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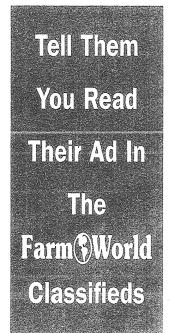
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Michigan tractor puller raring for Louisville farm sh

BY SHELLY STRAUTZ-SPRINGBORN Michigan Correspondent

RICHMOND, Mich. -- Since the early 1990s, watching the Championship Tractor Pull has been a highlight of the National Farm Machinery Show in Louisville, Ky., for Charlie Capozzo and his family. But this year he won't be watching the show from his usual seat in Freedom Hall - instead, he'll have a view from the seat of his tractor.

The 35-year-old tractor puller from Richmond, in Michigan's Macomb County, "is honored" to be a firsttime competitor in the 41st annual pull, which is held in conjunction with the show, this year from Feb. 11-14. "This is a great honor for us. It's a dream come true," he said.

Capozzo, his brother, Nick, and their father, Tony, will be on the coliseum floor, up close to the action as competitors in the 9,300-pound Super Farm Tractors division with their John Deere 4010 named Cruel Intentions. While Capozzo doesn't have any cruel intentions as a competitor, he does hope to do well enough in the first round of competition on Feb. 12 to advance to the finals on Feb. 14.

That means he has to place in the top four in his division. "If that happens, we'll be jumping out of the building," Capozzo said.

But, he said whether his team advances to the finals or not, they're just happy to have been invited to participate in this level of competition.

"I'm excited," Capozzo said. "For us, it's just an honor to be there."

He and his family ran the National Tractor Pullers Assoc. (NTPA) Grand National Circuit in 2008. "It's been a long summer," Capozzo said. "We probably put 15,000 miles on the truck.

He said they competed in about 40 pulls last year, traveling as far as South Carolina, Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio and Missouri.

"Those are big pulls," he said. "But, our goal at the beginning of the year was to make it to Louisville."

The men take turns driving in the various competitions. Capozzo drew the lucky straw for Louisville. "It's my turn," he said. "I was just the lucky one to get to drive this time."

Tractor pulling is a family affair for the men, who own and operate an excavating business. Tony Capozzo has been competing in tractor pulls since he was a boy. It's a hobby he passed along to his sons as they were growing up.

"My dad grew up working on a farm that was next to a John Deere dealer," Charlie Capozzo said. "That's how he got started with the John Deere. We've been raised with green running through our blood."

Capozzo started with garden tractor pulling when he was 10. At age 12, he moved up to pulling his father's John Deere 60 - a tractor the family still enjoys competing with at local fairs and tractor pulls.

"We still have that tractor. It's like a member of the family," he said.

His father added a modified pulling tractor to the lineup and Capozzo moved up to driving that at around age 14. Through the years, he said his favorite part of pulling is the people he has met.

"We've made a lot of friends," he said. "It's funny, but some of our closest friends live 500 ... 1,000 miles away."

This year's Championship Tractor Pull features Pro Stock, Super Stock, Super Farm, Modified and Alcohol Tractors as well as Two- and Four-Wheel-Drive Trucks and is sponsored by Syngenta. Approximately 75,000 enthusiasts are expected to attend the four-day event.

The indoor roar of these pulse-pounding tractors and trucks begins at 7:30 p.m. each evening, Feb. 11-14, and an additional showdown takes place at 1 p.m. Feb.

Visit www.fammachineryshow.org for more information or to order tractor pull tickets.

IN THE N

A board elects officer team NDIANAPOLIS, Ind. - Grant County

James Peterson of Bloomington, Louis Rusch Jr. of Vincennes, Joe Rush of

car in the International Hot Rod Assoc. (IHRA).

(AF&PA), and Tom Kuhn, president of Edison Electric Institute.