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ONE THAT GOT AWAY

SEE PAGE 9

Sparta's Chris Jacobs



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MONROE COUNTY HERALD

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ONE SECTION | 18 PAGES

Two found dead in Ridgeville

PRESS RELEASE

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office is investigating the death of two people early Friday morning.

Shortly after 6:00am the Monroe County 911 Communication Center received a phone call about a deceased person at an address on Lexicon Ave in the Town of Ridgeville. The caller indicated that they had caused the death of that person and planned to do the same to themselves. The Monroe County Sheriff's Office and the Monroe County Combined Tactical Unit responded to the scene. Once inside the residence, the two victims

were located in the house.

The investigation is ongoing, but there is not believed to be any danger to the public.

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office was assisted on scene by the Monroe County 911 Communications Center, Monroe County Combined Tactical Unit, Wisconsin State Patrol, Wilton Police Department, and the Monroe County Medical Examiner.

This incident remains under investigation by the Monroe County Sheriff's and Medical Examiner's Offices, no other information is planned to be released at this time.

County medical examiner position elevated to full time

Department's cases up 33% in last three years alone

By PAT MULVANEY
Contributing Writer

With the number of cases the Monroe County Medical Examiner's office investigates annually more than doubling in the past decade, the county board Wednesday took decisive action to provide relief to the department.

Not only did it vote unanimously to elevate the medical examiner to a full-time position, it agreed to add a part-time chief deputy medical examiner and more on-call deputy medical examiners.

Over the past several decades, Monroe County's medical examiner has been an on-call position, which was backed up by an on-call deputy medical examiner and a part-time administrative assistant.

Bob Smith has been the county's medical examiner for the past five years. Before that he spent five years as a deputy medical examiner and 10 years as chief deputy medical examiner.

He told supervisors that just over the past three years the number of cases his office investigates has increased 33%, going from 675 cases in 2019 to 890 in 2021. In 2010, the office had 409 cases.

Smith said at an average of three hours per case that's equivalent to doing three cases per day, nine hours a day for 365 days a year.

He argued that the chief deputy position also was needed to relieve the burden on the office.

"Without that position, whoever is the medical examiner, you will burn them out extremely quickly if you're going to require someone to be there 24/7, 365," he said.

"They need relief, they need back up."

Smith added that the job is stressful and can be emotionally draining.

"When our phone rings, it's never good," he said. "Everytime our phone rings it's bad for somebody and that's what we deal with. That takes its toll after a while. You need to have that secondary position to allow that first position to have time away."

County board member Toni Wissestad is a former Monroe County medical examiner who started in 1982 when the office had only 65 cases that year. She argued it was time for the county to update the department, which has been engaged in a "band aid approach for years."

"We need to look at professionalizing the department," she said. "Having someone on call does not fit the needs of the families who show up at the office. It does not fit the needs of testifying in court, meeting with law enforcement, making sure paperwork is handled properly."

She said the office sends reams of paperwork to the state and every death the office investigates, the medical examiner has to sign the death certificate.

The medical examiner also has to view every deceased person before they are cremated to ensure the cause of death matches what the death certificate indicates.

"It's a service county taxpayers deserve and above all families who have a deceased loved one," she said. "We are that link to them and you need a professional office running that to do a great job."

The medical examiner's position will receive \$107,293 in salary and fringe benefits annually. The part-time deputy medical examiner's position will receive \$45,143 in salary and fringe benefits annually.

READY TO...



Skaters of all ages visit the roller rink in Oakdale. Herald photo by Logan Everson.

Mother-daughter team revive rural roller rink

By LOGAN EVERSON
Contributing Writer

It's a new chapter for Jennifer and Maci.

In March 2022, J+M Flying Wheels was born. Jennifer Pray-Specht, 47, and her daughter, Maci Hutchins, 14, became the fourth set of owners of the roller rink in Oakdale after purchasing the property from Greg and Barb Ackerley.

"We're so grateful to Barb and Greg for trusting us with their 'baby', and so thrilled that the staff was willing to come back," said Pray-Specht.

Flying Wheels has always held a special place in Jennifer and Maci's hearts. Jennifer first skated here when she was five years old, and eventually her older sister taught her how to skate. Maci first skated at school but didn't get the hang of it until she came to Flying Wheels.

"During some bad times, we'd come here and leave our problems at the door," said Pray-Specht.

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J+M: Jennifer and Maci

Long-time owners step away

It's the end of an era as Greg and Barb Ackerley end their roll as owners of Flying Wheels Roller Rink in Oakdale. The couple owned and operated the rink for 15 years.

While they had been considering retirement, it came a little sooner and more abruptly than they had anticipated.

In early August of 2021, just a day after having their septic system serviced, a driver in a van accidentally damaged part of the septic that is above ground. Worry and heartbreak mounted as they were forced to shut down the rink for an indefinite amount of time, while also not knowing how they would afford to fix the damage.

After a post on Facebook containing photos of the van circulated the site, the driver, who had not realized that they had caused the damage, came forward. Insurance was able to cover the

AWAY cont. on pg. 8

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BEHIND THE SCENES: Co-owner Maci warms up her wheels by sweeping the entire skating surface before the doors open. Herald photo by Logan Everson.

Rolling in Oakdale

continued from front page

Few things about the rink have been changed, and that's on purpose. The necessary repairs and updates have been made but besides some new tables and a couple new menu items, it is very much the same.

"We want the people who have been here to expect the same [as it was before]," said Hutchins.

"We don't want to change anything [right now]," added Pray-Specht. "It's nostalgic." Jennifer and Maci also operate the Sunrise Motel outside of Necedah, but are looking forward to leaving that behind. Jennifer said that her daughter's future is the inspiration behind buying the roller rink.

"She didn't want to take over the motel," said Pray-Specht. "But operating the roller rink is a totally different animal than changing sheets and scrubbing toilets. Well, there's still toilets," Jennifer said with a laugh. "There's the food, the admission, the rentals, but the DJ equipment has been the hardest thing to learn."

Jennifer and Maci are very happy that the staff decided to come back. The return of Rick Devito was a major win for the rink.

"He's been at the rink since the owners before Barb and Greg and if he had not been able to stay on there would have been no way we would have taken the plunge to buy the rink at all. Having him be willing to stay on was the deciding factor entirely," said Pray-Specht via J+M Flying Wheels facebook.

With all the buttons and knobs, Jennifer only lets a few knowledgeable individuals get close to the menagerie of technology. One of those few is 17-year-old Brenden Lake, who has been skating at Flying Wheels with his dad for as long as he can remember. When not in



ABOVE Trenton Schroeder, 17, of New Lisbon clears the reverse limbo. Schroeder was the champion on the official opening night of J+M Flying Wheels. **LEFT** J+M Flying Wheels employee Brenden Lake, 17, laces up for the night. Brenden has been working the DJ booth after learning the ropes. Herald photos by Logan Everson.

the booth, Brenden was known to dominate the reverse limbo competition.

"I only won because this guy [points at Brenden] wasn't on the floor," said Trenton Schroeder, 17, of New Lisbon, who proved himself to be the reverse limbo champ on the official opening night of J+M Flying Wheels on April 15. Schroeder prefers blades, while Lake rolls with the quads.

J+M Flying wheels rents out both, but depending on the night the supplies can run out quickly. Capacity is set at 200 people. Some eager rollers show up as early as 5pm for the 7pm to secure their spot on the floor.

J+M Flying Wheels is located at 15111 Hobby Road, Tomah, WI and is open Friday through Sunday with 7pm to 10pm sessions on Friday and Saturday, and 1pm to 4pm on Sundays. Hours subject to change. Like the J+M Flying Wheels facebook page to stay up-to-date.



"Operating the roller rink is a totally different animal"

- Jennifer Pray-Specht
Co-Owner

BEHIND THE SCENES: Co-owner Jennifer fills up the fry basket during one of their busiest nights. Herald photo by Logan Everson.

HISTORY OF THE ROLLER RINK IN OAKDALE

1964: The steel pole-shed style building was built

1965: The Gay 90's Roller Rink opens and is operated by Charlie Dixon. A couple years later, the name was changed to 8 Wheels.

1985: Dennis and Carol White purchased the rink and changed the name to White's Happy Wheels.

2006: Greg and Barb Ackerley of Minnesota purchase the rink and change the name to Flying Wheels.

August 2021: Septic system was damaged and rink was closed for an indefinite amount of time

November 2021: Ackerleys decide to not re-open the rink, even after repairs are done.

March 2022: Jennifer and Maci, long-time visitors of Flying Wheels, purchase the rink and change the name to J+M Flying Wheels.

April 2022: J+M Flying Wheels opens its doors.



BACK IN TIME: Along with the rink came the memories. Herald photo by Logan Everson.

AWAY

continued from front page

property damage, but the emotional damage had already taken its toll.

"It got us thinking, 'do we really want to start over?'" said Greg Ackerley.

In November 2021, the Ackerleys made the announcement: they would not be re-opening.

"I thought about storing hobby cars in here," Greg chuckled. "But Jennifer came forward, and she had actually

asked us about 5 or 6 years ago if we were willing to sell."

Since 1965, the steel pole shed building outside of Oakdale has continuously served the community as a roller rink. In 2006, Greg and Barb Ackerley purchased the Happy Wheels roller rink from Dennis and Carol White, and changed the name to Flying Wheels. Charlie Dixon was the original owner from 1965 to 1985, and the rink opened as 'The Gay 90's' and later changed to '8 Wheels'.



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