



Harvesting a Hobby

Restoring vintage tractors keeps couple busy in retirement

By Norm Powers
Photos by Matt Rose

When Steve and Judi Levinson come to Hendersonville from Florida for the summer, the mountains promise more for them than cool breezes and sweeping vistas. "We both enjoy driving around North Carolina to find tractors," explains Judi, adding, with a smile, "Steve suffers from TAS" — Tractor Acquisition Syndrome.

The Levinsons found their first tractor in Asheville a few years ago. It was a Ford Model N from 1949, now joined by 17 others that the couple has collected and housed in the pavilion of what was once a public park, now part of their property.

obsessions

THE FRENCH ROAD RACER

"We're amazed at how many people have fond memories of tractors from their youth, and get very excited to see them on display in beautiful restored condition."

BY JENNIFER HARRIS





Steve and Judi Levinson's 17 vintage tractors are all in working condition. Judi says her husband Steve is afflicted with "TAD"—Tractor Acquisition Syndrome.

Tractors built by Farmall, Massey Ferguson, John Deere and more obscure manufacturers such as B.F. Avery fill the space. "This year, we added pull-down plastic curtains to protect the machines from the elements," says Steve, "and exhaust fans so the tractors can run without asphyxiating the occupants, plus a security system." All the tractors are in working condition, thanks to Steve's effort and much help from locals who are infected with the same enthusiasm that afflicts the Levinsons, now both in their mid-60s but still active in real-estate-development projects in the county.

It was Steve who first got the tractor

bug, during his childhood in Israel, when his father moved the family from the city to a farm. It wasn't long before Steve was driving the machines, mostly American-made Fords, International Harvesters and Allis-Chalmers, planting the seed that would sprout nearly 30 years later on a country road half a world away in Western North Carolina. He met Judi in Miami in 1986 and eventually discovered Hendersonville, where his tractor obsession was reinvigorated during the couple's search for a summer home. When not tussing over their tractors, the Levinsons have been buying and renovating foreclosed homes

in Henderson County to turn into rentals. "We both flunked retirement," says Judi, the former vice president of student affairs at Broward College in Fort Lauderdale. Likewise, Steve left behind a successful career buying and rehabilitating South Beach hotels and apartment buildings for commercial use. Besides the tractors, he also collects watches and knives, while she searches out World War II memorabilia related to Miami Beach, much of which has been donated to museums for safekeeping.

The Levinsons find the tractors through classified ads, word of mouth, or just by driving around the mountains