

The first 75 years

Don't sell it if you can't service it, stock parts for it if you've sold it, don't be afraid to try new things, and be honorable in all things. R.N. Johnson made these pledges when he went into business in 1929. The venture, which he started out of his barn in Walpole, NH, is now one of the oldest John Deere dealerships worldwide. The company has grown and prospered over the years but still adheres to those founding principles, and to Johnson's 75-year-old vision.

Ralph Nathan "Jack" Johnson was born on the family farm on the side of New Hampshire's Mt. Sunapee in 1901. The oldest of six children, Jack was, from any early age, instilled with his mother's love of the outdoors and his father's love of agriculture. Both proved to be lifelong pursuits.

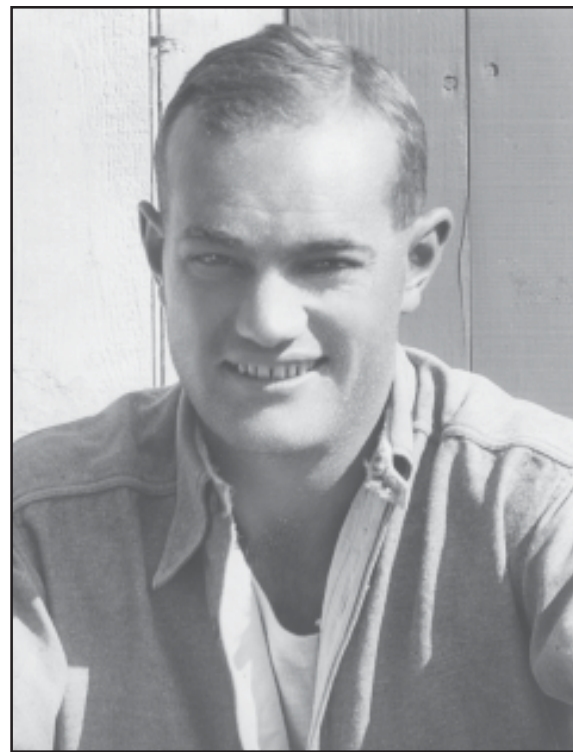
After graduating from Newport's one-room schoolhouse at the age of 16 Jack attended the school that would later become the University of

scarce. The area was in desperate need of a sales and service venue for their new farm machinery.

In 1929 Jack became a dealer for Thompson & Hogue the distributor for John Deere in Concord, NH. His decision was motivated primarily by his own farm's need for equipment parts and service; at the time the majority of rural dealerships were farm-dealerships. Jack sold to neighboring farms on the side and maintained his farm and dealership side by side for his first 10 years in business. Jack was often fond of telling people he had sold his first 100 tractors before he ever needed a mechanic in those first years in business on the hill—a testament to the reliability of the John Deere brand that he was so loyal to over the years.

Both of Jack's ventures flourished. His potato farm was soon the largest in the state

and his dealership had grown out of its remote hilltop location, needing a place of its own. Jack moved the dealership off the farm and downtown into an old delivery stable; this move was little



At the age of 28 Jack purchased his farm on Barnett Hill in Walpole and began growing potatoes. He started selling tractors that same year in 1929.

years old.

The new location allowed for a much larger inventory, and a wider array of products that could be sold. Over the years R.N. Johnson's reputation as the place to go for anything you might need has grown and the saying "if they don't have it you don't really need it" has become representative of the company's dedication to anticipating and responding to the customers needs.

One of the most impressive things about the operation is their dedication to carrying parts for every model sold whenever possible—most parts can be ordered and shipped next day but that was simply not good enough for Jack who believed that having 1,000 parts



Jack decided to start growing potatoes on his new farm; he soon found himself with the largest potato farm in the state. Shown here with his 1929 John Deere GP Wide Tread discing one of his potato fields.

New Hampshire, receiving a degree in agriculture in 1921. At the university Jack met Oliver Hubbard of Walpole, who became a lifelong friend the pair worked their way through school together at the college's dairy barn earning 20 cents an hour. After graduation Hubbard returned to Walpole to develop what would become his family's lucrative poultry farm and encouraged Jack to relocate to the small Connecticut River Valley town.

Hubbard showed Jack a foreclosed dairy farm nestled far from town on Barnett Hill and co-signed the loan, which allowed Jack to buy the farm for \$1,400. At the age of 28, Jack then found himself with less than \$10 to his name, already owing money. But, he figured that as long as he owned his Nash outright and was willing and to go out on a limb he could make a go of it, he was never one to be scared of hard work or a challenge.

Jack moved into the ramshackle farmhouse on Barnett Hill in the dead of winter with his young wife and baby daughter determined to make a go of it. On a dairy farm with no cows and no capital Jack made the decision to grow potatoes out of necessity. That year he put in 23 acres and harvested his first bumper crop.

In that first year Jack faced the same problem as many farmers. Horses were too slow to accomplish all that the growing competitive economy demanded but tractors were

more than a quick fix as the business outgrew its new location almost immediately and Jack began to look elsewhere for a location that could offer his business room to grow.

In 1940 Jack bought a large unused farm a mile north of town. R.N. Johnson, Inc. was moved into the converted sheep barn (now on Main Street) where it currently resides more than 60 years later. For the next ten years Jack maintained both his business and his farm simultaneously until both had grown to a size that required his full time attention. A decision had

to be made. Jack sold his potato farm and ran his dealership full time for the rest of his life. Staying in the office fulltime until he was more than 90



In 1940 Jack bought a large farm North of town and moved R.N. Johnson's into its current home--a converted sheep barn. For the next ten years he was able to maintain both his business and successful farm simultaneously.

was not effective unless you have the one part the customer needs at the moment they need it.

While a growing staff and wide array of inventory allowed for the company's superior customer service capabilities, which adhere to an old-fashioned personal approach to business. It was Jack's abilities to understand what the local farmers needed and to anticipate industry trends allowed him to make bold decisions.

In 1940 Jack famously ordered a number of JD Lindeman crawlers sight-unseen from an ad, because he instinctively knew that they would work for the farmers in his area. John Deere was skeptical and Jack didn't appreciate waiting



The exterior as it appeared in 1940.



Jack poses at the 50th Anniversary. Behind him is the JD 4240 ordered for Ken Bishop, Springfield, VT.

so he called Lindeman directly to place his order. The first shipment was sold and a second one ordered before the first truckload ever arrived at the dealership.

Lindeman was so impressed with Jack's attitude that they set him up as their parts distributor for all of the company's territory east of the Mississippi. From that day forward R.N. Johnson's has continued wholesaling a variety of products to other dealers in addition to steadily maintaining the company's retail business.

Prompted by the release of John Deere's first lawn and garden tractor in 1963, Jack opened the small machines division of the company, initially run by his son Jim, which dealt exclusively in smaller tractors for personal use. He later opened a branch in Claremont, NH to better serve customers traveling from a distance.

Maintaining the same location and quality service has over the years gained the company a loyal customer following. Many people travel great distances in order to do business with the company just to come to a place where they are known by name and treated with respect.

Jack lived to be 93 years old—involved in every aspect of the company for as long as possible—if his health hadn't interfered he would have spent everyday at the office until the end. As Jack's growing health problems made his close supervision of his company impossible Jack gradually passed more and more control of the company on to his grandson Alan. Alan had worked for his grandfather throughout high school and college and returned

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Alan became full-fledged president of the company in October 1994 when Jack passed away after a long period of illness.

Now occupying the same glassed-in office, which his grandfather used for so many years, Alan continues to uphold the traditions of the family business changing with the times but maintaining the same high standards in product, service, and care that Jack insisted on.

The Claremont division was closed in recent years as was small machines last fall, in order to place all operations

more conveniently underneath one roof. R.N. Johnson's Inc. now has 43 full and part time employees in their parts, sales, services and office staffs. Many of these employees like their customers have long histories with the company and take great pride in the work that is done here.

In addition to maintaining the qualities of a superior parts, sales and service departments for agricultural equipment the company has expanded to include industrial grade machinery, lawn and garden implements as well as a large inventory of merchandise and collectibles. The facilities may be relatively small, but, R.N. Johnson's prides itself on having virtually anything that their customer's might need before they need it. Customers from as far as 70 miles away are routinely serviced and its not uncommon to find the company shipping parts all other North America—many to other dealerships who don't have the inventory to repair the older tractor models which John Deere no longer makes but that R.N. Johnson's has on reserve.

The simple business principles of honest deals and good service which have been in place for 75 years will continue to lead R.N. Johnson's into the future as the company looks towards developments in the industry and continues to foresee the customer's needs.

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