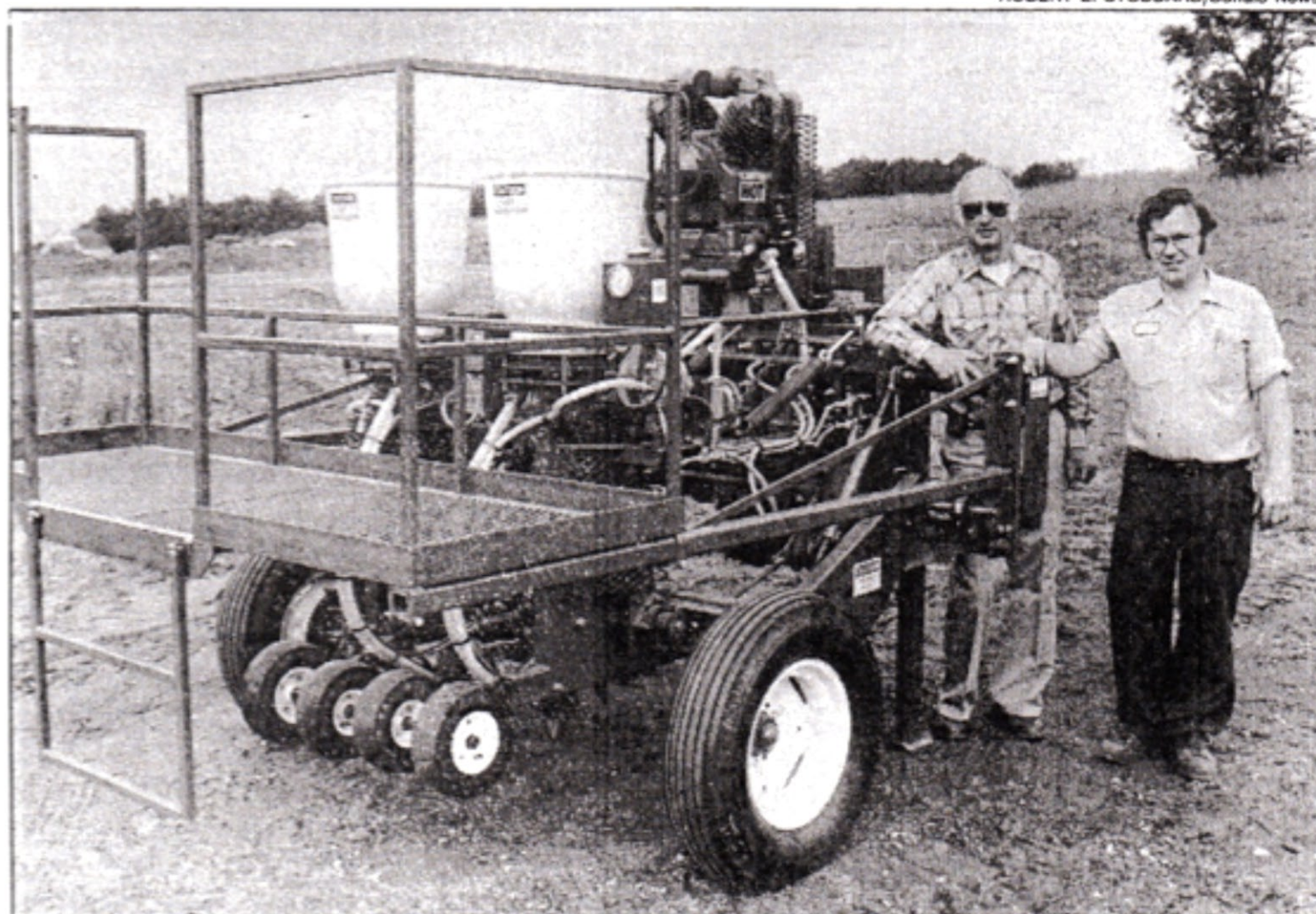


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James V. Renaldo, left, and Frank Faulring inspect one of the Brant firm's metered seed planter machines.

Seed planting machine sews up market

Brant firm reaps new business with innovative device

By BOB BUYER
News Staff Reporter

Jim Renaldo's company has been developing new farm products for almost 25 years, but his Brant machine firm has captured some national attention with its latest invention: a new seed planter that can do the work of 50 people.

The new seed planter developed by Renaldo Sales & Service caught the attention of *Agricultural Engineering*, a trade magazine that named the device as one of the 50 most innovative farm machines of 1988.

As the machine is towed by a tractor, it separates, meters and plants individual vegetable seeds, along with potting material, by burning holes through a plastic mulch cover.

"One of our planters can do the work of 50 people," Renaldo said. "We custom fabricate them for one-, two- or three-row planting."

Renaldo and engineer Frank Faulring displayed a two-row planter that cost \$27,000, and is scheduled for delivery to a Florida customer.

"In a couple of months, the Florida boys will begin planting their fall and winter crops," he said. "Imagine. This \$27,000 machine will plant millions of dollars worth of peppers, tomatoes and other vegetables." A three-row machine with a full line of optional attachments is priced around \$40,000.

"It took about three years to develop" the metered seed planter, said Ren-

aldo, who derived the machine from an idea he first had back in 1980.

Despite all its labor and seed saving properties, the metered seed planter is hardly economical for local vegetable growers, Renaldo said. "It's better used by growers with at least 100 acres. Some of our customers around West Palm Beach, Fla., have up to 2,200 acres to plant."

Several Brant area growers — the Meccas, Peros and Thomases — have large-scale Florida operations.

The company also has just completed a new operations and assembly building that's not visible from the firm's neat, well-kept brick office and showroom.

The new facility is far larger than the firm's original workshop, which Renaldo and his brother assembled and fitted themselves. "I think that the days of messy machine shops are gone," he said.

Renaldo, white-haired but trim at age 53, still scurries around around his office, showroom and workshops as he has done since 1964, when he and his brother expanded their father's propane service business by opening a farm machine repair service at 1770 Milestrip Road.

One thing led to another and soon, instead of merely repairing farm machinery, the company was designing, building and selling that equipment as well.

And now, what started out as a two-man business has grown into a firm

with 18 employees and nearly \$1.5 million in annual sales to "neighbors" from Florida to Texas and California, Renaldo said.

The original propane service business led to an early Renaldo product. When it became apparent that there had to be a better carrier to move large propane tanks, Renaldo designed one. Now he has customers all over the country for the \$4,695 Renaldo E-Z propane tank carrier.

Brant-North Collins is part of the Erie-Chautauqua grape belt, where grape growers rely on posts to support the wires that carry the vines so they can be bathed in sunlight. But several years ago, Renaldo engineered and built a machine that drives those posts into the ground. "They cost about \$600 and 'we've sold hundreds of them,'" Renaldo said.

The company is filled with plenty of family history too, since Renaldo's wife, Joan, and three sons, Jan, 29, Jeff, 25, and Jon, 23, and a nephew, Larry Szal, 29, work with him.

Renaldo bought his brother's share of the company in 1980. And one son, James, 27, wandered off to Buffalo where he runs a broadcast and industrial video production business.

"Our business took off about five years ago when I took off my shop overalls and started managing the business I started. I find good people who carry through some of the ideas I have. It works," he said.