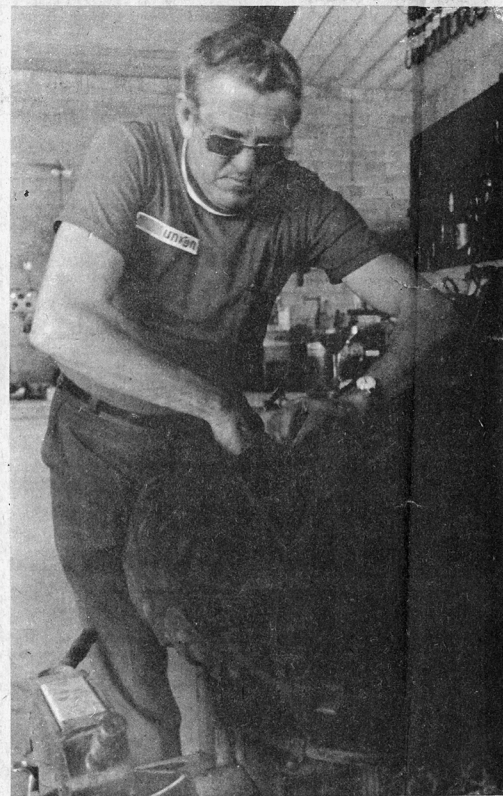




THREE GENERATIONS - Three generations are involved in the Otter Tail Oil. They include son Delbert, father George, son Eldin, and grandson Tim.



Eldin takes care of the servicing at the shop. One of the duties is changing tires.

Ottertail Oil Co. began 56 years ago when George Lueders got into the garage business after World War I. Now he's 84 years old and his sons Delbert and Eldin run the station, but George still works there every day.

"George is an old tough German," smiles Delbert. "Some of those old horses just don't give up. He works every day. He doesn't have to be here at any special time, but you can set your watch by it. If he's not here at 9:00, then he's just coming around the corner."

George is a very healthy 84 years old, and recalls the history of the company. He started out after WWI in the garage business, but didn't like that, so he got the idea of getting into the gasoline business. And he liked that better. In fact good enough to stay in it until the present time.

First gas deliveries were done in a 350-gallon horse drawn wagon, with the actual delivery done by a man with a livery barn. An old Model T truck was next. Today the company has a 2,000 gallon truck for their bulk gasoline and fuel oil deliveries.

"That first year he shipped in three tank cars of gas," Delbert points out. "Now we do three in a week sometimes."

The company dealt with a number of oil distributors in those early days, says George. He started out with the Manhattan Oil Company then went to White Eagle. "Their gas was supposed to be white, but it got yellower and yellower so I dropped them." Next was Marlin in 1927, which was bought out by Conoco. They stayed with Conoco until 1972 when they switched to their current Union 76 brand.

George also saw the advent of the first gas tax in Minnesota in what he recalls as being the late 1920's. "People figured it was all right," he says, "because they figured they would probably get better roads." At the time the tax was implemented, he received one of the first state licenses issued. He held that till he retired in 1959 for what was probably the longest distributorship license in Otter Tail County.

The station which George built in 1922 survived the test of time, and wasn't replaced until 1968. The new station was constructed for the sake of room and service for automobiles.

Eldin and Delbert have been running the business since they purchased it from their father in 1959. Eldin takes care of much of the service work around the garage, while Delbert does most of the bulk delivery.

The two, of course have come through the changes in the oil industry. "I think when we took over in 1959 gas was \$.27 a gallon," says Delbert. "For the first 10 years I don't think prices varied more than two cents. Since then, as everybody knows, gasoline has shot up into the 70-75 cents per gallon range."

"The oil industry has changed a lot," says Delbert. "Those were the days when the oil companies appreciated your business. You can ask any oil man. Now they don't want anything to do with you. It used to be that if you needed your station or your truck painted they would do it. There wasn't anything they wouldn't do for you."

"Now they have cut back on everything," he continues. "They dictate the rules and regulations, and that's it. Like one time I was talking to a field representative. I was complaining about something and he said, 'You might as well be talking to that cash register over there. You'll get more results from doing that.'"

And at the same time that gasoline prices have risen, the cost of running a station have risen at least as fast. George still has the receipt for the first gas pumps he bought back in the '20's. \$194 was the cost. Today it costs about \$1,100 for a single station pump.

Besides the gas pumps, Ottertail Oil does bulk delivery of gas and fuel oil. In addition basic services are offered including grease, filters, spark plugs, tires and batteries.

The third generation is involved in the station, with Eldin's son Tim helping out part time after graduating from high school last year.



BULK DELIVERY - Delbert does most of the driving for the bulk gas and oil delivery in this 2,000 gallon truck.



ORIGINAL STATION - George built this original station back in the early '20's, and it was used until the