

Ray Johnson, A Jack Of Trades

By Terri Johnson

Versatility is one word that describes J.R. (Ray) Johnson, 67, of Rupert.

"Jack of all trades, but slave to none," Johnson quipped. "Master of none" doesn't fit. You do master some of them. But you never get tied down to just one thing."

And "tied down" this mild-mannered western gentleman is not. Up at dawn and late to bed—there never seems to be enough hours in a day to do all he would like.

"You take more time gettin' up and more time movin' when you get old. And you do get old," Johnson said. "I'd love to be 30 again, to be able to do the things you can when you're 30."

At 30, Johnson was doing work he was born to—farming. He and his wife LaReta had been on their present farm at 220N 250W, Rupert, for 6 years. The farm was producing well for them. Their family of four children two sons and two daughters had begun.

"You begin to mature at 30," Johnson declared. "Things that were important don't matter so much. Your values change."

One value acquired early in his life has never changed. That is hard work.

"We always worked hard," stated Johnson in reference to his early years. He was born Oct. 20, 1913, the third son in 12 children born to George and Bertha Johnson of Fountain Green, Utah. His father was a sheep man. In March 1914, Johnson's family moved to Ruby Valley, Nevada, to homestead 160 acres. They were to plant sugar beets processed in a sugar factory there. Lack of adequate irrigation water and the need for a doctor for his mother pushed the family on to Idaho. Johnson has remained here since 1919. While in Nevada, as a 6-year-old boy, he worked as a cattle drover for Ed Goodwin. World War I was raging and no help could be found to herd cows. This was the beginning of a life of work in the agricultural field.

After reaching Rupert, Johnson attended first grade at the Lincoln School. He subsequently attended Pershing School and Rupert High School (now Washington Elementary) where he graduated in 1931. His graduating class celebrates its 50-year reunion this year. Johnson is in charge of the program for the reunion.

There was always plenty of work to do while he was growing up. Helping at home with his father and brothers, cutting potatoes, and working horses are just a few of the jobs.

"I never wanted many possessions, just necessities," Johnson said, "I never found anything to hard. We used the resources and initiative we had. You only expected out of life what you could do for yourself. I get alot of pleasure from just accomplishing something. It doesn't matter who knows about it or what I get from it."

And accomplish he does. Even though he is semi-retired from farming (his youngest son Alton does most of the farming now) and retired from sugar factory campaign work after 34 years, his hobbies keep him busy and happy. Johnson and his son have 14 horses which they drive or ride almost daily. The newest ones, a pair of black percheons, are training to pull in nulling contests. The Johnsons have done almost all of the farm work this year with those horses. Ray likes working with his hands using leather, wood, and metal. He has restored or made all of the leather tack he uses with his horses, i.e. bridles neck collars and harnesses. Blacksmith is a love of his, too. He works metal into spurs, bits, rings and workings on wagons, yokes and tongues. He has restored two antique wagons on wagons, doctor's buggy and made four other wagons from acquired parts. His newest interest is working wood on a lathe to form neck yokes for the horses and single trees for his wagons. This spring he made 32 single trees, 15 heavy neck yokes and five buggy neck yokes, most from locust wood no one wanted.

When asked of the cost of his hobbies, Johnson had this to say. "If you have a hobby and follow through, it costs you some money. People have asked me why I do all this, what do I gain. Well, the gain is not monetary. The gain is in personal satisfaction."

Buying is often a secondary means of acquisition for Johnson's hobby supplies, however. He uses a barter system. He trades something or a skill of his and his time for something he wants.

Johnson's interest in horses involved him in the community as well. He was a charter member of the Minidoka County Rosse from 1946 to 1958 when

the posse disbanded. During this time the posse acquired the present Minidoka County Fairgrounds, later sold to the county, where Johnson helped with rodeos. He and his son Alton presently serve with the Fair and Rodeo committee helping with the Horse Pulling event during the Fourth of July celebration. He has also donated many hours of wagon rides for Cub Scouts and church groups.

Another of Johnson's interest is people. He has many friends. Almost any day a person can drive past his home and find his friends congregated in his shop talking and sharing work.

His grandchildren light up when someone speaks of "grandpa." He has a special way with children and great patience. As a life long member of the LDS church, he worked with young people in MIA and Sunday School. His family is important to him.

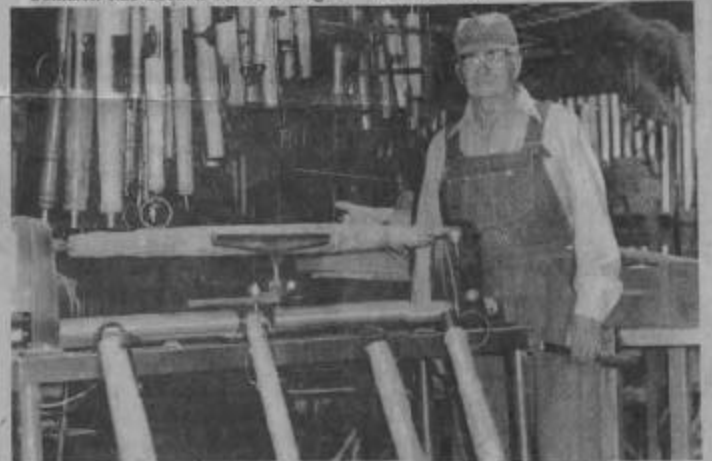
Johnson has seen a lot of changes

over the years.

"People have changed in character and attitudes. We don't help each other as much any more, especially the farmer. We've become a self-centered people. Honestly, courtest, love—all those things have deteriorated in my estimation. Young people ought to keep their families closer. I advocate the family farm run by the family."

To take something cast off by others or spoiled and turn it into something useful, whether it be metal, wood, leather, a horse, or someone's life is "the whole program" for J.R. Johnson. He has lived a full life with meaningful work and people. "I wouldn't change a day of my life, except to get a better education," he said.

He may go slower as he gets older, but "As long as I can move, I'll keep doing what makes me happy," he said with a smile.



Ray Johnson, a man who makes what he needs.