

His Kids Books Are Based On Real Farm Life

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

"I loved hearing stories at the dinner table and at family gatherings when I was a kid growing up on the farm," Gordon Fredrickson says, "and that story listening has turned into story telling."

In the past 11 years, Fredrickson has authored more than 10 children's books on farm life. He's also told hundreds of farm life stories to civic groups, to school classrooms, and at retirement homes. "I don't know the exact number of places I've spoken at," Fredrickson said, "but the total audience I've spoken to now numbers more than 13,000." He's now a regular on the calendar for several schools.

Fredrickson draws inspiration for his stories from real farm life. He grew up in the 1950's near the rural Minnesota community of New Prague, 40 miles southwest of Minneapolis. He and his siblings had regular "chores" and experienced the highs and lows of farm life. In high school, he realized that making a living on a small farm would be difficult,

so he entered the military after graduation. After completing his tour, he graduated from the University of Minnesota and taught high school English for 16 years. When his parents retired, he moved back to his home farm and settled in to a new job. As urban areas devoured farms in the 1990's, including his parents', he saw a need to tell stories about farm life.

"A story untold is a story lost," Fredrickson says. "What will be remembered about small town and country life in the mid 20th century if those realistic stories aren't written down and told?" he asks. "Would the 'truth' as told by city folks be fractured and diluted?" The answer, of course, is that those stories could be incorrect or could be forgotten entirely.

Fredrickson set out to make sure that didn't happen. He began with a series of books titled "If I Were A Farmer", featuring a child and a pet. The child imagines himself or herself as a farmer having an adventure, in which he or she is the hero. Each page has the child's narration and a color illustration.

The prose is aimed at pre-school to grade 3. The series has received numerous awards and has favorable reviews from many readers and organizations.

"I base the stories on situations and events that my family and I actually went through," Fredrickson says. "Kids love the stories because they relate to the age and gender of the characters and what those characters are imagining or going through."

Fredrickson also has titles about farm country picnics, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve. He plans on 16 titles for the Farm Country Tales series. Originally, he published the books himself and his wife printed and bound them in their garage. He sold them at his presentations, at events and on his website. A contract from a publishing company in 2008 has provided much broader exposure.

"Writing kids books isn't a get rich scheme," Fredrickson says, "but that was never my intent in the first place. I enjoy telling stories, and my audiences are fascinated by recollections from a one-room



Gordon Fredrickson has authored more than 10 award-winning children's books based on real farm life.

school, machinery and animals we had on the farm, the props that I show them and the humor that I weave throughout. It's just a very satisfying and rewarding experience."

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Business Developed Around Pedal Tractor Pulls

When Eric Willey's kids got into pedal tractor pulling competitions, Willey and his wife thought it was just for fun. Eight years later, they've added a thriving tractor pull enterprise to their lawn care business.

"My 12-year-old daughter Brittany has been participating since she was four," says Willey. "A few years ago, some of the guys who attend meets suggested I start a pulling company. We thought, 'Why not?' We go to pulls almost every weekend anyway."

Running a pedal tractor pulling competition requires a pulling sled and tractors. Willey has a trailer decked out for pulls. It holds the tractors, a public address system for announcing races and tables for signing up entries and displaying trophies.

Willey charges a flat fee for putting on a competition, plus mileage from his home. He puts on competitions throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Willey already had a pulling-style pedal tractor with large wheels custom-built for his daughter. He found a pulling sled (he now has two), and bought 8 more tractors costing \$1,000 to \$2,000 each. Soon he was in business.

In addition to the large wheels, pedal tractors for pulling contests are all geared according to age group. Willey compares them to 10-speed bikes. With 9 age groups from ages 4 to 12, tractors for the youngest age group are geared for easy pulling.

"The tractor for the oldest age group is like starting out the bike in 10th gear," says Willey. "They really have to work."

The pulling sled is a scaled down version of full-size tractor pulling sleds. Willey's was made from old aluminum hog confinement crates. The sled is designed to go 34 ft. He plans to build another one that will travel 50 ft.

Willey pays a small fee to the tractor pulling associations to have his events sanctioned. The top three winners in each class of a sanctioned event are invited to a state pull. Winners in it can go on to a national pull and even an international pull with pullers from the U.S and Canada.

Willey encourages folks to get their kids involved. He says it has given his family reason to get out and travel to other states.

It has also involved him in pedal tractors in a big way. In addition to the pulling business,



Eric Willey and his wife operate a thriving pedal tractor pulling enterprise, using a scaled-down version of a full-size tractor pulling sled.

he also buys and sells used pedal tractors. Currently he has more than 150 in stock for sale as is, or he will restore them.

Recently he expanded his pedal tractor interests in a new direction. He bought Just Like Dad's, a pedal tractor implement business. With the completion of a new shop, Willey plans to begin making and marketing implements of all types.

"We have all the molds for the original attachments, but are planning to make many more styles and types of implements," says Willey.

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Storage Buildings Made With Home-Cut Lumber

Lewis Legge's part-time business venture gives him a nice sideline income while providing a valuable service for smaller North Dakota communities. Legge designs and builds mini storage buildings using his own labor and wood that he cuts himself. In the past 11 years, he has put up facilities in 5 North Dakota towns, each with less than 500 residents.

"I work in smaller communities because there are usually very affordable lots for sale," Legge says, adding "I can also find someone willing to partner in the process." Another reason his concept works is that he builds the buildings himself using lumber that he cuts with his Wood-Mizer sawmill.

"I have access to 65-ft. long Cedar transmission poles, and they work great for posts and beams in the buildings,"

Legge says. "They're 12 in. in diameter, so I have to cut them to size, down to 6 or 8-in. squares. The waste cuts from the outside make nice skirt boards, and the wood is all treated, which is another plus," Legge adds.

He also uses the Wood-Mizer to cut other wood needed for the project from cottonwood or spruce logs. "We make our own rafters for the smaller buildings and have trusses made for the larger buildings," Legge says. Steel siding is used on the walls and roofs, and lockable doors are on each unit. Floors are poured concrete.

"With my own labor, materials and mill, I can build units for about 55 to 75 percent of the cost it would take to have them custom built," Legge says. He cuts all dimension lumber at 2-in. thickness, which adds extra strength to the roofs and walls.



Lewis Legge's custom-built storage buildings use posts and lumber that he cuts with a Wood-Mizer sawmill.

The overall building size is 52 by 80-ft., which provides individual storage units that are 10 by 20-ft., and larger 10 by 26-ft. bays for boat storage. "I put most of the buildings up in 4 to 5 weeks, working just on weekends," Legge says. "The overall cost, including land, is right around \$40,000." Legge figures there's a 6-year payback for his investment, which is a lot better return

than money in the stock market.

"People in small towns are no different than anyone else," Legge says, "they need storage and they're willing to pay for it."

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