

WORLD'S
LARGEST
TRUCKSTOP

IOWA 80

HAPPY
HOLIDAYS

Dec. 23, 2011---

WALCOTT, Iowa — A little trucker lives inside of all of us.

We are coming and going, yet trying to settle in the moment during the holidays. True hearts rail against big wheels and gas bags.

We like attention.

“What kid hasn’t tried to get a truck driver to honk his air horn from the back seat of Mom and Dad’s car?” wondered Dave Meier, curator of the Iowa 80 Trucking Museum, about 11 miles west of the Quad Cities. “There’s the romance of the open road. You have to be a self-motivated person to be a truck driver. There is a little trucker in everyone.” The museum is just a short walk across the parking lot from the World’s Largest Truckstop on I-80.

This honkin’ museum has a collection of more than 100 trucks, ranging from a 1911 Walker Vehicle Co. truck used by Bowman Dairy of Chicago to a 1963 Mack you would see on the cover of a Red Simpson country music album. (The Bard of Bakersfield recorded the 1973 hit “Truckin’ Trees For Christmas.”)

“You’d be surprised at the number of people here on Christmas Day,” Meier said. “There’s truckers, but less than normal. There’s a lot of people still trying to get home. We have a Christmas buffet in the restaurant.” The museum is open from noon-5 p.m. Sundays (besides Christmas) and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturdays.

About 30 trucks are on display at any given time. The collection rotates. I was a bit embarrassed about how excited I was to see a couple of rooms filled with restored trucks.

Bill Moon opened the Iowa 80 Truck Stop in 1965. Moon never drove, a truck but he loved antiques, particularly antique trucks.

“He hated seeing them going for scrap,” Meier said. “And that’s what was happening.” Moon bought a few old trucks and stored them at the Walcott home he shared with his wife, Carolyn. Moon’s first acquisition was a black and gray 1919 International Harvester, which is on display in the museum.

“By the time Bill died in 1992 he had about 65 trucks of various brands and ages,” Meier said. “You could pick them up for nothing. We started having the Trucker’s Jamboree (outdoor summer festival with live country music) in 1979 where we started an ‘Old Truck Show’. So every year we get them all out. And that show continues to grow. But we had all these trucks sitting around in sheds that nobody could see. They were packed in so close you’d walk sideways.”

Meier, 51, is married to Bill’s daughter Delilah. She is vice-president of the Iowa 80 Group, which also owns truck stops in Elk Grove, Joplin, Mo. and Kenley, N.C. Bill’s son Will is company president, and Carolyn is still involved in the business. In 2008 the group built a museum to display Moon’s collection. At first the museum was open only for private tours, but it became such a popular attraction that a welcome center, souvenir shop and bathrooms were added, and the non-profit museum became open to the public.

“We have even more trucks to display, so we’re adding another 21,000 square feet to the exhibit hall,” Meier said. The addition will be done by next month. By then nearly 60 trucks will be on display at one time, including the beige 1924 White Motor Co. featured in the movie “Fried Green Tomatoes.”

“A lot of truck drivers are third or fourth generation, so they can see maybe what Grandpa drove,” Meier said. “There’s not a lot of museums dedicated to trucks. (The C. Grier Beam Truck Museum in Cherryville, N.C. is on the National Register of Historic Places.) “Most people don’t realize what trucking does for them every day. Nothing you have hasn’t ridden on a truck at least five or six times. If trucking stops, so does your lifestyle.”

The museum attracts about 14,000 visitors a year.

The bright, retro, 18,500-square-foot space was designed by Chicago architect Stephen Wierzbowski, whose work includes 94 Harley-Davidson dealerships.

Lots of museums also have halls of fame, and that may be on the horizon for the trucking museum. I’d start with the late country songwriter Dave “Six Days on the Road” Dudley and my old pal Jeremy Tepper, who programs country music on Sirius/XM and formerly ran the Diesel Only truck music label in New York City. “We never really thought about that,” Meier said. “How would



BRIDGESTONE

BRIDGESTONE

Delaney & Finn
BAKERSFIELD, CA.

1950
Martin Carter
DIESEL

FAIRBANKS-MORSE SCALES

REPL
MOTOR

U.S.

978
MOTOR

you be famous as a truck driver?"

Ray O'Hanesian, come on down.

His 1958 Kenworth "bullnose" truck is in the museum. The machine is lean and mean with an apple red cab shaped like a bullnose and leading a stainless steel trailer. The Bettendorf, Iowa, resident purchased the truck new for \$25,000 in 1958. He drove the same rig until he retired in the early 1980s.

Ramblin' Ray put 5.2 million miles on the truck.

"Most of us are conditioned to get a new car or a new truck every few years" Meier said. "He's 84 now. He said he wanted us to have his truck and trailer. He gave it to us." There isn't a piece of rust on the beautiful truck.

Like any other museum on the distant road, it is nice to make connections with home. The wooden Walker Vehicle Co. truck with a steel floor was used by Bowman Dairy to transport "Milk of Superior Flavor," according to a panel on the side of the truck. "I don't know how you take that because it was unrefrigerated," Meier said. "Does it get flavor as you drive around? It had a range of about 50 miles and ran about 12, 15 miles an hour. There's no speedometer in it. You've got parking brake and a foot brake."

The milk truck was green in 1911. It ran on an all electric motor.

"It's all original glass," Meier said. "Batteries are in the case underneath. We had a 100th birthday party for it this year. This is truck No. 12, so I'm assuming they had 11 more of them. Early trucks were nothing more than a horsewagon with an engine and a steering mechanism. Trucking was not an easy occupation back then. Driver's comfort and safety wasn't given a lot of thought like it is today.

"You look at the address, it is 140 W. Ontario, Ed Debevic's area (in Chicago). It was used to deliver milk to hotels, restaurants, clubs and hospitals." The truck was acquired at auction in Shawnee Mission, Kansas. "Somebody cared enough to put it away," Meier said. "Something like this would have been down to nothing in a few years."

That's not the case with the Iowa 80 Truckstop.

What makes it the "World's Largest?"

"Ever seen one any bigger?" Meier answered. "We started on 10 acres. We're now on a couple hundred acres. We can park 800 semi trucks. We have 16 fuel islands. 24 private showers. An 80-seat movie theater. A 300-seat restaurant. In 2006 we added 'The Super Truck Showroom' (where you can buy discount books, Dickies overalls and "Smokey and the Bandit" DVDs)."

OK.

And like a youthful mind, the doors never close.



Caribons

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DODGE

Iowa 80

TRUCKING
MUSEUM

Visit the
TRUCKING
MUSEUM



STANDARD OIL

DIVISION OF AMERICAN OIL COMPANY

STANDARD OIL CO.
(INDIANA)



1910

The first tractor with a motor was built in 1801. It was a steam engine that ran on wood. In 1850, a tractor was built that ran on kerosene. In 1880, a tractor was built that ran on gasoline. In 1910, a tractor was built that ran on gasoline and had a steering wheel. This tractor was built by the Standard Oil Company.

In 1910 the average tractor cost \$750 and a horse-drawn tractor cost \$2500.

The wooden plug wheels provided traction in the field and on dirt roads. When the wooden plugs wore down, the owner simply replaced them.