

# Russ Hazzard inducted into Lambton Agriculture Hall of Fame

John Phair  
QMI Agency

Russ Hazzard, who established Hazzard's Grain Elevator in 1947, and later became a founding partner of SouthWest Ag Partners Inc., has been inducted into the Lambton County Agricultural Hall of Fame.

The induction ceremony was held Nov. 16 in Wyoming in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Lambton Federation of Agriculture.

The 89-year-old Hazzard was to have been inducted at the Hall of Fame's annual ceremony in September, but at the time was recuperating from surgery and was unable to attend.

Consequently, his induction was rescheduled to coincide with the federation's annual meeting on Nov. 16, in the hope he would be well enough to accept the honour in person.

But the St. Clair Township man was still dealing with health issues so the award was accepted on his behalf by family members.

Jim Hazzard said his father, after serving in the Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War, returned home to Beecher, north of Wallaceburg, to begin his post-war life.

In 1946 the elder Hazzard was a 23-year-old "upstart" with no money when Harley Bishop, a local businessman, approached him about buying his feed mill business in Beecher.

"Bishop insisted that he didn't need any money and could pay him when he was able," said Jim Hazzard.

"He agreed and Russ Haz-



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Russ Hazzard (inset), a founding partner in SouthWest Ag Partners Inc., has been inducted into the Lambton County Agricultural Hall of Fame. While the 89-year-old was not able to attend because of health reasons, the honour was accepted by his family. From left are Merle and Shelly Hazzard, Jim and Anne Hazzard, Janet and Paul Hazzard, and Stephanie and Caleb Courtney. Russ Hazzard was nominated by his granddaughter's husband, Caleb Courtney.

zard's business career began on Jan. 2, 1947.

Jim Hazzard noted that within a few short years the Hazzard enterprise grew to include a seed cleaning business, an Allis Chalmers dealership, a CIL Fertilizer dealership, a grain elevator, multiple farm service locations, a joint venture with Cargill and an amalgamation with Kent County Fertilizer.

The business today operates as SouthWest Ag Partners Inc., and is one of the major farm service companies within the region.

Jim Hazzard noted that while his father's enterprise grew over the years, so did his family. Russ

and Margaret Hazzard married in August 1947 and raised 12 children.

"He met her at the Royal Bank in Wallaceburg where he deposited his dusty money from the feed mill week-by-week," Jim Hazzard said, adding that all the children born to the couple were literally raised in the middle of this growing business.

In addition to the Hazzards' 12 children and their spouses, the couple now has 49 grandchildren, 35 great-grandchildren and one more on the way.

Sons Jim, Merle and Paul continue to work in the business as shareholders within

SouthWest Ag Partners Inc.

Jim Hazzard noted that his father was overjoyed to receive the honour from the Lambton County Agricultural Hall of Fame, but modestly wanted to make it clear there were a number of people who played a key role in his accomplishments.

"Notably, his wife Margaret who has stood with him through thick and thin as a confident, partner and joint owner of the business," Jim Hazzard said, who added that his mother looked after the accounting for the business.

As well, Russ Hazzard's brother, Bob Hazzard, worked

with him "shoulder-to-shoulder" for more than 40 years as general manager.

"His commitment to the business and our customers was key to the growth we experienced over the years," said Jim Hazzard.

Another brother, Jack Hazzard, who was an electrician, was responsible for converting the original feed mill, powered originally by a natural gas engine, to electricity.

"This conversion was a key turning point in the business," Jim Hazzard said.

He stressed that a huge part of the company's success should be credited to their

many customers who had supported them over the years and placed enough trust in the Hazzard family to do business with them.

"My Dad always respected the independent, sometimes crusty, but always down-to-earth nature of farmers."

He added that his father never considered himself a business man, but rather a farmer from downtown Beecher.

"So on behalf of my father, who is in his 90th year, and who chooses to view life as a cup running over, it is my privilege to accept this honour on his behalf," said Jim Hazzard.

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