comprised of 45 acres of trees. With three orchards at such great distances from each other, the decision was made to sell the Port Rowan orchard. In 1972 , the Aylmer orchard was expanded by an additional 55 acres with the purchase of the Widner farm, just south of the exiting farm. The first 20 acres of expansion were planted with2,800 semi-dwarf trees, with a density of 118 tress per acre. A further 20 acres were planted in 1975 with 4,500 tress at a density of 200 tress per acre.

Renovations over the years have now brought the density of the original Aylmer orchard to 500 trees per acre. The very newest tress have been planted with a steel post support system. This method is now being used in the Tillsonburg orchard.

Our orchards have evolved to a point where they now produce over 20 apple varieties, six varieties of plums , and four varieties of pears. As well, we produce cider, pumpkins, squash, and ornamental gourds. The bulk of our apples are marketed through the Norfolk Fruit Growers Association, with its headquarters in Simcoe Ontario.

The association markets apples throughout the Canada and around the world. Roadside sales from our "Big Apple" is a fascinating part of our operation, letting us meet both local and long-distance clientele and friends. Construction of the Big Apple began in 1973 by a group of high school student under the direction of Mr. Bob Copeland an East Elgin Secondary School teacher. By 1975 the end product the Big Apple was in place at the roadside and quickly became an Aylmer landmark.

Our loyal customers are captivated by our extensive varieties of apples from the oldest to the newest, and are sure to find something to suit everyone's taste. Our policy has always been to greet every customer with a smile and a free sample. Available to you today is "Linda's high apple pie". You may enjoy a slice with ice cream or Canadian cheddar for $2.00.

While you are here, tempt your taste-buds, and remember we have cider available for your freezer and apples available until mid-winter direct from our cold storage. We would be happy to arrange an orchard tour for your group or organization. Enjoy your visit, thank you for coming, and have an apple day!

Be sure to have a free sample of cider.

1993

**DRY** — Dave Jenkins, of RR 1, Belmont, holds some dry soil in front of the corn he and his brother Jim grow for their dairy operation. — (Staff)

July 30, 1993

# Pork industry improving daily says Peter DeKraker

Reductions in U.S. tariffs and improved production methods have South Dorchester Township pork producer, Peter DeKraker feeling very optimistic about the future of his industry. He said pig farmers have become more efficient as a result of tough market conditions in the past several years. They are now hoping to ship their meat to Pacific Rim markets.

The pork producing industry is "changing every day. It's not standing still, it's improving" says an enthusiastic Peter DeKraker of South Dorchester Township.

Reductions in U.S. tariffs and revival of auction marketing have opened new opportunities for expansion and growth in the industry. New procedures in raising animals promise expanded production with reduced risk of disease, he says.

In February auctions of live hogs allowed producers access to international markets, Mr. DeKraker said. "Now, any processor can bid on our hogs."

Prices for the live animals began to rise after the auctions opened.

This was good news to Mr. DeKraker. It signaled an end to a slump in the industry.

The DeKraker farm is situated on South Dorchester Concession Road 10, west of Highway 73. Peter DeKraker has been active in pork production for the past 10 years.

He ships an average of 2,800 pigs a year.

"The last few years have been painful but, they forced us (pork producers) to become more efficient, more competitive."

In March 1995, Mr. DeKraker told the annual Elgin County Farm Forum his industry was in a year of unrest and change.

That unrest led to the election of a new provincial marketing board last fall. With duties on Canadian hogs sold to U.S. producers being lowered, the new marketing board also announced it was ending an agreement to sell hogs only to Ontario processors.

Mr. DeKraker said the U.S. duty on Canadian hogs, called a countervail, "made the lawyers a lot of money and hurt the producers." It limited their market potential.

**RESTRICTED**

"The countervail got ridiculously high. It would cost 20 to 22 dollars more for each hog shipped to the United States."

Ontario producers were restricted to markets within the province. "Some barriers between provinces are tougher than to other countries. That left us in a bad situation."

Producers were forced to deal with Ontario processors and their board agreed to a complicated pricing formula that Mr. DeKraker said he could not easily explain.

Bottom line for him was producers were not getting a North American equivalent price for their pigs.

When the countervail was being reduced, processors tried to hold the producers to the agreement. "They knew we could eventually ship our hogs to the U.S."

Mr. DeKraker said he understood why processors wanted to hold onto the marketing agreement. "After all, they're businessmen and they want to get the best deal they can."

A clause in the agreement allowed either side to terminate the deal after 28 days notice. Last October, the newly-elected board decided to terminate. Processors in turn launched an unsuccessful bid to retain the agreement.

"We still have a countervail, but it is only two or three dollars a pig. I would like to see it at zero but, at least we can afford to move our pigs south to markets."

Prices at auction fluctuate daily. At the end of a week, prices are averaged and that is what farmers are paid for animals shipped that week.

**PROMISING**

The expanded markets offer a promising future, Mr. DeKraker said. "The processors want more pigs and with new developments in the industry, there is room for expansion."

The increased demand will not mean producers have to expand their facilities.

Segregated Early Weaning (SEW) can reduce time required to get animals ready for market and improve the quality of the stock.

Mr. DeKraker said under SEW, two-week-old pigs are weaned from their mothers and moved to a segregated nursery, well away from the rest of the herd.

"By isolating them, you eliminate the risk of the young animals getting diseases from their mothers or other pigs. For the first two weeks of their lives, their immune systems are pretty good. After that, weaker."

Mr. DeKraker said disease spreads easily through a pig herd and animals recovering from an illness, take longer to grow to market maturity.

SEW has the added potential of better quality pork products. "When you eliminate a lot of vaccines needed to fight disease there are fewer chemicals in the pig. You also get better growth without adding any hormones."

Consumers, he said, were becoming increasingly concerned about use of chemicals in food production and what effect they might have on humans. "We cannot afford to lose any of our (consumer) market share, that's why we are trying SEW."

As a member of the Quality Swine Co-op, Mr. DeKraker and other members are able to isolate their SEW pigs at facilities in west Elgin.

"It works out better for us. We don't have to construct a separate building on our farms." The co-op he said also pays wages for one person to operate the segregated area. "It's more efficient, cheaper and all the animals are in one place."

The process is new and still in a trial stage. Mr. DeKraker said he sends only one-third of his herd to the SEW facility.

**NEW MARKETS**

Pork producers hope to expand into Pacific Rim markets and towards that end are investigating opening a kill and chill plant near London.

Mr. DeKraker said a number of producers, along with Detroit-based Thor Apple Valley, bought the former Pillsbury plant on Wilton Grove Road.

A feasibility study on the most efficient way of establishing the kill and chill operation is now underway. Mr. DeKraker said he hoped the plant would be open within two years.

The Detroit company will operate the plant and own 40 percent of the operation while the farmers hold the balance.

Mr. DeKraker disagrees with suggestions that producers need to be more efficient. He says the industry went through several years of low prices for pigs despite steady increases in production costs.

"Bags of feed, for example, are substantially higher this year. We've been forced to look at how we can improve our performance without increases in the prices we were paid."

"Any serious producer, still around today, is efficient."

While his industry is labour intensive, changes in technology and facilities have cut manpower requirements. "Twenty-years-ago you might have one or two hired hands on an operation this size. Now one person can handle it."

He keeps about 140 sows on a five-acres site owned by his father Bob.

8.

# Hobby farm harvests knitted goods, photographs and pets

Kenneth Clarke feeds animal crackers to sheep at his South Dorchester family farm. The crackers are more effective than a dog for gathering the animals which are being raised for their wool. Mr. Clarke and his wife simply have to shake the bag and the sheep come running.

Two three-week-old lambs enjoyed life in the home of Evelyn and Kenneth Clarke with carpeted floors and comfortable furniture on which they could frolic. The lambs were from a hobby flock the South Dorchester Township family raised. Their other hobbies include spinning, knitting and photography.

11

Evelyn Clarke cards fleece beside her spinning wheel in the basement of her South Dorchester Township home. The shelves behind her are stocked with wool spun from sheep she raised. The fleece mat at her feet was a product of her hobby farm.

March 1996

The flock of 12 sheep is small, but for Evelyn and Kenneth Clarke the animals form a revenue-producing hobby that includes spinning, knitting and photography.

Motorists driving on Elgin County Road 52, just east of Highway 73, might well be surprised to see full grown sheep wearing coats over their fleece, as they graze on the Clarke farm.

The coats, made of a woven plastic-like material, are used to keep the fleece clean, Mrs. Clarke said. The fleece is either sold or spun for wool for Mrs. Clarke's knitting at their South Dorchester Township home.

"It's a nice hobby but I don't want it to get too big," she said.

Their house and lot adjoins the cash crop farm owned by Mr. Clarke's mother, Wilma. The sheep are kept in a barn and use two pastures on the 170-acre farm. They have access to the house from the barn.

Kenneth Clarke is a seasonal worker at Imperial Leaf Tobacco plant in Aylmer and works alongside his wife in caring for the sheep.

**SPINNING**

They have raised sheep for three years because of Mrs. Clarke's interest in spinning. A social gathering for her London-based spinning group was held at a sheep farm. That visit sparked her decision to raise sheep.

"We bought five Romney sheep. We knew nothing about them or how to raise them. Three of them had never had lambs so we all learned together. I got all my information out of books and from talking to people, the sheep came by it naturally."

Five lambs were born at the farm the first year. "Three were black and two were white."

Mrs. Clarke entered the black lambs in a Focus (province wide show) held at Kingston where one was named grand champion and another awarded a second place ribbon. She sold the lambs at the show.

In 1995, the Clarkes had nine ewes that produced 15 lambs, four of which had to be bottle fed because the mothers were not able to feed them.

They were brought into the house because it was warm and the lambs would be more accessible than in the barn, especially for late night and early morning feedings.

"I sure hope we don't have to bottle-feed any this year," Mrs. Clarke said. While they were kept in the basement of the family home the lambs soon had run of the entire house.

**INSPIRED**

Their antics inspired Mrs. Clark to start photographing them. Some of those photos were made into cards offered for sale.

She entered seven of her photographs in a competition at the 1995 Aylmer Fair. All were awarded prizes. "I ended up competing against myself," she said with a laugh.

The sheep are sheared once a year, usually March or April. The Clarkes have not yet mastered the art of shearing and rely on others. Australia-born Clive Smith of Lucan often shears the animals for them.

Each adult sheep will yield five to 12 pounds of fleece from its back and shoulders, depending on the density of the fleece, she said.

"I keep some aside for myself and sell the rest." Most of the fleece is sold to other spinners. Average price is $5 a pound depending on quality.

One customer, not a spinner, buys fleece which she washes and dyes for sale at her London store.

Quality of fleece is the reason the Clarkes put coats on their animals. They reduce dirt and damage to the fibres. "They really look strange, but the coats keep the fleece clean."

Mrs. Clarke tried washing the sheep before they were sheared but, while the animals appeared to enjoy the experience, it did not produce the results she wanted.

10.

**NO WASTE**

The poorer quality fleece from the underside of the sheep is shipped to Prince Edward Island where it is used for yarn. "Nothing goes to waste."

Mrs. Clarke said it takes her about seven hours to convert a fleece into two-ply wool for knitting.

She hand washes the fleece to remove oil produced naturally by the animal, as well as dirt and foreign matter. She then teases it, to separate the fibres, and cards it, a process that points all the fibres in the one direction.

The fibres can be dyed any colour before or after being spun into wool. Mrs. Clarke said the most common method for that is putting the fleece, or wool, into a dye-filled pot on the kitchen stove.

She has dyed fleece by putting it in a pot, adding the dye and placing it outside on a sunny day. It is not a method she uses very often. "You need sunny days with temperatures that are quite high for it to work effectively."

Once the fleece is carded, she spins it into single-ply strands. When that is complete she spins two strands to form double-ply wool.

Mrs. Clarke uses the wool to knit sweaters, mittens and other products, most of which are sold. She recently made 50 pair of fleece-lined mitts and slippers for a woman to sell in her Sarnia store.

As an experienced knitter, she says "real wool is warmer, looks nicer and is easier to work with" than blended wools. She has known how to knit for many years but has been more active at it since 1987.

She began spinning seven years ago when she became involved with a group of London spinners. She is now in her third year of a master spinner's course. The course takes six years to complete.

Sheep form a revenue-producing hobby for Kenneth and Evelyn Clarke

March 1996

**SALES**

When Mrs. Clarke sells lambs it's usually as pets or for breeding. "They all have their own personalities and names. I know it's silly but I don't like to think of them being eaten. My biggest problem is treating them more as pets than anything else."

Last year she sold a young ram for its meat and has since had another inquiry about a similar sale. "I know other people like the meat, but personally, I'm not fond of it."

"I bought the sheep for their wool."

Her small flock was just the right size, she said. It meets her limited needs and she enjoys working with the animals.

"I guess you can say they are pets. They just love animal crackers." She and her husband use the biscuits as treats and a means of attracting the sheep to the house or barn.

"All we have to do is go out and shake the bag (of crackers) and they come running."

Mrs. Clarke is from the Toronto area. She met Kenneth, an Aylmer area native, at Canadian Forces Base Borden when both were members of the armed forces.

Mr. Clarke was in the supply branch while Mrs. Clarke was a carpenter with the engineering branch. At that time she did not imagine she would ever end up on a farm raising sheep.

"I've done everything else from building a house to selling Tupperware, so why not farming?"

She prefers the sheep. "I've learned how to give them needles and trim their hooves. I don't like giving them needles but it must be done to keep them healthy."

Are they making any profit with the sheep.

"No. Raising sheep is just like going down to the barn and throwing your money away," she said with a smile. "But, it's better than selling Tupperware."

# Jim Thompson won't keep all his eggs in one basket on his cash-crop farm

9, March 5, 1997

Jim Thompson doesn't believe in putting all his eggs in one basket and for that reason has a diverse range of products at his South Dorchester Township cash-crop farm.

The farm is just east of Highway 74 on South Dorchester Concession Road 11. It is where he was born and he has operated it for 37 years. He has cash crops plus a dairy operation and raises broiler chickens for a commercial processor.

When he bought the property, it had 100 acres. He now farms 1,150 acres, including rented land.

He cultivates and harvests about 300 acres of corn, 500 acres of soybeans, 150 acres of winter wheat and 100 acres of hay.

He owns his equipment and can take up to 2½ months a year for harvesting, depending on weather.

Mr. Thompson uses some corn as cattle feed and sells the rest, "depending on the year".

Prices paid for soybeans are "pretty good" which is why he concentrates on that crop.

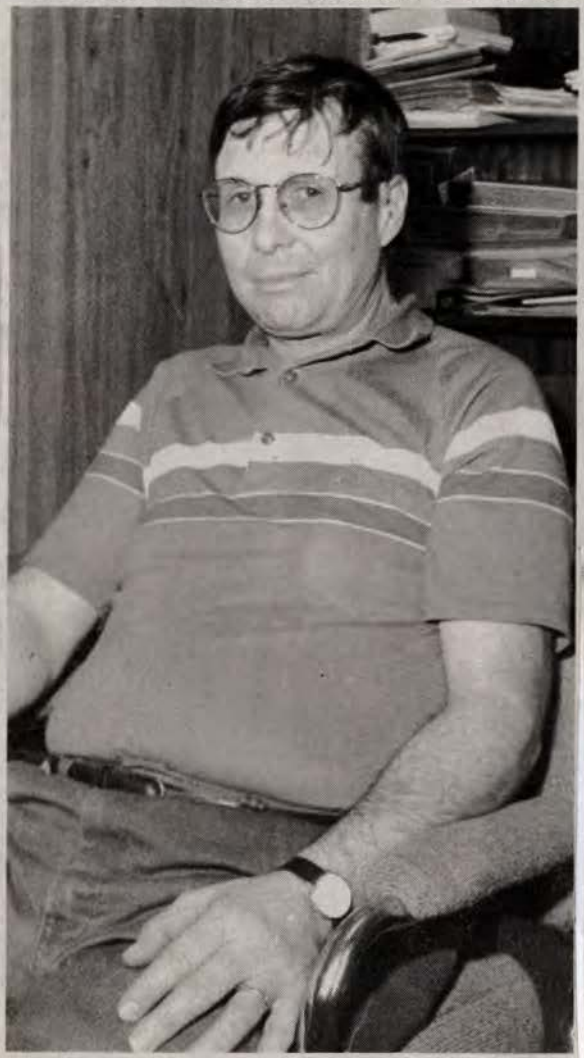
Looking back at 1996, he said the yield was average with little adverse effect from erratic weather.

Free trade with the United States and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade had little effect on his cash crops but he monitors developments.

He has a herd of 90 Holstein dairy cows and raises and sells about 15,000 to 16,000 broiler chickens several times a year.

He began raising broilers about two-years-ago to diversify his investments. "It's still pretty new but so far it's been satisfactory," he said.

He has one full-time hired man to help him and son Carl operate the farm. He and wife Pat also have a daughter Carrie who is in her third year, studying human nutrition, at Guelph University.



Farmer Jim Thompson is a strong believer in product diversity. At his South Dorchester farm he grows cash crops, milks 90 dairy cows and raises broiler chickens.

Mr. Thompson said at times it seems he doesn't have much free time.

"But, I do take holidays. Sometimes I manage to get away for a day or so, but there are always things to do."

He is optimistic abut 1997. "Right now (cash crop) prices don't look too bad. but, a lot can change, depending on the weather."

What makes ideal weather?

"That's hard to say, timely showers are quite important."

His biggest challenge are weather and market prices. He faces them every day.

Why does he continue?

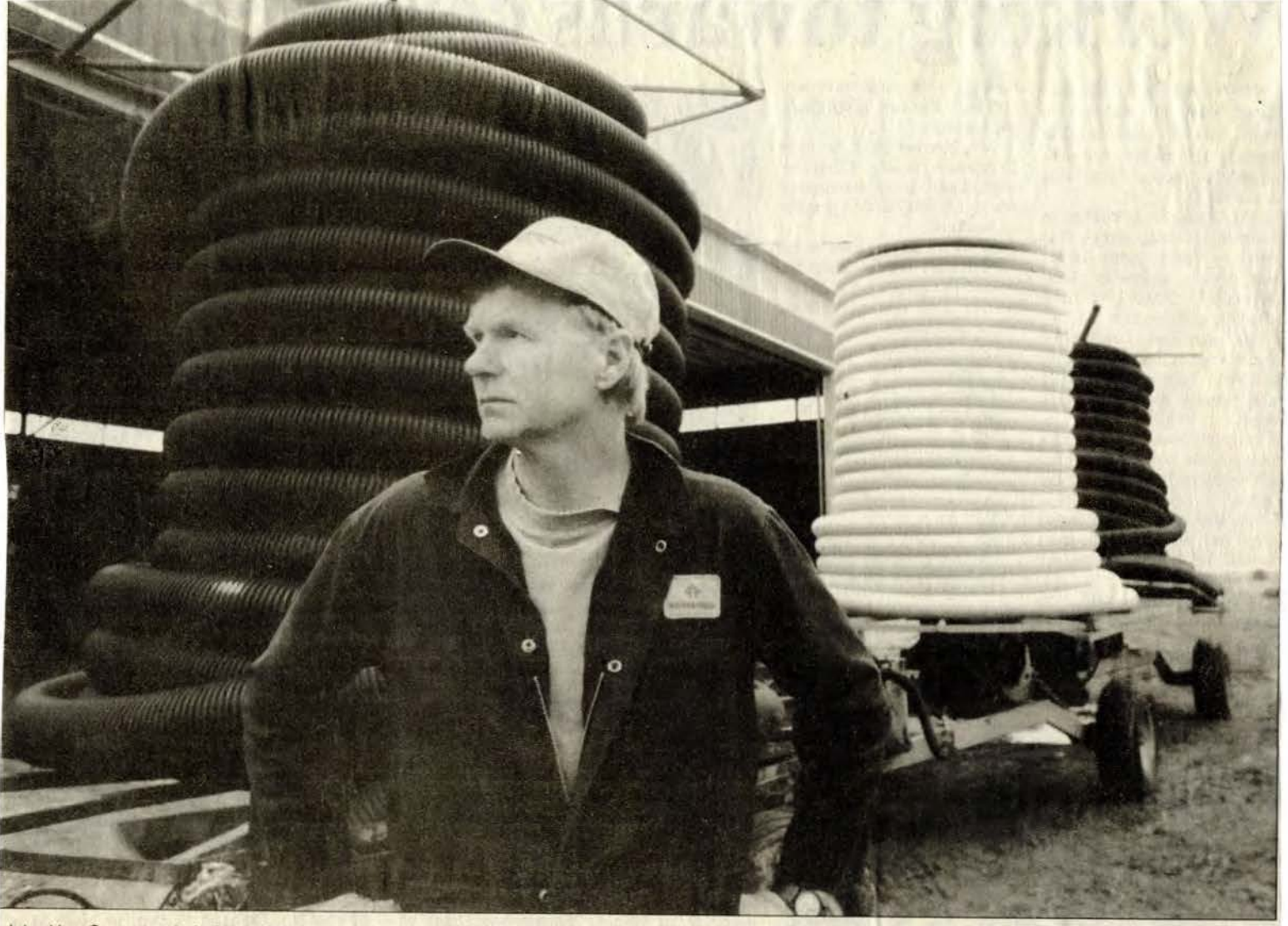
"I guess I like to see the crops grow. And with the livestock operations continuing in the off-season, everything seems to work out okay."

Looking to the future, he said the farm industry would continue to change with new technology, as it had in the past.

He hoped governments at all levels would not interfere with more regulations.

He thought more public education of challenges facing farmers was needed. Farm organizations needed to be more aggressive in promoting the value of the farmer to society.

On his farm halfway between Aylmer and Belmont, and housing development continuing in nearby communities of Lyons and New Sarum, road traffic is increasing, but he is not feeling crowded by urban growth.



John Van Gorp stands in front of three towering reels of flexible drainage pipe on trailers in the workyard of his business on Imperial Road north of County Road 52 in Malahide Township. Mr. Van Gorp said the reels could each hold up to 3,500 linear feet of pipe, and made drain installation a speedier process.

June 3, 1998

# *Digging drains--and more--for 30 years*

**by Rob Perry**
**of The Aylmer Express**

"Anything to do with the earth"--that's how John Van Gorp described the scope of his drainage and excavating business situated on Imperial Road north of County Road 52 in Malahide Township.

Van Gorp Drainage and Excavating Ltd. is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

As a youth, Mr. Van Gorp worked a few years on his father's dairy farm, then was an employee of a drainage company for a time before he and his brother Case decided to set up their own business.

They started laying clay-tile drains in 1968 with a Buckeye Wheeldigger, which is just about what it sounds like. A rotating wheel with digging implements cuts a narrow channel into the ground for laying drain pipes.

The channel could be up to six feet deep, and was usually about 25 inches wide, Mr. Van Gorp said.

He said that field drainage first came to the Windsor area at the turn of the century, and spread gradually throughout Southwestern Ontario.

The purpose of drainage to lower the water table on a field was twofold, he said.

Drainage helped get heavy machinery back onto a field soon after a major rainfall without the risk of damaging the soil by having wheels cut deeply into muddy earth, he said. "It's a guarantee of getting your crop off."

When the water drained, soil also warmed more quickly in the sun, which was better for crop growth and yield, he said.

When the Van Gorps started their business, they used the traditional clay tile for about five years before switching to plastic pipe, which was easier to handle and less likely to "tip" in shifting sandy soil.

Clay tile with its smooth interior flowed better, but now was twice as expensive as corrugated plastic pipe, making it economically unfeasible, Mr. Van Gorp said. And properly-installed plastic pipe shouldn't become clogged with silt.

Five years after starting the drainage concern, Mr. Van Gorp took over operation totally from his brother Case.

Today, the business remains very much a family affair, though. Mr. Van Gorp's wife Johanne does the bookkeeping and other office work plus multiple loads of laundry every day (drainage work makes for dirty coveralls).

Mr. Van Gorp's business also employs two sons and two brothers-in-law.

Tiling a field of 50 acres would, depending on the situation, usually take Mr. Van Gorp and his crew about a week, at 1,100 to 1,300 linear feet of pipe per acre, he said.

The busiest times for installation were from April 1 to May 31, and August 1 until the first freezing of the ground.

The drainage business was mainly driven by two factors he had no control over--the weather and commodity prices.

A wet year usually produced a crop of calls from farmers for drainage prior to the next growing season.

Depending on how "wet" a field was, he said, proper drainage could improve yields by between 10 and 40 percent.

Commodity prices have a lot to do with drainage orders as well, he said. When prices were good and farmers had money to spend on improvements, Van Gorp Drainage was kept busy.

When prices were down, business was slow, he said. That was why he had branched out into other excavating work as well, to fill in during slow periods.

Any kind of farm or construction excavation was in his line, he said. Last year, for the first time, he installed natural-gas transmission lines for Natural Resource Gas Ltd. of Aylmer.

Using a "ploughing" method that opened a trench, laid the pipe and closed the opening in one operation, he installed 11 kilometres of line in six days.

NRG officials told him that he did more in a day than the company could do in a week using other methods, he said.

His workers also have installed underground irrigation pipes for tobacco growers, cut brush and dug open ditches.

"Anything to do with the earth," he said.

His main focus remained on farm drainage, though. Mr. Van Gorp estimated that about two-thirds of local fields were already tiled, "But there's lots of work out there yet."

Many years ago, drains were spaced 60 feet apart. Often his orders today to improve drainage meant adding more drains between the existing tiles.

Payback from a drainage investment took about six years on average, he estimated. The lifespan of modern tile drains wasn't known, but he would hope for something in the range of 100 years, as long as the installation was done right in the first place.

While drainage and excavating were muddy work, Mr. Van Gorp said he enjoyed dealing with his many customers, and getting about the countryside on his various jobs.

His business radius was about a one-hour drive from his work yard, he said.

The drawback was the high stress in the spring, when drainage work had to be done promptly to keep fields in production.

That meant 16 hour days, seven days a week, for two months. "Spring is such a nuthouse around here."

Van Gorp Drainage and Excavating employs 10 to 12 workers for nine months of the year.

Mr. Van Gorp has also since 1978 been one of the partners in a plastics plant east of Ingersoll that makes 20-million feet of pipe a year.

The company is overseen by three partners, and employs 15 persons.

He is also a partner in a smaller drainage installation company in Nova Scotia. A cousin was involved in the operation when it started, he explained.

St. Thomas Times-Journal, Tuesday, January 12, 1999

Outgoing president Harry Schipper, left, shakes hands with 1999 president Eric Hartemink, at the annual meeting of the Elgin Holstein Club. *(T-J photo)*

# Belmont farmer leads Holstein club

*BY TIMES-JOURNAL STAFF*

Despite a low Canadian dollar and a slightly higher cost for milk quota, 1998 was still a "good year" for Elgin's approximate 150 Holstein farmers, said the outgoing president of the Elgin Holstein Club.

"We had a good year," said Harry Schipper, who has 200 Holsteins and calves at his Springerhill Farm operation at RR 1, Eden.

Commenting prior to the annual meeting of the club at St. James Presbyterian Church, northeast of St. Thomas, Schipper said milk prices were up slightly at 55 cents a litre.

"It was a dry summer, but the crops were still good," he said of the success of 1998.

Milk quota was up slightly across Ontario, costing more than $16,000 per kilogram of milk fat, or about $16,000 per cow, making it more difficult for new farmers to move into Holstein farming, he noted.

Elgin's Holstein farmers have about 6,000 cows in total.

Most are milked, but some are sold.

And with a low Canadian dollar, it was more difficult for Canadian farmers to bid against Americans who are in the market for the same Holsteins, said Schipper.

"That's not good for us," he said.

New president of the club for 1999 is Eric Hartemink, a Holstein farmer from RR 1, Belmont.

"It's just a privilege to lead the club into a new millennium," said Har-temink.

Leon Dennis of St. Thomas won the First Excellent award, while Rudolph and Gerald Schipper of Aylmer won Premier Breeder and Premier Exhibitor.

**Highlights of 1998 for the Elgin Holstein Club**

- **Feb. 10** - Curling Fun Day
- **Feb. 28** - Barn meeting, hosted by Mike and Mark Hiepleh
- **March 7** - Annual banquet at Springfield Lions Club
- **June 26** - Golf Day at Pleasant Valley Golf Course
- **Aug. 12** - County Holstein Show, at Aylmer Fair
- **Nov. 4** - Club sale at Tavistock Sales Arena

Residence of Jim and Pat Thomson

# Built to Last

**Residence of: Jim and Pat Thomson, South Dorchester Township.**

This attractive, two-and-a-half storey, white sided house was constructed in 1920 by the Charleston Family. The 125-acre farm was purchased by Jim Thomson's father in 1930. Jim bought the farm in the early 1970's. Little has been done to change the classic charm of the house which features hardwood floors and fir wood trim, doors and wainscotting in the kitchen. A special note of interest is the cranberry glass in a Scottish Thistle pattern located in the upper portion of the front window. The Thomson family has remodeled the kitchen. The farm, which is now 175-acres, is located on Lot 24, Conc. 10, South Dorchester Township.

May 19, 1999

# Metal fabricating the mainstay of operations at P&T Welding

At P&T Welding and Machining, the principle business operated by Peter Thiessen and his wife Tina, customers are offered metal fabrication services, welding, machining, painting and plastisol coating.

They also manufacture and sell utility trailers under the name Canada Trailers as a subsidiary of the metal fabricating business on Imperial Road, north of Aylmer. It was developed to maintain production during slow periods in other manufacturing.

"We do just about everything here, from farm equipment repairs to manufacturing parts for the automotive industry."

Chief among the automotive products are racks for storage and shipping of parts.

The racks are custom built to hold specific parts, such as bumpers, to prevent them being damaged in shipping. He said the racks were built for companies supplying parts to domestic and foreign automobile manufacturers.

Mr. Thiessen said his company offered maintenance work, construction and installation of railings and a variety of other services to industry or individuals.

"The racks are our main business" but it operates in cycles.

**Trailers**

"We got into trailer manufacturing to fill the gap." They build and sell single and double-axle utility and car carrying trailers. He plans to expand trailer production to include enclosed utility and cargo trailers.

He employs 10 to 30 workers depending on business demands. Winter is his slow season.

The building was formerly a warehouse and automotive body shop. It was damaged in a fire just before Mr. Thiessen moved in almost six-years-ago.

Front wing of the building measures 40-by-80 feet. The main structure is 70-by-100.

The warehouse was divided into 10 rental units for storage and littered with discarded material when he moved in.

He initially cleared enough space to start production. As business developed, he cleared the rest of the building one room at a time, removing the dividing walls.

"It took a good year, doing a little bit at a time, to fix the interior of the building."

The building now encompasses 13,500 square feet, for production and office areas.

**Improvements**

He is improving the grounds and exterior of the structure. "I'm doing a little bit at a time, paying for the work as I go along.

"I want to fix this place up nice. It's coming along thanks to a lot of help from my family, friends and staff."

He recently purchased five-acres adjacent to his property and had it rezoned to accommodate a 30,000 square-foot expansion to his building. He did not expect to construct the addition all at once but, gradually.

The business is not only work but a hobby to Mr. Thiessen. He averages 14-hour days. "I'm happy at what I'm doing."

He lives in a house close to the business site so sees his family daily and tries to spend time with them on weekends and holidays.

Mr. Thiessen and his wife Tina have two daughters and a son.

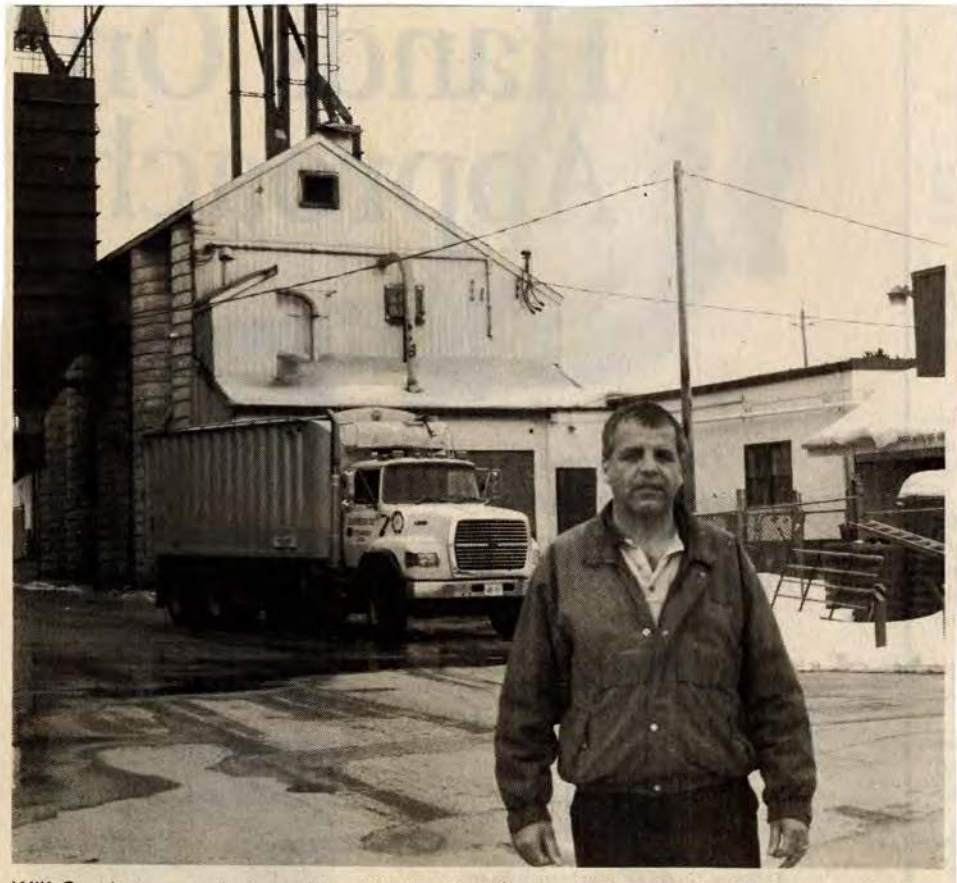
Henry Bergen grinds the steel frame of a truck bed being custom built at P&T Welding and Fabricating, north of Aylmer on Imperial Road. The company, which manufactures trailers and transportation racks for the automotive parts industry also provides a wide range of fabrication and welding services to customers.

## Feed Mill and Agricultural Supply Business

Mr. Wilf Saarloos, a lifelong resident of Malahide, purchased in 1993, Top Notch Feeds located at 26 Beech St. Aylmer. It had been the Elgin Co-op for more than 40 years. Working for the two previous owners had given Mr. Saarloos a good grasp of the established market and strong knowledge of day-to-day operations. Elgin Feeds Ltd. serves customers an average 40 kilometre radius of Aylmer including Dutton to the west and Norwich to the east. The grain elevator has a capacity of 4,000 tonnes. A store at the front of the mill is stocked to meet the needs of both urban and rural customers, offering clothing, tools, garden supplies, seed and animal products, including food for household pets. A gas bar offers fuels containing environment friendly ethanol, produced from corn.

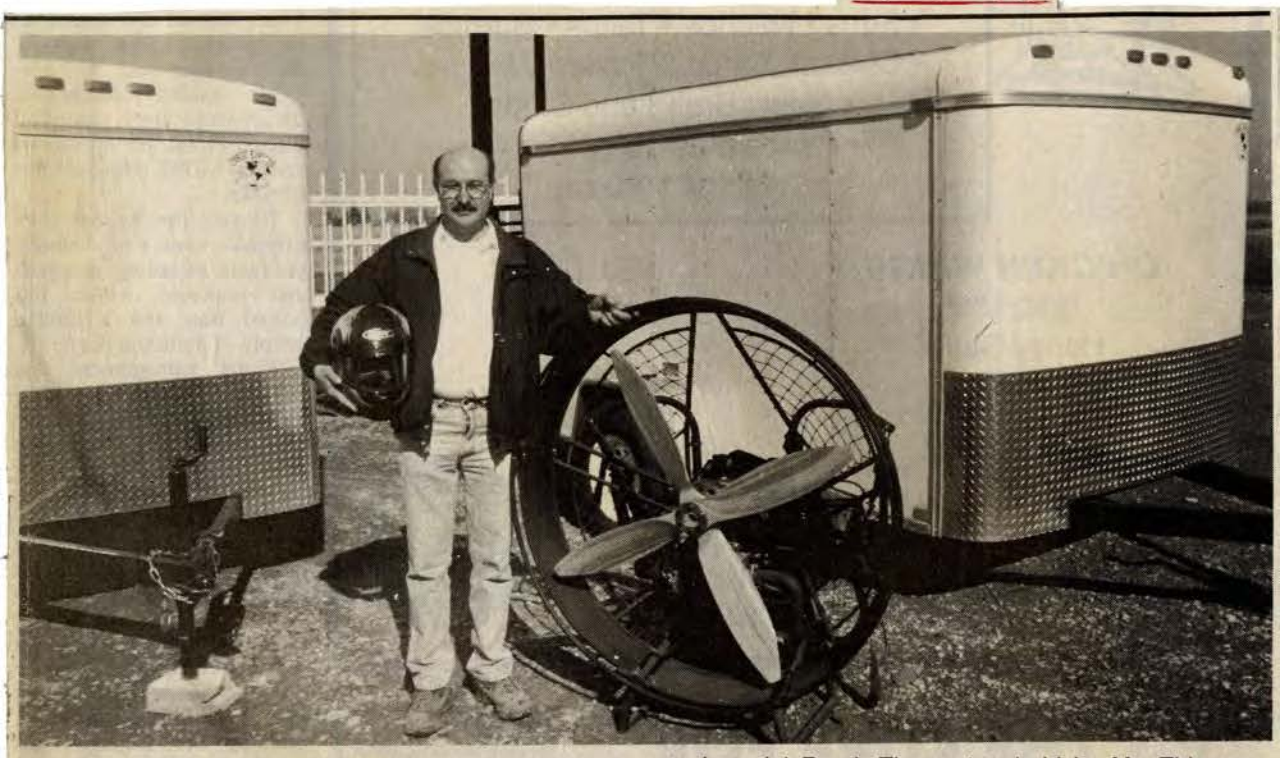
from Aylmer Farm Edition of The Aylmer Express

March 1, 2000



Wilf Saarloos says he considers his feed mill and agricultural supply business an extension of farms in east Elgin area. He processes grains for use as feed on area farms. He bought the business at the Imperial Road north entrance to Aylmer six years ago when a national company decided to close it.

May 19, 1999



Peter Thiessen was so impressed with the experience of flying a motorized para-glider, he started selling the units from his business, P&T Welding, north of Aylmer on Imperial Road. The motor, held by Mr. Thiessen, weighs 85 pounds when the gas tank is filled, and strapped to the back of the flyer.

# Sky's the limit -

## *With new venture at P&T Welding*

"It's a wonderful feeling. You fly along with nothing in front of you to block your view. And, if you feel like it, you can shut off the engine and drift with the wind."

Peter Thiessen was describing the sensation of flying a motorized para-glider. He enjoyed the feeling so much, he formed a company, Skyfly, to sell the flying units and train customers on proper use.

Mr. Thiessen said a basic unit would cost $15,000 or $10,000 U.S. Training was available.

He operates Skyfly in partnership with his son-in-law David Redekop as a subsidiary of P&T Welding and Machining, on Imperial Road, close to the Canadian National - Canadian Pacific railway tracks north of Aylmer.

A motorized para-glider is a rectangular parachute whose operator uses an engine and propeller, strapped to his back, to ascend and propel the unit.

The engine, propeller and a full tank of gas weigh 85 pounds. But, the operator bears the weight for only a few minutes at take-off.

At take-off, the operator directs wind into the parachute causing it to rise taking up the weight of the engine then raising the operator off the ground.

**Harness**

The operator sits, strapped in a harness, attached to the engine. The four-blade propeller has a diameter of 48-inches.

Mr. Thiessen said the units were equipped with high-performance, 24 horsepower, gasoline engines initially developed for use by the United States Army. They had to start on the first pull.

His units are equipped with extensions to the pull-start cords that permit the operator to kick start the unit while in flight.

He said that an airborne flyer could shut off the engine and ride the wind in silence enjoying the view or taking photos.

Some flyers, he said, liked to climb as high as 12,000 feet. He prefers to stay closer to the ground to enjoy the scenery.

With a maximum fuel ca-

**Continued on page B12**

# The sky's the limit

May 19,1999

**Continued from page B1**

pacity of two gallons, the engines operate for one to three hours depending on winds and where the flyer wants to go.

Mr. Thiessen has been selling these flying machines for just over a year.

He does not market them aggressively, preferring to concentrate on his other manufacturing and trailer sales businesses.

"I have been operating it (para-glider sales) more as a sideline until I can determine how much (customer) interest there would be."

**Inquiries**

Public interest has grown and he had several inquiries after people saw flying units in this area, and a display before and after Aylmer Kinsmen Santa Claus parade.

Some inquirers merely wanted rides.

He is considering buying a larger unit with which he can give rides.

He said most inquiries were from young persons. "Older, more financially secure persons preferred to keep one foot on the ground."

**Licence**

At present, a person did not need to be licensed to fly one of the units, Mr. Thiessen said. "They don't have wheels. If they are attached to a tricycle, they are considered ultra-lights and you need a licence."

Mr. Thiessen said he and several friends had applied for instruction to qualify for an ultra-light licence. He believes motorized para-glider operators should be licensed and he is not waiting for the federal government to enact legislation.

He said it took three to five days to train a person to operate the motorized para-gliders.

He said he would not sell a unit to a person who did not complete the training program.

Ground training, where students learn to fill the parachute with wind, is often at Port Burwell to take advantage of wind blowing off Lake Erie.

1992

Wed., June 3, 1992—AYLMER EXPRESS-


Brother Douglas Benner, left, District 16 Deputy Grand Master, Odd Fellows, Brother Roy Miners of Aylmer Odd Fellows and Sister Sandra Rhame, chairman of public speaking committee congratulate Ammie Lunn of Belmont on winning the area United Nations speech contest and her grandfather Brother Russell Lunn of Victory Lodge, Belmont. Miss Lunn won a trip to New York City and the United Nations headquarters there.

Ammie Lunn wins the area United Nations speech contest and a trip to New York city and the United Nations headquarters there.

Congratulations Ammie !


Boy and girl winners and officials at the annual oratorical contest at South Dorchester Optimist Club include, from left: Rod Baird, oratorical co-chairman for the club; Nathan MacIntyre, 12, grade 7, Summers Corners Public School, first; Adam Campbell, 12, grade 6, South Dorchester Public School, second; Rebecca Foster, 11, grade 6, South Dorchester Public School, first; Rebecca Lunn, 13, grade 8, Davenport Public School, second; and Paul Faulds, oratorical co-chairman. South Dorchester club will host zone finals at its hall in Lyons on Tuesday, March 22.