

Wonders of WALWORTH COUNTY

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Hundreds help at annual Toy Run

Tri-County Riders makes 25 stops to pick up donations

By Jason Arndt
STAFF WRITER

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, hundreds of motorcyclists went on a mission to make Christmas possible for needy families in Racine, Walworth, and Kenosha counties, with the Tri-County Riders holding the 30th annual Toy Run for Love, Inc.

Founded by the late Chuck and late Karen Dexter of the Log Cabin Tavern in Burlington, the event features motorcyclists making stops at dozens of establishments in multiple counties before ending at the festival grounds off of Maryland Avenue in Burlington.

"They wanted to help children at Christmas, so they paired up with Love, Inc. and started this little run," said Tri-County Riders President Nash Kinnard. "It has grown from a 50-bike run to what you see today."

The Toy Run typically draws anywhere from 300 to 1,200 motorcycles participate on an annual basis.

Kinnard said the most recent event, held Sept. 8, would not have been possible without the support of motorcyclists, establishments, and the community for contributing to the group's mission.

"The bars, establishments, and all of these riders have given us the opportunity to run this," he said. "If it wasn't for them, we would just be a couple of guys going for a ride. They are the ones that make this happen."

Tri-County Riders made more than two dozen stops, including venues in all three counties, with some establishments making sizable contributions.

Kinnard reported 2 Brothers Bar and Grill from Pell Lake had more than 19 boxes of toys waiting for pickup, while The Village Tap in Lyons presented 61

children's bicycles.

"That is just two out of the 25 stops that we had today," Kinnard said.

Bikers could select one of five runs, each featuring five establishments, based on informational flyers from Tri-County Riders.

At the end of the day, volunteers treated bikers to free food, beverages, and entertainment provided by Twin Rivers Band on the festival grounds.

Giving spirit

Love, Inc., which offers a Christmas program for families in need, receives a large contribution from the Tri-County Riders Toy Run.

Executive Director Terri Plachy of Love, Inc. said the recent event also saw the Burlington High School boys soccer program contribute to the cause by serving meals to riders upon completion of the Toy Run.

"Today has been a very big day. We have about 30 kids from the Burlington High School soccer team here. They are actually serving all of our riders and doing it cheerfully," Plachy said.

Love, Inc. plans to distribute items from the Toy Run to agencies in neighboring counties, including the Sharing Center in Trevor, for its Christmas program.

"This is probably one of the biggest parts of our Christmas program," Plachy said. "We share what (Tri-County) has given us with other facilities in those counties."

Kinnard said Tri-County Riders spends the year planning for the event with one simple mission.

"We help support families at Christmas in all three counties," he said. "Everything that we do all year long goes to the Christmas program for these families."



top: Motorcyclists make their way to the final stop in September after the Tri-County Riders Toy Run for Love, Inc., which featured stops in Walworth, Racine, and Kenosha counties. **above:** Volunteer Michael Plachy of Love, Inc. carries two children's bicycles to a staging area at the end of the run in Burlington.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Walworth County



left: Chris Winters was one of many bikers to help unload the amazing amount of toys donated for the recent toy run. **right:** Chris Clapper of Tri-County Riders helps unload trucks filled with toys. Clapper is also the Executive Director of the Elkhorn Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Center.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Walworth County

Wonders of Walworth County

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On the cover: Among the Grand Champions at this year's Walworth County Fair was Lainey Popp for her 159-pound Hampshire lamb. Popp, a member of the Richmond 4-H club, said one of the most important lessons she's learned through showing animals is sportsmanship.

TOM GANSER Wonders of Walworth County

Making something old new again

Eagle Scout hopeful restores Millard Cemetery

By **Callie Koehne**

CORRESPONDENT

If you drive down any county road in Wisconsin, it's hard not to notice the cemeteries peppered throughout the state.

Oftentimes, those quiet monuments to lives long past sit run down and nearly forgotten, with stones that are so covered by age that the names are hardly visible.

One local teenager on the path to earning his Eagle Scout was moved by such a cemetery – so moved that he took it upon himself to restore it.

This summer, Gus Heckel – a Scout from Troop 53 out of McFarland – came with his parents Susan and Mark and a group of more than 30 volunteers to work on Millard Cemetery in Elkhorn.

The group braved the scorching summer heat to complete a mission: Gus's service project that's been in the works for eight months. The project itself will earn Gus the highest rank in the Boy Scouts of America organization and marks the culmination of nine years of hard work and dedication.

Only 4% of those who participate in the Boy Scouts of America go on to reach the rank of Eagle Scout. In order to do so, the challenge calls for more than just showing up to weekly meetings. The Scout is expected to embody 12 specific characteristics, being: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

Scouts also need to earn at least 21 merit badges (Gus has more than 30), fulfill leadership roles and display outdoor skills, demonstrate by example the Scout Oath and Law, and complete a comprehensive service project in the community.

After visiting the Millard Cemetery, the question of what Gus would choose as a service project was a no-brainer.

"The whole back right corner of the cemetery is my family," Gus said. "My grandparents, my brother, most of my family are there. We came to leave flowers and visit, and I saw that it was dirty and looked run down. A lot of the stones are broken and leaning."

Gus said that he started trying to figure out how to help right away.

"I didn't know how to clean a grave stone, but I knew there was a way to figure it out, so I started researching," he explained.

He learned that the gold standard in headstone cleaner is called D2. At \$50 a gallon, he needed to fundraise to get the 10 gallons required to clean all the stones in the cemetery, along with brushes, water pumps, scrapers, buckets, the food for volunteers, the flags for veterans' headstones, and the wood he needed to build a bench.

Once he had what he needed and was fairly certain on the method, his investigation led him to Janie Jenkin and 815 Stone Scrubbers - a non-profit group out of Rockford, Illinois - that focuses on cleaning the stones of Civil War Veterans in the Winnebago County (Illinois) area.

Gus reached out to Jenkin to make sure he was doing things the right way, and she responded by volunteering her time to come help him, bringing with her several other Stone Scrubber volunteers.

"Gus has been our first Boy Scout in the process of working on his Eagle Scout



McFarland's Gus Heckel, shown by his Troop 53 sign, took on his Eagle Scout project this summer, restoring Millard Cemetery in Elkhorn where members of his family are buried.

CALLIE KOEHNE Wonders of Walworth County

Project to contact us," Jenkin said. "We loved seeing youth so passionate about cemetery preservation.

"By the time we connected with him, he had everything in the works, his visions of his phases and how he would execute his event was already in motion," she added. "I was quite impressed for being a young man of his age, how well-versed and organized with his event he was. It was great seeing him in action, speaking with many of the adults stopping by to ask questions, and most importantly how professional he was with his volunteers that came out to help him."

Helping Gus was the first and farthest the organization has ever gone to lend a hand, and the very first Scout they've been asked to assist. After such a positive experience though, they hope it won't be the last.

The local community also came out in droves to help Gus. Millard Community Church made lunch for volunteers both days, The DeLong Company, Inc. donated a water tank, Little Miss Sweet Pea's in Elkhorn donated the flowers the group planted around the new sign, Home Depot donated supplies for the bench Gus built for the cemetery, and Bonstone: Stone, Masonry & Concrete Adhesives in Mukwonago gave Gus a 15% discount on D2.

David Robers, chairman of the Town of Sugar Creek, acted as Gus's beneficiary, donating a portable toilet for the weekend

and food for the many volunteers who showed up to help.

"The Millard cemetery recently became defunct, at which point it became the property of our township," Robers said. "We welcomed Gus's project, as the cemetery has fallen into disrepair, and we had no funds available for much repairs.

"He is a great young man and a very good organizer and is doing an amazing job."

Volunteers from the community and his troop worked hard for two days, scrubbing moss and grime off of every stone that needed it, covering them in a chemical that will continue to break down the moss and mold for weeks without hurting the stone.

At Gus' direction, they built and installed a new "Millard Cemetery" sign and a bench that now sits back in shade looking out over friends and loved ones, gone but - thanks to Gus - not forgotten.

Gus was pleased at the end of the two-day project when they finished with hours to spare, and he was thankful to the many people who had a hand in helping him.

"They had a huge role in my project," he said. "Without them it wouldn't be done."

He learned a thing or two about managing large groups of people, instructing them on how to get the job done, and what to do when the weather doesn't cooperate. He mentioned each donor by name, each volunteer, his grandpa, and his mom and dad for taking

so much time to encourage him and help him in Scouting. The impact he made on the community, Gus said, was only possible because of the impact made on him.

Gus exceeded his fundraising goal, thanks to the generosity of family, friends, his fellow scouts, and the community, breaking even on his project. Now that the work is done and the stones are cleaned, Gus needs to fill out the Eagle project workbook that's almost 30 pages long, then complete the Eagle application.

Once the council reviews it, an Eagle Board of Review is set. He'll need five letters of recommendation and will then sit and defend his project to the board, answering any questions they have about the project and his time in scouts.

After he's officially an Eagle, he will have an Eagle Court of Honor ceremony. While he will step down from his role as Senior Patrol Leader, to allow another Eagle Scout hopeful to have a shot at the highest leadership position in a troop, he will still be an active part of Troop 53 and looks forward to helping his friends achieve their goals.

"I wouldn't say that getting this far in Scouts has been hard," Gus said. "There are things about figuring out how to best preserve Millard Cemetery that were challenging, but even when it was difficult, I knew that I had to do it, not to become an Eagle Scout, but because it needed to be done."



Wendy and Joe Staller own Staller Estate Winery and Distillery, located on Highway A on the north side of Delavan. The business recently won a pair of international medals for two of their distilled products.

JENNIFER EISENBART Wonders of Walworth County

Local distillery awarded at international event

Staller Estate wins pair of competition medals for brandy, liqueur

By Jennifer Eisenbart
STAFF WRITER

A little bit of travel turned into a big international win for a local winery this summer. Staller Estate Winery and Distillery - located at W8896 County Road A, Delavan - entered the Finger Lakes International Wine and Spirits Competition in Rochester, New York, winning a Best in Class gold medal for the estate's brandy. The brandy "features an amber hue with notes of dried fruits, subtle vanilla, and oak. On the palate, it offers a harmonious blend of caramel, toasted almonds, and spiced honey," according to the business. Adding to their success, Staller Estate garnered a silver medal for its Orange Royale - an orange liqueur featuring barrel-aged brandy with ripe oranges that delivers "a balanced aroma of citrus freshness and mellow brandy notes." The FLIWC - one of the largest charitable wine and spirits competitions in the US - draws Masters of Wine, Master Distillers, Master Sommeliers, and industry experts for a rigorous, two-day, blind judging process. Proceeds support Camp Good Days and Special Times, benefiting families affected by cancer and sickle cell anemia. "We are deeply honored by these awards," said Wendy Staller, owner and winemaker. "From our beginnings in 2008 to opening our distillery in 2021, this recognition underscores our commitment to quality."

Keeping it unique

That is part of the commitment that Staller Estate has to its overall product, which Wendy - the company's general manager - and Joe say starts with the

crafting of unique products. "Our focus is really on the craft product," Joe explained. "We have really, really great customers that embrace a craft product. You can go anywhere and get a brandy old-fashioned. But you can't go anywhere and get one made with all fresh ingredients." The old-fashioned is one of the many specialty items that Staller Estate has added to its lineup. Now using the house-made brandy, the addition of fresh cherry juice and orange, aromatic bitters, and demerara syrup (essentially, a less-refined version of simple syrup, or sugar), the couple has a hit on their hands. "That adds a lot more depth, a lot more character to the old-fashioned," said Joe. Another item that quickly grew in popularity is the couple's old-fashioned mix, which Staller Estate has federal approval to sell. It takes the brandy and the old-fashioned components and puts them in a barrel to age before being sold as an old-fashioned. Since wine serves as the base from which to distill brandy, that step was the next logical one for the winery, which is in its 16th year after opening in May of 2008. Even the artwork on the bottles is a little different - an artist's rendering of Wendy operating the presses for the product. Among the newer offerings is the Orange Royale, which the couple had described back in November of last year and has now earned a silver medal. Staller Estate is working to produce a style of wine that Joe said is inspired by Beaujolais nouveau - the idea of using this year's grape harvest to produce a fresh wine that has only been fermented a short time (versus years). "It's 100%, estate-grown, estate nouveau," Joe explained, adding that while the winery uses many of its own grapes, it does bring in others. And then there is the Apple Nouveau - a spirit made with apple cider and apple brandy, blended and aged in a bourbon barrel. The spirit uses apples from Orchard Ridge, a nearby neighbor on Highway 89.



Joseph Thayer Jonah Fredlund Kamryn Swenor Kaja Frederick Mason Kluss

Area trap shooting team is on target

Mukwonago/East Troy Trap Shooting team wins state, national awards

The Mukwonago/East Troy Trap Shooting Team's Intermediate/Advanced (I/A) squad took first place at the SCTP State Trapshooting Tournament this summer in Rome, Wisconsin. The team consisted of four eighth graders and a seventh grader. Three of these shooters were members of the Intermediate/Entry (I/E) level team that won first place at state last year. The team consists of Caden Stoltz, Jonah Fredlund, Kaia Frederick, Kamryn Swenor, TJ Tearney, and coaches Brian Fredlund and Tim Kluss. In addition to the team award, four shooters received individual awards at the state competition: Joseph Thayer won third place Men's I/E Trap High Over-All. He earned this award by placing fourth in Men's Trap, fourth in Men's Handicap, and fifth in Men's Doubles. Jonah Fredlund won fifth place in Men's I/A Trap and placed eighth in Men's Trap High Over-All and Men's Handicap. He was also a member of the first place I/A team. Kamryn Swenor won second place Ladies' I/A Trap High Over-All. She earned this award by placing first in Ladies' Trap, second in Ladies' Handicap, and sixth in Ladies' Doubles. She was also a member of the first place I/A Team.

Kaia Frederick won second place in Ladies' I/A Trap. She was also a member of the first place I/A Team. The team would also like to recognize the following shooters who placed in the top ten as individuals or in the top five as a member of a team at the State Tournament: Cyerra Hanson - eighth place JV Ladies' Trap; Parker Minkley - ninth place I/E Men's Trap; Caden Stoltz - ninth place I/A Men's Trap - also a member of the I/A first place team; Rikki Oday-Fletcher - ninth place varsity Ladies' handicap; Fifth Place I/E Team - Nolan Hatinger, Tanner Kurtz, Dalton Meillier, Parker Minkley, and Joseph Thayer. Ten shooters from the team also participated in the SCTP National Tournament in Marengo, Ohio, July 13-20. In the collegiate division, Mason Kluss won second place in Men's Trap. Two years ago, at the National Tournament, Mason was the winner of the Last Man Standing Competition - Men's Division and was pictured on the cover of SCTP's Junior Shooters magazine. Kluss also shot well at the State competition, winning sixth place in the Collegiate Men's High Over-All by placing fifth in Men's Handicap, seventh in Men's Trap, and seventh in Men's Doubles. Additional awards for members of the team included two \$500 SCTP Scholarships, which were awarded to Sydney Swenor and Michaela Doyle.



The Intermediate/Advanced squad from the Mukwonago/East Troy Trap Shooting Team earned first place at the SCTP State Trapshooting Tournament held in June in Rome, Wisconsin. From the left: coach Brian Fredlund, Caden Stoltz, Jonah Fredlund, Kaia Frederick, Kamryn Swenor, TJ Tearney and coach Tim Kluss.

SUBMITTED PHOTO Wonders of Walworth County

Another year, another amazing donation

Golf league continues to put best foot forward for New Beginnings



By **Jennifer Eisenbart**
STAFF WRITER

For 27 years, the Abbey Springs Ladies Golf League has been committed to helping local charities.

For the past three years, the league has been committed to helping one specific organization – New Beginnings APFV.

With its annual Guest/Charity Day, the women’s league raised \$48,300 this year to donate to New Beginnings.

New Beginnings Executive Director Suzi Schoenhof said it was both a shock and a pleasant surprise when the league reached out to let them know about the donation.

“We found out late,” Schoenhof said. “We kind of assumed we weren’t getting it.”

About a month before the outing, Schoenhof said the group informed them of the donation. From both sides of the aisle, the issues that New Beginnings tackles are important.

The organization provides comprehensive support and services to people affected by violent crimes – not just domestic abuse and sexual violence, but stalking, harassment, and human trafficking as well.

That support includes crisis intervention, legal advocacy, safety planning, individual counseling, housing advocacy, children’s services, medical advocacy, and information, as well as referral to other community resources as needed.

All of that support is provided by 11 team members and New Beginnings’ board of directors. The costs are covered by donations and grants – which is part of the reason why the continued support of Abbey Springs’ women is so vital to the work being done.

“The issues are important to them,” Schoenhof said. “It’s a large group of women, and approximately 80% of those we serve (at New Beginnings) are girls and women.”

Sue Wendt, one of the women in charge of the fundraiser each year, said the golf league has always supported women’s charities. First it was Koman for the Cure (breast cancer), and then Tree House Child and Family Center when the group decided to keep the money local.

They then supported Open Arms Free Clinic through 2021 and the break that was occurring in a live event due to COVID-19.

Wendt said following that, the group went looking for another local charity, because there are so many.

“We researched New Beginnings, met with Suzi Schoenhof, and told her we would do our best to help their efforts by raising awareness as well as financial donations,” Wendt said.

Tools developed during the pandemic for virtual events – a trivia contest and weekly communications – were again used, and between that and the Charity Day event, \$20,000 was raised in 2022 and \$23,000 last year.

Suezy Golden has gotten involved and is taking the lead of Charity Day now, working to garner more donations from local businesses and individuals.

“This effort is near and dear, and the generous women of the Abbey Springs Golf League are kind, caring and giving,” Golden said. “Thrilled to know so many wonderful women to do good things.”

Schoenhof, for her part and that of the people New Beginnings serves, is equally grateful.

“We’re privileged to know this group of people,” she explained.

“To know them and work alongside of them to identify the impact we’ve made on them, and for them to value the work that we do,” Schoenhof added.

“It makes it all worth it, really.”
For more information, to donate, or to request help, call 262-723-4653 or visit newbeginningswalworth.com.



Rescuers honored

Aurora Lakeland Medical Center staff recently presented one of the East Troy Fire & Rescue Department crews with the Brain Saver award after they responded to a call for a patient having a stroke. As a result of the crews’ communication with Aurora and quick response time and actions, the patient was able to receive the medication needed to subdue the stroke. The patient recovered and was able to be discharged from the hospital within two days due to receiving this medication within the allotted time for best outcome. The honorees were, from the left: Cadet Maddie Merath, Chief Joe DeGaro, EMT Hunter Scheel, and Deputy Chief Patrick Preuss.

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For the third year in a row, the Abbey Springs Ladies Golf League has made a sizable donation to New Beginnings APFV from its yearly fundraiser. From the left: Tyler Surface, crime victim advocate; New Beginnings Executive Director Suzi Schoenhof; Suezy Golden, Sue Wendt, and Peggy Knutte, Abbey Springs Ladies Golf League; Carla Ruelas, bilingual legal crime victim advocate. In front on the left is one of Schoenhof’s dogs, Apollo, a regular at the New Beginnings’ office.

SUBMITTED PHOTO Wonders of Walworth County

Lifelong connection with nature

Man recognized for his efforts to tackle invasive species

By **Jason Arndt**
STAFF WRITER

John Mariani has invariably been bound to nature since he was a child growing up along the lakeshore north of Chicago.

A child of the 1950s, Mariani worked at his family's nursery and landscaping business near Lake Bluff, which at the time had a strong rural character before commercial redevelopment took over the area and wiped out the natural environment.

"I grew up in the country on a nursery with a lot of land," Mariani said from his Town of Lyons home. "It is now redeveloped, and that identity disappeared."

Despite the transformation into a commercial and residential area consisting of high-end family units, Mariani's passion for nature continued through high school.

While attending high school, the United States showed a commitment to conservation, including the passage of the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, and banned the use of DDT in 1973.

"When I was in high school, there was a lot of talk about the greenhouse effect," Mariani said, adding that he recalled conversations related to a changing climate.



John Mariani works on restoration as part of tackling invasive species in the area. He recently earned state recognition for efforts.

SUBMITTED PHOTO Wonders of Walworth County

Since then, he said, little action has been taken, which has caused the loss of wildlife. "We've got a lot of problems now, and pretty much everything they predicted is happening," Mariani said. "We have lost a third of our wildlife since I was in high school."

Tackling invasive species

A graduate of the University of Illinois-

Urbana Champaign, Mariani owns a business called Landserve, LLC, based in Lyons.

While he works with clients, Mariani has also been personally devoted to reducing invasive species, which earned him recognition through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

This summer, the Wisconsin Invasive Species Council, a public-private partnership with participation from

state agencies, honored Mariani with an Invasive Species Action Award.

According to the DNR, Mariani, who received the award in the volunteer individual category, has played an instrumental role in tackling invasive species.

"Since 2003, Mariani has singlehandedly removed thousands of

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Honored for making their mark

Walworth County Fair recognizes outstanding seniors

By Tom Ganser
CORRESPONDENT

The 175th Walworth County Fair kicked off during the opening ceremony at the Peggy's Park Stage with the presentation of State of Wisconsin citations honoring the service of four outstanding senior citizens for decades to their communities.

The senior citizens honored included Andy Pearce from Walworth, Larry Malsch from Delavan, Rick Bottlemy from Delavan, and Ruth Pfeiffer from Elkhorn.

The ceremony also included a singing of the national anthem led by students from Elkhorn Area High School, a tribute to Peggy Fraser – the longtime fairgrounds staff member who passed away earlier this year – and awards for outstanding vendors, exhibitors, and friends of the fair.

In his opening remarks to the presentation of citations to the senior citizens, State Sen. Steve Nass said it was an honor to recognize the volunteer efforts of others.

"The citations that we give out are allowed under our rules. We can't just give willy-nilly give citations to whomever we want," he said. "They have to have earned it, and these people have certainly earned it."

Nass presented the citation for Andy Pearce, who was unable to attend the ceremony, to his son, Dan Pearce. Nass stated, "Andy ensures that Walworth County is a better place to live, to work, and to go to school."

A member of the Big Foot Lions Club for 36 years, Andy has been responsible for organizing and managing the annual Lobster Boil that is the main fund-raising event for the club where "100% of the money goes back into the community and state."

According to John Tucker, President of the Big Foot Lions Club, the Lobster Boil on the last Saturday in July is an event known across the nation.

"We have people from Florida, St. Louis, and California who plan their vacation to this area and time it to coincide with the Lobster Boil," Tucker said. "The atmosphere that his event produces is nothing short of magical."

Andy recalled later, "I got involved right away when I joined the community and just never looked back."

Regarding his membership in the Big Foot Lions Club, he said, "One of the most rewarding things that we do is being able to screen the children in the grade schools, and when we do that there will be probably 80 kids out of 600 kids that we refer to get eyeglasses, otherwise they might not know they need eyeglasses."

Nass also presented the state citation to Malsch in recognition of "his many years of countless hours as a volunteer, and in other positions of service and value to the community."

Nass said that Malsch began his service to others by serving our country in the United States Navy as a Navy corpsman – who provides emergency, preventative, and routine medical care to Navy personnel – and continuing as an officer in the Delavan Police Department rising to the rank of Police Chief.

Malsch has served on the Delavan city



State Sen. Steve Nass (center) leads the honoring of the Walworth County Outstanding Seniors at the 2024 Walworth County Fair. Naas was one of a handful of state legislators on hand to recognize the seniors who have made strong contributions to the community. Inset: Nass hands an award to Larry Malsch, one of the honorees.

TOM GANSER Wonders of Walworth County

and town boards and on both the city and town's fire and police department boards, "ensuring the safety of his community."

Nass noted, as an active member of American Legion Post 95 serving in roles as Commander and Adjutant, Malsch "demonstrated his belief in serving those who served our county."

Malsch attributed his drive to serve the community in part to his grandfather, who served on a volunteer fire department for more than 50 years.

"We're sitting there eating supper and the whistle goes off and he goes," Malsch said. "I just learned that you do things like that."

He also pointed to Harry Larsen, Delavan Chief of Police, for instilling in him the importance of serving the community: "He was my guide and my inspiration and my model."

Rounding out his contributions to the legal system, Malsch has served as a jail bailiff in the Walworth County Circuit Court for 16 years, whose role is the maintenance of order in the courtroom.

Wisconsin State Representative Nik Rettinger presented Bottlemy with his Outstanding Senior Citizen award.

Rettinger cited that as an active member and director of the Walworth County Farm Bureau, Bottlemy "has served an extensive amount of volunteer hours, giving freely of his time to the Elkhorn Ribfest and at the Walworth County Fair Ice Cream Stand and Dairy Breakfast."

Bottlemy is a devoted supporter of the Walworth County Historical Society and the Walworth County FFA, and a long-time Big Foot High School FFA alum for more than 50 years.

Rettinger said that Bottlemy "serves his brothers and sisters in agriculture throughout his career at implements and other farm-related jobs for many farmers throughout Walworth County."

Wisconsin State Representative Ellen Schutt presented the 2024 Outstanding Senior Citizen Award to Pfeiffer, noting having known her "from exhibiting in the open class horticulture building. She is a wonderful volunteer, always helping in the flower department. Ruth is the person who always answers the call, selflessly offering her time and efforts to assist her community in any way she can."

"Ruth has proudly served as a volunteer with the Walworth County Senior Nutrition Program for over 17 years," Schutt said, "demonstrating unwavering commitment to the well-being of others."

In addition, as an active member of the Senior Travel Club, Pfeiffer has "further enriched the live of her peers" and she has "generously volunteered with the Walworth County Farm Bureau, contributing her time and energy to community events such as Elkhorn Ribfest, the Walworth County Dairy Breakfast, and the Ice Cream Stand."

In a simple but powerful summary of Pfeiffer's contributions to her community, Schutt said, "Ruth is a dedicated servant and genuinely cares about family, friends, and community."

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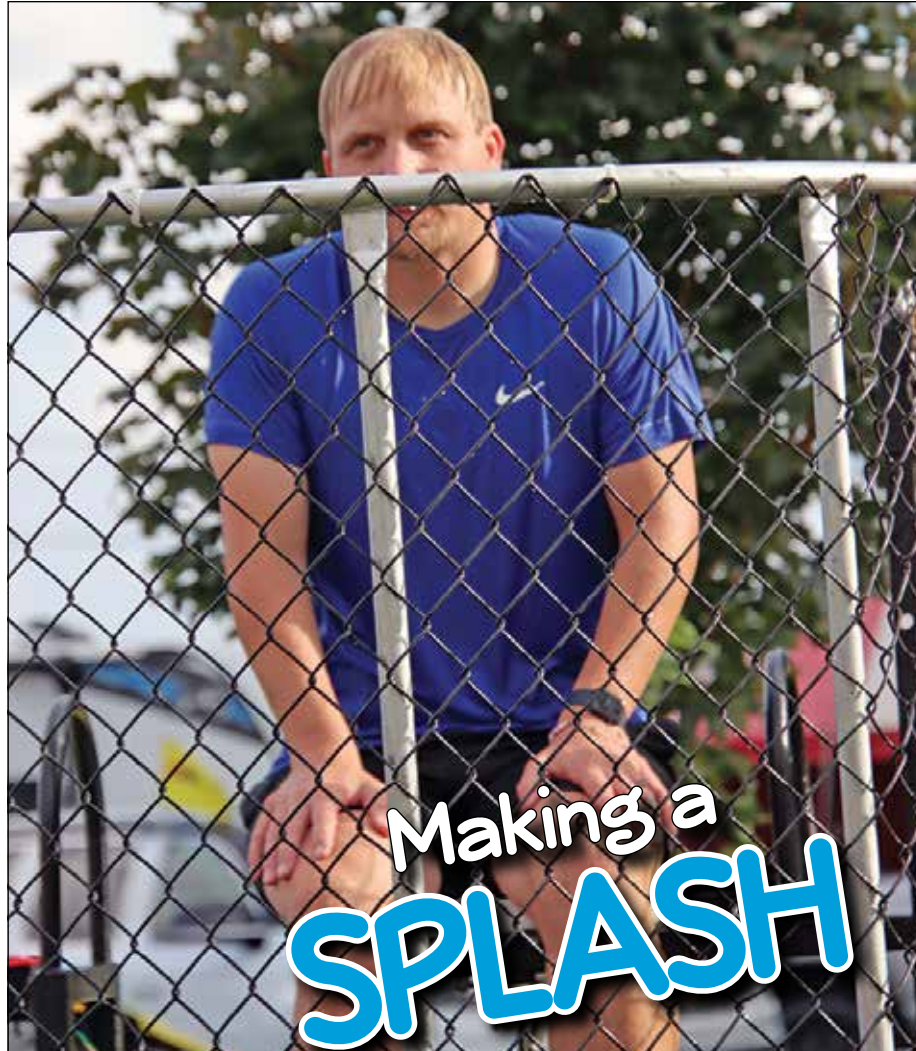


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Raising money for various organizations, Kunes Auto Group hosted a pair of dunk tanks at the Walworth County Fair. Among the battles was one between Elkhorn Area High School Athletic Director John Handel and Delavan-Darien High School Activities Director Kyle Polzin (above), shown above after taking a dip courtesy of someone hitting the target.

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above: Jess is shown here running the 100-yard FastCAT track at a competitive event. **far left:** Jess, an English Setter, sits with her owner, Erik Tonge, at their home on Delavan Lake, in front of her numerous ribbons and awards. **at left:** Jess Lea Tonge chases a butterfly in the yard of her home on Delavan Lake. A runner on the AKC FastCAT series, Jess will get a chance to compete nationally against other dogs at the AKC FastCAT Invitational in Ohio.

SUBMITTED PHOTO
Wonders of Walworth County

Area resident takes his dog to new heights on the AKC FastCAT circuit

By Jennifer Eisenbart
STAFF WRITER

Who are the heads of the Tonge household? Why Jess and Harry, of course – an English Setter and an orange tabby domestic shorthair, respectively.

“In this house, the fur flies,” joked Delavan resident Erik Tonge.

The fur-family of the home are Harry – the 13-year-old orange tabby – and Jess Lea Tonge, the Setter. Jess, though, claims the family star status, but not because of the friendship she shares with the cat.

Jess is an American Kennel Club FastCAT racer, with the CAT standing for “coursing ability test.” Dogs must have the ability to chase a lure, running a 100-yard course for the best time while chasing said lure.

She’s taken part in 30 races since the beginning of 2023, finishing last year undefeated and breaking a breed record across 100 yards for English Setters.

Now, having registered the top time of 2023 for her breed, Jess was ready to show off her speed at the AKC FastCAT Invitational in Wilmington, Ohio, where the top five dogs in each breed compete. With 200 breeds recognized by the AKC, plus non-invitational races being held the

same weekend in October, hundreds of dogs will be making their way to Ohio.

The Tonges are Team Jess, fueled by Bark River Freeze-dried Dog Treats.

Bringing home Jess

Like most pet owners, Tonge has had a close bond with the animals he has owned. In April of 2021, he lost his Rhodesian Ridgeback/Cocker Spaniel mix, Jack, and said it was like losing a child.

“Not having a child, he was my boy,” Tonge explained. “I just really appreciated the unconditional love.”

A few months later, Tonge and his girlfriend, Melissa, put a deposit on a Brittany Spaniel, hoping to fill the hole losing Jack left in their lives but that deal fell through.

“We weren’t looking for a purebred. We were looking for a puppy,” Tonge explained.

The couple had trouble finding a rescue that would allow them to adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Tonge admitted their frustration was growing when he and Melissa decided to check out an English Setter breeder in southern Illinois.

As it turns out, it was a match made in doggy heaven.

“There were these nine little English Setters in this pen,” Tonge said. “I kneeled down, and this little girl comes flying at me and just knocks me down.”

And, she was available.

“I brought her home and she slept right next to me in the car on the way home,” Tonge said. “That’s where the journey began.”

Little did Tonge understand just how active an English Setter could be.

“She’s a busy bee,” Tonge said, and she has a stubborn streak. The first time he let her outside, she bolted into Delavan Lake.

“From then on, we got a trainer,” he said.

The trainer got at the heart of what Jess needed, and Tonge got Jess out and about to area dog parks for more exercise.

As it turned out, though, Jess was also competitive.

A chance meeting

A random trip to the Williams Bay dog park saw Jess find another dog – a Whippet – whose owner was throwing a ball. Every opportunity she had, Jess tried to beat the Whippet to the ball.

Its owner had a suggestion.

“He said, ‘have you ever heard of the AKC FastCAT? You should try it out,’” Tonge explained.

As it turned out, the Whippet dog was a former FastCAT champion.

When he got home, Tonge looked up information on FastCAT, which gives dogs a chance to test out their top speeds and race against a clock while chasing a lure. The timed 100-yard dash allows some breeds to reach up to 45 miles per hour.

Tonge decided to give Jess a try at FastCAT, running her in a free race at the Racine Kennel Club.

“Her first time, she tied the fastest time that was posted on the AKC website,” Tonge said.

“Wow. You have a fast setter,” the man running the lure told Tonge.

That first race was in May of 2023.

From there, Jess did 19 races during the remainder of 2023. She’s quickly established herself as one of the top English Setters in the country, and by the end of 2023, had broken the lifetime record for English Setters.

That top time earned Jess an invite to the AKC FastCAT Invitational in October.

Jess’s time has since been passed in the all-time records, by her sister, Fhf Mabel, who won’t be at the invite because of the timeframe for which invitations are issued.

It’s interesting that Fhf Mabel passed Jess. The two happen to be sisters – a dog from the next litter of the same two dogs at the breeder where Erik purchased Jess.

“What are the chances of that? I didn’t get this dog to race. It’s incredible,” Tongue said.

This year, she’s running a bit faster than she did last year, according to Tonge.

Looking ahead

Jess has continued her training in 2024 as well as continuing to race.

Tonge said she is racing a “little more consistently faster,” and he’s hoping she can earn the record back in Wilmington.

As for training...

“I swim her a lot in Delavan Lake. It’s very good for their hips,” he explained. “Then a lot of dog walking, and she pulls you around the whole block.”

His goal for Wilmington is to be competitive, but also to have fun and spend time with Jess.

“I got lucky,” he said. “Jess, she picked me out.”

JENNIFER EISENBART Wonders of Walworth County



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What the future holds for students of all kinds

Local manufacturer hosts state Department of Workforce Development

By **Jennifer Eisenbart**
STAFF WRITER

Local manufacturer Precision Plus had plenty of reason to celebrate recently.

The Elkhorn-based company, which now also owns the former Easley building in Walworth, hosted Jennifer Sereno, the Assistant Deputy Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, in late spring to celebrate National Youth Apprenticeship Week.

The event drew more than a few of Precision Plus’s partners in the youth apprenticeship field. Gateway Technical College had Katie Graf, the director of high school partnerships, in attendance, as well as Mike Dahle and Chris Trottier, who handle the three arms of Elkhorn Area School District’s high school programs.

Also at the event was Barry Butters, direction of education and training at Precision Plus Inc.

The day was also supposed to include Elkhorn Area School District Superintendent Jason Tadlock, but President Joe Biden’s visit to the state – to announce an investment in AI development in Sturtevant – pre-empted his appearance.

It was a celebration of the opportunities that Precision Plus – which is transitioning now to Reader Precision Solutions with the acquisition of new properties – has offered in the youth apprenticeship field.

“National Youth Apprenticeship Week is a very important time for us,” said president and owner Mike Reader at the event. “We can’t expect the youth to understand what we do and the beauty of what we do every day unless we invite them in,” adding, “Human capital to us is like oxygen.”

“We have a lot of expensive machine tools that do nothing without talented people,” Reader said.

Sereno and others in attendance took part in a brief roundtable discussion that addressed the youth apprenticeship opportunities in the area, particularly through Reader Precision Solutions. That was followed by a brief tour of the Precision Plus property.

Gateway Technical College’s YA Consortium works in 11 different school districts in the area, including Lake Geneva Badger, Big Foot, Burlington, Delavan-Darien, Waterford, Union Grove, Westosha Central, Williams Bay, Whitewater, and Wilmot.

The Youth Apprenticeship Consortium has impressive numbers. There are 176 youth apprentices at 148 different employers through Gateway, and those students had logged more than 80,000 hours of work and earned more than \$1.1 million.

The largest programs involve connecting students with the following fields: architecture and construction, hospitality and tourism, agriculture, food and natural resources, health and health care, and of course, manufacturing.

Elkhorn’s trio of high school options – Elkhorn Area High School, the College and Career Academy, and Options Virtual Charter School – are at the heart of the partnership, at least when it comes to Precision Plus.

“There’s going to be a war for talent moving forward,” Reader explained, pointing to the shortage of workforce-appropriate employees.



Reader Precision Solutions and Precision Plus in Elkhorn hosted a National Youth Apprenticeship Week event at the business in late spring. **above:** RPS owner Michael Reader (left) and his director of training and education, Barry Butters (center) lead a tour at Precision Plus. At right is Gateway Technical College Director of High School Partnerships Katie Graf. **top:** Student apprentice David Redford (from left) listens as Ray Reader of RPS talks while Amanda Griffoul, VP of Human Resources, looks on.

JENNIFER EISENBART *Wonders of Walworth County*

The idea, he explained, is to get high school age students to understand that four-year colleges aren’t always the best fit for all students.

“We’re just trying to provide them a chance to look at an alternate path,” Reader said. “I would rather help them understand what manufacturing careers look like when they’re 16 or 17, when they’re able to adjust their education plans.”

Reader Precision Solutions has had youth apprentices at the company since 2013, and those students are either working on marketing communications or manufacturing. A total of 51 youth apprentices have gone through the business, with five working there this year.

Among those are J. Anthony Ortiz-Arroyo – a graduate who now works full-time at Reader Precision Solutions – and David Redford – an Elkhorn Area High School student who is apprenticing in the

marketing program.

Ortiz-Arroyo said he “had no clue” what he was getting into when he approached JoAnne Pella for career advice. Pella, the former CTE Coordinator for EASD, is now retired.

As it turned out, Amanda Griffoul, VP of Human Resources at Precision Plus, was on hand at EAHS that day to interview a student for a youth apprenticeship, and Ortiz-Arroyo was added to the agenda.

Both students ended up involved in the youth apprenticeship program, and Ortiz-Arroyo said he found a job that he loved.

Redford started around the same time in the late fall of 2022.

“There was a lot of stuff I enjoyed doing, but nothing that really stuck out,” he said.

Redford took a day trip from school to check out options in the area, and met Ray Reader. The next thing he knew, he was an apprentice.

At the roundtable event in the spring, Ray Reader said “these kids have so many more skills than I had at that age.”

Using social media, Reader Precision Solutions is getting out in the community and recruiting students.

“Getting in front of them ... is our biggest return on investment,” Ray Reader said.

Butters said the investment of time in the community is paying off. He’s gone to talk to second-grade students about manufacturing jobs and had middle school kids tour the plant last year.

“It’s actually become quite easy, because we’re well known,” he explained.

Now Mike Reader wants to see other businesses in the area step up. Having been “aggressively” pursuing talent for 12 years, he wants others to step up to the plate.

“We can’t do it all by ourselves,” he explained. “Be part of the solution.”

exotic invasive woody and herbaceous plant species to restore 60 acres of oak and hickory savannah,” DNR officials said in a news release about the award. “He has started his landscape design business and shows others how and why to use native plants.”

The state agency also noted he gives tours and mentors students, clubs, and tradespeople on ecological restoration.

Mariani said he felt humbled by the honor, however, he acknowledged the award looks to raise awareness of removing invasive species while focusing on using plants native to the area.

“It was very nice. I have received other awards. I am kind of surprised that they made a big deal out of this but am glad they are because this kind of needs to get attention,” he said. “People need to realize that this is something special and this needs to happen.”

Because of his efforts, many uncommon, special concern, threatened, and even endangered plant and animal species have re-appeared and recovered, DNR Public Information Officer Garrett Dietz explained.

The Council issues the awards – previously known as Invader Crusaders Awards – in multiple categories, according to the DNR.

Categories range from individuals to groups in both professional and volunteer settings that have shown a commitment to removing invasive special.

“The winners represent all regions of Wisconsin,” according to the DNR. “They used many different approaches in their fight against invasives, but each winner is united in putting in long hours in the ongoing battle against the spread of invasive species.”

The Wisconsin Invasive Species Council advises the DNR and state legislature on invasive species.

Landing in Lyons

Mariani, who lived in northeastern Illinois decades ago, and his wife, Marie, were seeking a property with a strong potential for restoration.

Shortly after the year 2000, they discovered a 60-acre parcel of land formerly used as a dairy farm that showed promise.

“I looked for the largest piece of property that I could afford and had the best opportunity to not only be able to remove all of the invasive species but have a good chance that there would be native plants,” Mariani said.

Another criterion on the checklist included finding property that had not been tilled and carried remnants of native plants.

For several years, one by one, Mariani started removing invasive species and non-native plants from the property.

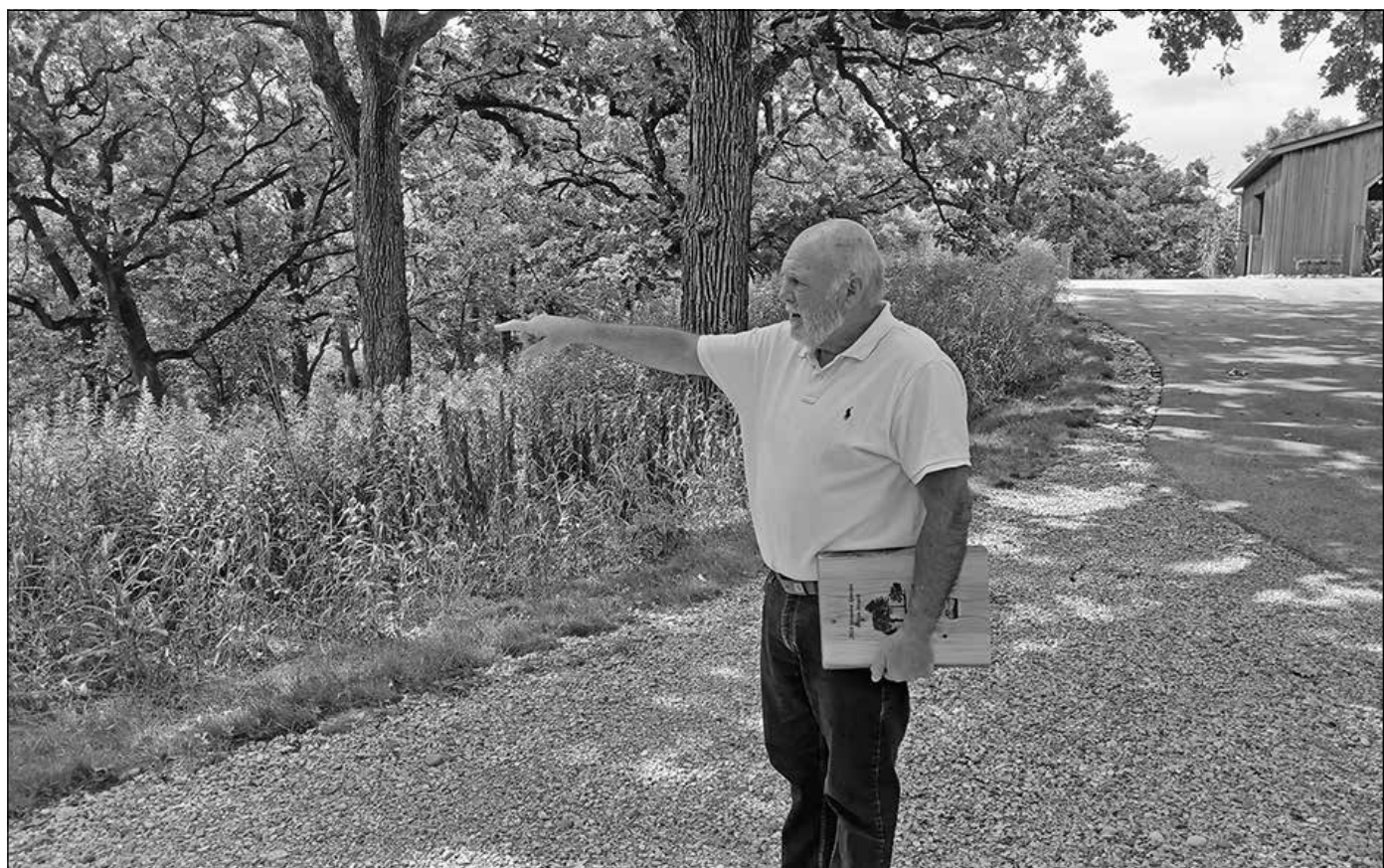
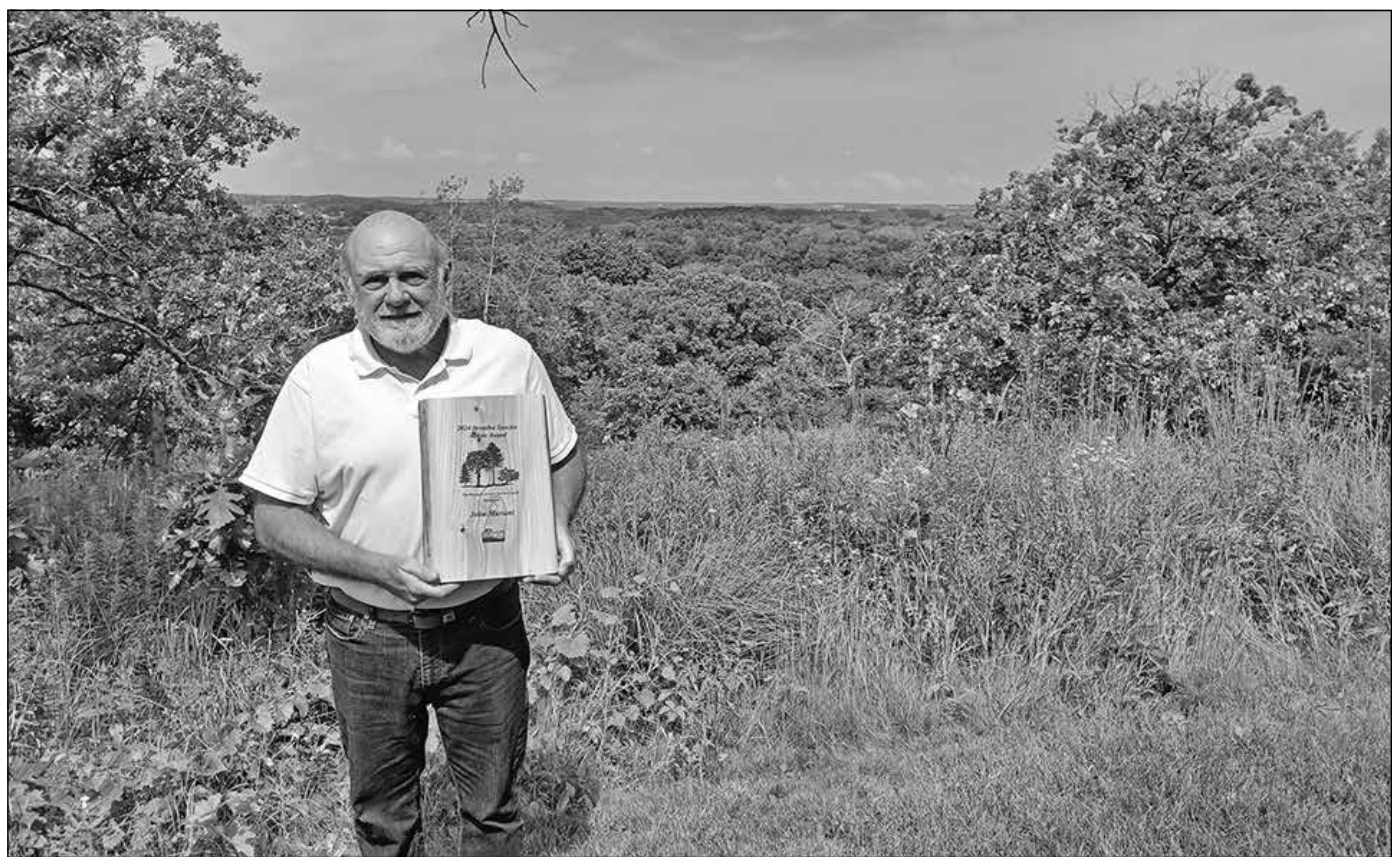
Once removed, he saw cherished wildlife return to the land, including butterflies and birds.

Landscaping is critical

Creating an ideal landscape, particularly with native plants, plays a key role in eliminating non-native plants and invasive species.

“Every time you plant a non-native plant, you just displaced a native plant,” Mariani said. “I try to use 100% of native plants, but they are not always available. It’s OK, give people that sentimental blend of lilac and magnolia, but I try not to overdo it.”

Another component is the proper placement of trees, including the oak, on a



top: Mariani showcases the award he was recently honored with by the Wisconsin Invasive Species Council related to his 60-acre property in the Town of Lyons. **above:** There are many oak trees on the property of Mariani, who said proper placement of trees is one of many components in eliminating invasive species.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Walworth County

parcel of land.

“Put the oak tree in the right place, where it is not problematic and dropping acorns on your car or in the gutter,” he said.

Additionally, using native plants helps preserve Wisconsin’s distinct landscape, as differing regions in the United States have specific identities.

“It doesn’t make any sense for me to use Colorado spruce here in the Town of Lyons,” Mariani said.

“When I go to the southwest, I expect to see things local to the southwest region. When I go to the tropics, there are palm trees, not oaks that I would see,” he added.

In Wisconsin, some of the most common forestry elements include oak and apple trees, among others.

Using native plants could also save on shipping costs and Mariani said he typically finds locally sourced items to use in his landscaping projects.

Transient living

Mariani said another factor that plays a role in diminished landscaping is a change in homeownership.

He explained some people can move to a new place up to 14 times in their lifetimes.

The transient movement, he said, often leads to neglect and inconsistent landscaping with new homeowners having differing tastes.

Considering the total amount of property transfers, Mariani believes people don’t consider the affect those changes have on nature.

“People are not connected with nature like they once were,” he said Mariani, adding that up to 80% of the population lives in densely urban areas or suburbs of a nearby large city.

“Everyone just has a fascination with nature, but they don’t understand it,” Mariani said.

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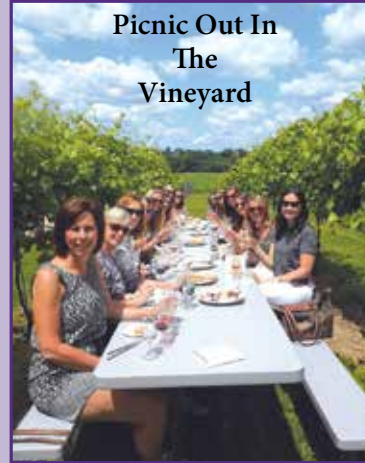
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