



# **Harley and Viola Summers Toolbox Scholarship**

**B**orn in North Dakota with humble beginnings, the hard work ethic of both Harley and Viola helped them survive many hard times and enabled them to become highly successful.

During the early 1930s, Harley worked with his father Abraham in a little blacksmith shop in Brinsmade, North Dakota. Harley began learning the blacksmith trade at age twelve, and in 1934, they moved their business to Maddock. He took over when Abraham left to establish a business elsewhere. Harley was well known in the area for his expertise in blacksmithing and repair. In fact, when he volunteered for the service during World War II, local farmers were successful in petitioning the government to have him deferred because they felt he was essential to their farming operations.

Viola was born near Maddock, attended school in Hamburg, and later moved to Devils Lake. Her father Alfred was a carpenter by trade. Harley and Viola were married in 1941, and from this marriage, four children were born—Carter, Larry, Karen, and Debra.

As time wore on, farming practices changed, and it was very difficult to support a family by blacksmithing. In its time, wagon wheel repair had been a big part of the business, along with sleigh work and shoeing horses. Plowshare- and sickle-sharpening were later included, but all of these had become obsolete. They had a one-fifth interest in a bowling alley/café built in Maddock in 1960, and this helped temporarily. Harley was expert on pin-setting machines, and Vi managed the café. However, this was not enough to raise a family... and then a big opportunity presented itself.

It would mean a big change in Harley and Vi's life, and big gambles would have to be taken. In fact, they would end up with not only a first, but a second mortgage on their home, and with four kids still at home!

A new type of harrow had been introduced by Ardon Herman of Brinsmade in 1964. Harley heard about the harrow and approached Mr. Herman about making components for him. An agreement was negotiated that benefited both parties, and demand grew. In 1969, Summers Manufacturing, Inc. was born and the manufacturing rights to the Herman Culti-Harrow were purchased. It has been built in Maddock ever since.

The struggle to become established was long and arduous. Working capital

was tight, even non-existent, and eighteen-hour days were not uncommon. There were no frills or vacations for many years. The first factory was built in Maddock in 1965. As the business grew, another factory was built, and an additional factory was built in Devils Lake.

Besides a busy work schedule, Harley was active in many civic organizations. He served on the Maddock City Council for eight years and was a member of the Maddock Commercial Club, Maddock Golf Club, and a sustaining member of the Boy Scouts of America. He served on the advisory committee for the Lake Region State College Welding program for four years and was a member of the \$1,000 4-H Club and a director of the North Dakota Foundation of 4-H. In 1983, Harley was chosen North Dakota's Small Businessman of the Year by the Small Business Administration.

Sadly, Harley and Viola were involved in a tragic automobile accident shortly before Christmas of 2000. Harley died soon after, and Viola passed away in March. They left behind Summers Manufacturing, their legacy, the accomplishment of a man who never moved beyond eighth grade in school and the faithful woman who was always by his side, for better or for worse.

Summers Manufacturing went on to have about 100,000 square feet of factory space and more than 100 employees. These two people who took a gamble on the future have been of immense benefit to those who were employed and to surrounding communities. ■