

Bob Engler

Anyone who knows long-time member of Tired Iron Robert "Bob" Engler would agree that he comes from a good, solid background. He was born November 26, 1935, in Ames, Iowa, to Kyle Engler and Thelma Rawlings Engler. At that time, his father was attending school at Iowa State University. Because this was during The Great Depression and jobs were scarce, his dad stayed in school and earned degrees in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and agricultural engineering. This was a diligence that would, in the future, greatly reward the Engler family. His mom earned a degree in history at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas. She taught in several one-room schools before her marriage to Kyle. Bob has two siblings. Phil, an older brother, is a retired bacteriologist in New York. His younger sister Janet is a minister's wife in Festus, Missouri, which is just south of St. Louis along the Mississippi River.

The Engler family and the Rawlings family had strong roots in the soil of Kansas. German great grandparents on each side of his family, in earlier years, had homesteaded farms near Hutcheson, Kansas. They grew wheat, oats, alfalfa, and other field crops with draft horses. Farming became "easy" in the lives of his grandparents with the coming of tractors to the farms in the 1940s and 50s. The farm setting was important in the lives of Bob's parents in that Kyle Engler was "the boy next door," to Thelma Rawlings...almost. There was one farm separating the two families, which proved not a problem at all. Incidentally, one of Bob's great grandparents raised ponies and used them to pull sulkies in harness racing, which was a popular sport at Hutchinson.

While pursuing degrees at ISU, Bob's dad did research on water resources in the rice fields of Arkansas. His work centered around ground water tables, which he noted were endangered. His conclusion was to reduce the pumping of the water before the water tables were too low to sustain rice production. Since Arkansas continues to be a great rice producing state, we have to believe his dad had positive influence on the industry. His prominence in agricultural research led to his 40 years of employment at the University of Arkansas as head of the Department of Agricultural Engineering. While Bob was still a child, he and his family moved to Fayetteville and became Arkansans.

Bob spent all his school years in Fayetteville. In his high school years in the early 50s, he worked at the Dairy Queen on College Avenue. His wage was 35 cents an hour, but he was allowed all the ice cream he could eat. That was a good perk for a long time, but eventually, even good DQ food became not so appealing. In the summers, he often helped in the hay harvests on farms near town. Bob got around Fayetteville better than most kids since he was the only one in grade school with a motor scooter. Later, his maneuverability was greatly enhanced when he obtained what would now be a classic 1946 Harley Davidson knucklehead motorcycle. At the time he weighed about 120 pounds and the Harley over 600, but he never let it get the better of him.

After graduating from Fayetteville High School in 1954, the Korean War had ended but trouble persisted in the Far East. Right out of high school and looking for new vistas, Bob volunteered for the draft and entered the army. He used his Harley to travel from camp to camp during his training but sold it when he was assigned to duty. He was ordered "overseas" to, of all places, Puerto Rico. He said he regularly faced hardship and danger from barracudas and sea urchins while he and his friends took their daily swim in the ocean. Also, sunburn was a constant threat. He managed to survive these rigors, and after a year in Puerto Rico as a radio operator, would return to regular army duty in the states for the remainder of his time in the service.

In 1959, Bob married La Rue Jackson, the daughter of the well known and well liked Dr. J. L.

Jackson of Bentonville. Lots could be written about him as an old-fashioned physician who still made house calls, often in his Super Cub airplane. Several times, he landed his plane on a gravel bar along a river to reach his patients. And also, it may be fortunate that Dr. Jackson practiced before too many controls existed over the medical profession. When he performed amputations, he simply took the amputated limb with him and disposed of it in the fire of a brush pile.

Eventually, Bob and Louise would have four sons. They are, from oldest to youngest: Kyle (Bentonville), who works for Sam's Club where he supervises the construction of all the Sam's stores built and is the only Sam's employee who has visited all the companies stores; Jim (Springdale), who is in building construction; David (San Diego, California), who is a grocery store manager in the Von's chain that once was Safeway; and Eric (Denver, Colorado), who remodels and installs windows in homes and businesses.

After ending his stint in the military, Bob was able to use the G. I. Bill to obtain his college education. He attended the University of Arkansas, and graduated in 1965 with a degree in industrial education. He then embark on an interesting work career.

Bob's first employment was in Fayetteville at the organ factory owned by Baldwin Piano. His skills were first applied to the building of the beautiful wooden cases for the units. Soon after beginning with Baldwin, Bob was relocated to De Queen, Arkansas, where the company was beginning its foray into the building of guitars. This Baldwin venture, along with the starting of a banjo factory in Boonville, Arkansas, in the 1960s, was a result of the world-wide rage for the popular music of that period (think Beatles). Bob worked at both plants by commuting the 100 miles from De Queen to Boonville when he was needed to solve problems. He said the guitar and banjo experiment didn't work out too well for Baldwin, and the efforts ceased by the 1970s. Even though the guitars and banjos did not "catch on" and couldn't compete with established builders, many of the instruments are collectors' items today.

The last place Bob worked for Baldwin was when he was sent to El Paso, Texas, to help start up a plant across the border in Juarez, Mexico. This plant manufactured many of the electronic cable components for Baldwin organs. Bob quit Baldwin in 1975 and went to work in El Paso for Mann Manufacturing, an enterprise which made clothing. His job, true to form, was in keeping the machinery updated and in good working order, but in spite of his expertise, the company closed.

Next, Bob's entrepreneurial flair led him and a friend to start an earthworm farm. They had 180 frames measuring 6' by 8' where they collected 100 pounds of worms every two days. Bob said El Paso was a good place to raise worms since they were unlikely to escape into the hot sand surrounding the beds. The business was amazingly lucrative until the company which purchased the worms went bankrupt. When the family home burned in El Paso in 1978, it was time to return to Arkansas.

In 1978, Bob and two of his sons built a new family home on five acres inside Bentonville. The striking features of the home include its great room which presents a comfortable setting for cooking, dining, and visiting with friends. A large, free-standing stove is a central feature. It is a solar home, but Bob said the cost of building and maintaining such a home is not really feasible. The savings on electricity would never be as much as the cost. Tragically, his wife La Rue would not get to enjoy the home very long. She passed away a few months after the home was completed.

Back in Arkansas, Bob would soon begin a twenty year career in teaching. He used his formal education and his years of experience to teach machine shop skills at Rogers High School. It is difficult to imagine anyone other than Bob who could have been more prepared to help youths in learning the use of lathes, milling machines, and most other tools of the trade. In 2001, Bob retired from teaching and the "regular" work force to begin a new endeavor.

But first, in 1983, Bob married Barbara Craig of Bentonville. Barbara's two children from a former marriage were added to the Engler family. Her son Craig is a manager of the Walton Museum located in the building on the Bentonville Square where Walmart began in 1950. He manages the museum, including the vintage ice cream parlor and the third floor area known as The World Room, which is used for musical performances, and Walmart meetings. Her daughter Ginger is a math and science teacher in Carl Junction, Missouri.

Barbara graduated from the University of Arkansas with a Bachelor of Science degree in home economics and began a career as a county agent, operating out of Jonesboro, Arkansas. She returned to Bentonville to work with her parents in the Bentonville family business known for many years as Black's Ready-To-Wear. Back in Northwest Arkansas she met Bob where they both attended The First Christian Church. Barbara began a serious hobby or vocation by following her interest in quilting, an interest she had since a child. She became well known in quilting circles all over Northwest Arkansas. She belonged to several quilting clubs and won many awards with her beautiful quilts. In 2012 another tragedy struck the Engler family. Barbara passed away after a long fight against cancer. All of us in Tired Iron mourned the loss of Barbara.

To Bob, the most important feature of the home he built in 1978 is the large basement. In 1995, he began filling the basement with industrial size machining equipment (see photos). Soon, big companies and individuals, including friends, began seeking Bob's expertise in all things related to metal machining. Several large local companies such as Bekaert, Rogers Machine Shop (now defunct), RTW Tools, and Welding Fabricators became clients. Orders were for one item in many instances but often orders were made for 300 to 400 units to be skillfully made by Bob one at a time. As much as he continues to enjoy the work, the demand on Bob's time has become a problem in recent years, and not long ago he "officially retired." He accepts no large commercial orders and limits his work to a few old customers and friends and to his personal projects. The absence of his expertise is a great loss to the industries of Northwest Arkansas.

Bob's involvement with Tired Iron took an interesting course. On a trip to Springfield, Missouri, with Barbara, Bob noticed that a tractor, steam engine, and gas engine show was being held at Republic, Missouri. He suggested that she let him out at the show and pick him up on the way back home. She did. Bob was captivated by the antique engines he witnessed at the show. This began his serious approach to engine collecting.

He soon owned as many as six full-size hit and miss engines, but the first scale model he built with his machining skills was of a steam engine, which he powered with air compression. He was more interested in gas powered engines so he soon began building miniature models of hit and miss engines. During this time, Bob found out about Tired Iron of the Ozarks and began exhibiting his increasing collection of scale model engines and even Stirling hot air engines. He sold his full-size engines to club member Lynn Barnica and others and from then on concentrated on scale models. He is currently at the assembly point for his latest engine, which is a classic Monitor engine(see photo).

Not only does Bob show at Tired Iron's spring and fall shows but he is a well recognized exhibitor in a four state circle in our region. He shows his engines at Pawnee and Catoosa, Oklahoma; at Winfield, Kansas; at Pittsburg, Fort Scott, Adrian, and Republic, Missouri; at Harrison, Arkansas; and especially at the Lathrop, Missouri, Model Engine Show. Bob is a highly respected maker and collector of these beautiful scale model engines and is a hit at any show he attends. Thanks, Bob.