

Join us for two March bus trips

You don't have to be a farmer to enjoy two bus trips coming up in March, beginning with our March 16 journey to the biennial "Gathering of the Green" conference in Davenport Iowa. Hundreds of John Deere tractor enthusiasts from across the United States, Canada and around the world will travel to the Quad Cities March 14-17, for the seventh "Gathering" to be held in the River Center, Davenport, Iowa. Back by popular demand, the conference will offer admirers of John Deere antique two-cylinder and New Generation tractors and implements an opportunity to enjoy workshops and to shop the vendor area. Members of the four sponsoring John Deere antique tractor clubs located in central and northern Illinois and eastern Iowa have worked for many months to put together another outstanding conference for John Deere enthusiasts from across the nation and around the world. Sixty workshops and drop-in sessions will be presented Thursday through Saturday, and 70+ vendors will be offering services; new, used, and reproduction parts; manuals; books; tires; signs; JD decals; art; clothing; and memorabilia. Cost for our trip on the 16th is \$35, which includes transportation, show admission and refreshments on the bus. Find out more at www.gatheringofthegreen.com.

Our March 21 excursion is a great trip featuring three fascinating stops, beginning with the John Deere Harvester Works in East Moline Ill. This comfortable 1-1/2 hour riding tour of the world's largest combine manufacturing operations will showcase amazing technology and innovation, and I've learned something new in each of the more than 10 times I've toured the plant. We'll then visit the newly-renovated John Deere Pavilion in Moline, where the company's history and accomplishments are displayed in great detail.

Following an extended lunch stop at the Coral Ridge Mall in Iowa City, we'll travel a bit further west for a tour of Kinze Manufacturing in Williamsburg Iowa, where those massive blue grain carts and state-of-the-art planters are produced. Equipment pioneer Jon Kinzenbaw started out as a 21-year-old with \$25 in his pocket and a small bank loan when he started his on-farm welding shop in 1965, eventually creating various pieces of farm equipment that caught on rapidly. Today, Kinze is a global equipment presence with over 650 employees and operations covering 25 acres – it is truly one of America's great success stories. This is a walking tour covering about 1 mile inside the plant, but a cart may be available for mobility-impaired people. Cost for this trip is \$30, which covers transportation, tours and refreshments on the bus – lunch is on your own. Call (815) 232-3186 today to sign up for these outings!

Computer classes filling

Our February 7 Internet Basics & E-mail class is full, but there is still some room for our February 13 session, as well as for our two Basic Word & Excel classes on February 8 and February 16. The Internet classes run from 6:30-9:30 p.m., with the Word/Excel sessions running from 7-9:30 p.m. There is a nominal fee to participate and space is limited, so call (815) 232-3186 today if you'd like to join us.

Mark your calendar

There are several important programs offered at the Farm Bureau in the coming months, beginning with Stroke Detection Plus on February 20 and 23 – call (877) 732-8258 to schedule an appointment for these life-saving screenings. Saturday March 10 is our Basic Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) class from 9-12:30 with Sandy Sciutto and Louise Lameyer, and April 17-18 brings another session of our popular Defensive Driving class taught by veteran instructor Doug Sommer. Call the Farm Bureau office at (815) 232-3186 for more information, and visit www.stephensoncfb.org for details on everything happening in the Farm Bureau organization!

It keeps getting better

January 19 marked the start of my ninth year as Stephenson County Farm Bureau manager, and each day brings new enthusiasm and opportunity. I'm thrilled to be involved in a career that links me to production agriculture, education, community development, government and local affairs activities, and a never ending variety of other opportunities. Our new membership secretary/bookkeeper Marlie Folk is working out fabulously as we establish our new team collaboration, and our outstanding board of directors will be meeting next week in a strategic planning retreat to look at where we are, where we've been, and where we're potentially heading in the future. I feel good about our organization and what we offer to those in the agriculture community and to the general public as well. Be sure to let us know how we can better serve your needs as we move into the future.

Bruce Johnson is the manager of the Stephenson County Farm Bureau