

2023

our town

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Welcome to OUR TOWN

Nestled at the center of Racine County, the Village of Union Grove and surrounding communities, like the villages of Yorkville and Raymond and Town Dover, have plenty to offer residents.

The Village of Union Grove, home of the Racine County Fairgrounds, consists of about 5,000 residents and hundreds of businesses.

While Union Grove and neighboring communities have seen growth – both residential and commercial – the area still touts a small-town atmosphere with families in mind.

Primarily located along the Highway 45 corridor, intersecting with Highway 11, Union Grove residents have easy access to larger communities.

While the Village of Union Grove brings in thousands of visitors, courtesy of the Racine County Fair, the area also offers the Great Lakes Dragaway and serves as a home for many cherished veterans at the Southern Wisconsin Veterans Home.

Attractions aside, many local groups,

like the Greater Union Grove Area Chamber of Commerce presents activities throughout the year, including the traditional Fourth of July parade.

Other activities consist of the Main Street Car Show, farmers market, among others.

Yorkville, meanwhile, serves as home to Ives Grove Golf Links.

The small-town atmosphere also features multiple schools, including Union Grove High School, and other educational opportunities such as the Modine Benstead Observatory.

Union Grove's many features and attraction warrants a trip the area.

Come in and check the area.

You may want to stick around and start a family.

Union Grove truly has something for everyone in the family and continues to grow.

Be a part of the growth and welcome to Our Town.

~ Jason Arndt
Westine Report editor

Union Grove, Wisconsin **our town** 2023

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(262) 763-2575
www.myracinecounty.com

Editor in Chief: Tracy Ouellette
Creative Director: Heather Ruenz
Advertising Director: Vicki Vanderwerff
Page Design: Jen DeGroot
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above: Bridget Raimondi welcomes customers to her Vinny's Produce booth at the Union Grove Public Market last summer. The market is held Tuesday afternoons throughout the summer in the Piggly Wiggly shopping center parking lot.

ED NADOLSKI *Our Town*

on the cover: Kansasville Fire and Rescue Department hosts its annual Pancake Breakfast and Safety Day in July last year.

CHAD HENSIK *Our Town*



above: The Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery hosts a Memorial Day ceremony each year. Last year's event featured a flyover by the Commemorative Air Force in Waukesha, music by the Milwaukee American Legion Band and the Wisconsin Independent Pipers, Christina Kuenzi singing the National Anthem, Keynote Speaker Mary Kolar, a Ceremonial Rifle Salute by the Marine Corps League Agerholm-Gross Chapter 767 (pictured) and more. **below:** 2022 Racine County Fairest of the Fair Kennedy Bosch waves at the crowd in Union Grove during last year's Fourth of July parade.

CHAD HENSIK Our Town

OUR PARKS



The Village of Union Grove has 13 designated park areas within the village limits.

Leider Park (8th Avenue and High Street) has bathroom facilities, pavilion and soccer field as well as playground equipment.

American Legion Memorial Park (7th Avenue and Main Street) is the new home of our dog park with a sledding hill in the winter.

Village Square (Main Street and 10th Avenue); this is the location of the Village Christmas Tree and the Union Grove Farmers Market.

Ryan Moe Michael Young Park located off of 67th Drive has playground equipment and bathroom facilities, along with a football field.

School Yard Park- on the historic site of Union Grove Elementary School (14th Avenue at New Street) has a brand new concession stand, bathroom facilities and several baseball diamonds as well as playground equipment.

Lauer Wildlife Preserve located in the Fox Creek subdivision is the home of

Whitetail Lake.

Other parks are Old Settlers County Park (Highway 11); 12th and Vine Park; 18th Avenue Park and Indian Trail Park (New Street); Martin's Pond; Woods Park and Bufton Park.

Two rustic walking trails can also be found in the Village; Eagle Trail which connects Ryan Moe Michael Young Park and Lauer Wildlife Preserve, and Woods Park Trail (Commerce Drive).

OTHER PARKS

Lake, Dover

Town of Dover Park – Highway 11, 1/2 mile east of Highway J, Dover

Samuel Skewes Memorial Park

15084 Spring St., Yorkville

Eagle Lake County Park/ Minnetonka Drive Boat Ramp

Eagle, west of Dover

Richard Bong State Recreation Area

26313 Burlington Road,
Kansasville (262) 878-5600



Local farm hosts state Farm *to* Table event

More than 150 guests attended the eighth annual Wisconsin Farm to Table Dinner that took place last summer at Mighty Grand Dairy in Union Grove.

The elegant-dining event welcomed visitors near and far to enjoy an evening of extraordinary food and discovery by learning about local farmers and their contribution of farm-fresh ingredients, according to organizers.

"After attending a Wisconsin Farm to Table Dinner last year, we were eager to host one ourselves as it's such a great opportunity to share the story of how we care for our animals every day to produce a wholesome product for so many to enjoy," said Dave Daniels, one of the partners at Mighty Grand Dairy. "We enjoy welcoming others to the farm, and to incorporate other local farmers into such a unique dining experience was something we knew others would enjoy as well."

The event at Mighty Grand Dairy included farm tours, a cheese and wine sampling reception, and a five-course meal created by Chef Chanse Schomber of Entrees by Chef Chanse based in Juneau. Chef Chanse orchestrated the menu for the evening, placing special emphasis on a local farmer during each course.

Guests learned about River Valley Ranch, a local mushroom farm, as they began the dinner with a mushroom, caramelized onion and venison crostini, followed by a cucumber, beet and dill soup. Brightonwoods Orchard apples were featured in a fresh green salad and drizzled with raspberry vinaigrette. Valley Croft Farms provided a medley of beef, pork and vegetables to provide a hearty entrée of outside round beef and whiskey-glazed pernil pork, chimichurri mixed beans with bacon and onions, and Dauphinoise potatoes.

The evening's taste experience was concluded with apples once again from Brightonwoods Orchards in an apple caramel cannoli with mixed berry compote.

"Incorporating locally produced food brings more than just great flavor to our evening's menu, but a greater understanding of the passion and dedication that goes into producing the food that we all enjoy," Chef Chanse said. "There is no comparison to the true dedication like that of the farmers within our own community, and we are proud to feature them throughout our evening."

Conversation and community were generated as guests dined on local fare,

highlighted by presentations from the farmers contributing dinner ingredients.

Local farmers and processors brought the character to the evening's fare, but the evening would not have been made possible without the support of founding sponsors, including Adams Farms, Arch Solar, BMO Harris Bank, Community State Bank, Completed Feed Service, Duick and Associates, Edge Cooperative, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative, Feed Components, GPS Dairy Consulting, Super B Grain Farms LLC, The Scharine Group Inc., and Tier 1 Nutritionals.

Special appreciation is also given to the Kansasville Fire Department, the group chosen by Mighty Grand Dairy to receive proceeds from the 2022 dinner event.

"The mission of the Wisconsin Farm to Table is to share the story of agriculture and to feature the dedication and passion of our local farm families," said Kari Blazei, Wisconsin Farm to Table founder and president. "Over the years, our organization has been able to generously give back, and this year, the team at Mighty Grand Dairy has chosen the Kansasville Fire Department, in recognition of their presence in the local community. We are happy to help support their organization with this year's event."

Diners for the state farm-to-table event get a tour of the host Mighty Grand Farm in Union Grove during the Aug. 5, 2022, event.

SUBMITTED PHOTO *Our Town*



CHAD HENSIK Our Town

Smoke *and* thunder

The Racine County Agricultural Society presented the Southeast Wisconsin Showdown Truck and Tractor Pull last June at the Racine County Fairgrounds in Union Grove. The event included competition in several tractor and truck classes. Food and beverages were available for purchase from local FFA chapters during the event.

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Baking Bird works to give back to those who support her

By **Jason Arndt**

STAFF WRITER

Melissa Wandrey has spent nearly two decades in the baking industry, working in grocery stores and other bakeries throughout the Midwest.

Within the last five years, she moved to Union Grove and found an opportunity to open a new business called Baking Bird, which came from her childhood inspiration.

"My nickname is actually Bird, it has been since I was a little kid and I have been a baker for almost 20 years," she said. "I just thought it sounded really cute."

Wandrey, born and raised in Illinois, initially started the business out of her home about a year ago as a test to see how receptive the community would be a new bakery.

"In that year's time, we just took off in popularity," she said. "I just started asking people how they would feel if I would open a bakery. The support was overwhelming."

Baking Bird, 1013 Main St., launched last June and offers multiple specialty items as well as favorites such as Cheesecake and Salted Caramel Bars.

Wandrey also has staple items available for customers looking for a treat.

"In this area, there is a lack of availability of specialized items. You would have to drive to the city or downtown Racine to get similar products," she said. "We have a huge variety of items. We have an ever changing menu."

The new establishment, open Wednesday through Sunday from 6:30 a.m. until 4 p.m., also caters to workers who typically start their day at 7 a.m.

Oftentimes, Wandrey sees customers waiting at the door before she unlocks the building for business.

"I have people usually waiting at the door at 6:30," she said. "There are a lot of people who start work at 7, so they will stop in for coffee, or a little treat."

Wandrey, however, acknowledges the early morning isn't even the most hectic for her establishment.

But once school begins, she expects more traffic, considering Baking Bird is just down the street from Union Grove High School.

"The reason I started so early is that we are open for all of the high schoolers," she said. "They don't have anywhere to go."

Wandrey said high schoolers would have more breakfast options, instead of merely stopping at the convenience store or gas station for a simple snack.

Unique blend

Customers will be able to find a coffee blend unique to Baking Bird.

Baking Bird uses Anodyne Coffee Roasting Co., of Milwaukee, for its coffee and has produced a proprietary blend.

"We actually have a chickadee breakfast blend, it is a proprietary blend that we created for Baking Bird specifically," she said.

"We also carry a few a Anodyne's other top types of coffee."

Established in 1999, Anodyne Coffee Roasting Company is a locally owned, small batch roaster, according to its website.

The coffee roaster aims to provide an exceptional cup of coffee using just enough technology coupled with an experienced crew to assure satisfaction with every roast.

For customers looking to bring coffee home, Baking Bird offers bags of Anodyne, ground on site.

"You can actually buy a whole bag of coffee and we will actually grind it for you," she said.

Giving back

Wandrey's stepson was diagnosed with Leukemia, and has underwent extensive treatment in December 2021.

Since then, the community has been overwhelmingly supportive of her and her family by offering assistance such as gas cards, Wandrey said.

In response to community support, Baking Bird's mission is to give back to the organizations dedicated to battling cancer.

"We wanted to be able to pay it back to the community and the organizations that helped us," she said.

"Whatever monetary donations you want to make, there is a no cap or minimum," she added.

Melissa Wandrey, owner of Baking Bird, sits in front of a wall containing multiple birdhouses with proceeds from each sale benefiting organizations dedicated to battling cancer. Baking Bird, located in downtown Union Grove, has been open for a little more than a month and offers multiple specialty baked goods.

JASON ARNDT *Our Town*

OUR SCHOOLS

There are four K-8 elementary schools (Union Grove, Raymond, Kansasville and Yorkville) that feed into Union Grove Union High School District.

Post-secondary educational opportunities in the area include Gateway Technical College, which serves the tri-county area of Racine, Kenosha and Walworth counties, University of Wisconsin-Parkside and Carthage College.

Shepherd Collage in Union Grove is a post-secondary educational program for young adults with intellectual disabilities.

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Union Grove Elementary School students (from left) Bennett Wier, Mason Miller and Mac Jaramillo show off the snowman they built on the school's playground last year.

SUBMITTED PHOTO Our Town

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Bronco's Give Back Day has positive impact

HIGH SCHOOL GROUP DISTRIBUTES \$5,000 THROUGH LOCAL OUTREACH

Local farmer Brad Vyvyan last year directed a \$5,000 Bayer Fund America's Farmers Grow Communities donation to Union Grove High School's FFA.

The school used the funds to have a Bronco's Give Back Day, which was a large community outreach event.

The day began with an energetic all-school assembly, which included many activities that helped energize participants for the day. The entire school completed a picnic lunch on the football field, then students, staff and administration worked throughout the rural community to help build relationships and do service projects in the Union Grove area.

The goal, according to organizers, was to use this as a downtown and surrounding area beautification project while helping to build connections between local businesses and the school. It was meant to give students a sense of ownership through their service in the community.

School officials and students were thrilled to give back to the community.

This was a huge undertaking for teacher Emily Paskiewicz, who started to lead on this project back in January. She had multiple students assist her with planning, organizing and talking to various community members for ideas.

"We wanted this to be a student-driven event" said, Joel Adamczyk, principal at UGHS. "Our momentum with this was positive and the students were feeling the sense of ownership and pride as they planned the day for our school. None of this work could have been accomplished without the amazing leadership of Emily Paskiewicz."



top: Bronco's Give Back student volunteers include (front row from left) Natalie Nelson, Maddie Henderson, Abby Nelson, Lilly Nelson, Ashley Gunderson, Morgan Feuker, Maggie Domanico; (back row) Libby Kalbas, Josh DeWees, Shannon Roberts, Cade Peterson, Elizabeth Spang and Sophia Rampulla. **above:** Event organizers include (from left) Morgan Fueker, Maggie Domanico, teacher Emily Paskiewicz, Sophia Rampulla and Elizabeth Spang.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS *Our Town*

The Bayer Fund

In 2022, Bayer Fund revamped America's Farmers Grow Communities program, making it easier for farmers across the country to find and fund the organizations and institutions that keep their communities thriving.

This included doubling the individual donations to \$5,000, from \$2,500 in previous years to provide a greater impact to local rural communities.

For more than a decade, Grow Communities has partnered with farmers to direct funds to programs and organizations that contribute to their

communities' health and vibrancy, such as food banks, schools and youth agriculture programs. Since the America's Farmers programs began in 2010, the initiatives have awarded nearly \$65 million to such programs.

To learn more about how America's Farmers programs are making an impact, visit www.Americasfarmers.com.

Bayer Fund is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening the communities where Bayer customers and employees live and work by providing funding for food and nutrition, education and community development projects.

TAKING Stunts to A new Level



Equine lover becomes self-taught trick-rider

By **Jason Arndt**

EDITOR

Equestrian sports take many forms ranging from the well-known Kentucky Derby to flat racing, barrel racing, steeplechase and Gymkhana. However, avid horseback riders have another segment to consider, trick riding, which consists of high-flying acrobatic stunts.

The tricks include the rider standing upright on the back of a galloping horse using a specially designed saddle with a reinforced steel horn and specialized loops for the hands and feet.

Lia Peterson, of the Village of Raymond in Racine County, took an interest in trick riding a few years ago.

Peterson, 16, the youngest of six children to Jennifer and Eric Peterson, said she has always been around horses; three currently live on her family's property.

"I have been around horses my whole life. I grew up watching my siblings compete and when I was old enough I wanted to compete, too," she said.

Lia, who had experience competing in barrel racing, became interested in trick riding after watching video clips of people performing stunts on their horses.

"I started trick riding around three years ago and I decided to do it because I watched videos of people doing tricks and I thought it was really cool, so I tried it and ended up loving it," she said.

However, considering the danger of trick riding, her parents voiced initial hesitation.

"Lia came to Jenny and I and asked if she could start doing



above: Lia Peterson, 16, of Racine County, rides her horse, Pretty Boy, at her home. **top:** Peterson and her horse have formed a longstanding bond and she decided to start trick riding.

JASON ARNDT *Our Town*

trick riding,” Eric said. “We told her no because it is too dangerous.”

But Lia forged ahead and learned to trick ride on her own with a 22-year-old Tennessee Walker named Pretty Boy.

“When my dad was at work, I practiced in the arena with my mom watching,” said Lia, who knew her father would not initially approve.

After a few months, Eric discovered what Lia was doing, but said he didn’t initially watch her perform stunts out of fear.

Lia, who has two other horses on the family’s property, said she found Pretty Boy an ideal fit because she has a deep personal connection to the horse.

“Pretty Boy and I have a really close connection. He is the only reason I am where I’m at with trick riding. Without him, it wouldn’t be possible,” said Lia, a junior at Union Grove Union High School.

“Pretty Boy means so much to me. My love for him is indescribable,” she added.

BACKYARD TRAINING

Lia plays soccer and runs cross country at school. She also previously competed in gymnastics.

In between extra-curricular activities and studies, she started to train with Pretty Boy in her family’s backyard.

“I learned how to trick ride in my backyard. I watched videos and read books about it and then I would go outside and practice them,” Lia said.

According to Eric, Lia asked her sister, Anna, for help rigging her barrel-riding saddle into a trick saddle.

From there, Lia continued to practice and experiment with trick riding, Eric said.

“Of course, mom knew by then and I could tell something was going on,” Eric said. “Then one day, we had an extended family party and Lia asked everyone to come watch her perform.”

Eric admitted he had rattled nerves and said he couldn’t bear to watch his daughter perform stunts at first.

But on that day of the family party, Lia’s two older sisters urged Eric to come outside and see the routines she had learned.

“Well, I gave in and headed back to the arena. To my surprise, Lia had on a trick riding costume and had fast paced patriotic music playing,” said Eric, noting Lia’s sister, Anna, bought the costume.

“She started her performance for me, and others, and I was absolutely amazed. I looked at my wife in amazement and said ‘as scary as that was, that was awesome.’”

After Lia’s performance, it became clear she had a real passion for the sport so she won support from her family to continue improving her skills at trick riding.

“At that point Jenny and I talked about her obvious passion for the sport, and we

could see all that she had put into rigging her saddle and learning all the tricks on her own,” Eric said. “From there, we decided it would be much safer if she had an authentic trick-riding saddle.”

That saddle, Eric said, allowed Lia to expand her skill sets in trick riding.

In retrospect, despite initial protestations, Lia believes her father “is really proud” of her accomplishments as a self-taught trick ride and said she enjoys specific tricks more than others.

“My favorite tricks are the suicide drag, when I hang off the saddle with one of my feet strapped in, and the hippodrome, when I stand up on the horse,” Lia explained.

Performing tricks not only takes skill, but practice and strength, Eric said.

“Lia’s amazing strength to be able to balance and perform tricks that require lots of muscle and practice with her horse,” Eric said. “We are also impressed with the fact that she had learned all of this on her own.”

While impressed, none of Lia’s accomplishments came as a surprise to Eric, who recognizes she brings many skills to trick riding.

“Lia is a spitfire. She loves to try different things and she pretty much grew up on horses,” Eric said. “Lia also took gymnastics lessons early on in her life. So it doesn’t really surprise us that she took to this sport.”

DAY AT THE FAIR

Lia, a member of Raymond 4-H, previously participated in swine and poultry shows at the Racine County Fair.

But this year she decided to focus on the horse project, and performed in front of a crowd for the first time.

Lia, wearing a red costume, performed acrobatic stunts including the hippodrome while carrying the United States Flag.

“I performed in front of my family and my first time performing in front of a crowd was at the fair,” Lia said.

“Pretty Boy and I are so in tune to each other’s movements that we tend to compensate for each other. I feel like one with Pretty Boy while I perform the tricks. To me, it feels so good to be a team,” she added.

For Lia, Pretty Boy is more than just a horse. He’s also an equine friend with a remarkable personality.

“Pretty Boy loves to do anything that includes running. He also loves to jump,” Lia said. “He will pretty much do anything I ask him to do and that has got to be one of my favorite traits of my horse.”

Although she has won the support of her parents, not surprisingly they still have some anxiety whenever she performs stunts.

“We are always nervous watching her perform,” Eric said.



above: 16-year-old Lia Peterson hangs off to the side of her horse, Pretty Boy, during a routine at the 2022 Racine County Fair. **below:** Peterson waves the American Flag as part of a trick-riding routine. **bottom:** Peterson performs another stunt with her horse.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS Our Town



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THE BEST OF THE BEST

Runkel wins grand champion steer at State Fair

By **Jason Arndt**

STAFF WRITER

Riley Runkel, at times, admits she wanted to give up showcasing steer at multiple fairs.

The 17-year-old Wheatland resident who will be a senior at Burlington High School experienced scrapes, sprained ankles and even got slammed to the gates while caring for both of her steers.

In spite of the struggles, Runkel persevered, showing a grand champion steer for the fourth time at the 2022 Racine County Fair before winning a similar title at the 2022 Wisconsin State Fair in West Allis.

Runkel, who showcased a 1,339-pound Crossbred steer she called Sosa, fetched the highest bid in the Governor's Blue Ribbon Livestock Auction with Meijer Supermarkets paying out \$35,000.

Exhibiting grand champion steer at the State Fair, however, isn't new for Runkel and her family.

In 2019, one year after her older brother, Reid, showcased a grand champion steer, Riley captured the title.

"It is definitely an awesome feeling because of how it came about," Riley said. "I know that my family thinks about it, too."

The State Fair victory comes week after she showcased a different steer, Hot Fudge, which won at the Racine County Fair.

Juggling two steers, especially with challenging personalities, did not come easy for Riley.

Hot Fudge, a 2,290-pound Crossbred, exhibited a spunky attitude and required patience since the steer was born on the family farm.

"I would say my steer, personality-wise, (Hot Fudge) is pretty spunky. He is really lovable, but he also has quite a bit of an attitude, so it is hard to work with him," Riley said. "His personality is quite different from the ones I had before."

Hot Fudge, meanwhile, was brought to the State Fair alongside Sosa with Hot Fudge capturing the title in the Bred and Owned Show held on Aug. 9, 2022.

As for Sosa, who has his own unique personality, the Crossbred earned the title of Grand Champion Market Beef before yielding the high bid.

"I was super excited and I immediately started crying," said Riley, a member of Burlington Back 40 4-H Club and Burlington FAA. "It was such a relief. It was just a good feeling to know that it finally paid off."

"I was glad that I didn't give up."

SCARY YEAR

When Sosa arrived to the family farm, according to Riley, the steer exhibited some

angry behavior and oftentimes attacked her in the barn.

She became inspired to name her steer, Sosa, based on a rap song called Love Sosa by Chief Keef.

"In the song, he is talking about this guy named Sosa, who has an attitude, like he is very angry," Riley said. "I thought was funny because my steer has kind of an attitude."

The attitude, she said, certainly showed while she cared for him.

"He has stepped on my foot, hit me in the gates, he has come running at me with both feet up in the air, he has kicked me in the face, sprained my foot," Riley said. "A lot of times, I was scared, but I was thankful that my dad was there."

In addition to her father, Ron, Riley said both victories would not have been possible without the unwavering support of mother, Gail, and brother Reid.

While her mother kept her composed, even amid challenging times, Reid and Ron has assisted her with some work inside the barn.

"They have all mentally supported me and physically," said Riley. "My mom is always there to keep me mentally supported, but my dad and my brother are definitely there to help me with the work that it takes,

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

Riley Runkel showcases her grand champion steer at the Wisconsin State Fair with a large contingent of supporters.

SUBMITTED PHOTO *Our Town*



Riley Runkel stands beside her grand champion steer, Sosa, at the Wisconsin State Fair in West Allis. It was the second time she's won the honor at the statewide animal auction.

SUBMITTED PHOTO *Our Town*

RUNKEL • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

especially my dad – my brother has been working a lot lately.”

MAKING SACRIFICES

Becoming a grand champion takes dedication, including making sacrifices, such as spending time with friends.

Ron previously said Riley rarely, if ever, takes a night off.

“It is a lot like a full-time job, it is really really a lot of work,” he said. “I am just really proud of her, she has given up a lot as a teenager to do this.”

Riley, meanwhile, acknowledged she has had to make tough decisions on when she can step away from the barn.

“Showing cattle as a teenager, you have to give up fun things that teenagers do, like going out with your friends and what not,” she said, “Every morning, I will wake up early and do chores, wash and whatever and I will have to come back a few hours later and work on it some more.”

Even if she does opt to participate in activities with friends during the evening, Riley recognized she must return to the barn bright and early the next day.

“You don’t get done with chores until 10 p.m. and at that point, it is kind of hard if you do want to go somewhere, because you are going to have to go back out there at 6 a.m.”

Riley still has three more years in her show career.

While she has collected multiple accolades, even as a 17-year-old, Riley still plans on continuing as exhibitor until her eligibility expires.

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CHAD HENSIK Our Town

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An elected Village Board president governs the Village of Union Grove with six elected trustees. These positions are considered part-time. The village administrator is a full-time position, overseen by the Village Board.

A chairman and two to four trustees govern the surrounding townships of Yorkville, Dover, Raymond and Paris. Visit the municipality website for listing of board members and village/town officials.

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Town Board

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Shenkenberg
Jared Guillien

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Village Board

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