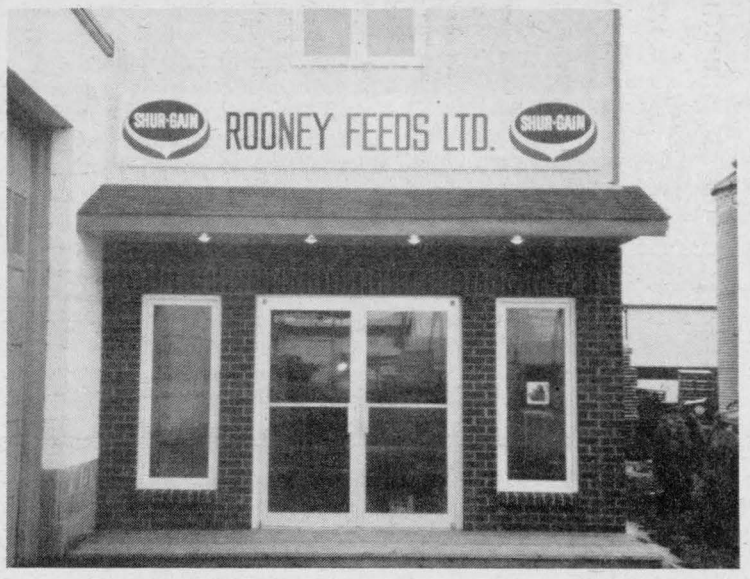
IROQUOIS • KEMPTVILLE

# Rooney Feeds

## *Celebrates its 30th Anniversary*




Two locations to serve you better: Rooney Feeds is located in Iroquois (above) and Kemptville (below), with a fertilizer plant in Matilda Township. Thirty years of quality and service.




**by Sandra Lee Johnston**
**Chieftain Staff Reporter**

From being a carpenter and a farmer, Frank Rooney decided some thirty years ago to purchase the feed mill in the Village of Iroquois.

Always on the lookout for a business that he could own and operate, Frank had farmed in the Johnstown area until his land was expropriated when the overpass went in for the Canada-U.S bridge cloverleaf system. Moving his family to Spencerville for the next two or three years, he worked at the trade of carpentry. When the Merkley Mill in Iroquois and the Morrisburg Feed Store came up for sale, the decision was made and the choice for the Iroquois location began a tradition that would carry on in the Rooney family three decades later. The Iroquois area seemed a better agricultural region with better possibilities for the growth of a Mill.

"Everyone pitched in from day one...at some time or another, we all did our bit," notes Louis Rooney.

Recalling how things were for a large family operating a family business, Louis told us that he was not interested in running the mill, he even noted that he was not too keen on working in the business when he was in high school and was expected to pull his teenage weight.

Working at various jobs after graduation, Louis worked for a local construction firm, a large farm operation, and finally returned home to work in the Mill. Working in the Mill proper for 2 years and on the truck for one, he learned all aspects of the business from those in the various sectors. The next move was to the office where Bob Bennett was in charge. Learning the ropes from those in the know made things easier for Louis and helped to persuade him that indeed this was his place afterall.

When speaking about his two young sons, he notes that one has shown an interest in the Feed business, but hastens to add that, "Both of my boys will need as good an education as they can receive, before they can enter the work world." He continues, "They will not even be able to entertain thoughts of working in the Mill full time in any capacity until they have gotten the fullest learning opportunity possible."

Louis seems very sure when he states that "A college education can help so much along the way. Kemptville and Guelph offer diversified programs that will be invaluable in the future."

Stressing the need for education in the busines, he points to the fact that since he has been in the Mill (he took over the operation sixteen years ago, full time), four sales representatives have come and moved on, and they all were graduates of KCAT.

"In order to go one on one with the farmers today, you need that technical knowledge, because, if you don't someone else will."

Over the years things at the Mill on Dundas Street has seen numerous changes that have kept it abreast of the times that dictate what will be current at any time. Going from bagged feed to bulk feed and supplements; now farmers are being supplied with commodities. (soy bean meal, raw soy beans etc.)

It is a sign of the times that farmers are not buying the tonnage of feed that they did 10 or 20 years ago. "Larger farms equals less volume for people like us,"says Louis,"We pick up the slack now, more than ever before, that is why our fertilizer plant exists, it does this for us." Along with this, the store sales account for a bit of how ends are met today as well for the Mill, and Louis reluctantly adds that Rooney Feeds is "Creeping

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In the beginning...Rooney's had a Ford even then!

back into the garden centre merchandising."

The effort has changed from a "grist mill" type of business to a "Feed Manufacturer/Retailer, and a Fertilizer Dealer. Louis adds that,"Some expansion plans are in mind today in order that Rooney Feeds can keep up with the ways the market is going."

The Mill is a place of smells that remind one of the farm, the sweetness that comes from brans and molasses, bags of meal are stacked to the ceiling in the storage areas, and the noise can be deafening when the grinding is going on. As feed bags fill with animal feed, the dust flies. The sun comes through windows in slanted rays that capture particles of dust in their streams before they meet the worn, wooden floor. A peaceful atmosphere prevades when the mill sits idle and cats scamper after mice that find a free meal ticket...Farm pickups are loaded at the platform and a bit of the country comes to town.

The Mill was always a local gathering place where farmers could compare produce and methods, successes and failures. Trades were made and ideas thrown around. Something special for sure, a part of history that is not altogether missing in the 90s. Farmers still gather at the Mill, and the pace slows as they compare, share and care about one another and the state of the world in general.


*HAPPY 30th*

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Equal opportunity at Rooney Feeds has two generations of Rooney wives, Marg (front) and Audrey (white blouse). Karen Merkley tends to the accounts and serves the public with her daily smile.


***Happy 30th Anniversary & Best Wishes from the***

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A typical day for Louis begins at 7am when the Mill opens for business. Getting the orders made out before the crew of five come to work, he has an hour to prepare. The orders may include the deliveries to be made, or the items a farmer may come by to pick up himself must be readied. Bulk feed is loaded and ready to be delivered to the farmer. In the same truck bags of feed may be going to another farmer along the route.

Louis notes with a smile that "the best time of the day is about twenty to eight when the crew begins to filter in to work, grab a hot coffee and settle down to plan the day ahead. "This is when the gab takes over and the boys discuss everything from politics to what they did for excitement the night before."

At 8, the manufacturing will begin, and the trucks that will be heading out are loaded.

Karen, who works in the office arrives at 8:30, and will spend the better part of her morning taking care of the accounts, the bookwork etc. Louis says that going computerized about four years ago made a big difference in what they do at the Mill. "All our accounts are on the computer, I don't know if it saves time, but it certainly makes us more efficient in what we are doing day to day."

The sales representative or Feeding Management Advisor, Barton Simpson does computerized feed programs for customers right at the Iroquois office."If we did not do it here, we would have to send the information supplied by the farmer to Shur-Gain and there would be a wait until they computed the results and figured out what the best options are, then forwarded them to us. The farmer would be waiting a long time for his advice...this process allows us to stay competitive and reliable as well as on top of things at all times."

Louis and Karen share duties in the store as they take care of customers as they come in or call in with orders and questions. Mrs. Rooney and the boys lend a hand here when necessary as well.

"Making feed is not as big a job as it used to be. We need to place orders with suppliers for special items and bulk feeds not kept on hand, more than before."

Just before Louis took over 16 years back, renovations to the Mill upgraded the plant to modern standards, making it one of the best little Mills in Eastern Ontario. The output of the Mill was extended from 25 tons per day output to 50. The installation of new scales for the bulk mixing facility they have operational. A new heated molasses tank added to the capacity of the Mill as well. The scales were hooked to a gathering hopper directly under the bins of pre-rolled bulk grains. In preparing that special feed for a customer, the operator stands at a control panel while measuring the exact proportions of each ingredient into the scale. Up to one and a half tons each time then is sent by auger to the mixer. From here the feed can be bagged or delivered in bulk to the farmer.

A new oat roller and corn cracker replaced the one used in pre-Seaway days. The longer roller is faster and crimps the grain instead of beating it, thus the mixture is a better texture.

The water jacketed, thermostatically controlled molasses heater provides piped molasses directly to the mixer where dairy ration is produced. Molasses can also be delivered to the bagged feed area or directly into 45 gallon drums or milk cans.

Over the passage of time, Louis notes, "Most of our raw material for the production of feed came to the Mill from the National Harbours Board Elevators in Prescott, or from the Almonte Flour Mills. Rooneys' dealt with this firm since taking over the Mill. Almonte supplies mill feeds such as bran, shorts and middling, all by-products of the milling of wheat into flour. The grains, oats, barley and wheat were purchased through a Montreal grain

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broker and picked up at the Elevator near Prescott.This wheat came from Western Canada. Today, only about 2 per cent comes from outside the immediate farming area. "We buy locally grown produce and this is good, supporting the customers who we sell to makes good sense."

Updating equipment to keep pace with changes, new trucks with blowers for bulk feed deliveries, and modernization keep Rooney's Feeds in the market place of the 90s, competitive and ready to serve their customers.

The newest addition is the office and store at the easterly portion of the original Mill."This was something long over due, we should have built it before. It has paid for itself in that it draws a different type of client to the business. The improved atmosphere enables you to make varied sales, and the working conditions are much better for the employees which aids production all around."

About a year and a half ago, the Fertilizer plant on the fourth concession in Matilda Township was doing well as was the Iroquois location. A need was noticed in the Kemptville area for another supplier and so Rooney Feeds became resident in the South Gower Industrial Park. Serving a different type of customer from this locale, they supply to sheep and horse farmers, although they continue to try to crack the hog and dairy market as well.

Frank has retired, but is in to work every day when he is able. He repairs clippers and sharpens them, as well as attending to any and all general maintenance that no one else ever seeems to find time to take care of.

Over the years, numerous Rooney family members have come and gone. Whether they came to work during summer vacation, on Saturdays or during busy times, they have all moved on to other experiences and employs, all but Louis..remember Mary in the Garden Centre?

Louis explains how the farmer today is more concerned with what and how much of any chemical they use. "There is concern as well as the government dictates where, when, and how much of a given chemical a farmer can utilize in his operations. The Mill, according to Louis gets a fair amount of government intervention as far as permits to buy corn, to clean seed, to sell animal health products and the like goes. "The entire industry is pretty closely monitored by the government.We have to be ever mindful of cleanup, spillage and proper disposal of materials at the Mill and the Fertilizer Plant."

Talking about the survival of a small time operation such as Rooney Feeds, as it would be considered in the bigger, provincial plan, Louis smiles when he tells us that because the operation is small, they can specialize in certain areas that larger operations cannot. "We look to provide service, delivery times acceptable to customers, and actual special blends of produce that may be requested...there is always a niche for this type of thing."

Sitting at his desk high above the ground, a vantage point for the entire operation, with the sun streaming through the window, Louis seems happy with his lot in life, his easy manner and knowledge of the feed business adding up to good customer relations no doubt. He continues talking, "A customer came to our open house the other day and was saying how it was his first time in ten years to enter the Mill or the store. There is no need for anyone to come here, Bart makes farm calls, orders are called in and we deliver."He is adament when he becomes serious and says,"Over the years, if it were not for family and the quality of people we have, it would have been a tough go. Family always steps in when needed to cover, and having confidence in the people who work for you makes everything easier for everyone. The fact that we have dealt with reliable truckers over the years has made our job better to endure and foster. The variety of products we have to provide cannot be manufactured by us and so we buy from other suppliers; getting what we need when we need it for delivery is essential to our business, we've been lucky."

The good working relationship that has been fostered over the years with competitors makes things run smoothly and benefited both businesses. "When we have run out of a specific product, if C and L have had, it we traded with them to get over the hurdle and they reciprocate til shipments are received."

Looking to the future, he is aware

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A real family affair, Rooney Feeds involves Grampa Frank, Grandson Spencer, Son Louis, and Grandson Jason in the day to day business of farm supplies...back to work fellows!


*Congratulations Louis on a fine business relationship*

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that a decreased farm base will exist. "Each farmer will demand a higher level of product, knowledge and service from us. I see an increase in the "hobby farm" market, and a higher demand for crop services (fertilizers etc.)."

Louis foresees a good future in the business, he notes that things will constantly change, but adds, "There will be a living here for a long time to come, I think."

With thirty years behind them, and their sights set on the future, Rooney Feeds would seem to be on the right track.



The new mill saw increased productivity and more of what local farmers demand from their feed service in the 90's. Rooneys works to stay on top of their business - way up top!


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