

# The View...as crew

AN OFFICIAL'S POINT OF VIEW *by Craig Blake*

During the oil crunch of the 1970s, my father decided to heat with wood and I still harbor fond memories of the family taking the pickup truck to the woodlot during the hot summer months. I remember our neighbor's home-built, single-wedge wood splitter that was powered by a Wisconsin engine from a hay baler. In those days, we cut, hauled, split, and stacked about five cords a year. I've never lost the sense of how good it feels on a cold winter's day to feel the pleasant warmth of a wood fire and experience the personal satisfaction that I've created my own fuel from a **renewable resource**.



**M**y awareness of sawmills came from a neighbor and friend who was also a millwright for Lane Sawmills. Being a bit younger than my parents, this guy was like an older brother to me. Pete, a true craftsman and a truly talented “Swamp Yankee,” built a 1:10 scale, fully working version of a No. 1 Lane Sawmill, and I watched this piece of master craftsmanship through every stage of fabrication. Possessing both a propensity for storytelling and a passion for his creation, I learned a lot from that model and from the hours of conversation about the intricacies of how he was going to reproduce the operations of a full-scale sawmill. As a result, I begged my father to go with him to the local “farm” sawmill when he needed an odd piece of material for a project. This particular sawmill—like so many—was a combination of parts from several circle mill manufacturers. As a kid, this was my impression of small-scale sawmilling. During my senior year in high school, I attended a farm show and saw my first portable band sawmill. Right then and there I decided that a smaller, portable

sawmill was the ultimate tool. That, for me, was where the dream began.

When I arrived at the first SAWLEX in 2005, it was obvious that this was to be an event unlike any other that I had ever experienced. Over the years, I've attended dozens of different shows to view what would qualify as small-scale wood processing equipment—agriculture shows, woodsman's shows, woodworking shows, and private manufacturer demonstrations just to name a few. The concept of an event dedicated to the smaller, independent, wood processing community, combined with the opportunity to see the machines actually demonstrated in the Shoot-Out venues is—in my opinion—the reason for the show's continued growth and success. The best thing about SAWLEX is the staggering amount of information available and the opportunity to meet, talk, and share experiences with others in the industry. The educational and practical value of new product or new technique demonstrations is worth the trip alone. For anyone interested in buying for the first time, upgrading, or diversifying on any scale, SAWLEX is the place to be.

This year I attended the event as part of the support crew. As you can imagine, there are a host of last-minute details that have to be taken care of, as well as unforeseen problems like the rainstorm Mother Nature dealt us this year. But the event's organizers had put together a group of officials and staff with an amazing “can-do” attitude that was bound to make the event a success in spite of any obstacles thrown their way. Most impressive was the cooperation between exhibitors and the show staff donating their time, talent, and equipment to help remedy the weather-related problems. It was encouraging to see the camaraderie between competitors in our industry—even in this tough market climate.

But now the show is over and I'm back to business as usual. However, I'm dreaming of a new firewood conveyer and enjoying a new little field tool for my chain saw. I've tried a different sawing technique with my swingmill and I'm excited to use a new, smaller log arch in the woodlot. I can't count how many times I've started a sentence with “when I was at SAWLEX.” ■