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feature article...

Neighborhoods: Waunakee



Fortunately, “the only Waunakee in the world” is a treasure in our midst

It's no secret that Waunakee prides itself on being “The only Waunakee in the world.” The signs at the village limits proclaim it, and Wisconsinites for miles around know about this unique designation. But what's in a name? Madison's neighbor to the north certainly deserves our attention, but for so much more than merely its moniker.

Waunakee includes amazing variety, from big business and industry (Mastertaste, Scientific Protein Laboratories) and local home improvement powerhouses (Kennedy Hahn, Waunakee Remodeling, H&R Carpets, Techline) to the down-home retail and food establishments highlighted on the next few pages. The area's first industrial park was established in 1982, and since then it has grown to over 5 times the original size.

This kind of boom can have wonderful results, such as the area's unemployment rate, which is far below the Dane County average. At the same time, the villagers of Waunakee have been smart enough to keep an eye on this expansion, ensuring that the town's growth doesn't overrun everything that makes Waunakee special by carefully assessing where growth would most benefit the community.

The village maintains more than 15 parks, ranging in size from Reeve Park, at less than an acre, which is located downtown and houses the renovated Waunakee depot, to the 82-acre Ripp Park, home to soccer and baseball fields, play areas and

walking trails. There is also the highly praised school system, and active residents who give their time to a wide variety of service organizations, including Friends of the Library and the local food pantry.

So what does all this tell us? That this village could be named Smithtown, Springfield or even Leicester (the name by which Waunakee was originally known.) A town by any other name would still be as sweet, because it's the people, the businesses and the unique history that make Waunakee the only one of its kind.

Business Spotlight:

Endres Manufacturing Co.

Industry and philanthropy are in perfect harmony at this family-run business

When brava chose to spotlight Waunakee as our March Neighborhood, more than one person urged me to check out "that neat cheese place on the edge of town ... the German-looking one with the goats outside in the summer." Little did they know that there's nary a curd in sight inside this charming Bavarian building, home to Endres Manufacturing Company, a structural steel company.

"Lots of people [stop in] wanting cheese or restaurant menus, or chocolate," says Sam Ballweg with a grin. Currently the company's project manager, he is part of the fourth generation of the Endres family to put their heart into this company. And the family business is about as far away from cheese and chocolate as you can get, manufacturing structural (support beams for large buildings) and miscellaneous (stairs and railings) steel for a variety of uses.



The company began back in 1926, when Lawrence Endres Sr. founded the enterprise as a small machine shop and began patenting some of his inventions, like the Endres disc sharpener. Today, the impressive network of warehouses fronted by that noteworthy Bavarian exterior still contains the company's original machinery. "It was a big part of the business for a long time," says Ballweg.

So, why bother to put such a whimsical front on a seemingly impersonal industry? "It's what sets us apart," says Ballweg. "My grandpa was very proud of his heritage. He made a commitment to the city to keep the outside of Waunakee looking good, because he knew that this would be one of the first things people would see when they came into town." In addition, the noise pollution is very low, considering the loading, pounding, cutting and welding that goes on inside the warehouses.



Project Manager Sam Ballweg is part of the fourth generation of the family business.

Most of their product gets put into use right here in Wisconsin, but they also work in Northern Illinois and beyond. "When our contractors go to places outside of Wisconsin, we follow," says Ballweg, who worked as a general contractor in California prior to returning to his hometown to work full time with his father Ken Ballweg, who heads the company.

First and foremost, Endres is a family business, and employees have always been treated as if they're part of the family. Because of this, there has always been a strong desire to keep the company thriving year-round, both for the good of the company and its workforce. "My grandpa was always looking for new things to keep the guys busy, new ways to make money in the winter when construction used to slow down, so he wouldn't have to lay people off," says Ballweg. One of these ways was to come up with smaller projects, like carts for line-striping football and soccer fields, or the piers you see populating our area lakes, both of which are still being made today.

Endres' altruistic approach to business reached its full potential 10 years ago with the establishment of the EMC Foundation. According to its mission statement, it "was established to provide financial support to local organizations and non-profits that would make Dane County a better place to live, work, and play."

The philanthropic foundation was the brainchild of Ballweg's mother, Diane Ballweg. "My mom believed that charity was a part of owning your own business." Grant requests are taken twice a year, and past recipients include Porchlight, Inc., Big Brothers Big Sisters and Madison Children's Museum.

For four generations of the Endres family, steel has been a big business that has been run with an even bigger heart. It's rare these days to have industry so well balanced with humanity, and we're lucky to have them. So if you accidentally stop by to inquire about their selection of cheeses, they probably won't hold it against you.

Endres Manufacturing Co is located at 802 S. Century Ave. in Waunakee; (608) 849-4143 or www.endresmfg.com.

Business Spotlight:

Mill House Quilts

This quilter's mecca has something for everyone

While the late-19th century building at the crux of Main and Baker Streets in Waunakee no longer churns out grain, flour or coal, these days it's abuzz with activity of a different sort. Known around our region and beyond as a quilter's paradise, Mill House Quilts caters to quilters of every ilk.

Proprietor Dianne Larson, who took over from previous owners Mike and Debbie Kuehn a year ago, has been quilting for over 30 years. "I was self-taught, back in the 1970s, and then I started taking classes. I vended for 15, maybe 20 years. From the mid-'80s until last year."

Over that time, Larson has seen the craft evolve and expand to include conveniences unheard of in her early years. "There are inventions all the time. People don't realize that," explains Larson. Everything from cutting mats that protect your precious dining room table, to rotary cutters that ensure clean, straight lines have taken much of the stress out of this popular hobby.

Quilters run the gamut from traditionalist to modern and beyond, the unifying factor being the reason the quilts are begun in the first place. "There are so many styles, there are so many people, there are so many interests," but Larson has found that they all make quilts to celebrate something or someone. "Somebody's having a baby ... getting married, somebody's graduating. All three of those events are big quilt generators."



Owner Diane Larson has been quilting for over 30 years.

And Mill House Quilts has fabric and utensils to answer any quilter's needs. The range of fabrics is mind-boggling: brilliant batiks, conservative reproductions from the Civil War and 1930s, hand-dyed wools and novelty fabrics for everything from sports to holiday, just to name a few. New to quilting? No problem. Instruction books abound.

All this is arranged around the first floor of the building in a dazzling rainbow; brash reds yield into softer pinks in one area, while in another, calming blues leap into vibrant purples. "I like to buy full lines when I can, and that means there might be 35 or 40 fabrics that go together," says Larson.

Upstairs the mill houses classrooms of several sizes with space for everyone, from a few students up to large gatherings and lectures. Class offerings range from beginner, which starts off with a simple quilted pillow, on to more advanced and bigger projects like rag and French braid quilts.

Although Larson never planned to own her own quilt store, it's clear that she takes pride in being a destination for quilters from around the region and beyond. Being named as one of the top 10 quilting stores in the country in 2000 by a national magazine helped them gain exposure, and now their mailing list is nationwide.

"What I'm trying to do is to be a complete quilt store," says Larson, "and have some of each style, although I can't have everything. But I'm trying because there are so many styles of quilting, so many styles of people, and so many reasons to make a quilt." Thanks to devotees like Larson, this growing hobby, once unfairly pigeonholed as geriatric and conservative, is reaching out and appealing to more people every day.

Mill House Quilts is located at 100 Baker St. in Waunakee; (608) 849-6473 or www.millhousequilts.com.

Waunakee Businesses:

Explore a wonderful town

Spend a day in Waunakee this spring and check out all the retail and dining opportunities that locals have known about for years. If you go, here are a few must-see suggestions.

Taste sensations

- **Kalscheuer's Funky Bean**, 244 N Century Ave., Ste. 1; (608) 850-3665 – Do you need to cool down or warm up? No matter – this coffee shop offers Chocolate Shoppe ice cream along side its java selections. Why not try some of both?
- **Rex's Innkeeper**, Hwy 113 N; (608) 849-5011 – A favorite with the supper club crowd and a Waunakee institution, they don't make 'em like this anymore. So skip the chain restaurants for a bite of Wisconsin flavor; try the Slow-Roasted Prime Rib, the juicy Tender-Time Chicken, or cruise their famous Triple Salad Station.
- **Sweet Sophie's Restaurant and Catering**, 1008 Quinn Dr.; (608) 849-4255 – A down-home restaurant, a friendly bar, and a banquet hall ... Sweet Sophie's does it all! We suggest starting with dinner. Whet your appetite with the Goat Cheese Spring Rolls on Asian Pear Salad, and then indulge in the Bloody Mary Shrimp Pasta.

An abundance of blooms

- **Orchids by the Ackers**, 4823 Hwy Q; (608) 831-4700 – No matter what basketball fans say, the real cause of our March madness is the spring fever that's so contagious this time of year. This lovely establishment has the cure: greenhouses full of delicate orchids, from Cattleya to Zygopetalum. Their selection also includes a variety of annuals and perennials for both sun and shade.
- **Country Creek Floral & Gifts**, 806 S Division St., Ste. B; (608) 849-8100 – Whether you have a yen for a dish garden of your very own, or just want to peruse their selection of flowers and gifts, this Teleflorist is a great shopping stop.

Home sweet home

- **The Front Porch**, 119 W. Main St.; (608) 850-4632 – Fill that empty spot on your wall or mantle with a home accent from The Front Porch. A delightful selection of home accessories and gifts awaits you.
- **Waunakee Furniture ETC & Gift Gallery**, 121 W. Main St.; (608) 849-7574 – The lower level houses their eclectic gift selections, while the rest of the store features furnishings for every room in your house, including accents and accessories. And if you fall in love with something that won't fit in your car, they offer free delivery within 30 miles.

Gifts galore and more

- **Newell Gallery and Fine Wine**, 315 East Main St.; (608) 849-8422 – This classic Victorian home, built in 1925, is the perfect setting to experience Newell's selection of wares, from paintings and prints to jewelry and sculpture. And the wine is the icing on the cake!
- **Heather's Gifts & Gourmet**, 105 E. 2nd St.; (608) 849-9213 – After a grand re-opening last November, Heather's is more equipped than ever to satisfy your shopping urges. And the personal attention here makes it a not-to-be-missed stop.
- **Skalitzky Jewelers**, 118 W. Main St.; (608) 849-5040 – Glittering gems and glitzy gold? Check. Beautiful bangles? Check. But this is a store with much more. Offerings also include clocks, personalized gifts and incense.
- **Stokes Sports**, 217 S. Century Ave.; (608) 237-6312 – An expert outfitter for archery, skate- and snowboarding, team sports and more. They go above and beyond to offer L.I.F.T., a wellness and fitness program, and Waunakee Physical Therapy operates here too!

When you need a beauty boost

- **Jansen's Hair Design & Tanning / Patrice Douglas Skin Care & Massage Therapy**, 503 W. Main St.; (608) 849-8267 – Patrice Douglas has newly relocated into this fine hometown salon to offer a beauty seeker the best of all worlds in one convenient place.
- **Turning Heads Hair & Nail**, 212 W. Main St.; (608) 850-4886 – This full-service salon nestled right on Main St. is the perfect place to stop and refresh your look while chatting up the friendly staff.

