

AEM Executive Insights



Rodney Miller, CEO McCormick USA, is a happy man. When we spoke with him, he was getting ready to spend the week living his passion - antique tractors. He and longtime

agribusiness broadcaster Max Armstrong led the procession of antique tractors driving through Central Illinois to Half Century of Progress, an antique tractor show sponsored by McCormick in Rantoul, IL, not too far from Rodney's hometown in the Benton, Illinois area. Better yet, Rodney was driving the last new tractor that his father ever purchased - a 1978 IH 1086. Rodney found the tractor two years ago - ironically on the day of his dad's death - and had it completely refurbished. It is his prize among his collection of about 30 antique tractors and pays tribute to his father, on whom he recently published an article entitled "My Dad: A Tribute to his Life and his Tractor."

Q Obviously your dad had a huge impact on your life. What made you decide not to follow in his footsteps as a farmer, but instead get into the equipment side of things?

A It's because it is really tough to make a living farming, unless you inherit a farm, which I did not! Dad always struggled to make ends meet, yet he always did. I always wanted to have a job in agribusiness - even as a young child - but wanted to farm on the side, as that was my life's passion. I've been fortunate to be able to live that out. I got a degree in agribusiness from Rend Lake College

that I actually use! And I am still tied very closely to the farm.

Q Over the years you've worked for companies like Montana, Mahindra, Valtra and Long Agribusiness. What did you take away from your experiences there?

A I was very fortunate to work for some very smart people who taught me a lot. It's been a great ride. I'm hoping at this point in my career to give something back - to try and help other young people get started in the industry like the people in my life helped me. At McCormick, we're trying to hire young people straight out of schools like University of Georgia to help them get a good start.

Q What would you say is your leadership philosophy?

A Well, I coached High School and Junior High basketball for 15 years in Illinois - was actually voted District 21 coach of the year in 1984. What you learn through that is that you do what's best for the team - not always what's best for the individual. Sometimes those are decisions I don't enjoy making. But usually people make their own fate. If you are working for me and you don't do your job, then I will do mine of making the tough decisions for the company. Basically you use a lot of common sense and kindness.

Q What would you say are your greatest challenges at McCormick right now?

A The short term challenge is keeping retail sales strong. Over the next few years our challenge is increasing our dealer network. We currently have 280 dealers, and we

need 3 times that many. We've signed on about 50 dealers since January 1 in this tough year, with a focus on high hp tractors - the ag sectors - upper Midwest, row crop and heavy livestock.

Q You relocated into a new, expanded facility in Duluth this past spring, consolidating several operations. How did that go?

A On the parts side it went great. The assembly side has been a challenge, though. New systems and work flows had to be set up. But we're making great headway and should be running smoothly by the end of the year. We were able to

save about \$2 million annually through the consolidation of logistics and assembly operations. It's a great facility and improved working conditions for our employees.

Q You serve on the AEM Board of Directors as well as on its Ag Equipment Council Executive Committee. What do you gain from being involved with AEM?

A It's an honor to sit on the board and is a great learning experience. I hope to contribute and give something back to the industry. It also helps further McCormick's interest in supporting the industry as a whole. An example of that is AG CONNECT Expo. It's a necessary show. We really need an international show in America and right now, we don't have it. It's the first step in a long journey, but I think that each show will get bigger and better as we go along. I'm really looking forward to being at AG CONNECT -- and to being in Florida at that time of year!

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