

## Hall of Fame Nomination For:

Greg and Cheryl Thurman of Thurman Harvesting, Inc.

Greg Thurman is a third-generation harvester whose grandfather, Ray Thurman, was a member of the Harvest Brigade Movement starting in 1948. Ray Thurman Harvesting ran the largest combine operation, totaling 13 combines, in the Barber County, KS area. His son, Bob Thurman, started his own harvesting business in 1954 when he was just a junior in high school. Greg grew up on the harvest run and at the age of 9 he started to help his dad in the field. Greg assisted by moving pick-ups and trucks from field to field, and occasionally he would get to ride in the combine and steer. One summer, Bob was short-handed on help, so Greg accompanied him down to Seymour, TX. Greg's first job in the field was running a 510 Massey Combine with a 20-foot header and at the age of 11 Greg's life-long career of a harvester began.

When Greg was 16 years old, he made a deal with his dad. Bob promised, if Greg could find the money for a combine, then Bob would call his old customers for jobs. After scrapping together just enough for a 510 Massey Ferguson with a 20-foot header, Randy Blunk, Gary Green and Greg Thurman loaded up and headed north. That 1978 voyage marked the birth of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of Thurman Harvesting. During the early years of Thurman Harvesting, Greg would travel from Kiowa, KS, to Dighton, KS, and finally Gordon, NE, before heading back home to Kiowa for football practice. After graduating high school in 1980, Greg continued further north to Aberdeen, SD and North Dakota.

On May 3, 1986, Greg Thurman married Cheryl Daniels in Cherokee, OK. Cheryl was the daughter of a farmer and had spent many days and nights on a tractor. She was no stranger to the farming industry, but harvesting was a whole new ballgame. However, Cheryl did not skip a beat and picked the harvesting lifestyle up quickly (well after her leg healed). Cheryl's first official harvest in 1986 was mostly spent with a broken leg she acquired after a car accident on her and Greg's wedding night. The pair spent their honeymoon recuperating, but hardly slowed down as not too soon after it was time to head on the harvest run.

In 1986, Greg made the switch from Massey Ferguson combines to John Deere, an 8820 combine with a 30-foot header to be specific. But Greg wasn't the only one making Thurman Harvesting run. Cheryl cooked two meals a day, each day, serving 6 crew members, and eventually 15, as the operation expanded. And while the crew would eat their meals Cheryl would run a combine, because you *never* stop the combines. Cheryl was not only the head cook (and dishwasher), but she could run every piece of equipment in the field and complete all paperwork associated with making the business profitable.

In 1993, Greg and Cheryl welcomed their daughter, Ali Thurman, who aptly made her arrival just in time to interfere with the USCHI convention. On December 3, 1993, Greg and Cheryl were set to travel to Hutchinson, KS, for the USCHI convention when Cheryl went into labor. Greg drove her frantically to Wichita, KS, anticipating the arrival of their little girl. Except that little girl made them wait (this would become a recurring theme for Greg). Eventually, Greg

grew impatient (another recurring theme) and he asked Cheryl if he could "just run over to Hutchinson to the convention for a bit since the baby wasn't coming yet". That was answered with a resounding no, and their little girl was born on December 4 in the late afternoon.

During the 2000s, Greg and Cheryl grew Thurman Harvesting to 6 John Deere S670's with 40-foot headers. To accommodate the demanding harvesting schedule, Greg began hiring employees from different countries in 1999. Thurman Harvesting employed workers from Denmark and Sweden then eventually 10 other countries worldwide. Although few arrived with farming backgrounds, Greg aided each employee in developing their skills in the harvesting profession. He not only demonstrated but taught everyone who he employed about hard work and the importance of meticulous upkeep of equipment. No combine was out of line in a Thurman field. Greg always takes pride in his work and his business is a reflection of that.

Harvesting has always been a Thurman family affair. Ali's first harvest run was at five months old and her last official run was when she was 20 years old. From pre-school until fifth grade, Ali would start her school year in Faulkton, SD, where she would attend until fall harvest was over. Then, she would switch back to her hometown school of South Barber. From a young age Ali helped her mom out in the kitchen preparing meals for the crew and eventually got recruited to the field. Ali feels it's her dad's incredible work ethic and dedication to his career that has encouraged her to pursue her own goals.

Cheryl has always been by Greg's side. When he needed extra help in the field, Cheryl was his right-hand woman. When parts were needed for a broken piece of equipment, Cheryl would find time between cooking meals, doing paperwork, and being a mother to run the errand. Cheryl made countless trips from Kiowa, KS to South Dakota and back to be with Ali while she was in school and continue to assist Greg with fall harvest. Her commitment to Greg, to her family, and to Thurman Harvesting runs deep, and is what helped make Thurman Harvesting what it is today.

Greg and Cheryl joined the United States Custom Harvesters Inc. (USCHI) in 1986. Greg served on the USCHI board as President in 2006-2007 and 2016-2017, Vice President in 2005-2006 and 2015-2016, was a board member from 2001-2005, and was advisor to the board in 2017-2018. Greg fondly remembers his time going to Washington D.C. as a board member. He enjoyed the opportunity to speak up and fight for the organization he loved and for his livelihood (plus, we know he loves to argue). Both Greg and Cheryl have been active participants, assisting with trade show booths and convention registration, with USCHI since they joined and continue to be active members to this day. Greg is an Eagle Scout, an honor acquired in his younger years. In 1981, Greg joined the Masonic Lodge and later became a Shriner. Greg was eventually honored as a Jester and Cheryl as an Eastern Star.

Greg and Cheryl are always there when a friend needs help and are willing to go the extra mile to help anyone. Greg is always willing to help out a fellow harvester whether that be by cutting crops they are unable to get to, help them find jobs to harvest, lending a piece of equipment or even offering one of his employees. Their loyalty to each other and to those around them demonstrates what wonderful representatives of USCHI they would be.

Presently, Greg has downsized the business to 3 John Deere S670s with 40-foot headers. He also has farmland, although he still enjoys harvesting more than farming, and has a "few" cows as a "hobby". In their free time, Greg and Cheryl enjoy traveling, riding motorcycles, snowmobiling, boating and spending time with their daughter, who resides in Oklahoma. The Thurman's love when they are able to do these activities with the many close friends they have made on harvest. It would serve us all well to live by Greg's mantra, "Work hard all summer, play hard all winter!"

Harvesting runs in Greg's blood. In 2018, Greg celebrated his 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a custom harvester and Cheryl celebrated her 32<sup>nd</sup> year. From a 510 Massey Ferguson with a 20-foot header to John Deere S670s with 40-foot headers, Thurman Harvesting stands as a symbol of what harvesting is and should be. As their daughter, I have seen them embrace this profession with passion and commitment. Greg Thurman's lifelong work as a harvester has not been easy, but with the help of Cheryl they have created a legacy that stretches beyond a job. Greg has dedicated his life to this industry, since the day he drove that old Massey Ferguson, and no one is more deserving of this honor.