

Let's all give thanks for family, friends, community



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Thank you for making our communities a great place to live, work and play

It is so easy to overlook gratitude. We are busy. We are distracted, overwhelmed, we have lives to lead, and what should be a routine — taking a moment to appreciate — is easily forgotten.

We set aside a day for thanksgiving, and although it is deeply rooted in our common historical tradition, it has come to mean so

much more. We are grateful to our ancestors, and we are grateful to those whose lives have shaped ours, but Thanksgiving Day has become a day to reflect on many aspects of our lives.

For several years, NEW Media has asked community leaders to write a short essay on “Why I Give Thanks.” These essays are about the Thanksgiving holiday, what the writer is grateful for or just the concept of gratitude.

These are personal reflections, but they also speak to issues and beliefs

that many of us share. They are as interesting for how they are the same as for how they are different. Some of the authors find them easy to write, others struggle with the pressure of a blank screen, a blank piece of paper and a looming deadline.

Knowing this, it is especially important for the editorial and advertising team at NEW Media to say “Thank you” to these writers.

Thank you for sharing what is important to you. Thank you for being will-

ing to make your feelings public. Thank you for making time to have a portrait taken. Thank you for facing that blank screen or blank piece of paper and writing the first word.

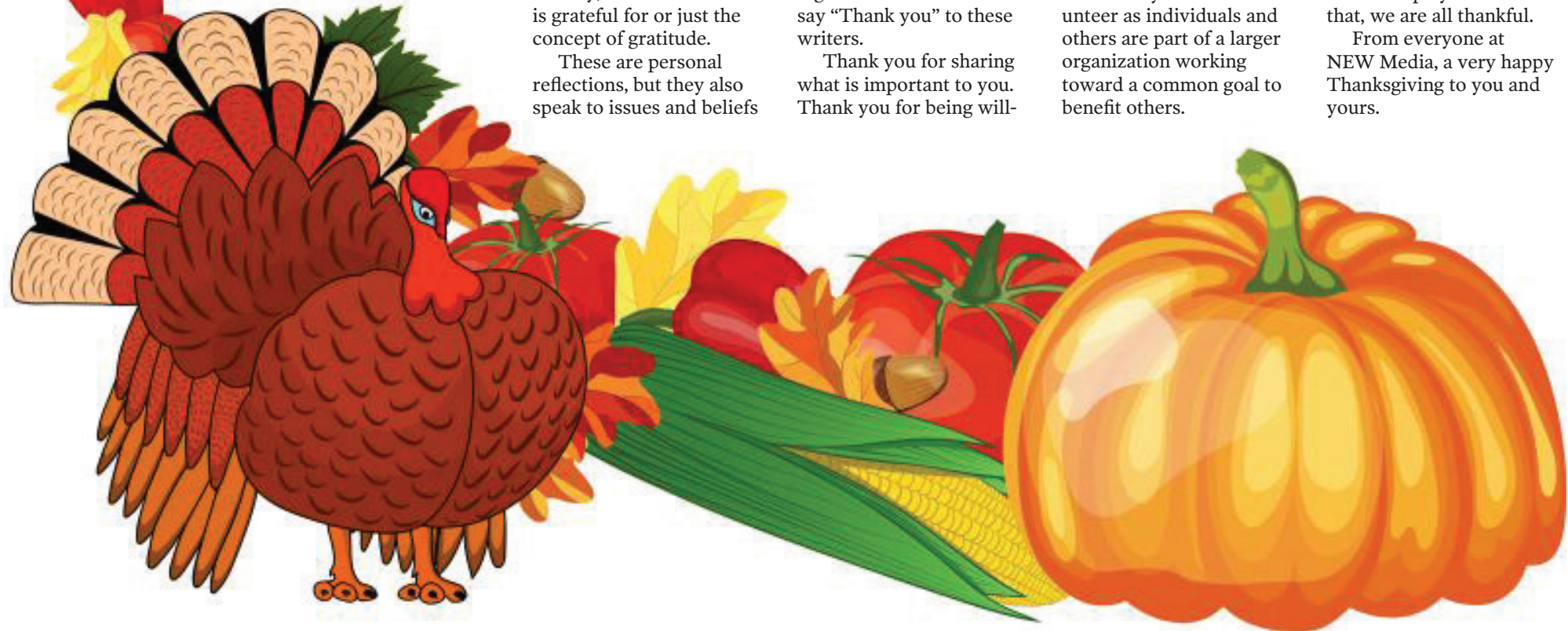
Thank you for showing us, again, how gratitude connects us all.

That gratitude is often expressed in volunteering in our community for our community. Some volunteer as individuals and others are part of a larger organization working toward a common goal to benefit others.

In addition to the essays of thanks, we have also chosen to highlight a selection of activities that focus on community. These activities are put together by volunteers for the wider community. The reward is simply knowing they made it an enjoyable experience for others.

This is what makes the area a great place to live, work and play. And for that, we are all thankful.

From everyone at NEW Media, a very happy Thanksgiving to you and yours.



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Thanksgiving complicated for Native Americans

By SHANNON HOLSEY
Special to NEW Media

We are in the season of gratitude. Thanksgiving is more complicated for the people at the center of the Thanksgiving story, Native Americans. There are 576 Native American tribal nations in the U.S. today, each with its own distinct traditions and culture.

As an Indigenous woman at this time of year, I am especially mindful of where our journey began, the lessons learned from what we have endured and what we have kept sacred despite all we have lost. For nearly 400 years, they have tried to erase us from the land without realizing how impossible that is. We are the land, the land is us, and we are still here.

Giving thanks is a long-standing, central tradition among Indigenous peoples that is still practiced today. Native traditions are distinct, complex and specific to each nation.

Thomas King said, “Most of us think history is the past. It’s not. History is the stories we tell about the past. That’s all it is. Stories. Such a definition might make the enterprise of history seem neutral. Benign. Which of course it isn’t.”

We can begin to write a new narrative. Today is a day to honor the first inhabitants and an opportunity to be grateful for Indigenous nations and their rich contributions to this country. By learning the real history of the land we occupy; becoming a friend, ally and advocate for tribal nations and their causes; and restoring our relationship with the natural world.

We can give thanks to the creator, for the bounty that we’ve been given. We can give thanks to our families, for their health and their good well-being. We should also look for ways to continually show gratitude for one another and the land that sustains us. Look among our friends slightly to the



As president of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, Shannon Holsey said Thanksgiving is more complicated for the people at the center of the Thanksgiving story, Native Americans. As an Indigenous woman at this time of year, she is especially mindful of where their journey began, the lessons learned from what Native Americans have endured and what they have kept sacred despite all that was lost.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

west, the Haudenosaunee, the Iroquois nations. They say that the Thanksgiving address is a very formal enumeration of all the gifts of life from the earth to the plants, the animals, the winds, the waters, the sun, the moon, the stars and the creator.

One original purpose and agreement was to be in sync with Mother Earth. We are meant to appreciate and respect all life, knowing our part is within the circle, not above creation. This practice can be implemented every day, especially during the season of gratitude. The dominant culture of the United States encourages

people to practice gratitude only at special times, neglecting it as a daily ritual.

I cannot emphasize how grateful I am for our youth. I watch as each new generation breaks paradigms and overturns old ways of doing things as a matter of course. This isn’t gratuitous — it’s how we move forward as a society. Each generation of young people will remake the world, and we’ll gain all kinds of new discoveries today and every day.

Also central to what I am grateful for are the sacrifices made by our patriots or veterans who helped forge a path of our

survival but fought for our U.S. citizenship and rights. Native Americans have historically served at the highest rates of military service per capita among all ethnic groups in the United States. Tribal veterans hold a wealth of knowledge, experiences and memories that deserve to be honored, remembered and safeguarded for future generations. The sacrifices of tribal veterans and all who have served are never forgotten. Every day, we benefit from your contributions to our nation.

What has always made America great, and what will always make

us exceptional, are the patriots who, generation after generation, dedicate themselves to building a stronger nation — a little freer, a little more perfect every day. I am grateful for you.

I am grateful for the work and dedication of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, our tribal citizens and staff for their important contributions. I hope their communal spirit will spread.

I am grateful to my parents and grandparents for the beautiful teachings and examples they provided me growing up. As I walk the path of self-discovery, weaving

the threads of my identity with the wisdom of my ancestors. I honor the strength and resilience of those who came before me and the love and guidance by fully embracing and celebrating the person I am becoming.

May all of you have continued good health and blessings, Na’kaawthe xaangaap onamanitheyaak (I hope that you all be well/healthy). My heart is full of gratitude for the many reasons I have to be hopeful and grateful for. Anushiik (Thank you).

Shannon Holsey is president of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians.



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Community, family and the past — all are important things to be thankful for, according to Jesse Borlen, president if the Shawano County Historical Society.

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Being thankful isn't limited to single thing

BY JESSE BORLEN
Special to NEW Media

When I was first asked to write about what I am thankful for, I will admit that it was difficult to choose one specific thing. Many people who know me will acknowledge the fact that I tend to be a sentimentalist. I, however, believe that it is my love and passion for history and the arts that has affected this. With that said, this season I am most thankful for the people and community in my life that have and continue to make a difference in my life.

Firstly, I am thankful for my loving and supportive family of the present, as well as my family members of the past for their acts of bravery and tenacity. I have always been interested in my heritage and feel that we can learn a lot from our ancestors, which

in a way shapes our lives.

Doing genealogy research is one of my favorite things to do and my fellow volunteers at the Shawano County Historical Society can attest to that fact. There is something about someone's life story that I find fascinating. One thing many of us share is the fact that many of our ancestors were immigrants. I often wonder if I would have the courage and perseverance it required to leave my home and travel to a new country. Would I be able to abandon the place where my family had perhaps lived for hundreds of years, with nothing more than a trunk or suitcase filled with my possessions?

My great-great-grandmother, Amelia Simatic, usually comes to mind when I think of this situation. Imagine being 36 years old with eight kids

in tow, unable to speak or read English, navigating your journey via train and boat before reaching the shores of the United States.

All I can say is that the sight of the Statue of Liberty must have been an awe-inspiring experience for them and all immigrants who traveled through Ellis Island. Although they had left their homelands behind, many were quick to embrace the ideals and freedoms of their new homeland. Many of these freedoms, which were absent or had been taken away in their native country. One of the biggest reasons many immigrated.

Secondly, I am thankful for my friends, including my second "family" at the Shawano County Historical Society. Whether it is a night out at the wine bar or a quick walk across the street to the Daily Drip, we

are always there for each other. We know that we can always count on each other to boost our mood after a rough day at work or stop each from making a poor fashion choice, or in some cases enable bad shopping/spending habits. Just kidding. Although I'm not a big conversationalist, one thing my friends will tell you is that I am a great listener.

My fellow volunteers at the historical society without doubt deserve so much thanks. I believe that preserving and learning about our history is so important to our society. Although we are a small group, my fellow volunteers and I are constantly maintaining and sharing the history of Shawano County with the community. We all share a passion for history and the past. It is truly wonderful to have such a great group of people to connect with.

Lastly, I am thankful for the community around me. Although I don't live in Shawano, I consider it my home, as I spend the majority of my time here. Shawano has always been a burgeoning community, steadily growing within the last few years. There are many wonderful and generous people in the community that I have met over the years volunteering at the historical society and working at the Register of Deeds.

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I have always felt a part of the Shawano community. It's always amazing how a welcoming connection with a stranger can influence your day. I love listening to people, especially people from the older generations, tell stories about growing up here or about Shawano of the past.

As hectic as life can

sometimes get, the Thanksgiving holiday is a great time to take a pause from our busy lives and contemplate on what we are thankful for and who/what may have shaped our lives. I also strongly encourage you to sit down with your family this holiday season and have conversations about your heritage. You may learn something you never knew before and perhaps it may make you think how it has impacted who you are today.

I would like to wish everyone a wonderful, happy, and loving holiday and hope that you get to spend it with your family and friends, whoever they may be.

Jesse Borlen is the president of the Shawano County Historical Society and works at the Shawano County Register of Deeds. He also sits on the board for the Clintonville Historical Society.

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Grandmother, teachers motivated minister's appreciation

By **REV. BETH MACHA**
Special to NEW Media

About a year and a half ago I went to take care of my best friend from college, Cathy, for the first few days after she had a knee replacement. I had a knee replacement the year before, so I knew what those first few days were like, and I knew how to nudge her along in her recovery.

I kept cheering her on and telling her how much better it would get as long as she kept doing her exercises and pushing herself. At one point after she was struggling and I gave her my best pep talk, she looked at me, rolled her eyes, and said, "You always have to be positive, don't you? You were like that even when we were in college."

Those comments caught me off guard. I know that I choose to be positive these days, but I hadn't realized that I had been like that so many years ago. I believe that the reason I give thanks is because I examine the world with a positive outlook.

I think my positive outlook started during childhood because I spent so much time with Grandma Braun and because of so many of my teachers in school. I remember my grandmother telling me stories and showing me everything in which she was interested. She often told me to appreciate nature, books, gardening, sewing, and animals.

My teachers in school helped me to see and to appreciate all of those things and more, and they gave me the opportunity to go deeper. I learned how things worked, how to examine things under a microscope, how to do research, and how to put pieces together. Throughout my school years, my



A positive outlook and an appreciation for the seasons of life are among the things that drive Pastor Beth Macha, who serves Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church.

WARREN BLUHM | NEW MEDIA

teachers shared their appreciation for and their excitement about whatever they taught.

I still have a great appreciation for learning and for nature. My husband and I love to travel, which allows us to visit places that we've read about and to learn more about history. We have been to Europe and have only one more state to visit. Our current travel plans are to visit as many of our national parks as we can so that we can see for our-

selves the glorious beauty of this great nation.

I have a great appreciation for the seasons of life. The lessons we learn in our youth are built upon as we mature. Each season of life has its joys and its challenges. Each season teaches us new lessons about life. I have tried to be intentionally aware during each season of my life so that I don't miss what they have to teach me.

Sometimes those lessons can be difficult lessons to learn. When I

have been through difficult times, I have been especially appreciative of soft landings. When there are people around to shore me up, when new opportunities come available after doors have closed, and when healing has replaced illness, I have been deeply grateful for those soft landings.

Why do I give thanks? I give thanks because I live a good life. It's not perfect. It's not always easy, but I still notice the blessings all around me. I

respect when life gives me challenges and difficulties. I try to learn lessons from all of it. Above all, I know that through everything, through all of life's ups and downs, God has been and continues to be with me.

In Psalm 31:8 (NIV), we read, "I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With God at my right hand, I will not be shaken." I really do try to keep my eyes on God at all times. I believe that my positive attitude helps me to see what God is up to, even

when I'm not exactly sure where I am going.

During this month of Thanksgiving, we all have the opportunity to take stock in our lives, to realize our blessings, and to give thanks to God. May we all take that opportunity to reflect and to truly give thanks.

The Rev. Beth Macha has been pastor of Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church outside Suring for about two years. She served for 17 years previously as an interim pastor for several congregations throughout the state and region.

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Couple uses blessings to help others

BY LEE AND LINDA
KREKLOW
Special to NEW Media

As we approach Thanksgiving, it is a great time to reflect on all that we are thankful for. We are thankful every day for a multitude of reasons; however, the month of November finds us reflecting on all the blessings bestowed on us throughout life.

We are so thankful for our health. As a family, we have overcome several health-related challenges with the help and support of family, friends and medical professionals.

One of these challenges was Lee's kidney transplant. We are forever thankful for all who supported us before, during and after this; especially John for giving Lee the gift of a second chance at life through the donation of one of his kidneys. We are also thankful to John's family for their love and support, and we are thankful for all the medical professionals who used their knowledge, skills and talents for a successful outcome.

We received so much support from family, friends and even people we didn't know during this process, as well as during the other challenges we have faced. We are extremely thankful for all of these people.

We thank God every day for providing for our needs during these times and also every day.

We are thankful for our family. We have been blessed with two daughters that we were able to raise and who now are beginning their adult lives. We are also thankful that Lee was able to be a stay-at-home dad while our daughters were young. We are very proud of our daughters and all they have accomplished so far and are excited to see what the future holds for them. There are so many blessings that come with being parents, and we are thankful for them.

Living and working in a



small community (Tigerton) is another thing we are thankful for. Being in a small community is like having an extra family. Everyone looks out for everyone else, and there is an overall sense of safety and security. People seem to truly care about others and are willing to help others whenever they are in need.

We are also thankful for the opportunity to learn. We have had many teachers, professors and role models that have had positive impacts on our lives, and we are thankful for them and the knowledge and experiences that they have shared with us.

All throughout our lives, we have been supported and encouraged by our extended families and

friends. Whether it was giving us advice, sharing knowledge and skills, cheering us on or just being there for us, we are the people we are today due to the tremendous support of our families and friends, and we are so thankful for them.

Having time to appreciate all that we have been blessed with is another thing we are thankful for. We are fortunate to have time to spend with family and friends. We also have time to volunteer and help others as well as time to just enjoy what we enjoy!

We are also thankful for the opportunity to do things we enjoy, such as going for walks or bike rides, working in the garden or just sitting outside

and enjoying the weather.

There are countless things we are thankful for including the many blessings bestowed on us. We hope that we have used these blessings to help others as well. Whether it was through volunteering in our community, church and schools, or through our interactions with the people we worked with over the years, we hope we have had a positive impact on others.

As we reflect on our lives, we have so much to be thankful for! We truly are blessed!

Lee and Linda Kreklow are longtime Tigerton residents. Lee runs his own business, and Linda is a retired teacher from the Tigerton School District. Both volunteer in the community.

Lee and Linda Kreklow have been supported and encouraged by their extended families and friends throughout their lives. Whether it was giving them advice, sharing knowledge and skills, cheering there on or just being there for them, the Kreklows are who are today due to the tremendous support of their families and friends.

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Uriah Williams took over as executive director for Shawano Area United Way in August, leaving as pastor of Peace United Church of Christ. In his new position, he is able to help many of Shawano County's nonprofit organizations with their work in the communities.

LEE PULASKI | NEW MEDIA

Diaper bank, other places make for a giving community

By REV. URIAH
WILLIAMS

Special to NEW Media

Hello, everyone. My name is Rev. Uriah Williams, and I am the new executive director for the Shawano Area United Way, Inc. which serves Shawano County and the Menominee Reservation. This year, I have a great many things to be grateful for in my life, including a good roof over my head, adding a member to our family, and getting to work with some of the most amazing people I have ever met.

It's this last item that I want to focus on because words cannot truly express succinctly how thankful I am for each

and every volunteer, staff member and community member throughout our service area that works to make the Shawano area a better place for all their neighbors.

On Nov. 5, for example, I was volunteering at the Snuggled with a Hug Diaper Bank with its director and several other volunteers. This program has served just under 200 families since it began in 2021. In November alone, we added seven new families and served a total of 30 families, many with multiple children enrolled.

If you don't know what the Snuggled with a Hug Diaper Bank is, on the first Tuesday of every month from 4-6 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church in

Shawano, eligible families can come receive free diapers for their children that are up to 4 years old. All a family needs to be eligible is to provide a state issued ID with a current address in Shawano County and either a WIC card or proof of Badger Healthcare. This truly is a phenomenal program for Shawano County.

More than that, some amazing things were apparent to me while working that night. We were giving out diapers that the Shawano branch of Associated Bank and its customers had just donated the week before and other diapers that had been funded by community donations. Several family members, friends and a staff member from Family Services

were picking diapers up for the parents who were working. I was witness to people taking care of their neighbors and loved ones, something I am always grateful for.

On top of that, the diaper bank has a partnership with the Shawano Area Food Pantry and Resource Center (SAFPARC). Diaper bank clients can go straight from picking up their diapers to the food pantry to receive free food just by showing their diaper bank registration card. So, not only was the Diaper Bank providing resources and volunteers to help families in need, but so was SAFPARC, which is another nonprofit organization that is supported by the Shawano community

with some amazing staff and volunteers keeping it going year after year.

In one night, I had the opportunity to watch as a whole community came together to take care of its fellow citizens. Businesses, personal donors, volunteers, nonprofit organizations and people who care gave of their time, talents and treasure and those 30 families were able to benefit from this abundant generosity of the Shawano area. That is always something to be grateful for.

It's moments like that in which I am most proud to live in Shawano. Moments when we prove that this is a community that takes care of one another. That is the kind of community that I want to raise my

daughter in. That is the kind of community that others want to be a part of. That is the kind of community that we work to help support at United Way. So, this month, I am grateful for those who make this kind of community possible.

If you're interested in learning more about what the Shawano Area United Way does, check us out on Facebook or visit our website at www.shawanocountyunitedway.org. I hope you all have a wonderful Thanksgiving and see all the blessings around you that you have to be thankful for.

The Rev. Uriah Williams is the executive director for Shawano Area United Way, Inc.

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Reflecting on health, freedom, gratitude

BY CLINT BRAUN
Special to NEW Media

In the spirit of Thanksgiving, I find myself reflecting on the essence of gratitude, and the first thought that surfaces is a quote that has always lingered in my mind: “When you have your health, you have 1,000 dreams. When you don’t, you have one.”

This simple yet profound statement encapsulates the core of why we should give thanks, especially for our health. In today’s fast-paced world, we often get engulfed by the daily grind, losing sight of our blessings.

As Jordan Peterson wisely advises, “Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping.” This philosophy extends beyond self-care into recognizing how fundamental health is to our existence.

The basics — exercise, diet, hydration, sleep, and even exposure to sunlight — are often overshadowed by modern medical solutions. Yet, these natural remedies hold immense power in maintaining our well-being, which in turn, allows us to appreciate the broader aspects of life: family, friends, career, and spiritual beliefs.

We live in an era where convenience is at its peak — climate control, lighting, food, education, and communication are accessible with minimal effort. This ease, however, can sometimes breed a sense of entitlement or dissatisfaction. We forget that many of these things were once the results of struggle and sacrifice. Our military, police, firefighters and health care workers ensure our safety and well-being, often at great personal risk.

The paradox of modern society is our inclination towards depression over unmet instant desires, a stark contrast to historical struggles for survival. It’s estimated that 90% of our worries and anxieties never materialize, suggesting that much of our mental turmoil is self-induced rather than



Life’s milestones often drive us forward, but it’s crucial not to overlook the journey itself, says new Oconto Falls Mayor Clint Braun.

WARREN BLUHM | NEW MEDIA

a reflection of our actual circumstances.

Shifting our mindset to focus on progress rather than perfection, and valuing experiences over material possessions, can significantly enhance our life’s quality.

Life’s milestones often drive us forward — educa-

tion, career, family, retirement — but it’s crucial not to overlook the journey itself. Each step, with its challenges, molds us, teaching resilience and appreciation. Instead of being caught in the consumerist cycle where the joy from new purchases quickly fades, investing in experi-

ences and relationships yields lasting happiness.

As we approach Thanksgiving, it’s a moment to reflect not only on what we have but also on how we can better appreciate and utilize these gifts. It’s time to slow down, to really see the people around us, to engage with life rather than

just pass through it.

This Thanksgiving, let’s choose to be thankful not just for the tangible but for the intangible — for health, for freedom, for the love we give and receive. Let’s remember that while modern life offers us comfort, it’s our responsibility to use these comforts to

enrich our lives and those around us.

Happy Thanksgiving to all. May you find time to give thanks and cherish the journey as much as the destination.

Clint Braun was elected mayor of Oconto Falls in April. He is co-owner of the PROCAR automotive repair shop in Oconto Falls.

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Oconto County Times Herald news editor Warren Bluhm said he's a little surprised to still be at work. It will be eight years and change on May 19, 2025, when I plan to put in my last day on the job. I'd been trying to find a time to retire for awhile, and when I passed my 49th anniversary last May, I figured, "What the heck? Let's make it an even 50 years and call it a career."

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

Thankful for 50 years in community journalism

By **WARREN BLUHM**
News Editor

I sat down with Morgan Marti, the station manager, and told him I was looking for my first job in the "real world" and thought I might be able to help WDUX.

"That depends," Marti said with an enigmatic smile. "What can you do?"

I talked about my experience as program director for the student radio station at Ripon and my love for music and —

"Nope, we don't need another disc jockey," he said. "What else you got?"

His interest perked up when I said I had also spent a little time as editor of the student newspaper at the other end of the second floor of the student union. It seems WDUX needed a news director.

And so, the following

Monday, May 19, 1975, I started my career as a community journalist instead of driving back to New Jersey with my parents to face an uncertain future.

After my four years at Ripon, I already knew that I'd rather make Wisconsin my home, and so among the multitude of reasons I have to give thanks, that chance visit to the Wau-paca radio station is at the top of the list.

I'm grateful that for the most part, I've been able to stay employed telling stories and keeping my communities informed about what was happening around the town and county. I even got to be a disc jockey after all at times during my 22 years in radio.

I give thanks that after stumbling around for almost a quarter century, I

found a life partner who spent more than 25 years sharing love and stability until she passed away last June. I miss her every day, but I'm so grateful for the time Red and I had.

I'm grateful for having grown up in a family with parents who loved each other and two brothers as lifetime friends. I'm tickled to see a new version of that family in Son of Red, the beautiful woman he married and their three young sons.

I had just met Red when I transitioned to newspapers in 1997, and she was with me when I first saw the building that housed the Door County Advocate in Sturgeon Bay in 2002. I'd been offered the editor-in-chief position but wasn't sure I really wanted to leave the Green Bay News-Chronicle.

A bronze replica of the Advocate's first front page hung outside the front door, and as I admired Vol. 1, No. 1, I noticed that it was published March 22, 1862. The paper and I shared the same birthday, a few years apart.

"Maybe that's your sign to take the job," Red said, and the decision was made. I give thanks for the opportunity to be part of that legendary newspaper's history for more than a decade.

I had expected to retire from the Advocate when I turned 70, but the corporation had other plans and decided a twice-weekly newspaper didn't need a full-time editor, a few months shy of my 64th birthday. I am grateful that the Oconto County Times Herald and NEW Media called a short time later.

I'm a little surprised to still be at work more than seven years later. It will be eight years and change on May 19, 2025, when I plan to put in my last day on the job. I'd been trying to find a time to retire for awhile, and when I passed my 49th anniversary last May, I figured, "What the heck? Let's make it an even 50 years and call it a career."

Lord willing, I'll be able to spend more time with my beloved golden retrievers, Dejah and Summer, bring the gardens closer to the beauty that Red created here, and finish those Great American Novels I've been tinkering with in my spare time.

Hopefully my successor will give Oconto County the thing I regret not being able to give — a community newspaper editor who lives in the com-

munity. Red and I built a home in Door County near the shores of Green Bay in 2012, and I have been loathe to leave it.

But in a perfect world, the person who reports on the doings of a community should be a part of that population. I look forward to seeing what the next editor can accomplish commuting from a home somewhere in Oconto County.

It's been a challenge finding that person. Maybe it will be someone who walks into the office next May, four days before they graduate, and offers to help.

"That depends," I imagine myself saying. "What can you do?"

Warren Bluhm is news editor for NEW Media and author of the novella "Dejah & Summer in the Time of Magic," which is scheduled for release Dec. 3.

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**Thank you all for a wonderful year,
For memories made that we hold dear.
To instructors and volunteers so true,
Who lead our programs, we honor you.**

**To lifeguards at the pool inside,
Ensuring safety with care and pride.
To non-profits and volunteers combined,
In every event, your work we find.**

**To Shawano's kids, both young and old,
Who played in our parks, both warm and cold.
To those who stayed healthy, active, and free,
Enjoying our parks in harmony.**

**To businesses who gave their support,
Making events a joyful resort.
Grateful we are, for all that you do,**

Here's to 2024, and a heartfelt thank you!

*Sincerely,
Your City of Shawano Parks &
Recreation Team*

Joni Denise
Carl Montane
Tom JD
Nicole Kresche
Theresa Marguette
Leisa Passon
Matt



Volunteers give it their all to make events fun for community

New, old traditions help provide connections with others

By **LUKE REIMER**
Correspondent

Football season is in full swing, and the evening air is crisp and cool. But, before you completely embrace the cold Wisconsin winter, take a moment to appreciate the efforts of volunteers who gave selflessly of their time and talent to make our communities a wonderful place to live, work and play.

Significant events like Thursdays at Franklin, the Shawano Ski Sharks performances and the Shawano Municipal Airport Fly-In and Car Show have once again produced countless memories that are shared by many.

“(Having these events in Shawano) gives an opportunity for people who live here to have something to do during the summer,” Shawano Mayor Bruce Milavitz said. “It also gives people who don’t live here the opportunity to want to come to our community and to be able to participate in all of the wonderful things that we have going on here.”

The Ski Sharks is the oldest of these summer traditions, with the Thursday concerts and airport activities more recent additions to the summer lineup of free and fun events.

Thursdays @ Franklin

Shawano hosts Thursdays at Franklin, which features various music talent at Franklin Park, near the city’s historic downtown.

The former Shawano High School and Franklin Middle School gave way to bulldozers in 1998, leaving several blocks of wide open space. In 2014, voters approved a referendum to support additional park projects, and Franklin Park took off from there.

“We went through some park planning pro-



Thursdays@Franklin has become a joyful gathering place for all ages. The former middle school was razed in 1998 and currently is the home to both the Saturday Farmers Market and the Thursdays @ Franklin. The “BYOB” format extends to bringing your own chair, tables and food.

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cesses, and people in the community really wanted an outdoor event space,” said Shawano Parks and Recreation director Matt Hendricks. “You will notice that there are no playgrounds, there is not a basketball court in there.”

Hendricks said that in about 2016, Thursdays at Franklin was introduced. The event started off much smaller than what it has

evolved into today.

“It was a couple of smaller local bands. It was maybe two or three of these bigger bands,” said Hendricks. “It was two or three movie nights and maybe a family night. We did that for a year, maybe two, and the feedback was that people really loved the live music. On Thursday nights, people just want to come out, hang

out, be with their families and so that’s where the idea of just going with the music series went.”

Hendricks said what visitors are used to seeing the past few years has pretty much stayed the same.

“We are pretty dialed in. I don’t foresee a lot of changes,” he said.

Thursdays at Franklin kicks off on the first

Thursday in June and lasts through the end of August. Every Thursday, visitors to Franklin Park are treated to high quality local bands, various food trucks and an area to gather and socialize.

Hendricks said attendance has gradually increased as the word has spread and as the event has become more and more popular.

“If we were to just use this year and the first year as years of comparison, the first year, even what we considered to be one of the bigger bands that we have seen, brought 300-400 people,” said Hendricks. “Now, the bigger bands, while difficult to estimate, are in the 2,000-3,000 people range. Our top evenings, I think we are close to that 3,000 mark, and our typical audience, we are probably close to 1,000 people.”

A typical Thursday behind the scenes sees a number of volunteers and workers helping to put on the event. Hendricks estimates that the parks and recreation department has three people to plan and organize the event. As for the day of the event, he estimates that 30 people are there every week to work, including nonprofit organizations, food truck vendors, police, bands and the crew for the bands.

Included in those are two nonprofit organizations, Shawano Pathways and the Shawano Optimist Club. Those two organizations have been with the event since its inception. At the concerts, the organizations sell beverages and run 50/50 raffles as a fundraiser.

“That is really cool, because Pathways and the Optimist Club have done a lot of great things locally with that money that might not have been able to do otherwise,” said Hendricks.

As the event has continued to grow, Hendricks said more nonprofit organizations have reached out about getting involved with their own fundraisers.

“The humane society really stepped up this year, which was really cool,” he said. “They reached out and brought out adoptable animals – cats and dogs. They had people out there talking with the humane society and they brought these animals, and from what I understand, every dog that was brought there was adopted out. Fridays were some of their busiest days. I thought that was a pretty cool story of how an event like this can help that.”

As a whole, Hendricks said Thursdays at Franklin provides an area and an event for residents and visitors to get together and socialize while enjoying good music.

“Thursdays at Franklin has a lot of attributes, the biggest one being that social connection,” said Hendricks. “Even though we have social media and cell phones in our pockets and are more connected, sometimes I hesitate to say that is true. I think events like this, where you are able to sit together with your friend, neighbor, coworker or someone you haven’t seen in years, don’t happen. So that is super cool.”

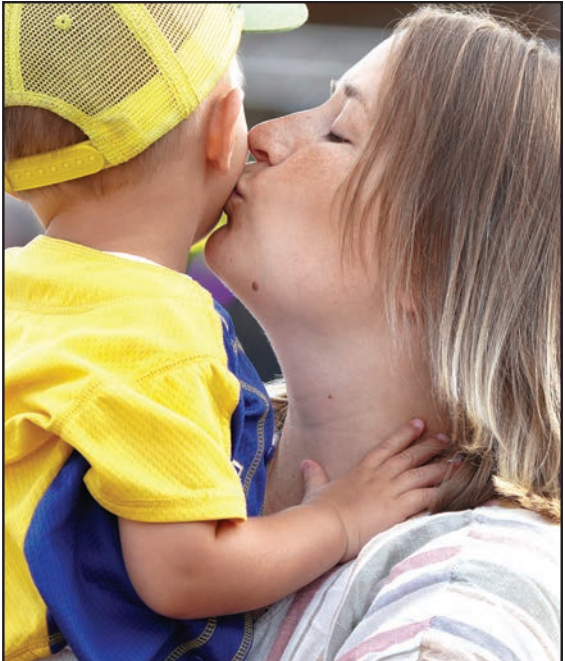
Hendricks said the concerts are also a draw for tourists to the area.

“It is very supportive for people who are maybe out on the lake or came to town for a primary purpose and stumbled upon this,” he said. “It has a significant tourism aspect, we believe, and then for us, it validates parks and why we have these open spaces and why people pay taxes to support them.”

EVENTS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 13



With an army of weekly volunteers the event also aids two community organizations, the Shawano Pathways and the Shawano Optimist Club. The groups alternate weeks selling raffle tickets with the proceeds benefiting each organization.



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Shawano Ski Sharks

The Shawano Ski Sharks got their start in 1976 and approaching 50 years of entertaining residents and tourists alike. On Wednesday nights, spectators are treated to a ski show, with a theme, at Smalley Park on the banks of the Wolf River. Performances feature many stunts and tricks, including pyramids. Starting with help from the Crandon Ski Serpents, the Ski Sharks have evolved into a record-setting, nationally recognized waterski team. Today, the Ski Sharks see about 120 members, with about 40 skiers on the team and 80 volunteers. Outside of the roster, the Ski Sharks Board consists of six members. “Year-round, the work is the board,” said Dave Passehl, president of the

Ski Sharks. “Then June comes and away we go.” On any given Wednesday during the summer, the audience consists of about 400-500 spectators. “Our biggest shows are 1,500-2,000 (spectators) our smallest shows are 200-300 (spectators),” Passehl said. Passehl said those numbers continue to grow year-by-year along with the team in general. Over the past decade, excitement surrounding the team continues to grow. Along with the excitement and success comes the impact within the waterskiing community, as well as the Shawano community. “The interest is high,” said Passehl. “There is pretty good buzz around the team, so we just keep seeing more and more each year. We have added infrastructure to handle that

– more bleacher seating to accommodate. I mean, we are recognizing that we have a lot of people to hold every week.” Looking at the success of the team is one way to see how popularity continues to grow surrounding the Ski Sharks. Since 2010, the Ski Sharks have achieved three Wisconsin State Championships (two in Division 2 and one in Division 3), a second place finish at the National Division 2 Show Ski Tournament. The Ski Sharks have hosted numerous tournaments, including Division 2 National Show Ski Tournaments and have set world records, including a record of 40 barefooters behind one boat. “The quality of our show has continued to improve each year – the dedication and commit-



It's truly become a regional destination, especially for those who enjoy music, conversation and laughs at no charge.

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ment to excellence,” said Passehl. “I talk about it all of the time – our best foot forward each week starting day one. People should show up knowing that it is a family-friendly

environment.” As the Ski Sharks have continued to grow and become a big part of Shawano, Passehl said that he, as well as the team, are happy for the recognition and are

proud to be able to share this success with residents and visitors in Shawano. Passehl said the Ski Sharks have helped to extensively develop Smalley Park to continue to bring residents and visitors to Shawano. Partnering with the city and the parks and recreation department, Passehl said that Ski Sharks have invested more than \$240,000 into the park. “We feel grateful that people are recognizing our efforts and are excited about it for our town,” said Passehl. “Most of these events – it brings hundreds, if not, thousands of people to town that would not normally be here, so we are very proud of that, but again, that was our objective – keep Shawano on the map.”

EVENTS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Whether it be the thriving downtown, Shawano Lake, the Up North feel, Shawano has staked its reputation on being a major tourist hub, especially in the summer. Passehl said the Ski Sharks are just another feature that goes into that tourist designation for the city.

“There are so many things going on in our town, and we happen to be one of those,” said Passehl. “Again, we just feel proud to be a part of the conversation of why people want to come to Shawano.”

Shawano Municipal Airport Fly-In and Car Show

On top of those weekly events, Shawano has recently introduced a once-a-summer event that involves a very prominent part of the city – the airport.

The fly-in started when the city developed a “refresh” of the air, Milavitz said. There were a number of upgrades, including a new building, a new runway, a revamped surface and fresh painting.

He said there used to be fly-out event at the airport a number of years ago. Visitors went to the airport to see planes land and then had the chance to talk to the pilots and see the planes up close.

“That was successful in years past, so we decided to do something that was going to be much



Shawano Ski Sharks, Shawano's veteran weekly free summer event, is a fan favorite. Visitors fill the stands at Smalley Park each Wednesday (and select special shows) to watch the show. A combination of thrills, including many community members, make each summer Wednesday special.

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more family friendly, and also, we wanted to make sure that the community understood that this fence (around the airport) is not a barrier,” said Milavitz. “We want people

to participate in our local community airport.”

Milavitz said a multi-faceted event was created in 2022 to help show off what was new at the airport. This event in-

cluded airplanes flying in, a Young Eagles program (free airplane and helicopter rides for children and teenagers), support from the police and fire departments and an accompany-



ing car show.

“We just have something for everybody that would attract people out there, because we want to dedicate and show what was going on at the airport,” said Milavitz.

According to Milavitz, in 2022, the first year the event was held, about 2,000-3,000 people attended.

In 2023, the arrival of a Black Hawk helicopter was added.

“We probably gained another 1,000 people at that point,” said Milavitz.

The 2024 was even bigger, with Milavitz estimating a crowd of 4,000-5,000. Also, 215 children took part in the Young Eagles program this year.

“Again, all of these things continue to grow,

and the community has really gotten behind this event,” said Milavitz.

In reviewing what the event has done for the Shawano community as a whole, Milavitz said the airport has gained much more exposure for pilots and aviation enthusiasts, as well as brought more visitors to the city in the weeks and days before and after the show.

“I know people that fly in and come to Thursdayz at Franklin, I know other people have come in and visited the Ski Sharks, so it really is a community event,” said Milavitz. “It is definitely helping with tourism, attracting new faces to the community.”

More than just tourism,

EVENTS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



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Milavitz said this event has also opened eyes of those who may use the airport at a business level.

“Instead of maybe flying into Green Bay or Appleton and driving to our community, they are starting to think about landing here at our airport and supporting local businesses that way,” said Milavitz.

Milavitz estimated that 50 volunteers take time out of their days to help the fly-in and car show be the success it is.

“That comes from the car show, that comes from aviation, that comes from pilots, that comes from air patrol – it takes a lot of people to put on an event like this,” said Milavitz. “We have a great local sponsorship. That sponsorship is not only financial in nature, but it is also donations in terms of different types of equipment and things like that. That is what really makes it successful.

“The community that has gotten behind this.”

As for next year, Milavitz said preparations have already begun.

“We are hoping it grows, and it is going to be the biggest ever,” said Milavitz. “We are really looking at on the grounds how we can utilize the space that we have available. We are also looking at different types of events that we can add. Last year, we added sky-divers. We have flight schools.



In its third year, the Shawano Airport Fly-In has quickly become an August weekend favorite for both air and car enthusiasts. Shawano Mayor Bruce Milavitz and Shawano Airport Commission members lead the charge and had the forethought to open the airport to all of those in the community.

Next year, we are going to add more airplane rides to the community itself, more than just children, but the entire population.”

Whether it’s on water, land

or air, Shawano’s summers are full of opportunities to connect with friends, neighbors and visitors. Organizers have already started on plans for 2025. You should, too.





Thank You

SHAWANO AIRPORT FLY-IN VOLUNTEERS

The board of the Shawano Airport expresses its heartfelt appreciation for all the volunteers who contributed in any way to help make the 2024 Shawno Airport Fly-In a great success.

