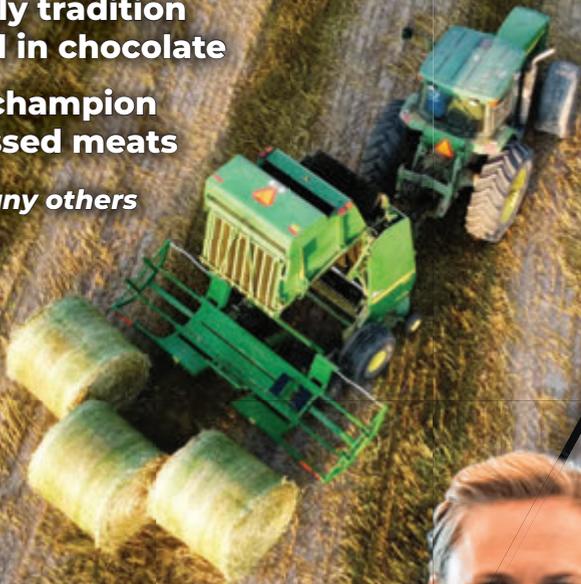


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## Made in Eagle River:

*revitalized downtowns,  
youth entrepreneurship*

By Josephine Hinderman

In recent years, the Eagle River's downtown area has witnessed stunning transformations, having become a revitalized hub for young entrepreneurs seeking to start their small businesses in the area.

These efforts are thanks, in part, to the Eagle River Revitalization Program (ERRP), a program dedicated to helping local small business owners find success in this slice of Northwoods paradise.

With the surge of new and young business owners flocking area with them comes new businesses, goods and services.

"You always see the same old mom-and-pop shops in a small town like this, but I feel like you're starting to see new things, new goods, around here with younger business owners coming in to settle," described co-owner of Eagle River Pet Company Josh Dishno, who owns the pet boutique along with his wife Ryli.

While utilizing local services, such as the pet company's grooming services, visitors will have opportunities to explore a downtown area lined with stores that breathe life into its main street.

Terri Shaefer, owner of Shepherd's Wool which opened in March 2024 at the corner of Wall and N. Railroad streets, added, "Things are changing, but it's nice to see that we're updating with the times and with what people want. Eagle River really steps up, everyone is upping their game, and it's a really positive feeling."

Local business owners in Eagle River have



Eagle River has swiftly become a hub for young entrepreneurs looking to start their small businesses.

—Staff Photo By JOSEPHINE HINDERMAN



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applauded the ERRP for the continuous support they've provided to them in order to make them flourish.

"The (ERRP) is always encouraging us to apply for these grants to improve our businesses," said Andy Lichtfuss, owner of Andy's Pontoon Saloon which opened in May 2024 — just before Memorial Day weekend — in downtown Eagle River. "You feel such a strong sense of support from not just other businesses but the ERRP board, too."

Among supporting established and new businesses, the ERRP is also eager to provide support to young area entrepreneurs as well through their Young Entrepreneur Markets, or YEM.

The summer of 2024 saw three of these YEMs, all held in the newly built Rotary Square, where entrepreneurs between the ages of 10 and 17 could set up shop to try and develop and sell their homemade products, goods and services.

"This event helped me talk with people and learn how to have conversations," said Raelee Engels of Ree Bee's Bakery, a small business selling homemade cupcakes alongside plush bumblebees and jellyfish crafted from crochet. "It's also helped with learning how to count money, and it's also been nice to know how to run a small business in the future, and just learning skills that comes with a job, like counting money, accountability, all that stuff. It's been a good experience and a lot of fun as well."

Other youth who participated in the markets voiced similar sentiments, saying that the events helped them further develop people skills and learn what it truly means — and takes — to be a small business owner.

Though YEM events have come to an end for the summer season, the group is always looking for more young members to join and hone their entrepreneurial skills.

For more information, visit their website at [eagleriverrevitalization.org/YEMEagleRiver](http://eagleriverrevitalization.org/YEMEagleRiver).

To learn more about about ERRP visit [eagleriverrevitalization.org/](http://eagleriverrevitalization.org/) or contact Karen Margelofsky at 715-477-0645. 🇺🇸

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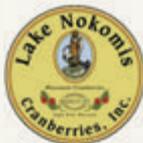


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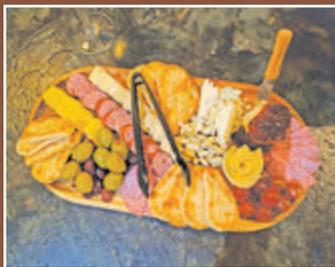
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# 'If it's something you're buying, we're probably energizing it'

*Rhinelanders' AirPro Fan and Blower quietly makes things for makers*

By Eileen Persike



Submitted photos

**A**irPro Fan and Blower makes industrial fans. And blowers. A simple statement that, even after more than 20 years, tends to elicit blank stares.

"Making metal machines since 2002? That's just what I tell people, because when I say 'fan,' I can't get anywhere with that," Keith White, Jr., president of the Rhinelanders-based company, explained.

Pointing to a series of photos on his office wall, White says one of them, featuring a large metal machine, was taken inside a pet food manufacturing facility. What is not pictured are the chemicals, the ingredients, the processes to make pet food.

"Those things need conveyance and all these fans to basically provide the power to move that material and dry it inside the plant," he said. "Fans are just at the back end, just doing stuff."

"At the end of the day, I think of us as a 'maker for makers.' I love making things; we mostly make things for people that make things. We're a piece of the supply chain

that brings something to you. It could be glass, it could be a car, it could be pet food, it could be power. If it's something you're buying, we're probably energizing it," White said.

## The beginning

AirPro was started in 2002 by three engineers who had worked in other fan businesses, White's dad, Keith White Sr., his uncle Marty Mathews and Jim Pierce.

A Rhinelanders High School graduate, White



Clockwise from left, AirPro founders Jim Pierce, Keith White Sr., and Marty Mathews.



Keith White Jr. became AirPro president in 2023.

Senior's goal was to live in the Northwoods. Armed with an engineering degree, he headed to St. Louis and worked for a company that made and installed fan systems for a few years

before being hired for a similar job in Phillips, bringing him back to the Northwoods. The next several years included a series of ups and downs that eventually led to White Senior turning down a job offer one day and incorporating AirPro the next.

"He felt like he knew fans and had the gumption to go for it, right? He'd already built a business but wasn't the owner," White Jr. recalled. "He felt like from his first job at six years, he knew fans, he knew the technology enough to run a business off it... the only

missing piece was to take the risk. So, what's the worst that can happen? It fails? And he also had a lot of kids; I'm one of 11. Ten kids at home at the time, and my uncle Marty, who started with him, had 10 kids at home at the time."

White Junior worked part time at AirPro from the start, when he was in high school, whenever help was needed. After a couple of years, business started to gain traction and turned a profit; White Senior gave himself his first paycheck.

"That's a big part of the entrepreneurial story that most people expect is part of it but maybe don't live or see like I did," White Junior said. "And my parents were great about all of it, but the actual risk that people take on to make something work - I'll always respect him for that."

White Senior purchased a facility on Highway 17 N in the early 2000s, allowing the company to move from a custom, small, niche manufacturer to one that could quote larger, more lucrative jobs.

"In our industry we're competing against way more experienced players," White Junior said. "We're still a new-ish name. We're getting less new-ish at 22 years, but we're still newish. It's an old industrial world. Machinery is that way. You want a name you can trust and we didn't have a name. He was focused on building a brand name from the beginning, but as soon as that capacity opened up and he could quote a bigger array, he started having more success there."



## Growing the business

As the business became viable, White worked in the summer and any extended breaks he had from Michigan Tech, where he studied mechanical engineering and played football. Over the years he did everything from welding and picking up parts, to cleaning up prints and doing design work. White Junior was named company president in 2023. He said there was no pressure for him to come back to Rhineland to work in the business after college graduation – only he and brother Chet work for AirPro – but after getting a taste of feeling less-than valuable during an internship in Georgia, he knew what he would do.

“I think that’s a big reason I ultimately took it, knowing I could be valuable and the tangible tie to that would be pretty easy to see; I could succeed or fail, I got to see what that looked like,” White said “I’ve always been drawn to manufacturing, the idea of creating a durable good, bringing it to market... and the market is going to tell you either you did a good job or you didn’t. I think that’s really interesting.”

Not wanting to be “just the guy who went to work for his dad’s company and punched the clock,” White said he was very motivated to grow it, to turn the company into something. Hired as a design engineer, he learned by walking the shop floor and asking workers to



critique his designs. Stepping into purchasing for a year, White began stocking parts for the first time, meeting with vendors, negotiating better deals. After that, White created a test lab.

“That was a two-and-a-half year project full of stories I’ll keep out,” he said. “I needed more confidence in our product. I needed to believe that when we said it would do this, that I had seen it.”

In short, he was doing anything he could to try and make the company better. With revenue doubling in the last three years, White said the goal is to continue to grow.

The company’s vision of bringing together the best minds in engineering, developing top-quality industrial fans and blowers, and delivering

them with unmatched reliability and customer service remains, White said, just perhaps some zigzagging and clarification along the way.

“You’re just kind of building the brand and coloring it in and I think that just gets more clear as we grow,” he said. “Because we’ve always wanted way more than we could do; we’ve always wanted to be better than we could and we’ve always been honest about our shortcomings so it’s fun to start taking that list of shortcomings and whittle that down.

“And then as you grow, another one pops in,” White said with a smile. But that, he added, is a good problem to have. 🍃



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# Manufactured in Tomahawk, LP's 'SmartSide' is one of the country's fastest-growing trim and siding brands

By Jalen Maki

LP Building Solutions is a leader in high-performance building solutions that manufactures engineered wood products for builders, remodelers and homeowners around the world.

Founded in 1972, LP is headquartered in Nashville, Tenn., and operates 22 plants across the U.S., Canada, Chile and Brazil.

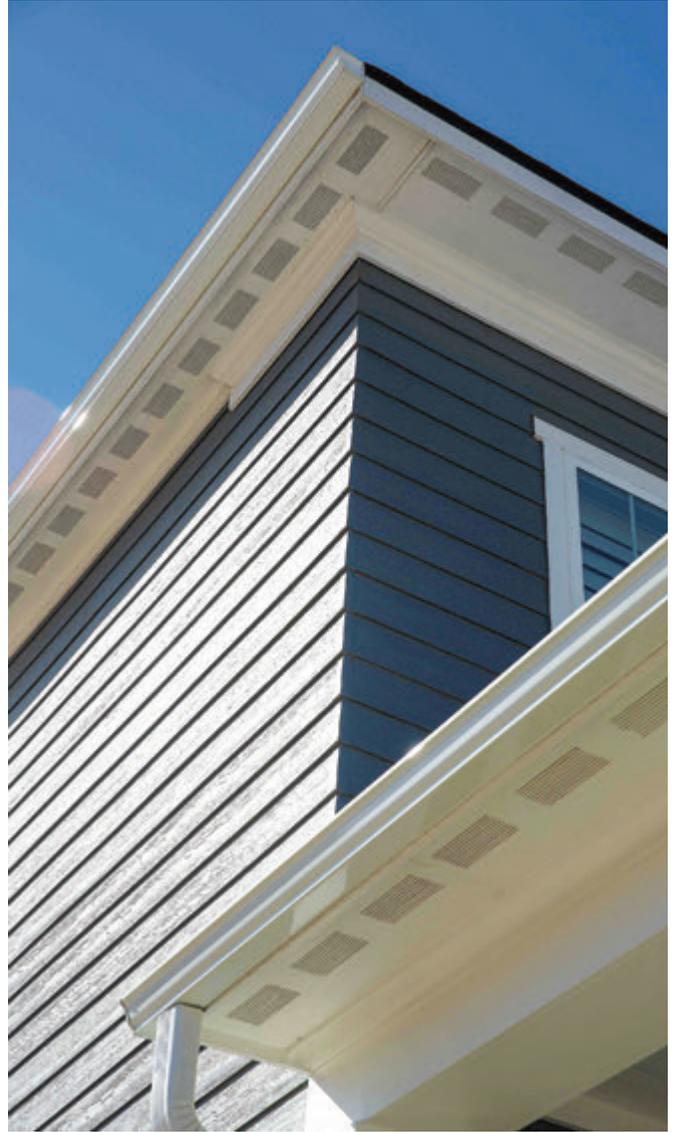
LP's plant in Tomahawk manufactures the company's SmartSide products, one of the fastest-growing brands for trim and siding products in the United States.

"LP has redefined traditional building materials with treated engineered wood products that are designed to offer game-changing durability, beauty and workability," the company said. "LP is a building industry leader in a category that's shaping the way homes, outdoor building structures and light commercial properties are being built."

LP said all of its SmartSide products are treated to the core through the company's SmartGuard manufacturing process, which involves a formulated mix of resins, waxes and zinc borate to add strength and protection against hail damage and moisture intrusion, as well as resistance to termites and fungal decay.

"Testing shows that LP SmartSide products resist impact better than vinyl and fiber cement siding, which means they can stand up better against everything from everyday bumps to storm debris," the company stated. "And because it doesn't break as easily as fiber cement siding, LP SmartSide siding is also easier to handle and install, resulting in less waste."

According to LP, third-party test results indicate that the company's SmartSide lap siding resisted hail damage better than fiber cement and vinyl.



Photos courtesy of LP



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The company noted that the SmartSide warranty covers impacts from hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter and added that the lap siding is also designed to withstand storms with wind gusts of up to 200 miles per hour.

LP's SmartSide siding has also endured rigorous testing in Hilo, Hawaii, for nearly three decades.

"An average temperature of more than 70 degrees, high levels of humidity and almost 170 inches of annual rainfall make Hilo's climate the perfect breeding ground for termites, moisture and fungal decay, yet our Exterior Exposure Program continues to validate that LP SmartSide siding performs over time," LP stated.

LP said its SmartGuard manufacturing process helps ensure that every SmartSide product is treated with an advanced formula of adhesive resins, water-resistant waxes and zinc borate, after which a water resistant, resin-saturated overlay is bonded to the product.

"The result: four components of protection against water damage, termites and fungal decay," LP said.

SmartSide products also have environmental benefits as one of the only carbon-negative siding options on the market. The products are "naturally sustainable," LP explained, with the manufacturing process beginning with wood, a renewable resource, grown and gathered responsibly under strict Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) standards.

"We target fast-growing trees and use 99% of the log for either the product or the fuel to make it," LP stated. "Plus, all binding agents and resins are low-emitting. The amount of carbon dioxide emitted during production of LP SmartSide products is less than the amount the product stores over its lifetime, qualifying them as carbon negative. In fact, LP SmartSide products emit 54% less greenhouse gases and store 10 times more carbon than fiber cement-based products."



The SmartSide line of products also offers a variety of designs to boost a home's curb appeal and overall aesthetic.

"With its variety of textures, styles and ExpertFinish colors, LP SmartSide products elevate almost any structure – from traditional homes to modern masterpieces," LP said. "Its versatility also offers endless options for designs that stand out, making it the siding of choice for over 20 years for homeowners who want distinctive beauty and uncompromising quality."

To learn more about LP's SmartSide products, visit [www.tinyurl.com/23b2sy4s](http://www.tinyurl.com/23b2sy4s).

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# A small-town program making a worldwide difference

By Kaity Coisman

The Samuel Pressure Vessel Group in Marinette started a program that awards employees for their ideas, but now, 22 years later, the program has grown into a global initiative.

Creator of the program and Quality Assurance (QA) Manager Dawn Topper said, “[Quality Productivity Safety Incentive] is a suggestion program that awards employees for ideas to improve quality, productivity or safety at Samuel Pressure Vessel Group sites of Marinette and Tomahawk and Lebanon, Va. It has been running since 2002 in Marinette, where the program was initially created.”

Since then, Topper has continued to facilitate the program for 22 years. “At the Marinette site, we have awarded over \$57,000 to employees so far,” Topper said. “Ideas are submitted to the QPSI committee, which selects the top three winners each quarter, and all who win or enter receive incentive points to be used for gift cards or shopping on Amazon.”

There are often three suggestion winners with varying prizes, and some employees will get participation awards at the end of each quarter.

The QPSI program later caught the eye of SPVG owners Samuel and Sons and their corporate leaders in Toronto, Canada. Topper explained that the program at the corporate level is called Samuel Solutions, modeled after the QPSI program started in Marinette. Winners of the QPSI program can enter to compete against the other Samuel companies throughout Canada, the United States and Mexico, with a total of over 90 companies. The Samuel Solutions prizes range from \$1,000 - \$15,000.

“Both programs are vital components to the continuous improvement effort and, in many cases, save the organization time, employee safety and added expense,” Topper said.

Operations Manager and Site Leader Mark Callow explained more about the program.

“We take the qualified ideas from the Marinette facility, and then we roll them up to the Samuel Solutions committee, and then on an annualized basis, our employees can be selected for their cost savings that can have an impact generated across multiple facilities, all the Samuel facilities.”

Since the creation of the Samuel Solutions program four years ago, the Marinette location has had multiple winners that have placed second, third and fourth to win cash prizes.

“As a whole, Samuel has about 6,000 employees across Canada, the United States and Mexico. So, we’re a pretty good sized organization with a lot of, you know, boots on the ground that can definitely have an impact when we talk about idea generation,” Callow said.



QPSI best suggestion of the year winner in 2023, Doug Siebers, pictured with his managers and supervisors.



QPSI best suggestion of the year winner in 2024, Brad Monfort, along with his supervisor and manager. **Submitted photos**

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# Geiss Meat Service: Pickle beef sticks, braunschweiger, and brats ... Oh my!

By Tina L. Scott



The Geiss Meat Service retail store is open weekdays and Saturday mornings, offering a full range of beef and pork products, as well as poultry, sausage, snack sticks, and more. **Tina L. Scott photos**

**G**eiss Meat Service, located not far outside the city limits of Merrill, produces a wide variety of sausages and processed meat products. It also provides complete butchering services for the community – of beef, pork and lamb livestock for farmers, and of wild game for hunters.

Founded in 1956 by Ed and Marcella Geiss, current owners Andy and Michelle Geiss are third-generation owners and operators of Geiss Meat Service, along with Andy's two sisters, Ginger Belgram and Lindsay Malzahn. Andy grew up in the business and he and his wife got involved as owners in 2005.

Geiss Meat Service offers a wide variety of beef, pork, lamb and poultry meat cuts for sale to consumers, as well as processed meats to include many varieties of snack sticks, jerky, brats and sausage products, ring sausage and wieners.

## Local favorites

Many local residents have their own personal favorite products from Geiss Meat Service, but three of their products were recently highlighted by customers on Facebook as favorites: Geiss Meat Braunschweiger, Geiss Meat Pickle Beef Sticks, and Geiss Meat Brats.

Andy is happy to learn how much customers love their products. In fact, their Pickle Beef Sticks are relatively new. They just started making them in spring 2023, Andy said. One of their secrets [well, not so much a secret anymore, but he was willing to share], is that they only use Milwaukee mini pickles in this product. "It's the only pickle that'll work in a pickle stick," Andy said. "We've tried probably 25 different kinds of pickles. It's the little mini with the hard exterior that holds up."

This relatively new product was inspired by customers; customers, he said, are what inspire the vast majority of their new products, including their new pineapple barbecue and barbecue cranberry beef sticks.

"We've been adding more and more and more products. And that really has been customer driven, along with the competitions," Andy said.

It's probably 50/50, he said, as far as the kinds of new products they create and develop. He said sometimes he will see something or hear of something and think, "That's really cool. Let's try making that."

## Master Meat Crafter - award winning meat products

As members of the Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors – Andy Geiss is currently president – and American Association of Meat Processors, Geiss Meat frequently enters their products into competitions through the associations and also at the Wisconsin State Fair and IFFA, The IFFA is the leading international trade fair for the meat and protein industry that originated in Germany but now also holds satellite competitions in the U.S. and other countries.

"When I started learning the business, my uncle Gary ran the smokehouse," Andy said. Everything was done by hand without automation. That was when and where Andy discovered he really wanted to get into the sausage-making part of the business. "I realized this is really where I want to be," he said. "I want to make sausage and I want to make good sausage, you know?"

It became a passion, so he pursued that with fervor, taking classes at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and entering competitions and completing a two-year program to become a Master Meat Crafter.



A close-up view of Geiss Meat's pickle beef snack sticks, made with Milwaukee mini pickles.



Slices of Braunschweiger, with pickle beef sticks on the cutting board on the left.



Clockwise from top right, Geiss Meat's bacon and cheddar brats, two packages of Geiss Meat's pickle beef sticks, and Geiss Meat's braunschweiger.

Geiss Meat entered their first competition in 2005 and Andy said he learned a lot from the feedback they received. By 2007, they had earned their first plaque in a mettwurst competition.

"We got a fourth place. And that is where we started," he said. "We've seen ourselves getting better and better with our product. And that was our first award. And then from there, then it was like ... let's make this work."

Since then, Andy and Geiss Meat have gone on to win many, many awards in many areas of competition for a wide variety of their products. In 2023 Geiss Meat took home 17 awards and two honorable mentions, and in 2024 they were named Wisconsin State Fair Champion Meat Processor, just as an example.

## Braunschweiger and brats

Regarding braunschweiger and brats, "Braunschweiger is pretty standard," Andy said. They've had that for about six years now.

Andy said he ventured into making it because he wanted to enter a Braunschweiger class in competition. That was his goal, and it's just grown from there. It's now become a classic product offering.

"Brats have been here for years. Brats are a staple," Andy said. "Same recipe as my uncle Gary, for a second generation." The difference is they now also offer nearly 20 different types of brat varieties, he said. Current brat varieties include garlic parmesan, kielbasa, Italian, cheese, Philly cheese, jalapeno cheese, mushroom Swiss, pickle, pizza, deluxe pizza, bacon cheddar, badger, beer cheese curd, sassy honey BBQ, smoked, and smoked cheddarwurst.

## Where to get them

All of Geiss Meat's products are available in their retail store at W4490 Pope Rd. in Merrill, which is open weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays 9 a.m. to noon, but distribution has recently expanded into many other locations in Merrill and is growing throughout the state, as well.

"We are starting to reach out to gas stations and bars and restaurants," Andy said. Right now they are getting products out in the Merrill, Tomahawk and Wausau areas. "Probably the 40-mile radius," he said. "But we're looking to expand that, too."

Andy said they now have a salesperson on the road making contacts to increase their distribution.

"It started by customers asking for our products," he said.

Local businesses actually contacted them about selling their products in their stores. They wanted to sell things like snack sticks and jerky, things that were produced locally and would be quick and convenient

snacks for their customers to buy. In addition to their own retail store location, one or more of their products is currently available in Merrill at Ace Hardware, Clarks Cup N Cone, Cenex, Eagles Club, Jokin Joes, Les & Jims Lincoln Lanes, Lions Club, Marathon Gas Station, Napa, Nelson's Powerhouse, Pine Ridge Mobil, River Country Co-Op, Sawmill Brewing Co., and Westside Market. They are also available during the annual rodeo and at Merrill area school events, such as those for fastpitch, baseball, basketball, wrestling, and cheerleading. "The sports community has been huge," Andy said. "They all support us." 🇺🇸

### Award Winning Products



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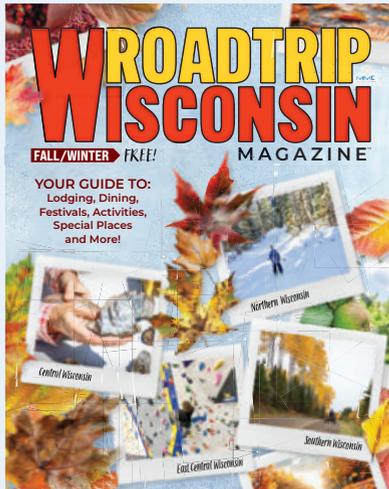
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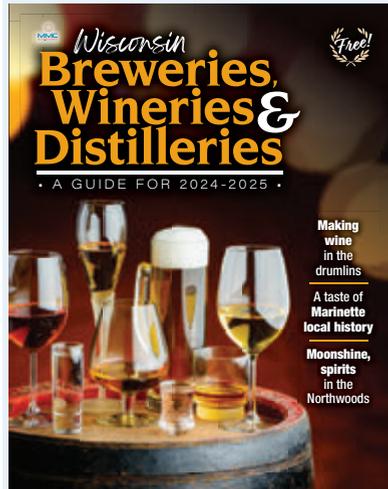


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## Distilling wisdom

*Knowlton House Distillery is making award-winning spirits out of cheese by-products, and looking good doing so*

By B.C. Kowalski



Heather Mullins is the owner (along with husband Luke) and distiller of Knowlton House Distillery in Knowlton. Knowlton House uses milk sugar to ferment its spirits, which gives the alcohol a rich, creamy flavor. They've been winning awards recently for their spirits.

B.C. Kowalski photos

**W**hen you first walk into Knowlton House Distillery south of Mosinee, the blend of operation and function become abundantly clear.

The distillery, opened last just over a year ago, features brand new distilling equipment, a blend of copper and steel that provides a steampunk aesthetic to the decor. Combined with tasteful design choices by Lamplight Sessions owner Logan Erickson, the place immediately feels welcoming and cool.

But that's just the outside decor of the place. At its heart is a devotion to the science of fermenting. Owner Heather Mullins knows that part well, with a master's degree in fermented science.

What makes Knowlton House Distillery

unique is that its spirits use the milk sugar by-product from cheese-making from the Mullins Cheese operations. That requires a special yeast to convert that milk sugar into alcohol to create the various spirits served at Knowlton House.

The result: A creamier style of spirits that is already winning awards.

Mullins says she was introduced to the concept in graduate studies in the UK, where a similar cheese-making operation was also producing the unique type of alcohol. It's not very common, and Knowlton House is one of maybe a dozen making alcohol this way, she says.

Mullins spent a couple of years experimenting



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with various yeast strains before coming up with one she liked, and since then she and her husband Luke started the distillery.

All that equipment not only looks cool, but it serves a function. The vodka process employs 40 plates that distill the spirit into the highest quality. The stacks, which can be seen through the glass from the tap room, are tall and impressive looking.

The name itself goes back to a Knowlton House tavern built in 1849 in Knowlton, Mullins says. The funny story is that the name of the bar, which was a popular stopping point for loggers and others, became synonymous with the area. So when they named it a town, they named it after the bar.

The spirits are actually named under a different branding: TenHead. That's a nod to the founder of what eventually became Mullins Cheese, who sold his 10 head of cattle to escape the potato famine in Ireland to come to the U.S. He started a dairy farm that eventually grew into a cheesemaking operation.

Today Knowlton House Distillery is not only a place to enjoy a cocktail, it features a pet-friendly patio for outdoor drinking and a full menu. That latter part was important, Mullins says, because if they're going to serve alcohol they see it as important to provide dining to mitigate the drink's impacts to a degree.

That menu features fare ranging from the Knowlton Burger, to an arugula and beet salad, to a bourbon-glazed pork chop.

How's it been going? Pretty good, Knowlton House staff say. Both the TenHead vodka and gin won gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. And the vodka won double gold and the gin won platinum at the SIP awards.

Knowlton House Distillery is located at 204575 Highway DB, Knowlton. Bottle shop & tastings available 11 am-5 pm daily. Cocktail bar & dining open 4-9 pm Thursday, 11 am-9 pm Friday and Saturday, 11 am-5 pm Sunday. 🍷



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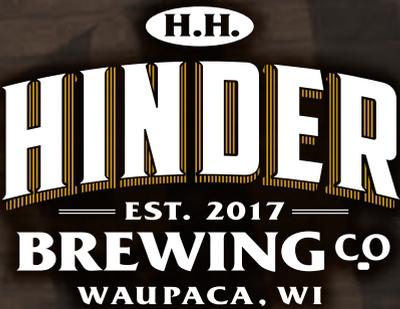


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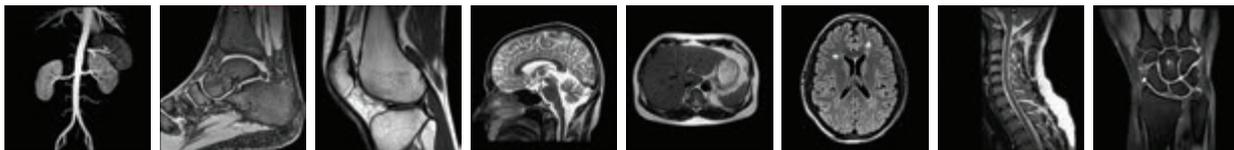


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# Seroogy's: A sweet story of success

By Kris Leonhardt



Seroogy's tradition does not end with their recipes, the company's dedication to the community and small-town, family environment remains in homage to the early years.

Kris Leonhardt photo

Like many other immigrants, the Seroogy family came to America to escape poor conditions in their homeland.

The call for ambitious men to the “New World” was attractive to families affected by both war and economic upheaval.

Among them were Rookoos and Anastasia and three of their sons — Solomon, Joseph and James — and a brother-in-law, Joseph Shalhoub.

Once in America, they headed for California, where southern California was beginning to grow at a rapid pace.

During a stop in Chicago, they heard of a city to the north offering plenty of mill work at the height of the country's Industrial Revolution, where they found the growing city of Green Bay — the perfect place for those with a knack for business and an ambitious mindset.

“With the Mediterraneans, the Lebanese, the Syrians, the Greeks, there is an inordinate percentage of — not big, but more often than not — you'll find people of that nationality involved in ice cream, bakery, candy, chocolate,

soda fountains, something like that,” said Rukas and Anastasia's great-grandson, Joe.

“There are several of them in the state that were like that. In Escanaba, there's Saykly's. In Beloit, there was a family of people from Lebanon. In Minneapolis, there's Abdallah chocolates and here, Ferrara had candy in Green Bay at one time, and Seroogy's have had it since 1899.

“So, I don't know why that is. I think they just like to make people happy. Candy's a fun business. It's been very enjoyable.

“So, they came over in the 1890s. Lebanese people do not like to work for other people. They don't like to work for a paper mill or a construction company or something like that. They want to do it themselves.

“They worked for a year or so in some of the paper mills in the Fox Valley, until they saved up a nest egg and they were able to get started in a retail business.

“There were sandwiches and soups and burgers and whatnot. And one day, my

grandfather liked to play around in the kitchen, and he made a batch of fudge, chopped it up into small pieces and sold them for five cents apiece, and they just went bonkers. You know, people loved it.

“So he did it again the next day, and became a staple thing. And then, long story short, ultimately, the chili and the burgers went the way of all things passed, and we specialized in being a candy company, with brittles and caramels and creams and taffies.”

In November 1900, the family welcomed a set of twins — McKinley and Bryan — corresponding with the 1896 presidential election and the 1900 rematch.

Just weeks before Christmas 1902, two younger siblings, arrived in Green Bay to join him and other family members, alone and presumably frightened, as their older brother was detained in France due to an eye infection.

“With tags pinned to their clothing giving their destination, George Seroogy, aged 14

»» CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

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Rookoos and Anastasia Seroogy's sons, Jim and Joe, stand in front of a Seroogy's storefront. The young girl pictured with them is Helen Seroogy Shalhoub, Joe's daughter and mother of actor Tony Shalhoub. **Seroogy's photo**

» SEROOGY'S CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

years, and his sister, 11 years old, neither of whom can speak a word of English arrived in Green Bay last week from Syria, having made the journey thousands of miles without the company of an older person," a Press-Gazette article stated.

The couple welcomed two more children in America — Selma in 1903 and Frances in 1905.

Rookoos Seroogy ushered all of the children into a life of entrepreneurship and through that created an environment that would lead to the industry of fine chocolate.

**Just like 1899**

The business was transferred down a couple of generations before the business landed in the hands of Rookoos' great-grandsons, Joe and Jim, who had been forging other lives outside of the business prior to 1980.

"My brother and I were not interested right away, but we had other careers, and when my father said that he was thinking of retiring it was attractive to us, you know. My brother was a social worker and I was a music teacher, but we have a great background," recalled Joe Seroogy.

"So, we gradually left our professions and came back to De Pere, and we had been working in the business on and off all of our lives. So it was not a learning process, but there were things that we wanted to change. The biggest challenge that we faced was to keep up with the demand that we had been creating for volumes of stuff that we make and consider more expedient ways of production without compromising on the quality.

"And I think we've done that. A one-pound box of our assorted chocolates today looks just like it did in 1899. If it ain't broke, we don't fix it.

"And even then, my father was extremely critical of, for example, the enrobers.

"We have five enrobers out there... they take single pieces of whatever it is we need dipping and they send them to the curtain and dip them. And it was our desire to make it so that you couldn't tell the difference between if anything



Sol and Libby Seroogy and some of the staff at the "Palace of Sweets" in the early 20th century. **Seroogy's photo**

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was handmade or machine-made. And I think we've achieved that."

Seroogy's sales manager Marjorie Hitchcock said that one of the aspects of Seroogy's chocolate-making business that makes it so successful is that the chocolate is made in small batches, so it is always fresh.

"We make it work because everything we do, we do by hand. We wouldn't have to do it by hand, but then it wouldn't be Seroogy's," she added.

But, that's not where the similarities end.

"The ingredients are the same now than they have been — no preservatives and a lot of butter. Shelf life is not an issue, because everything we make we sell so fast, and we don't run the risk of it going rancid or anything," Joe added.

### The fourth season

Seroogy's tradition does not end with their recipes, the company's dedication to the community and small-town, family environment remains in homage to those early years.

"We liked the people part of the business," explained co-owner Joe Seroogy.

"At any given Christmas, you see everybody in town at one time. They come in, and my father loved it, and he would see kids who are now parents and grandparents that we went to school with.

"That's real nice. You don't get that kind of thing at the supermarket with a checkout, or any other place. Restaurants, maybe, it depends on the type of business. But for us, it's part and parcel of being here. Everybody comes here at Christmas and Easter, and it's very social. And everybody knows everybody and it's a fun time."

Seroogy said that the current employees are much like family.

"They're all wonderful, wonderful people," he said. "We laugh a lot; we have fun."

And employees are at the heart of one of their largest "seasons" of the year.

"We have divided the year into three main sections — there's Easter, there's Christmas, and there's the in-between stuff, Mother's Day,



Joe Seroogy, at left, visits with members of his production team.

Kris Leonhardt photo

Father's Day things — but the main ones are Easter, Christmas and Valentine's Day," Seroogy said.

"Well, along comes June, and like Hughes Candy in Oshkosh locks up for June, and they don't open again until September.

"We don't like to do that, because people coming through want the stuff and take it when they go up north to vacation and they come back here, they'll stop and pick up stuff and bring it back home for the family.

"For us, it has to be a 12-month business. It's just not worth it for us to go through liquidating all of our stuff and getting rid of it and reducing it just so that we don't have to have stuff hanging around. So we created a fourth season, which for us is candy bars.

"When summer would come we would have to lay off or replace a lot of people who wanted 12-month employment. But if you're closing because of production, they're going to find other places to go, and it's easier for us to keep something going so that they have a job 12

months out of the year. And that's why we have candy bars because we had to create, in essence, a fourth season.

"The kids come back from school, from vacation, and there is energy and they're excited and that's the best time to get them to sell candy bars for the playground equipment or the new band uniforms or something. And that's one of our biggest seasons, biggest sellers of the years when school starts up again.

"When the Memorial Day parade hits, we have about 30 kids that help us out, giving out the candy bars — like 30,000 of them — and they love it.

"I always put them in back of one of the bands — De Pere or West De Pere bands — so we can establish a friendship with them because they sell our candy bars when they need uniforms or instruments or something. It's a great thing."

Today, Seroogy's operates two locations — one at 144 N. Wisconsin St., De Pere, and one at 784 Willard Dr., Ashwaubenon, which opened in 2008. 🇺🇸

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OPEN YEAR ROUND



# Hillview Flower Farm

## *Fellowship among the flowers*

By Katherine Dresback

It all started with the dream of a greenhouse—just a simple greenhouse to grow succulent plants. When Megan Chamberlain moved back home to Pine River, with her husband and three children in tow, she never would have imagined that this new adventure would lead to a flower farm where people could gather and create bouquets together.

The Chamberlains decided to pick up their roots in Milwaukee and move to rural east central Wisc., in Pine River, where Megan grew up. The land was available for purchase from Megan's father. Her father asked her if she wanted sunrises or sunsets to view from her new residence, and she eagerly chose sunsets. Megan and her family now enjoy sun downs that peer over rolling corn fields and a growing flower field.

There are many things to consider when purchasing a new home, so many plans to make and dreams to conjure. Megan began to imagine a greenhouse in her backyard. She wanted to grow a couple of succulent plants, nothing too ambitious, right? Her small dreams became a big reality that has flourished into a still-growing field of flowers.

Learning any new skill will come with its challenges, and since 2021 Megan has been learning about the different flowers she has wanted to grow. Some flowers need more attention than others. Megan had perennials that she would care for yearly and had always loved flowers, so with her background knowledge and a passion for learning, she jumped into her new hobby headlong. Megan became familiar with different flowers and learned some of them can be “divas” as she refers to them. For example, lisianthus are planted in January, but won't bloom until July!

The local community of flower farmers has become invaluable to each other.

“If I'm making a bouquet [for a customer] and I run out of dahlias, I know who to call,” Megan remarked on the friendships that have formed with her fellow flower farmers.

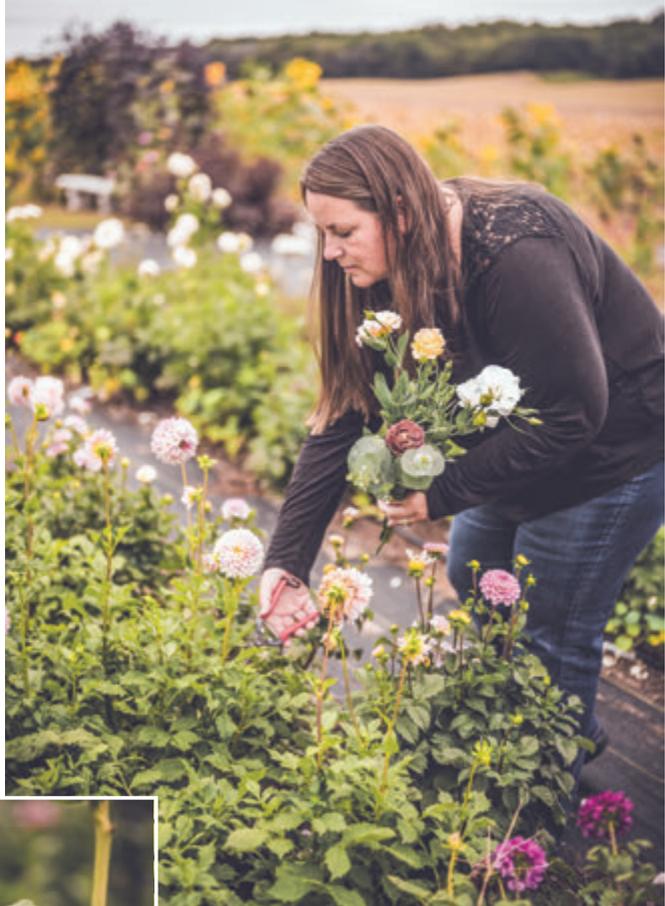
A desire that Megan had for her flower farm was that people would be able to convene with each other while they enjoyed the scenery.

“I wanted people to be able to gather here and pick flowers together for their bouquets,” she said.

Megan has hosted events on her farm, from “You Pick” yoga, photography sessions and a pizza night. The pizza night included a local artisan pizza entrepreneur, Benny Bakes. Guests came to pick their own arrangements of flowers and then enjoyed hand-tossed pizza.

Megan continues to dream up different events for her farm and contemplates business practices she would like to implement in the future, such as a flower stand. Additionally, Megan has started offering subscriptions. Customers have the option of a single season, or a three-season subscription of spring, summer and fall.

Anyone who finds themselves in Waushara County should be sure to visit Hillview Flower Farm. Until then you can find the Chamberlains on Facebook at Hillview Flower Farm, where she keeps her event listings up to date. 🇺🇸



Florist, Megan Chamberlain of Hillview Flower Farm picking herself a bouquet from her flower field.

Photos by: K Muller Photography, Pine River



Dazzling dahlia in full bloom.



A hoop house located on Hillview Flower Farm. The hoop house is used to protect annual plants from the harsh weather.

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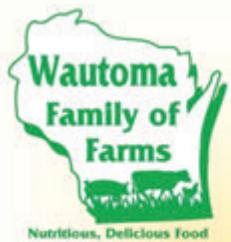
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# Centerline builds partnerships

By Robert Cloud

**C**enterline Machine in Waupaca makes high-quality custom components, offering intricate, close-tolerance machining and metal joining.

Charlie Leiby founded the company in 1996 in his garage. As the business grew, he relocated to a building on Wendt Drive in Waupaca and then expanded again in 2009 to its current location on Industrial Drive.

Dielectric Manufacturing, based in Richfield, acquired Centerline Machine in January 2015, strengthening both companies through expanded capabilities, shared expertise and combined personnel

## Centerline builds ongoing partnerships with its customers

“During a visit to a local customer, we observed that they were manually forming and cutting stamped metal parts, a time-consuming process that had become a significant bottleneck for their operations. Recognizing this as an opportunity to help streamline their production, our salesperson took the initiative to offer a potential solution. He collected sample parts and brought them back to our facility for further analysis,” said Bob Wilms, Centerline general manager.

“Collaborating with our estimating and engineering teams, we identified a more efficient approach: using our waterjet to cut the material and creating a custom die to form the parts. After a few rounds of trial and error, we successfully produced sample components for the customer. With some final adjustments, the customer approved the design and promptly placed an order,” Wilms noted. “This partnership not only led to substantial cost savings and a faster production timeline for the customer but also strengthened the relationship we’ve built with them. They were thrilled with the results and the collaborative



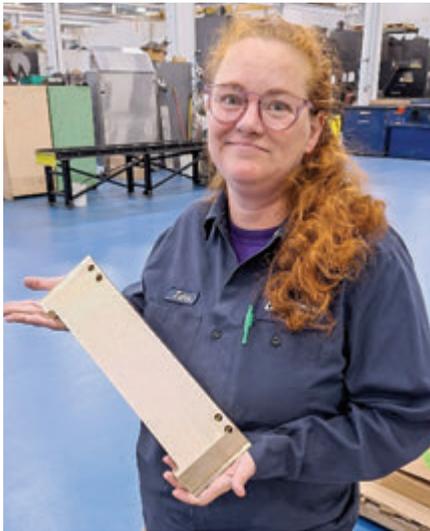
Dan Schmidt at Centerline Machine in Waupaca.



Centerline Machine makes precision parts to customer specifications.



Centerline Machine fabricates custom parts for manufacturers.



Julie Hanshaw is part of the team at Centerline Machine.



Centerline Machine makes high-quality precision metal parts.



Joel Phelps is part of the team of skilled employees at Centerline Machine.

effort that helped resolve a key pain point in their process.”

When asked what aspects of the company make Centerline an effective partner to other manufacturers, Jamie Benter, director of business development, said, “Skills of staff, Centerline’s skilled machinists, knowledge experts, technology and experience make us a valued

and trusted supplier. Whether your production run is large or small, you can expect outstanding workmanship, unrivaled customer service, exceptional value, and fast turnaround from the team at Centerline Machine.”

Centerline Machine is located at 777 S. Industrial Drive. For more information, go to [centerlinemachine.com](http://centerlinemachine.com) or call 715-258-5229. 🇺🇸

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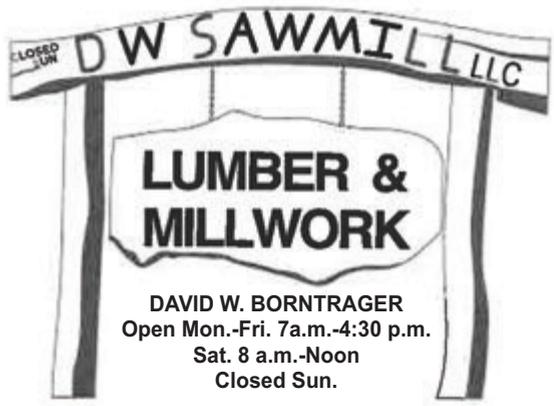
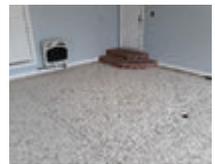
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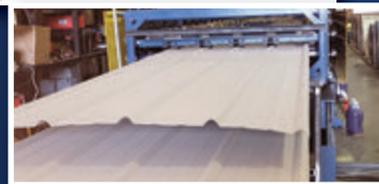
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# Family-owned company revolutionizing agriculture industry

By Clarice Case

**F**amily-owned and operated RCI Engineering specializes in the design and manufacturing of hay and forage equipment in Mayville, Wisc.

RCI Engineering was founded in 2005 by Randy and Wendy Clark, who met in Iowa while working together at John Deere. Coincidentally, the couple both grew up on local Wisconsin dairy farms.

Randy holds a mechanical engineering degree from UW-Platteville, and Wendy earned a dairy science and agriculture journalism degree from UW-Madison.

“Randy has always had a passion for designing and working with agricultural equipment, and he always knew he wanted to start his own business,” said Wendy.

After operations began in 2005, Randy, CEO, grew the company to 22 employees. Wendy joined RCI in 2021, full-time, as marketing director.

“RCI Engineering has manufactured and designed in three main areas, John Deere hay and forage attachments as an allied John Deere supplier, plot harvesting equipment for commercial seed companies and university research, and contract engineering,” Wendy explained.

RCI’s key self-branded products are the 521R/421R bale accumulators, 8A numpers and R1 merger attachments.

The 521R and 421R bale accumulators, one of the newest innovations, allows round baler operators to “carry two bales while baling a third.”

“Customers have been requesting a better way to carry and deposit bales to help reduce



The 521R and 421R Bale Accumulator allow round baler operators to carry multiple bales of hay.

bale-handling costs,” said Randy. “Now, with the 521R and 421R bale accumulators, customers will reduce labor, operator fatigue, fuel usage and hours on equipment. We estimate customers will save at least \$1 per bale in handling costs alone.”

Randy continued, “Soil health and reducing soil compaction is a vital issue facing all growers across the U.S. By limiting passes across the field, hay producers will see a reduction in crop damage and soil compaction by utilizing the bale accumulator.”

The 8A bumpers are available to be attached to the John Deere 7000-Series, 8000-Series, and 9000-Series self-propelled forage harvesters (SPFH). There are six bumper options to choose

from: base, weight rack, water tank, tool carrier, inner bumper, and bolt-on pintle hitch and receiver tube.

“The R1 Merger Attachment is available for the John Deere W200-Series Self Propelled Windrowers (SPW) with 500R/R500 Rotary Platforms,” says RCI. “The R1 allows merging of windrows with SPW in front of a self-propelled forage harvester, or in conditions that do not require wide swaths for dry-down. The R1 can eliminate the need for raking or merging passes through the field.”

In addition to their own products, RCI also manufactures Ag-Bag products. RCI acquired the Ag-Bag company from CNH Industrial in 2019.

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“RCI had a history of working closely with Ag-Bag products since 2011 by performing engineering and prototype manufacturing services,” said Wendy. “Since that acquisition, RCI has introduced the T-Series Ag-Baggers featuring a redesign for greater forage capacity, operator ease, and higher machine efficiency. Ag-Bag by RCI offers 24/7 service and support, full parts offering and Ag-Bag boost forage inoculants.”

The T-Series includes the T7060, T7170, T7270, T8088 pull-type Ag-Baggers and the self-propelled Ag-Baggers — AB1214.

In February of this year, RCI announced it received the 2024 AE50 award for the T8088 Ag-Bagger from the American Society of Agriculture and Biological Engineers.

“The AE50 Award is presented to top companies bringing new technology and innovation in agricultural equipment to the market,” said the press release.

The T8088 pull-type Ag-Bagger’s unique engineering features include “the industry’s widest 104-inch rotor, 12-foot tunnel and an anchor positioning control system.”

“[It] has been designed to allow dairy producers to segregate their feeds while maximizing butterfat and protein components, increase forage storage capacity, take advantage of tight forage harvesting windows by increasing throughput, and to make better forage faster



The T8088 Ag-Bagger from RCI received the 2024 AE50 award from the American Society of Agriculture and Biological Engineers in February 2024.

through ease of operation,” RCI explained.

Wendy concluded, “RCI Engineering employee team is dedicated to providing

excellent customer service and supporting North American hay and forage customers.”

To learn more, please visit [rciengineering.com](http://rciengineering.com).



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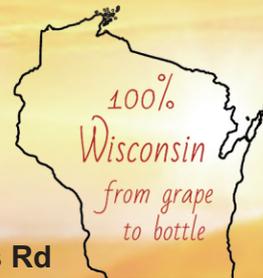
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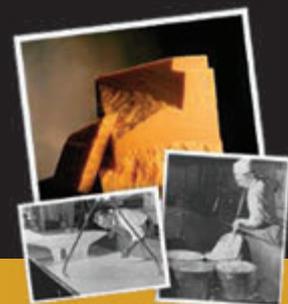
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# HEAVENLY FOOD Served by “Angels”

In 1950 the Sky Club became the home of the FIRST ever salad bar...

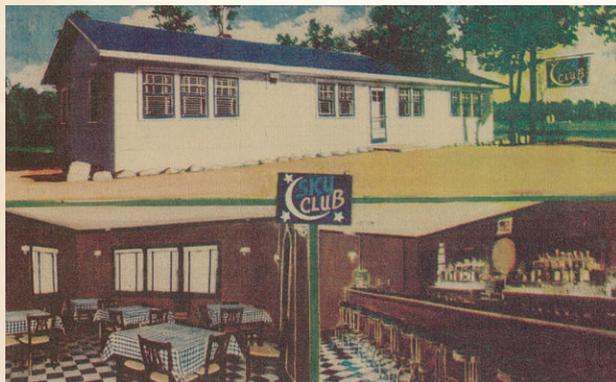
*Three generations of fine dining*



In 1935, a new business ventured its way in to the small town of Plover, WI. Boasting its lunch specials consisting of homemade sandwiches and oven - baked chicken, it attracted many hungry tourists who also had the opportunity to spend the evening at the business camping facilities offered at no expense. A gas and oil service station were included for those who may have been on their way to a more distant location. Marion Nall started this unique combination of services set among stately oaks offering a quiet country setting. The original building not only housed a bar and a restaurant, but also served as a home to the operators. It didn't take long for this wayside to become an identifiable



spot for travelers heading through Plover and Stevens Point. Near the end of the war, the tourist season seemed to grow along with the restaurant, whose service was becoming more extensive, hence the term “supper club”.



Post war booming the 40's and 50's came rather quickly. It was in those years changes were made to the wayside restaurant which helped identify the present Sky Club. In 1950 an innovative self-service, all - you - can - eat salad bar, believed to be the first ever was introduced. It became an identifying benchmark of the Sky Club. Around this time, the slogan, “Heavenly Food Served by Angels” was introduced, and is said to have been started by Tom Leach, a part - time owner/customer in the early 1940's. The restaurant's history of owners, in order is: George Armstrong '35 Marion Nall '40 Louie Jacobs, John Rocco, Louie and Evelyn Schnittger '50 and finally, in 1961, John Freund. Freund, from Neenah purchased the restaurant and operated it until 1965, but died suddenly. It was then his sons, Doug and Terrol who purchased the restaurant and took over where their father left off. In May of 1966, another son Dennis, fresh out of the Air Force,

joined his brothers in the business. Age was their only asset, but in no time, the business was on its way to success. In 1969, Doug decided to pursue other interests, and left the Sky Club. In late November, the restaurant dealt with a severe setback from a fire forcing the business to close until June, 1970. Dennis and Terry responded to the challenge and rebuilt the restaurant again. With the help of loyal customers, dedicated employees, and a few years' time, an additional dining room was added in 1979. In order to do this, the owner's home located next to the business was moved. Additions were added in 1981 and in 1994. With tremendous pride, the Freund's are able to look back at the history of their business. Dennis Freund retired in the summer of 1999 and Terry Freund retired to his other restaurant “Headwaters” in Boulder Junction Wisconsin in the summer of 2007, passing the tradition down to his two son's Patrick and Eric. The Freund's continue the tradition of the Sky Club and want to thank our past and present patrons and employees, for helping us make the first years successful...

And we've only just begun.... Once again

2022 Post Road, Plover WI 54467 • 715-341-4000 • [skyclubdining.com](http://skyclubdining.com)

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