



Wessels Oil: From 5-Gallon Buckets to a Fourth-Generation Family Business

When Ray Wessels of Palmer began hauling fuel and oil in 1938 to farmers and service stations in northwest Iowa, gasoline was 15 cents a gallon, kerosene was 10 cents a gallon and fuel oil was 7 cents a gallon.

Wessels Oil grew from these humble beginnings, when Ray Wessels transferred Petroleum products in 5-gallon buckets from his tank wagon to customers' fuel barrels. While the equipment has evolved, the company's commitment to personalized service hasn't changed.

"We're up for any task," said Brandon Wessels, the fourth generation of his family to operate Wessels Oil in Palmer.

That includes starting at 3 a.m. and working on Saturdays and Sundays, if necessary, during the busy fall and winter seasons. "It's not unusual for us to work 70-hour weeks," said Bryce Wessels, who is Brandon's younger brother.

Family, farming connect rural Iowa

This work ethic has helped fuel Wessels Oil's growth. "We deliver energy products from Waterloo to western Iowa, and from the Missouri border to the Minnesota border," said Ron Wessels, Ray Wessels son who joined the family business in 1963 as a tank wagon driver. "We've even hauled fuel to Tennessee."

Wessels Oil also operates seven convenience stores throughout northwest Iowa. As the business expands, the Wessels family remains rooted in Palmer. This thriving family business includes 28 employees, seven propane bobtail trucks (which hold 3,200 to 7,500 gallons), five refined fuel trucks, three propane transport semi-trucks and four refined fuel transports.

Many of these trucks serve Iowa Select Farms. Wessels Oil began supplying Iowa Select with diesel in the late 1990s and has been delivering propane to Iowa Select locations for nearly 10 years. "Iowa Select is great to work with," Brandon Wessels said. "They understand what it's like to run a family business, and they are generous."

"LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION KEEPS YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL IOWA AND BRINGS PEOPLE BACK TO SMALL TOWNS"

-Bryce Wessels

This focus on family and farming is important at Wessels Oil, which boasts many long-time employees. "Livestock production keeps young people in rural Iowa and brings people back to small towns," said Bryce Wessels, whose mother, Terri, and aunt, Lisa, also hold leadership roles at Wessels Oil. "Agriculture means jobs and growth. It's also why we have a lot of third and fourth-generation customers."

Leaving a legacy

The Wesselses know that maintaining a family business for multiple generations isn't easy. When Brandon and Bryce Wessels's father, Terry, passed away from pancreatic cancer in January 2017, the loss was felt throughout the community.

Terry Wessels grew up in Palmer and played on Palmer High School's 1979 state tournament basketball team, which set the stage for the Palmer Panthers' basketball dynasty of the 1980s. As the guy who had almost as many nicknames (from "Crow" to "The Instigator") as he bestowed upon others, Terry Wessels later served as Palmer's mayor for nearly 12 years and was the assistant fire chief for the Palmer volunteer fire department.

Terry Wessels taught his sons the importance of community service, finding the fun in everyday life and honoring the Wessels' Oil motto of old-fashioned service since 1938. "We take care of you," Brandon Wessels said.



PROFILE

Wessels Oil

PALMER, IOWA



Employees: 28

Iowa Select Farms annually purchases in excess of four million gallons of propane and one million gallons of diesel from Wessels Oil

Wessels Oil delivers to 63 of our "full transport" sow and nursery farms and 115 finishing farms

