

# Farm Equipment Supplier Celebrates 100 Years

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — New markets and new products have kept A.B.C. Groff, Inc., growing despite the ups and downs of the industry.

Being in the retail farm equipment business for 100 years, this company has been through it all. The challenge it faced with surviving the down turn of the agricultural industry in the 1980s was no exception.

Although many dealers did not survive the 1980s, A.B.C. Groff not only survived, but thrived. "While many dealers have given up on the ag equipment business, we have not. In fact, we have actually expanded ours and have made an even stronger commitment to agriculture," said Robert Martin, A.B.C. Groff, Inc. president and general manager.

A large part of the stronger commitment was the recent addition of Ford and Versatile tractor lines. The company now handles two major tractor and equipment lines — John Deere and Ford New Holland.

A.B.C. Groff has also expanded into new markets with the addition of new products. Hardi sprayers; Nibex precision vegetable seeders; Kuhn hay, tillage and fertilizer equipment; Aer-Way aerators and chain harrows; and Hoelscher specialized hay handling equipment are just a few of the newcomers to the expanding product line.

The company also builds a specialized 2-row corn planter called the "Versa-Frame," which is designed primarily for the sweet corn grower.

Recent years have also found the company expanding into the construction equipment business. Increased sales of skid-steer loaders and tractor loader backhoes have been another boost to the company success.

While increasing sales of construction equipment, Groff is also pursuing business with the government. "We have put special emphasis on federal government sales," said Thomas Verghese, Groff's controller. "That includes commercial mowers, loaders, and backhoes," he added. Dealing with the government involves long lead times and strict equipment specifications. "It is a totally

different business," Verghese said. The company also has a thriving lawn and garden business, along with hardware and animal health care departments.

A.B.C. Groff, Inc., located at 110 S. Railroad Ave., was purchased in 1978 by Robert E. Martin, his father Earl F. Martin, and brother-in-law Jay Carpenter. Robert Martin, 39, is president and general manager; Jay Carpenter 38, is secretary; and Earl Martin, a long-time employee and major stockholder of the company, is now retired.

The company today employs about 30 full-time employees and 15 part-timers.

Robert Martin pointed out the employees are one of the major ingredients of the company success. "One of the challenges is to keep quality people around," he said. Key people in sales are Mike Shotzberger, Ford New Holland sales; Bill Beck, John Deere sales; Jay Carpenter, lawn and garden sales; and Dwight McFadden, government sales.

Sales, however, have not been the only area of concentration for the Groff organization. "We are constantly improving our parts and service departments," said Martin.

"We realize how important quality service and parts are to our customers and we take pride in providing it."

He pointed out that a large percentage of Groff's business comes from repeat customers. The number of technicians in the service area has doubled over the last few years. Technicians are schooled year-round by the Tech-Com Ford New Holland Service Training program and Pathfinder John Deere Service Training program. Key people in the service area are Gary Shotzberger, service manager and Walter Newcomer, assistant service manager.

The company operates two complete parts departments to supply parts for the many lines of equipment they carry. Russell McDowell is parts manager for the John Deere area and Nelson Horning manages the Ford New Holland area. The company today stocks more parts than ever before and it was noted that percentage of orders filled over the counter has



A special promotional 18-wheeler proudly displays the 100th anniversary of ABC Groff in New Holland, Pennsylvania's oldest farm equipment dealer in Pennsylvania.

been increasing. The parts departments are also connected to the latest computer parts search systems with both John Deere and Ford New Holland.

Robert Groff has recently come back to the John Deere parts, area benefiting it with his 21 years of experience.

Location is also a key ingredient in the success of A.B.C. Groff's business. "We are next to the New Holland sales barn, which attracts a lot of farmers from the Northeast. Being in New Holland also helps because it is the headquarters of Ford New Holland," Martin said.

Groff is one of the largest John Deere and Ford New Holland dealers in the Northeast. It also has one of the largest skid loader shops in southeastern Pennsylvania, according to Martin. "One question we are often asked is "What does A.B.C. stand for," in the company name," said Martin.

One hundred years ago Abraham Bare Groff started selling fertilizers and farm equipment to neighbors and friends. He used a barn as a warehouse for equipment. The original building was constructed in 1893 and a new building went up at the present location in 1903, with additions made in 1928 and 1950.

During the early years the busi-



Robert Martin, president of ABC Groff, right, holds a special Hardi Award in recognition of top sales volume for 1989. Jay Carpenter, company secretary, left, displays the Kuhn North America Top Ten Dealer Award for 1988.

ness was known as "A.B. Groff," after its founder. "In those days" said Robert Martin, "most of the selling was with a handshake."

Some of the products that the company handled in the early years included McCormick Deering, Dellinger, Caterpillar, New Idea, and Quaker feed seeds. The company contracted with New Holland Grassland Machinery in 1903 and the first contract with John Deere Tractors was signed in 1915, making A.B.C. Groff the oldest New Holland and John Deere dealer in the area.

Later, when Abraham's son Charles took over the business, the "C" was added, making the company name "A.B.C. Groff" as it is

today. Charles operated the business until 1963, when the company was incorporated and half of the stock was sold to its employees. In 1967, the employees purchased the remainder of the stock and then purchased additional real estate, according to Martin.

Now, entering what many consider to be the agricultural equipment industry's best year, and certainly a banner year for A.B.C. Groff, the company is celebrating its 100th year with a big gala. Friday, June 8 at 12 noon will be a ribbon-cutting, attended by local and state dignitaries. Festivities on June 8 and 9 will include, among other activities, parts and machinery specials and giveaways.

## Use The Nitrogen Soil Test

CARLISLE (Cumberland Co.) — The nitrogen soil test for corn is a test that was developed at Penn State to better manage corn nitrogen resources to save fertilizer dollars, and to reduce possible groundwater contamination by nitrates.

The Cumberland County extension office will be offering this test to any Cumberland County farmer who is interested. The cost will be \$2.00 per sample. Soil probes are available at the office. The best time to test is when

your corn is between 10 inches - 20 inches tall, or 1-2 weeks before sidedressing. The approximate dates are May 20-June 15, depending when your corn was planted.

Fields that should be tested include.

- Only corn fields.
- Fields with a history of manure application or legume production.
- Fields that have had less than 50 lbs. of chemical fertilizer at planting.

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ABC Groff representatives, left to right: Bill Beck, Jay Carpenter, Gary Shotzberger, Robert Martin, Tom Verghese, and Mike Shotzberger. The facility employs 30 full-time and 15 part-time employees and sells a wide range of farm and home equipment. Their inventory includes a variety of Ford New Holland and John Deere farm equipment.