



**Nancy Hastings | Jackson Citizen Patriot**

Todd Johnson has been breeding draft horses for years, but he never dreamed he'd compete among the elite.

Johnson's yearling Belgian stallion, Pine Ridge Boozer, recently won in the senior showmanship division at the Great Lakes International Draft Horse Show at the Michigan State University Pavilion.

He breeds his own stock on a small farm and considers himself "small stuff" compared with his competition.

With more than 1,200 draft horses from the U.S. and Canada, the Great Lakes competition is the largest annual draft horse event in North America. The four-day event in mid-October features some of the finest Belgians, Clydesdales, Shires, Percherons and mules.

Johnson and his wife, Dawn, own Pine Ridge, a horse-breeding farm near Pittsford. They got into the business nearly 24 years ago, after his wife gave up dairy farming.

"We wanted to be able to still get to the fair somehow," Todd Johnson said.

The family-oriented business includes their children, Maria, 24, and Larry, 26.

Great Lakes International President Aaron Rice said the event was a "power-packed show" with as many exhibitors as last year, and the number of spectators was up by 1 percent.

Johnson said they begin preparing for the event early in the year.

"We begin show preparation in early spring," Johnson said. "Planning starts way in advance."

Since then, the Johnsons have been to four different shows. In July they attended the Michigan Draft Horse Breeders Show in Mason, where their yearling stud won reserve champion.

The first week in August they attended the Wisconsin State Fair, where their stud received second in bred and owned class.

The last week in September, the Johnsons walked away with grand champion honors at the Hillsdale County Fair.



Courtesy photo

Todd Johnson holds on to his prize-winning draft horse, a Belgian stallion named Pine Ridge Boozer. Johnson and his wife own a horse farm near Pittsford.