

Rapp, 'kids' reunite at service station

By JOHN MOLSEED

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CEDAR FALLS — In the 1950s, John Rapp had trouble getting rid of the kids who used to hang out at his service station on Waterloo Road, so he let them stay.

"I'd let them work around there at night," he said.

More than 50 years later, he still can't get rid of the "kids."



John Rapp

"I still call them kids," said Rapp, 84, who still lives in Cedar Falls. "To me, they'll always be kids."

The "kids," who are now retirement age, started the Pacers Automotive Club in 1958. The club, which still is an active automotive enthusiasts' group, on Saturday honored Rapp at his former station — now a museum and welcome center at First and Clay streets in Cedar Falls. Members presented him with a plaque of appreciation in the shade of the old station.

Club members said the group wouldn't exist if Rapp hadn't given

them a place to spend time and learn about cars.

"You were a big influence on us," said Tom Otto, club member. "Sorry it took 50 years, but we've never been very quick about doing things."

Club members recalled how the pit next to the station would flood before a garage was built next to it in 1963. Rapp recalled a wet muskrat trying to scramble into a flat-bottom boat one of the members was rowing on the floodwaters.

One member recalled spraying the water hose at bugs collecting on the station's outdoor lights. Rapp recalled threatening to make a kid replace his light bulbs.

Jim Fogdall, club member and owner of Fogdall RV, said Rapp's station, originally located at 14th Street and Waterloo Road, was one of the only destinations for a kid living on that end of town.

"He kind of inspired us," club member Steve Hill said.

Rapp also extended credit to the club members, something the youngsters had never experienced. Rapp said it wasn't a bad risk.



RICK TIBBOTT / Courier Staff Photographer

Pacers Automotive Club members gather Saturday at the former Rapp service station for a reunion with former owner John Rapp.

"None of them stuck me," he said.

Rapp said he isn't sure why he allowed the kids to hang out at his business.

"I don't know why I did," he said. "I guess that's why I got so many friends."

The station opened in 1925. Rapp began working there in 1943 for

15 cents per hour. He took over managing the station in 1950 and bought it in 1960. Rapp closed the station in 1990 when Waterloo Road underwent reconstruction.

"If they hadn't rebuilt Waterloo Road, I might still be there," Rapp said.

The city bought the building and moved it downtown in 1993.