

*(Left to right) Dona and Shorty share a rare moment at home; John David in Sublette; and a Kulhanek friend poses with one of the family's earlier-model Gleaners.*



the year requires other sacrifices, says Kulhanek. One in particular involves the time his wife puts into their home in Colby. “If you ever see my wife’s landscaping around the house—that she’s done herself, strictly by herself—she does all this work and she’s not home to enjoy it,” says Kulhanek. “That may seem like a small thing, but it makes me feel bad that she’s sacrificing all that for what we’re doing.”

There are, of course, benefits. He gets to work with his sons. He also says it affords him a decent, albeit modest, living. And there are the friends he’s made during his 45 years in the business.

“I still go see people that my dad worked for over 30 years ago. I still have those connections with people that I’ve known since I was a little kid.

“It’s not just a job, it’s a friendship,” he continues. “Course, you’ve got to like your work whatever you do. And I do enjoy it.”

Still, business is business, especially when someone’s livelihood depends on you providing the promised services, and Kulhanek says he feels the pressure. There are equipment breakdowns, a volatile market, the rising cost of everything but crops, traffic backups that prevent his crew from getting to the next job, problems with hired help, and a host of other obstacles. Then there’s Mother Nature.

She can cause a lot of things, Kulhanek says. Some crops ripen before he can get to them; some take forever, forcing his crew to sit and wait. Some crops ripen, but then the humidity is too high for them to

dry down, causing them to wait some more. Then there are the storms that clobber the crops, his crew, and his equipment.

“I’ve always got to keep an open mind, be optimistic about everything,” says Kulhanek. “You know as a farmer and a harvester, too, you always figure Mother Nature has a way of correcting herself and things coming together. I never had a farmer be really irate with me yet over a weather situation. Still, it can get to you at times.”

Kulhanek customers range from farmers with 12,000 acres to those with as few as 400, “the small farms being just as important as the large ones,” he says. And for each of them, he says he helps them earn money. It just takes one harvest to prove it.

“I went in there and showed them the job I could do,” he says. “They realized I was saving them money because I was putting the grain in the tank and getting it to the elevator, not on the ground or their dock.”

And Kulhanek, a Gleaner customer and unabashed fan, gives much of the credit to his R76 combines. “I can see from talking to harvesters that run other colors that I do a lot better job cleaning it, and I know that when we go to the elevator, they always compliment on what a clean sample we have.”

“It just proves [that we] put more money in the farmers’ pockets. And while friendship with my customers is what’s most important to me, making them money, and I know this sounds obvious,” he says with a chuckle, “well, that’s pretty good, too.” ■