

90 years of doing things side by side

Written by Chris Lee

They were born together, farmed together, nearly married together, drink coffee together, eat breakfast together and this past weekend they celebrated their 90th birthday together.

Nearly 200 friends and family gathered at Phillips County Event Center Saturday, Aug. 21 to help twins Elton and Milton Oltjenbruns celebrate their 90th birthday. "We had a good turnout," they said.

On what Elton jokes was a hot day, the pair was born to Harry and Amelia Oltjenbruns Aug. 23, 1920 on the family farm southwest of Holyoke. They were two of five children. They have an older sister Clara who is 92, Evelyn is 85 and their late sister Glendora passed away after a fight with cancer.

The duo grew up helping their parents farm. They also attended a one-room school where oddly enough there were two other sets of twins. Out of about 24 students, six of them were twins. The other two sets were boy-girl twins they recalled. "It was a fertile area down there," they joked.

Elton said they rode ponies and worked on the farm. Everyone had a few chickens, pigs and milk cows, they said. When they were 19, they moved near Amherst with their family to another farm.

The two didn't go to high school. As Elton put it, "We went to the school of hard knocks. We worked on the farm and helped the neighbors."

In 1942, Elton was drafted into the army where he spent three years in Europe with the 9th army infantry division. He was in the medical corps and drove an ambulance.

That was the first time, excluding a trip into Yuma County or Nebraska, that Elton had left Phillips County. "That was my first train ride and plane ride," he said.

As most twins do, Elton and Milton have spent most of their lives doing things together. Not only does Elton pick Milton up at 5 a.m. every morning to head down to the coffee shop, but they

90 years of doing things side by side

Written by Chris Lee

both married their wives in 1947. Elton married Eunice Krueger in March and Milton married Leona Schmidt three months later in June. They also have breakfast together a lot.

While Elton was gone to war, Milton kept the farm running. At that time the army wasn't taking twins. "We had to leave someone at home to do the farm work," Milton said. "We had a farm waiting for you when you came back," he said to Elton.

"It was quite a chapter in my life anyway," Elton said referring to his military experience. He was inducted at Ft. Logan in Denver and discharged at Ft. Leavenworth in Leavenworth, Kan.

The family had purchased another farm for Elton to run when he came back from the army. Milton took over the family farm. "We farmed together," Elton said. "We've done a lot of work throughout the years together." The farms were essentially across the road from each other which allowed them to farm "together."

Both brothers retired from the farming lifestyle in 1985 at the age of 65 and moved to Holyoke.

Elton has been involved with things such as the Co-op board of directors, school board and Amherst Fire Department.

Milton was very involved with Phillips County Museum and he and his wife recently donated a large amount of depression glass.

Elton still enjoys making duck decoys out of wood while his brother calls himself a collector of junk. They both like to travel with their wives. In fact, Elton and Eunice traveled to Europe and retraced his steps with the army. This was done with his infantry outfit. Milton and his wife have also traveled to Europe.

Elton has also been to many infantry reunions and has been to every one of the lower 48 states except North Dakota.

90 years of doing things side by side

Written by Chris Lee

Elton and Eunice have four daughters, Susan, Sally and twins Jeri and Teri. They have seven grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Milton and Leona have three children, Cheryl, Kenneth and Nolan. Kenneth took over the farm when Milton retired in 1985.

“We’ve had a good relationship all through our lifetime,” Elton said. “We had our little differences I guess.”

“Nothing serious that I recall,” Milton added.

They both agree that life has been good to them and they both say they are blessed to have their health.

“He’s got a little better memory than I do,” Milton said referring to his brother.