

Featured Members: *The Sosler Family*

Henry George (Harry) Ferguson was the son of an Irish farmer who went to work with his brother Joe in his bicycle and car repair business. While working there as a mechanic, he developed an interest in aviation and farm equipment, and went on to develop the modern agricultural tractor. (Wikipedia)

The story of Raymond Sosler begins in a very similar way. He was born in 1925, the son of William and Elizabeth Sosler, European immigrants who settled in Orange County, New York and dairy farmed all their lives. The family moved from farm to farm over the years, but remained true to the farming spirit.

They were a traditional farm family with five boys and three girls who all worked together, with individual responsibilities and chores on the farm. As a young boy, Raymond recalls often eating his mother's homemade jam from a large pot on the farmhouse stove. Young Sosler also enjoyed climbing one of the cherry trees in his backyard and eating as many cherries as he could. Regardless of weather, he faithfully milked cows twice every day with his father and brothers.



Three generations of tractor fans pose in this 2006 photo: (l. to r.) are Ray III, Ray, Sr. and Ray, Jr. All three have been intimately involved in the operations of Sosler's Garden & Farm Equipment.

Raymond's first business experience was trapping small game, and selling the pelts to earn extra money. Every day before school, he would go out and check all his traps. Once, upon opening a trap, he was greeted by the spray of a skunk. Understandably, all his brothers and sisters avoided him for a couple of days. Nevertheless, Raymond was out the next morning, checking his traps again. He said, "I learned early on that to be successful in business, you can't be afraid to get a little dirty (or in this case, a little smelly)." It was this kind of work ethic and determination that helped him become a successful businessman.

In the spring of 1943 Raymond was on a IH Farmall 10-20 tractor pulling a manure spreader, something he had done many times before. The field across from his father's farm had a steep slope and the morning dew was still on the ground, making the terrain very slippery. Sosler was making his usual passes when he turned the wheel and encountered a situation that would change his life forever. One of the steering control cables on the tractor stuck, causing the tractor to tip over, and break the rear wheel off the axle. Raymond went tumbling down the hill with the several hundred pounds of tractor tire rolling down towards him. He landed in a drainage ditch at the bottom of the hill, which offered him some protection from the rolling tire. The wheel fell on top of him, crushing the lower part of his left leg and foot.

After being taken to a local hospital, the doctors were unable to save his foot. Raymond underwent surgery, and spent 16 weeks in recovery. The doctors fitted him with a prosthetic, device but told him he might never walk again. Sosler, at the age of 17, was now faced with a life-changing situation but was determined to persevere through it. He spent almost an entire year recovering from the injury and learning to use his new prosthetic foot. During the rehab process, he got an apartment in New York City and a job working as a pressman's helper for a printing company in Brooklyn. Despite his misfortune, young Raymond made the best of his situation. Every weekend he would come home to help out on the family farm.

When Sosler was finally well enough to come home permanently, he went to work on the family farm full-time. It wasn't long before he realized that he couldn't perform all his usual duties because of his injury. His father, William, took him to apply for a driving job with a local trucking company. Despite his age and lack of experience, Raymond was hired and became a union truck driver. He spent five years driving a tractor-trailer, hauling milk to New York City and syrup and molasses to upstate New York. Sosler recalls using a candle to defrost the truck window on one of his winter trips to upstate New York. After several years behind the wheel, Raymond decided to go into the auto and truck repair business with his brother, William (Bill) Sosler.

In 1952, Raymond and his brother William purchased the Petak Garage on Route 17M in New Hampton, NY. This same building is still being used by the Soslers. The business was known as Sosler Brothers Garage. The purchase included a four-bay garage, an upstairs apartment, three highway plow trucks (with thirty miles of local plowing contracts), and two new tractors for sale: a Massey-Harris 22 and Massey-Harris 30. The Sosler brothers became a Massey-Harris-Ferguson sales and service dealership. There was another dealer in a nearby town handling the Ferguson franchise at that time. Raymond remembers placing his initial \$400 parts stocking order when he became a dealer, and jokes that "some of the parts from that order are still on the shelves today."



The purchase of Ferguson by Massey-Harris in 1953 brought the two brands together, and opened the door for the Sosler brothers to handle one of the world's best farm equipment brands. The first tractors Raymond recalls selling were a M-H 50 and a Ferguson TO-35. He also remembers selling a 1956 Ferguson 35 (with 0 original hours) that became very famous years later and was featured in Issue 5 of *Ferguson Furrows* in April of 2002. Raymond had delivered the new tractor to the customer's farm and was instructed by the wife to park it in the back of the barn. Her husband had fallen ill and was in the hospital at the time. He later died and the tractor sat untouched in the barn for over thirty years, with a thick layer of dust on the hood, and the same tank of gas Raymond had

filled it with before delivering it. This tractor has since been re-sold a few times, and was most recently listed for more than \$20,000. This bit of history is marked by Raymond's dealership decals which were still on the tractor when it was removed from the barn. Today the tractor is on permanent display in the showroom of Wengers of Myerstown in Pennsylvania.

In 1952 Raymond married his wife, Josephine. This year they are celebrating their 55th wedding anniversary in conjunction with the 55th anniversary of the business. The apartment above the garage was an ideal place for them to live, as well



Grandson & grandfather at the Ft. McCoy, Florida, home of Ray, Sr. The three Sosler men had their first direct contact with FENA at the FENA North-East Regional Show held at Sharon Springs, NY in June of 2006.

as a good way to be close to the business. Raymond and Josephine expanded their operation by signing up with Texaco to become a licensed motor-vehicle shop and gas station. The Sosler brothers employed several local area farmers during the off season to drive their radio-dispatched highway plow trucks in the Denton area. These relationships opened the door for sales of tractors and implements to the local farming community. The largest agricultural area in Orange County was in nearby Pine Island, NY, commonly referred to as "the black dirt region." The Soslers went on to do business with dairy, horse and orchard farmers, as well as produce growers in Orange, Sussex, Ulster and Sullivan Counties.

Brother William left the business in 1958 to pursue a career in automotive repair and service. Raymond's passion was in farm equipment so he purchased his brother's share of the business and became sole proprietor. The business then became known as Sosler's Garage. In 1960, Raymond's wife, Josephine, started working with him full-time and served as office manager as well as a friendly face behind the parts counter. Many customers still remember her waiting on them in the parts department.

Raymond and Josephine ran the business side-by-side for many years. Despite his physical limitations, Sosler performed all aspects of the business. It was not uncommon to see him walking around on his crutches while working in the shop or waiting on parts customers. Reflecting on his life, Raymond said, "I credit Josephine for my success in business because she was there to support me every step of the way as a loving wife, wonderful mother and dependable business partner." The culmination of their success together was a MF dealer trip

to Mexico City in 1965. The trip was to kick-off the introduction of the "Rugged New Breed" of Massey Ferguson tractors, and was part of the MF "Going Places" theme.

In 1965, Massey Ferguson lawn and garden equipment, along with snowmobiles, were added to compliment the farm equipment line. Sosler's success in selling the MF snowmobiles was rewarded with a 1975 dealer trip to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which both Raymond and Josephine attended. The trip showcased the new line of snowmobiles.



In 1974 the business was incorporated as Sosler's Garden & Farm Equipment, Inc. Raymond's oldest son, Ray Sosler, Jr., graduated SUNY Cobleskill and joined the family business in the sales and service department in 1975. Ray, Jr. had grown up around the business and was always involved in all aspects. 1978 saw the addition of the complete line of Snapper lawn and garden equipment to the business. Snapper had purchased the MF lawn and garden equipment division.

A 1960s MF Executive model lawn tractor, shown here with its new owner, a Mr. Parker. Rhonda Sosler and Ray Sosler, Jr. are pictured in background at the dealership in New Hampton, NY.

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The Soslers restored this 1952 TO-30 in preparation for the 2002 anniversary celebration of their 50th year in business.

In 1989, Ray, Jr. purchased the business from his father and continued to expand the operation. Raymond, Sr. continued to help out around the dealership until officially retiring to Fort McCoy, Florida in 1997. To continue the long family tradition, Ray Jr.'s son, Ray Sosler, III, joined the family business in the sales and parts department following graduation from Binghamton University. The Soslers are now a three-generation business with one "Ray" after another becoming part of the winning tradition.

In this day and age when children often have no desire to follow in the footsteps of parents in

a family farm or business, it is refreshing to see the kind of example the Sosler family is setting. They would tell you that the long success of their business has resulted from a combination of factors, including full family involvement, pride in doing well, tradition, and constant attention to quality, whether in products offered, service, parts, or customer relations. They continue to follow the same philosophy today as they did back in 1952.

You can view their website at www.soslers.com.