

Neidholdt Pecans—Keytesville Chamber's March Business of the Month
By Janet Weaver

A ritual of fall that pecan tree owners in Keytesville look forward to is the arrival of Dennis Neidholdt on his tractor with the pecan tree shaker attachment. Mostly this takes place in the late fall every other year, but according to Dennis Neidholdt there are some years when the town trees will bear pecans two or more years running. Normally many of the town trees produce on odd numbered years, while others in town produce on even numbered years, so he is usually in town for the tree shaking every year.

When talking to Dennis about pecan trees and the nut bearing cycle, he remarked that he and other pecan tree growers in the area have been reading literature from a professor at one of the universities in Kansas that contends that with additional care and management, pecan trees will produce every year. Some of the extra care required involves grafting in some cases, proper pruning, spraying for worms, and fertilizing, etc. He and some of the other growers in the area have started utilizing this advice and have seen very promising results.

When Dennis was asked how long he had been in the pecan business, he replied he got into it seriously in 1980. Before that, he had helped his Dad with his own trees, but in the 80's he joined with his uncle, Melvin Neidholdt. Shortly after joining with his Uncle Melvin, he said he acquired his own first pecan picker. He laughed as he remembered when he initially saw a pecan picker working. He was so impressed that he wrote the phone number down that was on the machine's manufacturer's label and called it. To his surprise the company had a used picker for sale, and he said he was in the truck the first thing the next morning heading to Oklahoma to purchase it and bring it back home.

When Dennis was asked about what he enjoys most about the pecan business, he said he enjoys every aspect of it—from selling pecans retail and visiting with the customers to being out in the pecan orchards in the fall with family members who are working along with him to gather the pecans provided by the Lord for the taking. He says he even enjoys the pecan cleaning procedure as well since he often works alongside hired workers on that aspect of the project. Since the other regular crops such as corn and soybeans have already been harvested, the pecan harvest is just a perfect way to end the year.

The main drawback to pecan farming according to Dennis is the unpredictability of the harvest. An adage he believes to be true is "this year's pecans are determined by the preceding year's conditions". In addition, a late frost coming at the wrong time in the spring can also be detrimental to a potential crop or even cause crop failure. Due to the uncertainty of having a good crop on any given year, he believes that it is very important to have the funds available to purchase any pecan related machinery in advance rather than buying the machinery with the idea that the next pecan crop will help purchase it. That is too risky.

Dennis Neidholdt is married to Carol, and they have three children: Darin, Jason, and Heather. They are also the proud grandparents of seven grandchildren—4 girls and 3 boys. The Keytesville Chamber of Commerce congratulates Dennis Neidholdt of Neidholdt Pecans as the March Business of the Month!