

## RECYCLED GOOD NEWS

*Some of you may already be familiar with Buford. For those who have never discovered the valuable insight he provides, let me give a brief bio. Buford Douglas is an equipment mechanic out at The Homestead, the farm of Clint and Cindy Lincoln. Clint, Cindy, their children, and Buford, are all members of St. John Lutheran Church in Cedar Crossing. The folks around Cedar Crossing and Oak County have long absorbed the wisdom of this remarkable man on an array of subjects. The following is an account of Buford's little-known foray into the world of art.*

*Pastor Arnold Schmidt*

Regular visitors to The Homestead are aware of the vast repository of knowledge that Buford the mechanic possesses. His willingness to dispense his storehouse of valuable tips and information is well documented. The tremendous personal satisfaction that Buford has derived from his

construction of the world's largest nativity scene made entirely of used oil filters has not previously been well-publicized.

As an equipment mechanic, he has always had an ample supply of oil filters on hand. The idea for their use in the fabrication of a nativity scene did not occur to him until the fall of 2002, when a bolt of lightning struck him while he welded a four-bottom plow out in the field. Fortunately, the bulk of the current passed through the welding circuit, so he suffered little physical injury. But he has had remarkable clarity in his thinking since that incident.

The day after the lightning strike, Buford looked at the almost full barrel of used oil filters sitting in the shop and, being a frugal person at heart, decided there must be a way to save the expense of paying someone to haul them away and turn it into a positive investment instead.

If asked how he came up with the idea for a nativity scene, he makes no claim of personal creative genius, for he is a humble man. He prefers to say, "The Lord works in mysterious ways."

The project started out with that full barrel of filters and slowly grew by one or two filters each day, depending on how much maintenance work he

did that day. Buford worked on the scene without fanfare until Christmas time came around. When he put colored lights on it, people took notice. As word spread through the channels of hardware store to barber shop, other townsfolk started bringing Buford all their filters. The mechanic used his week of vacation time from The Homestead to catch up on construction, adding a cow, six sheep, and two camels. He took the time to rework a few of the figures since he had accumulated so many more filters. He made the baby Jesus out of Baldwin fuel filters, Mary out of Napa oil filters, and Joseph out of Fram oil filters. Such changes helped to project a more consistent biological perspective.

No one really knows when the title of “World’s Largest Nativity Scene Made Entirely of Used Oil Filters” came into being. One of the most plausible theories lies at the feet of Mabel Franz, gossip extraordinaire and female malcontent, who made a derogatory comment about it in the beauty shop one day. Somehow, when it filtered through the chain of others inclined to repeat such comments, it reached the men in the barber shop where it went through further transformation until it reached the point of honor. At least that’s one possible explanation.

As the years went by, Buford began adding all kinds of lighting effects to the scene. By inserting a high intensity red light into the back of the filter that made up the head of baby Jesus, the rays of light coming through the pleats and mesh of the filter produced an eerie glow. With Buford's small farm being in a little valley away from any town light, the nights were especially dark, making the dramatic effect of the light coming from Jesus that much stronger. Some have even called it a point of visually prophetic symbolism.

It soon reached a point where Buford could no longer take care of it all by himself, so he hired his cousin Bobby Ray to come twice a week and continue working on the construction. Seth Johnson of Johnson's Advertising and Marketing, LLC talked Buford into signing a marketing contract, giving him sole rights to promote the scene. He set up a website and scheduled Buford for a series of radio program guest spots.

As further testament to Buford's assertion that the Lord works in mysterious ways, it is interesting to note a few e-mails received on the website's e-mail account:

Sarah, from Billington, North Dakota, wrote, "My husband likes to restore old tractors,

and he frequently skipped church to work on them on Sunday mornings. Since visiting ‘The World’s Largest Nativity Scene Made Entirely from Used Oil Filters’, he has come to church with me every Sunday. He says that every time he looked at the filters on the tractor engine, he felt guilty.”

Mayor Robb Jackson, from Cedar Crossing, wrote, “I consider it a miracle. Community and spiritual enthusiasm and pride in our village has skyrocketed since the formalization of this magnificent work of spiritual art.”

Sheila, from Baltimore, Maryland, wrote, “Since touching the display on a recent tour visit with our ladies’ group from church, my arthritis has disappeared, and I’m now able to quilt again. We just finished a series of quilts to send to our Missionary at Large.”

The increase in publicity over time resulted in more people bringing more used filters to Buford’s farm. There are plans to expand to a passion scene in the coming summer. The county commission has applied to the state for official authorization to designate the site as a point of interest spot in its tourist brochure.

As previously mentioned, Buford derives a great deal of satisfaction from the entire project, yet

he remains humble and ever aware of that fateful day out in the field. The mechanic rarely ever refers to it as “The World’s Largest Nativity Scene Made Entirely from Used Oil Filters”, preferring instead the name, “Recycled Good News”.