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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

**REPORT TO THE
COMMUNITY**

NEW Media Inc
January 26, 2024



The Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce saw 2023 as fulfilling its goal of working together in the region. With the Shawano School District and the City of Shawano, the chamber organized a well-attended 2023 homecoming parade. FILE | NEW MEDIA

Annual report highlights successful year

By **SUZANNE WITTMAN**
Executive director

First off, I'd like to thank the Chamber staff for their dedicated and diligent hard work day in and day out. Secondly, a heartfelt thank you to the Chamber's Executive Board and the full Board of Directors who serve as representatives of all industries in Shawano and Menominee counties.

A shout out to our Chamber ambassadors! With Vaughn Bohm as president, the ambassadors were a joy to work with as they came up with fun and engaging ideas for our events and represented the Chamber at every ribbon-cutting.

We also saw 2023 as fulfilling our goal

of working together in our region. With the Shawano School District and the City of Shawano, we organized a well-attended 2023 homecoming parade. We partnered with Shawano County Economic Progress Inc. (SCEPI), Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC), Shawano Community Education Department and the Shawano Area Young Professionals (saYPro), offering educational events focused on the importance of employee benefits, the state of the local economy and how businesses are choosing Shawano Country as the place to be!

We continued to support the work of the Wolf River School to Work Youth Apprenticeship program, the Wittenberg

Chamber, the 8th Grade Career Fair and our area nonprofits.

A highlight of this summer was hosting Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez as we were able to show her just some of the assets in Shawano Country. We also learned more about the culture of all the tribes represented in our region through the Native American Tourism of Wisconsin (NATOW) conference, where we gave the lunch welcome address and represented Shawano Country with a booth full of resources.

To further encourage those to "shop local," we helped market our retailers by creating the "Shop Small, Shop Shawano Country!" promotion, which occurred around and during Small Business Satur-

day in November.

To end the year, the Chamber, our tourism department and Leadership Shawano County (LSC) were represented at Downtown Shawano's Holiday Stroll and Tree Lighting event. We are so proud of the LSC program and all that is gleaned during these sessions. Ask an LSC alum about their experience, and you will surely hear nothing but glowing praise for all that they learned and accomplished.

As we look to the future, we are already envisioning a year where we are engaged and eager to serve our Chamber members. Thank you to all our members who continue to support our endeavors year after year.

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Jeanne Cronic, having served a number of roles both professionally and voluntarily, was named the Shawano County Chamber of Commerce's Distinguished Citizen of the Year.

FILE | NEW MEDIA

Distinguished Citizen of the Year gives in spades

Cronic's dedication to community, children shows in her work, volunteer efforts

By **LEE PULASKI**
City Editor

Jeanne Cronic has been a lot of things in her life. Four decades in the education field saw Cronic teaching, serving as a school principal, helping college students as the student life coordinator for Northeast Wisconsin Technical College's Shawano campus, instructing through Junior Achievement, serving with Big Brothers Big Sisters and, finally, bringing history to life as a Heritage Park docent with the Shawano County Historical Society. Also on Cronic's resume is serving as Shawano's mayor along with stints on the Shawano County Library Board, St. James School Board, Safe Haven Board of Directors, Shawano Optimists, Shawano Area Matthew 25 and more.

Such a laundry list made it obvious to the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce, where Cronic serves as an ambassador, that she should be the 2024 Distinguished Citizen of the Year. Cronic was nominated for the honor by Robyn Shingler, director for the Shawano Community Education program. In her nomination letter, Shingler noted that the Shawano native lived right next to her father's shoe store on Main Street. "Little did she know, she would grow up to become principal of the school in her own backyard," Shingler wrote. Shingler noted that Cronic's dedication to her community hasn't waned, pointing out she continues to help Shawano by sitting on the board for the city's redevelopment authority. "Jeanne was a criti-

cal advocate and active participant in Shawano's Redevelopment Authority (RDA) through which new plans have been developed to expand and grow the Shawano area," Shingler wrote. "Jeanne continues to serve the City of Shawano as a member of the RDA Board, which published a 112-page downtown master plan to improve and enrich our community, its businesses and public spaces." Shingler added that once Cronic meets a person, she remembers them always. "Jeanne has the unbelievable gift of remembering the names of every student, every youth she has crossed paths with over all these years," Shingler wrote. For Cronic, it's not about the accolades when she sets her mind to improving the community.

Cronic calls living in Shawano "a lifelong thrill" and said she's always thought of ways to give back to the community, considering how much she has received. "It's overwhelming to think that I was chosen as Distinguished Citizen of the Year," Cronic said. "I love Shawano. It's my hometown. I'm born, raised and going to be buried here." Cronic touted a love of children as a reason that she gives so much to youth organizations and programs. "I feel it is my honor to give back to each of these organizations because they have given me so much," Cronic said. "St. James is where I started my education. I was in education as a teacher and principal, and I saw the need to help some of these kids that maybe don't have the best

home life and could use a little encouragement in their development. I just enjoy children, and I enjoy our community." Cronic's civic service gave her a chance to support her neighbors, regardless of their age. One of her inspirations was her father, who had served on both the Shawano Common Council and the Shawano County Board of Supervisors. She saw what he did to help the area grow, and she swore to herself that, if she had the opportunity, she would mimic his efforts. "As a mayor, I felt like I should be the community's best cheerleader," Cronic said. "I tried to do that and promote whatever we needed for our community. It just kind of evolved from working on the plan commission and then becoming the mayor, but prior to that, I had a

lot of encouragement by my family to be part of the political scene." For others who are looking to give back to her community, Cronic recommended starting small and focusing on something they're passionate about. She noted that people don't have to serve on "every committee" or be dedicated to dozens of organizations to make a difference. "Give as much time or as little time as you can to that organization, and you will see that you will get back more than what you ever give," Cronic said. "It is such a rewarding feeling to know you are helping your community, others, individuals to have a better life. I think it's so important that people give back. We've just been so blessed with opportunities in our lifetime — some more than others."

Primal Eats family involved in community

Wedding hall, partner satellites are part of growing business

By **WARREN BLUHM**
News Editor

Primal Eats has come a long way in three years. The store and restaurant at 14109 County Road VV began as a spin-off of Apple Creek Whitetails Ranch but has grown in leaps and bounds, added two buildings to its complex and formed partnerships with other businesses to offer its tasty cuisine in new locations.

Now Primal Eats has been named 2023 Business of the Year by the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce.

Apple Creek Whitetails Ranch had been open since 2007, offering guided hunting trips including a hunting lodge and private restaurants to people from all over the country and even the world.

Owner Scott Follett was seeking alternate ways to use the facility, which includes a 1,500-acre hunting range, when he and his family began to discuss the idea of a store and public restaurant.

“The concept probably started about five years ago with manufacturing and then it moved to restaurant three years ago,” said Ethan Follett, Scott’s son who serves as Primal

Eats accountant.

Another son, Isaac, is the restaurant’s general manager.

The Primal Eats store, offering primarily venison products such as venison sausage, opened up in September 2020, and the restaurant opened in January 2021. Outdoor seating opened that spring.

Billed as “Texas style BBQ meets Wisconsin,” their food is the main attraction, including an award-winning brisket that is slow-smoked for 14 hours, pulled pork, German sausage and a variety of sandwiches and pizzas.

Samantha Sperberg of Prey and Asenbrenner Insurance, who nominated Primal Eats, said Scott Follett and his family are very involved in giving back to the Shawano area community.

“An example of this is hosting their ice cream stand with proceeds going to local organizations, such as SAM25,” Sperberg said. “They also do a great job participating in community events, like Thursdayz at Franklin, Sun Drop Days and much more.”

The facility has gained a reputation for hosting business meetings and private gatherings, including a newly construction



Primal Eats has grown by leaps and bounds since it opened under a tent on the Applecreek Whitetails Ranch grounds in early 2021.

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Primal Eats products have been available at the store and gift shop since September 2020. PRIMAL EATS

wedding and banquet hall, as well as adding swing sets, campfires, live music and other activities for all ages.

“We wanted to make it family friendly with a whole bunch of activities outside, so we added swings and games outside,” Ethan Follett said.

In addition to the meeting facilities onsite, Primal Eats caters to gatherings throughout the area, from Shawano to Green Bay.

“They are also adding more food processes to make their dining experience faster and more compatible with their high demand,” said Sperberg, who added that the business grew so quickly that growing pains have been part of the family’s challenge. “They strive to make changes, adapt and continuing business at the

best of their ability.”

Having worked for Scott Follett some years ago, Sperberg said he was always considerate of his employees’ goals and ambitions.

“If there was education in that path, he was the first to get you in the right direction,” she said. “Scott and his family are very attentive to their employees and always consider them family and treat them with respect. I believe Scott would help anyone strive to any situation and also give people chances that might not have elsewhere.”

Another new phase of the Primal Eats story is the addition of satellite partnerships, including a dine-in restaurant at Titledown Brewing Company, 320 N. Broadway, Green Bay.

“Titledown Brewery wanted to do some food

with their beer and they came to us,” Ethan Follett said.

Primal Eats is also partnering with the BP gas station and convenience store in Cecil, at 417 S. Warrington St., offering food to go.

“It’s kind of like the concept of Kwik Trip where you just go in and grab food and go ice fishing,” Ethan said.

Follett said the Primal team is “excited and very thankful” to be named Shawano Country Business of the Year.

The Primal Eats restaurant and gift shop, 14109 County Road VV in rural Gillett, is currently open 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday. For more information, visit primal-eats.com or the Primal Eats page on Facebook.

Chamber resources offered to strengthen local businesses

By LEANN GUETHS
Chamber president

I am glad to report that the Chamber is closing 2023 with a solid performance thanks to our members, board members, the community and the Chamber staff.

Our memberships continued to grow, new partnerships were created and the networking events were a success. We even had a visit from the Lt.

Gov. Sara Rodriguez! The Chamber team worked diligently to meet the expectations of our members and our community, and supported the growth of the Shawano and Menominee counties. We have a great team of people working for us!

In 2024, the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce will continue to advocate for our community, our businesses and promote progress

and economic growth. I ask that you continue to utilize the resources the Chamber has to offer to help strengthen your businesses and develop growth opportunities within the area.

I look forward to our continued growth and development as the Chamber moves forward connecting, convening and advocating for the greater Shawano and Menominee counties in 2024.

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Unity Hospice demonstrates care for patients, families, employees

Nonprofit organization lives out its mission, vision and values each day

By KEVIN PASSON
Editor-in-chief

Alisa Gerke is humbled by the selection of Unity Hospice as the Service Business of the Year by the Shawano County Chamber of Commerce.

“It’s way cool,” said Gerke, Unity’s executive director, using her favorite adage. “It’s very humbling to be honored for our mission and our values by the community. For us, our work comes at one of life’s most vulnerable times. We go about our work in a humble fashion, caring for our neighbors when they need it the most.”

Unity Hospice has an office in Shawano and headquarters in De Pere. The company has been around since 1977 and has been in Shawano the past 26 years. It employs 208 full-time and 51 part-time staff.

Unity Hospice was nominated for the award by Christy Brozak, the company’s marketing director. Gerke didn’t know about the nomination beforehand.

“I was way beyond excited,” she said. “I was not aware of being nominated until Christy told me after we were selected.”

Gerke said Unity Hospice is a mission-driven, community-focused nonprofit organization. Both she and Brozak spoke highly of employees and the company’s culture as it relates to them.

“Unity recognizes and appreciates that our people are our most valuable asset and critical to our success. Culture is therefore at the heart of day-to-day operations,” Brozak said. “It’s how to care for each other that leads to a trusting, high-quality team that’s willing to go above and beyond to give top-notch service delivery.”

“As a result, many opportunities have been created for employees to share their ideas, concerns and feedback, and participate in new education/training — including nursing and CNA excellence councils, psycho-social focus group, quarterly all-staff town meetings, head heart hands engagement committee and emerging leaders program.”

Gerke has been with Unity Hospice for about 12 years.

“Working here has been a blessing,” she said. “It has grown me personally and professionally. I can’t imagine me being anywhere else.”

Shawano is one of three “work stations,” with others in Sturgeon Bay and

Marinette. These sites serve as a gathering point for those local employees, as well as a place to pick up and drop off equipment.

“One thing that sets up apart from the for-profit providers is that these employees live and work in these communities,” Gerke said. “They live in Shawano, have their kids or grandkids in the schools, buy their gas there, shop there. They care for people in their own community.”

Unity Hospice employees serve patients in 13 counties in northeastern Wisconsin, and the need for its services continues to grow.

“We have an aging population of those 65 and older in northeastern Wisconsin and across the country,” Gerke said. “That, combined with a longer life expectancy, means there is a growing need for palliative (specialized medical care that focuses on providing relief from pain and other symptoms of a serious illness) and hospice services.”

“Also, more individuals are embracing and understanding what hospice is all about and what we can offer.”

Brozak said the number of our family, friends and neighbors who received hospice care was 2,205 in 2021, which increased to 2,298 in 2022.

The number of virtual and in-person visits made to hospice patients by a member of Unity’s care team increased from 78,914 in 2021 to 99,085 in 2022.

Palliative care patient numbers rose from 81 in 2021 to 166 in 2022.

And, the number of individuals who benefited from Unity’s grief support services climbed from 6,379 in 2021 to 7,281 in 2022.

That growing demand for services is also of the biggest challenges facing Unity.

“Our most significant issue continues to be significant competition from for-profit hospice providers entering northeast Wisconsin with services because they identify the profit they can make,” Brozak said. “Unity is the only locally owned nonprofit in northeastern Wisconsin. We address the issue by regularly gathering feedback from our Patient and Advisory Council as well as community partners to develop creative solutions for program development and proactively discuss opportunities for improvement.”

Unity’s grief services are also important to fami-



Unity Hospice was named the Shawano County Chamber of Commerce Service Business of the Year.

CONTRIBUTED

lies who have suffered the death of a loved one.

“What does life look like now? We work with families, and we partner with schools and businesses when children or co-workers are struggling to deal with a death,” Gerke said.

Pediatric hospice care is another unique service. To serve in that capacity requires specialized training.

“In addition to the physiological differences between children and adults, there are medications, family support and more to deal with,” she said.

Brozak said Unity not only improves the lives of patients and their families but also provides excellent value for the taxpayer.

She said key findings from the most comprehensive analysis of administrative and enrollment claims data for patients in Medicare and Medicare Advantage include:

- Hospice care is associated with increased

satisfaction and quality of life, improved pain control and reduced physical and emotional distress.

- Medicare spending for those who received hospice care was \$3.5 billion less than it would have been had they not received hospice care.

- Hospice is associated with lower Medicare end-of-life expenditures when hospice lengths of stays are longer than 10 days.

- Hospice stays of six months or more result in savings for Medicare.

“Unity offers Community Care, a financial assistance program that ensures everyone throughout northeast Wisconsin, regardless of their financial means, has access to Unity’s compassionate hospice care, Supportive Care Management and grief support,” Brozak said.

Unity also offers a Speaker Bureau program that provides free virtual or in-person educational sessions on more than 20 end-of-life topics presented by experienced

physicians, nurses, social workers, grief counselors, chaplains and administrative staff.

Regardless of the program, though, Gerke and Brozak insist Unity Hospice wouldn’t be where it is today without its employees. And to that end, Gerke said it’s vitally important staff be taken care of, too.

“Our culture is very important,” she said. “Taking care of people is our No. 1 goal, and to offer exceptional care, we need to take care of our people.”

Strategic and annual operating plan cycles are built on the foundation of Unity’s mission, vision and values, all three of which were developed from staff feedback.

“These three pillars ensure we spend time on meaningful initiatives, assign and commit to outcome measures,” Brozak said. “Specifically, Unity’s core value statements serve as our guiding principles for how we go about our work on a daily basis,

how we interact with patients, families, co-workers and community partners, and which strategies we implement to fulfill our mission.

“Unity’s vision statement guides both our short- and long-term planning to create sustainable, organizational success. Our commitment is focused and intentional, resulting in engaged employees and positive quality and financial outcomes.”

Unity is the sole organization offering inpatient hospice at seven area hospitals and is a collaboration between Bellin Health, HSHS St. Mary’s Hospital Medical Center and HSHS St. Vincent Hospital.

Established as the third hospice program in the nation, Unity launched Wisconsin’s first palliative care program in 2002, the area’s first hospice residence in 2007, the region’s only Grief and Education Center in 2021 and the area’s first pediatric hospice program in 2024.

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Hoffman honored as SAYPro's Young Professional of the Year

By KEVIN PASSON
Editor-in-chief

Elyzabeth Hoffman still finds it hard to believe she was chosen as the Shawano Area Young Professionals 2023 Young Professional of the Year.

"When I first got a call about it, I was like, 'Really? Me?'" she said. "I don't like to talk highly of myself. There are a lot of really great young professionals in the community. I still have trouble believing they picked me."

Hoffman is a marketing assistant at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) in Shawano and a full-time student at University of Wisconsin-

Green Bay, pursuing a degree in organizational leadership. She's married with two young children, and she's involved in her church and community groups.

Her job led to her involvement with the Shawano County Literacy Council.

"It's a passion of mine and a logical next step based on my job," she said. "Both are involved with the same goal, just different ways to get there."

Melody Boyd, with the literacy council, was one of the two who nominated Hoffman.

"Elyzabeth has been a member of our board of directors at Shawano



Elyzabeth Hoffman is the Shawano Area Young Professionals 2023 Young Professional of the Year. Hoffman is a marketing assistant at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) in Shawano and a full-time student at University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, pursuing a degree in organizational leadership. She's married with two young children, and she's involved in her church and community groups.

CONTRIBUTED



County Literacy Council for the past two years,” Boyd said. “She is dependable and proactive. She established and maintains our social media account. She provides thoughtful and relevant input at board meetings and completes tasks in a timely and efficient manner. Elyzabeth always presents herself in a professional yet friendly manner and, as the youngest member of our board, provides fresh insight to whatever is presented.”

One of Hoffman’s co-workers, Becky Hutchison, also nominated her.

“I have worked with Elyzabeth since December 2021,” Hutchison said. “She exhibits positive energy and willingness to participate wholeheartedly in the Literacy Council, despite other involvement in the community and growing family.”

Hoffman and her husband, Kyle, are the parents of two young children, Henry, 4, and Clyde, 2.

She is also heavily involved in the Shawano MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) leadership team, based at her church, St. James Lutheran Church.

“As a young mother, it’s a great way to meet and talk with others,” she said.

Hoffman was among the 2023 graduates of Leadership Shawano County, a cooperative effort of the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce and the University of Wisconsin-Extension of Shawano County.

The goal of the leadership program is to build a pool of citizens with broad knowledge of ideas, issues and concerns faced by local communities. It is hoped that as the participants become aware of the challenges and the

many existing resources, they will take leadership and active participation roles in helping to meet those challenges.

From her participation in that, she and her fellow graduates created Shawano Paddlers, which aims to plan and coordinate paddle outings for canoeing, kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding in the Shawano area.

“I’ve always enjoyed time on the water, but the funny thing is, I don’t even own a kayak,” she said with a laugh. “Whenever we would plan an outing, we would make sure rentals would be available – for others and for me. There are a lot of really great places to paddle around Shawano. It has definitely reignited my passion for paddling.”

Another passion of Hoffman’s is sustainability. At NWTC, she’s involved with the Environmental Climate Stewardship Team that focuses on sustainability issues at NWTC and in the greater Shawano community.

“She sets a great example of work-life balance for other young professional women,” Boyd said.

The Shawano Area Young Professionals is a group of individuals engaged in a career and who exemplify strong morals and ethics, strive for personal and career-related growth, all achieved by experience, education and positive relationships.

“She checks all of the boxes in regards to (that) mission,” Hutchison said. “There is positivity flowing through her bones. She is always willing to participate, time willing. Learning is growing, so with her working at a school and being enrolled in school, I would say that also shows strong morals and ethics to better her life and family.”



Sunshine crosses the trees and fields on a warm fall day in Shawano Country. However, no matter the season, there is always a unique business to visit, something fun to do or a new corner of the area to explore.

FILE | NEW MEDIA

Board of Directors elected

The Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce named new board members and officers for 2024.

Leann Gueths, Novolex, will continue on as president. Zachary Linsmeyer, KerberRose, is past president, and Mary White, Nueske’s Applewood Smoked Meats, is treasurer.

Newly elected board members include: Ben Hartwig, Twig’s Beverage; Lori Singer, Celerity Staffing; and Kellie Diedrick, ThedaCare.

Keith Marquardt, Shawano County Parks, will continue in his role of president of the Shawano Country Tourism Council (a division of the Shawano Country Chamber of Com-

merce) and will fill the tourism representative position on the Chamber of Commerce board of directors.

The Chamber thanked all of outgoing board members for their participation: Yvette Hartman-Wilber, Tumbleweed; Roxanne Tilleson, The Rustic Shed; Vikki Weaver, ThedaCare; and Penny Kuhn, Charlie’s County Market.

The Chamber recognized the new and outgoing board members at the 97th Annual Celebration and Awards on Jan. 18 at the Menominee Casino Resort & Convention Center in Keshena.

The board is comprised of 15 Chamber members from throughout Shawano County

representing the areas of agriculture, manufacturing, retail/business, tourism, education, government and professionals.

Six additional liaison board members represent Shawano County, Shawano County Economic Progress Inc., The Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, City of Shawano and The Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians.

The Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce is a 400-plus member organization that advances economic growth by coordinating resources and providing networking, promotion and education to businesses in Shawano and Menominee counties.

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DaiJohn Gonzalez, left, throws a right jab at Alberto Moreira, right, during their four-round welterweight fight at Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg in June 2022.

FILE | NEW MEDIA

Working together works for Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg

By **GREG SEUBERT**
Correspondent

Teamwork. That one word, in a nutshell, sums up what makes Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg a success. Located just north of Wittenberg at N7198 U.S. Highway 45, the entertainment complex that includes a casino, hotel, restaurant and convenience store has 163 full-time and 17 part-time employees. On Jan. 18, it received a Business of the Year award from the Shawano County Chamber of Commerce. Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg opened its doors in July 2008 and is one of six casinos owned and operated by the Ho-Chunk Nation. Other casinos are located in Black River Falls, Madison, Nekoosa, Tomah and Wisconsin Dells. A seventh casino is currently under construction in Beloit and is scheduled to open later this year. “Simply put, teamwork makes Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg successful,” executive manager Fletcher Collins said. “In order to make this possible, it takes the entire team’s contributions, extra efforts and commitment to make us succeed. The team is committed to see our facility thrive and be an enjoyable place to game, dine and stay.” The casino has experi-

enced growth in many areas while recovering from the COVID pandemic, according to Collins. “We have seen growth in our tourism numbers,” he said. “Our guests’ visits have increased nearly 25% this past year. These guests visit from all four corners of the Midwest. This drives up the local economy, as they visit local businesses while they stay with us. “Our employee numbers have also experienced a boost. With the local community returning to work, we have been able to provide quality customer service through a near-10% increase in our staffing. This has been a positive experience with our local community serving our visiting guests, providing that local welcome and warmth this region is known for.” Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg saw substantial growth and profitability in 2023. “This is attributed to the attraction and visitation of our guests that come to our facility and our wonderful community of Wittenberg,” Collins said. “This past year, Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg exceeded net profit by 14% over projects. This is a 3% increase over the past year and a major improvement of 41% in comparison to pre-COVID revenue generations.” A commitment to its

nearly 200 full- and part-time employees is paying dividends for the operation, Collins said. “Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg has made valiant efforts to improve employee morale and loyalty,” he said. “Investing in our employees through incentives has been a positive step to improve employee satisfaction. Our employee incentive investments increased nearly 100% this past year in order to provide more appreciation and recognition to our valued employees. “Employment figures have improved, and 30% of our employees have been a part of our organization for 11 years and longer. Through on-the-job training, customer service training and meeting the needs of our valued employees, we have achieved a high retention rate and have reduced turnover in many areas. Keeping our employees informed, providing training and mentoring has been a great tool to achieving customer and employee satisfaction. “The management team is constantly working to meet the goals and needs of all of our team members. Investing more time and attention, improving employee work areas and creating team builders behind the scenes creates a more fun and entertaining work environment.” On the other hand, attracting quality workers is

a significant issue for the company. “Like many businesses, attracting employees is the most challenging issue in our industry,” Collins said. “Attracting the talent that is needed in the hospitality environment in a smaller community has been difficult. The management team has worked to develop interactive recruitment, interviews and further enticements that reward the applicant’s skill base, providing a more competitive wage along with our benefits.” Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg has made many improvements to make the gaming experience more enjoyable for its guests. “In the gaming industry, attractions are aimed at providing the most up-to-date games for our guests, providing fun and exciting promotions and providing services tools that make the gaming experience more enjoyable,” Collins said. “We have invested in gaming products that speed up jackpot payouts, reducing the ‘wait time’ and getting the player back to enjoying the game. We have invested in new ATM kiosks that have improved service, functionality and reliability. “We have maintained a fresh and exciting gaming floor with the games our customers ask for and enjoy. This is where we have benefited the most. Customer satisfaction

keeps our guests coming back to the Wittenberg community.” The casino is also a popular destination for wedding parties. “We have become a place for local weddings to stay and enjoy,” Collins said. “We have increased our wedding package sales and have included a shuttle service to and from the hotel where their wedding and receptions are held. This is a great way to improve safety on the highways by allowing us to be your designated driver. Our bride and groom receive many benefits from having their wedding party be our guests, and we have seen significant increases in the stays.” Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg supports the community in several ways, according to Collins. “Through our donations and sponsorships program, we were able to give over \$150,000 to nonprofit community organizations and charitable fundraisers within our community and surrounding areas,” he said. “We have been able to gain new relationships and invest in established, standing relationships with event organizers and personnel. “This has allowed us to understand the visions and goals each organization has and to see how we can better help them succeed. In order to help invest in a thriving community,

we continuously work to purchase items through local businesses, and we work to hire local entertainment.” The casino also promotes environmental awareness. “We put in place a policy to remove stand-alone office printers in order to consolidate printers and reduce paper usage, and we have an area to recycle cans in order to donate the proceeds to our local Head Start preschool,” Collins said. “We work on letting our community get to know us personally through volunteer work such as our twice-a-year Adopt-A-Highway roadside cleanups. We also provide ready assistance to a local community center when needed, and we recycle used towels and rugs from our local animal humane society. “We also have a great relationship with our local Head Start preschool, where we have the students come to our veterans events along with having them come to visit offices on Halloween to do some fun trick-or-treating. We routinely provide space within our facility free of charge for local vendors to set up and sell items and do the same for medical assistance pop-ups to provide free COVID testing, along with COVID and flu vaccine shots.”

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Marion Body Works still going strong

By GREG SEUBERT
Correspondent

What started as a blacksmith shop almost 120 years ago has evolved into one of the area's most successful manufacturing firms.

Marion Body Works Inc. is based in Marion and opened a second manufacturing facility in Shawano in 2022. It received a Business of the Year award from the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce on Jan. 18.

The company has grown from building cattle racks and milk wagons for farmers to building all-aluminum fire truck cabs.

“Our focus has always been on the quality of our product, as well as our customers,” said Kevin Ignacio, the company’s president since 2023. “Our employees are dedicated to providing our customers with the best experience and product. We have a great team that pushes past any challenge to ensure the customers’ satisfaction.”

Marion Body Works has 322 full-time and four part-time employees.

"Our employees are the main focus here at Marion," Ignacio said. "Marion Body Works takes pride in our extremely low turnover rate and the longevity

of our employees' time here. We strive to be the employer of choice and do what we can to make sure our employees are set up for success, growth and overall happiness. We provide a place of employment that allows our employees to grow and succeed."

The company's roots go back to 1905 as a blacksmith shop owned by the Milbauer family. The company started manufacturing all-aluminum fire apparatus in 1964. Wausau Homes acquired the shop in 1971 and renamed it Marion Body Works.

Vinson "Bud" Simpson purchased the company in 1980, and under his watch, the company started a new business segment in 1981 as a result of a partnership with Oshkosh Corp. to build wrecker and cargo bodies for the heavy expanded mobility tactical truck program.

Marion Body Works constructed a storage building in 1986 and converted the former storage building into fully equipped production space.

Two expansions in 1989 added to the company's truck mounting and paint drying capability, and the company purchased surrounding land in 1990 and



Marion Body Works opened its Shawano facility in 2022 after decades of having its main facility in Marion.

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Several chassis sit outside the main facility of Marion Body Works, waiting to be shipped.

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2001 for future expansion.

The company began building all-aluminum fire truck cabs for custom chassis builders, and an addition to the manufacturing building in 1999 accommodated the growth of van body production.

Curt Ignacio and Jim Simpson assumed leadership of the company as co-presidents in 2003. Simpson passed away in 2012, and Ignacio stepped down from his role as president in 2023.

Marion Body Works broke ground in 2015 for its new headquarters, which opened the following year on Ramsdell Street in Marion.

The company expanded its commercial truck building production by opening a second manufacturing facility in Shawano in 2022.

“Marion Body Works continues to develop all aspects of our business,” said Kevin Ignacio, who represents the third generation of leadership for the Simpson-Ignacio family. “In October 2022, Marion Body Works expanded into the Shawano community by opening a second location to help support the necessary commercial truck body manufacturing.”

Lead times are one of the significant issues the company is facing, according to Ignacio.

“In order to help accommodate orders, we opened the second production facility in Shawano and invested a lot into making sure the building could accommodate these high production numbers,” he said.

The company supports the local community in a number of ways, including charitable donations, sponsorships and a Christmas For Kids program.

“MBW has a Caring Committee that is staffed by our employees,” Ignacio said. “The main focus is finding ways to give back to our communities,” Ignacio said. “We are very adamant about supporting our local communities that so many of our employees reside in.”



Marion Body Works brought out its 15,000th chassis built for Spartan Motors on Aug. 16 at its main plant in Marion. For nearly 30 years, the two companies have worked together to build fire apparatus for municipalities all across the United States, across portions of Canada and in Latin America.

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Congratulations

*to this year's
Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce award winners!*



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IN 2023 HO-CHUNK GAMING
WITTENBERG GAVE OVER

\$150,000

TO NON-PROFIT COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATIONS AND CHARITABLE
FUNDRAISERS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY
AND SURROUNDING AREAS.



HO-CHUNK GAMING WITTENBERG TEAMWORK LEADS TO SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME + ACHIEVEMENTS

Veterans Day Ceremony

It's important to recognize and honor the sacrifices of veterans, not just on Veterans Day but also on Vietnam Veterans Day. We Show appreciation for their service by holding a special Flag Raising Ceremony each year.

Adopt-A-Highway Roadside Cleanup

Employees & community take responsibility for cleaning and maintaining a stretch of HWY 29 two times per year; a positive contribution to the community and the environment.

Employee Participation and Awareness

Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg employees participate in a variety of ways to improve, encourage and build morale at every level; as well as support and spread awareness and show support for causes such as Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), and more.

Customer Appreciation Concert

Ho-Chunk Gaming Wittenberg was able to offer a free outdoor concert in September to bring together a community of all ages.

Major Sponsor for Community Events

One Third of our sponsorships have been in Shawano County through great partnerships with businesses like T&C Lanes, Fireworks Country, Wittenberg Fire & Amulance, Wittenberg Community Days and the Wittenberg Chamber of Commerce just to name a few.

Free Pack Attack Event

Antonio Freeman was a special guest on Oct 30, 2023 for a Free Pack Attack event held on-site for guests to meet a legend and enjoy a memorable moment.

Community Contributions

We strive to make small community events a success through donation and sponsorship opportunities. For example, being able to help provide comfort care for animals in need by donating recycled rugs and towels to the local Humane Society.





saYPro is a Young Professional group for ages 21-40 in the Shawano County Area who are engaged in a career, and exemplify strong morals and ethics, and strive for personal and career related growth; achieved by experience, educations and positive relationships.

Mission

Our mission is to create relationships by connecting young professionals while contributing to our community.

Membership

Becoming a saYPro member is a simple process with zero time commitment. As a member you will receive monthly updates of what we are doing in our community, including invites to member only events, receive discounted rates to other events, many local volunteer opportunities and much more.

Connect



SAYPRO.ORG

Visit our website to see past and upcoming events, along with our membership form and monthly updates!



FACEBOOK

Find us on Facebook to stay connected with our organization and see upcoming events!



SAYPRO13@GMAIL.COM

Email us with any questions or ideas for our organization!



Shawano County has more than 400 miles of groomed and marked snowmobile trains winding through majestic forests and scenic meadows. ATVs can be used on most of the trails when the temperature is below 28 degrees and trails are open.

CONTRIBUTED

Did you know?

Snowmobiling

Shawano County has more than 400 miles of groomed and marked snowmobile trains winding through majestic forests and scenic meadows. ATVs can be used on most of the trails (with the exception of the Mountain Bay and WIOUWASH Trails) when the temperature is below 28 degrees and trails are open.

Cross-country skiing

Shawano Country has cross-country ski trails to challenge all levels of skiers.

- Navarino Nature Center, W5646 Lindsten Road, Shiocton, has 12 miles of groomed trails. Ski rentals are available.
- Maple Hills Recreation area, on Highway 22, 2 miles south of Shawano, has 6.9 miles of groomed hilly trails with a parking area.
- Shawano Lake County Park, W5785 Lake Drive, Shawano, has a one-mile groomed trail.
- Shawano Lake Golf Course, W5714 Lake Drive, Shawano, has 5 miles of groomed trail.
- Wilson Lake County Park, 2 miles west of Wittenberg on Nightingale Road, has a one mile trail through wooded area.

Fishing

Shawano Country is a fisherman's paradise and

home to some of the most exciting fishing tournaments in the state. The area's extensive lake and river system offers excellent pan and sport fishing. Visit the Shawano Country Chamber & Visitor Center for a topographic map of Shawano Lake and a complete list of other lakes in the county.

- Shawano Lake covers more than 6,000 acres up to 40 feet deep in some areas. It is one of the state's best fishing lakes containing a wide variety of fish including largemouth bass, walleye, northern pike, perch, crappie, muskie, bullhead, bluegill and panfish.
- Washington Lake is connected to Shawano Lake by a small channel on the north shore of Shawano Lake. It has excellent largemouth bass cover.
- Loon and Lulu Lakes are located just west of Washington Lake and are good bass and walleye pike lakes.
- Upper and Lower Red Lakes are formed by dams on the lower Red River at Gresham. They provide excellent bluegill, bass, and northern pike.
- The Cloverleaf Lakes chain of lakes near Embarrass is good for bluegill and bass.

Snowshoeing

Groomed trails are

available at:

- Maple Hills Recreation Area-2.5 mile trail
- Shawano Lake Golf Course, W5714 Lake Drive, Shawano
- Natural trails are available at:
- Navarino Nature Center, W5646 Lindsten Road, Shiocton. Snowshoe rentals are available.
- Hayman Falls County Park, County Road M west of Shawano through Pella one mile, then south 1/2 mile.
- Shawano Lake County Park, W5785 Lake Drive, Shawano
- Shawano Lake Golf Course, W5714 Lake Drive, Shawano
- Wilson Lake County Park, 2 miles west of Wittenberg on Nightingale Road

Ice skating

Outdoor ice skating is available in several locations. In Bonduel (located behind the Public Safety Building at 201 S. First St.), Tigerton and Wittenberg ice rinks with warming houses and skates available.

Indoor ice skating is available at the Crawford Center, 225 S. Waukechon St., Shawano. Open October through March for Shawano Hockey League. Open skating available. \$3 admission, skate rentals available. 715-524-3976

Shawano Chamber serves as ‘front door’ to community

The Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce is a nonprofit membership-based organization that advocates for, and works with, our member businesses.

The primary reason that it exists is to do what is necessary to keep Shawano Country’s businesses healthy, thus ensuring economic, civic and cultural well-being. The Chamber represent 430 businesses and organizations of all sizes throughout Shawano and Menominee counties. It is not part of local state or federal government, though it does often partner with governments to accomplish economic and community development. It is funded by membership dues as well as non-dues items such as event revenue, sponsorships and sales of various products and services.

Members of the Chamber serve on the Board of Directors, on committees and as ambassadors. The board directs the Chamber staff to carry out the “plan of action.” Members serve on committees with similar interests to explore issues, programs, or opportunities of common concern.

The chamber is not narrowly focused on one

particular industry, issue, cause or activity. It focuses on a broad range of activities and support for businesses and communities.

The Chamber serves as the “front door” for the entire area to attract new businesses and industry, new residents and tourists. Many newcomers, job recruits, visitors and business people get their first impression from their visit to the chamber. They are the ones who answer the phone calls and emails from people who have questions about Shawano Country. They are an information resource for prospective business owners deciding about locating to the area. They are the ones who build an awareness of the area with tourism advertising and promotions.

The Chamber supports new and existing businesses with educational seminars and workshops including leadership training. It provides networking and promotional opportunities that are critical for the survival of some businesses.

Non-members are urged to contact the Chamber office to learn more at 715 524-2139 or chamber@shawanocountry.com.

Happy anniversary!



Hundreds of people lined up for the ping pong ball drop at Nueske’s Meats in Wittenberg on Sept. 16, 2023. The balls were dropped from a helicopter, and specific balls signified prizes for those who grabbed them. The business celebrated its 90-year anniversary with a breakfast, farmers market and vintage demonstrations, children’s entertainment, food trucks, live entertainment, pig and duck races, wood carving demonstrations, a ping pong ball drop and fireworks. Nueske family ancestors came to Wisconsin in 1882, bringing with them European skills of applewood smoking and dozens of recipes for spicing and curing meat. In 1933, R.C. Nueske couldn’t find smoked meats as good as those his family made, so he decided to market his smoked bacon, ham, poultry and sausage to friends, neighbors and general stores around northern Wisconsin.

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BE AWARE: A REPUBLICAN OR A DEMOCRAT WILL WIN THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION – NOT AN INDEPENDENT – NOT A LIBERTARIAN.

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- #3 - children should not be subjected to TRANSVESTITE propaganda = like books, shows etc. in schools Pre-K thru 12.
- #4 - children's health is important - we must protect our children at all times - sex trafficking is a crime
- #5 - in the 1st - 2nd Amendment and all amendments
- #6 - the Supreme Court decision regarding affirmative action was correct because affirmative action mandated discrimination against certain groups – just like DEI does
- #7 - our National debt is too high and American energy independence is critical
- #8 - in America first because America is a good country and a beacon of hope for the world
- #9 - in immigration through a controlled secure border
- #10 - believe 100% in law & order. WE DO NOT support de-funding the police.



DID YOU KNOW? The Republican Party of Shawano has been a member of the Chamber since 2021.
Did you know that the Republican Party Shawano supports local business by giving away \$1,000.00 Chamber Bucks each year as raffle prizes.

www.shawanorepublicans.com • Visit our Facebook page - Republican Party of Shawano



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