



National FFA Organization
6060 FFA Drive
P.O. Box 68960
Indianapolis, IN 46278-1370

P: 317-802-6060
F: 317-802-6061

www.ffa.org

Delo Tractor Restoration Competition Heats Up the National FFA Convention

By Dorothy Spencer

Members of the Eufaula Alabama FFA Chapter believe that the second time, not the third time, is a charm. Last year at the 2008 National FFA Convention, the chapter took home first place in the annual Delo Tractor Restoration Competition. This year the team is looking to do the same.

The Delo Tractor Restoration Competition is an opportunity for teams and individuals alike to prove their skills at antique tractor restoration. All participants must completely restore an antique tractor and then submit a written workbook summary and movie detailing their experience. From these submissions, a group of finalists are given the opportunity to prepare a 20-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute question and answer session at the final round of the competition held during the national FFA convention.

Since 1995 students from across the country have been using the skills they would normally use in the classroom or in the business world to tear apart and put back together antique tractors to earn up to \$5,000. This competition challenges students to learn and apply skills such as equipment maintenance, teamwork, project management, budgeting, planning and marketing.

After 1,215 hours spent working on their 1944 Oliver 70 RC, the 10 members of the Eufaula team have “become like a family,” said sophomore and first-time team member Chad Hamm. Andrea Pittman, a senior completing her second year on the team, said that the team was able to create bonds that can never be broken. Team leader Jackson Harris, a sophomore and returning team member, said that the entire community of Eufaula supported the team.

The team picked the Oliver 70 RC out of a warehouse full of tractors at Landmark Park in Dothan, Ala. Now that the tractor is restored, it will be displayed at Landmark Park—home to the only agriculture museum in Alabama. “This is our chance to give back to the community,” said Pittman.

The Eufaula chapter has learned skills they can transfer to other areas of their lives. “The most

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important thing I have learned is work ethic,” said Harris. Knowing what has to be done and doing it is essential to being able to succeed at something, Jackson continued. Communication and cooperation were also skills that the Eufaula team felt they gained from the experience.

Julian Cran, marketing manager for Chevron Global Lubricants, also believes that the competition allows students to develop life skills. “The students are really running a small business,” Cran said. They have a budget to balance between repairs, parts and services. “In the end, the budget has to meet the gain,” Cran added. This process challenges students to be creative, manage their time and work together.

Eight-year judge Dennis Rupert has seen many teams come to the competition and has noticed changes among the team members. According to Rupert, team members gain more confidence over the years and develop their public speaking, communications, organization and general mechanics skills. “These are skills that can benefit you whether you are broken down on the side of the road or helping your child with a science project,” Rupert said.

This year the competition organizers created a community among the participants. By creating a Facebook page, a Twitter account and a You Tube page, students and supporters from around the nation were able to connect. Each of the 12 finalists posted videos on the Delco Tractor Restoration You Tube page and kept track of local radio, newspaper and television coverage via the Facebook page. Overall competition organizers and sponsors were very happy that social media could create such a grassroots community.

Hex Salsbury is a first-year judge for the competition, but a long-time tractor restorer and supporter. Salsbury says that reason he values the competition is because the end of the day it isn't about how the tractor looks, it's about what the students learned. Those skills learned are something that the students will take with them forever.