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— *First Amendment*

## THE MONROE TIMES

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### SOIL SISTERS

# Come Unity: A call to build community

We don't hear with our toes or see with our fingers. We don't smell with our backs or taste with our knees. We don't listen with our elbows. Our sense of touch varies throughout our bodies — what is too hot or too cold for one part is just right for another, and that strange sense that tells us where our bodies are in space cannot be located in any one part. But somehow our brains integrate all that information and allow us to move through the world safely, learning, doing, adapting to new and changing circumstances, as one unified body.



Grace McLaughlin

A community is similar. We each experience the world a little differently and have talents and skills that differ. Some ask the big questions, other see small details. We are leaders and followers, teachers and healers, protectors and explorers, farmers and mechanics, conservationists and miners, chefs and bankers, soft-wear and electrical engineers, artists, and builders. Somehow, out of our diversity, we come together as one, as a community, and each individual is important.

Just as we learn to integrate information from different parts of our bodies, we learn to listen to different community members. We think about varying points of view and how we feel about them, and we decide how relevant they are to our lives. We learn to work with those whose views and attitudes are not exactly like our own. These experiences help us expand our world view and gain appreciation for different cultures and ideas, but they can also be uncomfortable and unsettling. That is good. With each new person or idea we encounter, we learn and grow, and we expand our own ability to cope with problems and adapt to changing circumstances.

We can build bridges, come together, and create communities wherever we find ourselves. Farm families that are in their 4th or 5th or 6th generation on the same farm can be open and welcoming to those who are just learning to be farmers or have come from different places. We can learn from those who have been practicing rotational grazing and organic vegetable production in Wisconsin for 50 years. We can learn from the newcomer from Thailand or India, Mexico or Pakistan, Nigeria or Afghanistan, who may or may not come from a farming tradition. We can also learn from the city dweller who moves to the country and decides to grow flowers or mushrooms or medicinal herbs. Those of us from elsewhere can adapt crops we are familiar with and love to a new environment, just as we ourselves learn to cope with insects, diseases and weather found here. Those with skills gained in the big city business world can teach their neighbors about internet marketing, including live streaming online festivals and

sales. The last two years, we have all been learning about Zoom and Google Meet!

We can also build bridges across the so-called urban-rural divide. No matter where we live all of us want decent and affordable health care, good schools, affordable housing, safe streets, and good jobs. Most of us are concerned about drug addiction, poverty, racism, and crime. But are city dwellers, with access to buses and taxis, aware that more than 40% of rural dwellers wish they had access to any public transportation at all? Or that more rural dwellers want better internet connectivity and are worried about jobs than either urban or suburban residents? By coming together, we can develop strategies to cope with these issues.

When community members bridge their differences, communities become stronger, more resilient, more capable of responding positively to change, adversity, or disaster. In order to build bridges, we need communicators and their outlets, such as radio, newspapers, television, churches, small or large groups, and on-line social media. Although it is easy to pay attention to those who share similar viewpoints, we grow when we are open to listening to and learning about others. Just as children become competent in walking and talking, and gain confidence to cope with life's tumbles and new experiences, when individuals make contributions to their communities and build connections among members, our communities (small and large) gain in character, strength, and resiliency. When people take a risk by attending a meeting with a new or different group of people, they can be ignored and marginalized — which can lead to isolation, resentment, and anger. Or they can be welcomed and appreciated, and thereby be able to help the group grow and meet its purposes and goals.

When individuals and groups reach out to each other, we find concerns in common, and we can find common ground to build relationships, to build bridges, to build community, to come together in unity.

— *Grace McLaughlin has worn many hats in her journey from Washington to California to Florida to Wisconsin. She has been a horse trainer, a wildlife ecologist, a farmer, and a candlemaker; most of her jobs have somehow involved teaching. She raises garlic on a micro-farm on a limestone ridge outside New Glarus, and is Co-chair of the Community Kitchen Cooperative in Monticello. Support local farmers through <https://www.communitykitchen.coop/>. Soil Sisters, a program of Renewing the Countryside, connects and champions women in the Green County area committed to sustainable and organic agriculture, land stewardship, local food, family farms and healthy and economically vibrant rural communities. For more information on the return of the Soil Sisters weekend Aug. 5-7 see [www.soilsisterswi.org](http://www.soilsisterswi.org).*

### COUNTY ROYALTY

## Join us for Green County Queen's Brunch

Looking for something fun to do this Saturday the 25th of June? Join me, Maddie McGuire, the 2021-2022 Brodhead Dairy Queen and my fellow Queens for the Green County Queen's Brunch. We will start the morning at the Brodhead Fire Station with moo tails at 8 a.m. with a brunch to follow prepared by your local firefighters. Then join us after the family fest parade back at the fire stations to see who will be crowned the 2022-2023 Green County Dairy Queen and Princess. If you would like to make any donations for the event please contact Linda Wahl at the Bank of Brodhead.



Maddie McGuire Brodhead Dairy Queen

Photo supplied

## Getting to know the 2022 GC Fairest of the Fair

Hello Green County, my name is Sharlene Swedlund and I am your 2022 Green County Fairest of the Fair from Juda. I would like to take this time to introduce myself and give everyone a short background.

Growing up I lived on a farm just south of Juda where I attended Juda School. I was actively involved in 4-H throughout elementary school and then into middle school. I also became an active member of the Juda FFA. Ever since I was a little girl, I've always had a passion for the agricultural industry. When I was younger my dream was to become one of the beautiful princesses that I saw during parades and through local Green County Events. So, when I finally became old enough to partake in those events I decided to run for the Juda Dairy Queen, and from there I was crowned for the 2016-2017 year.

Once I started reaching my senior year it was time to start considering schools and careers, so after I graduated high school in 2018, I decided to attend South Dakota State University and Southeast Technical College to pursue Agribusiness and Ag marketing where I also had the opportunity to hold the position of the 2019-2020 Miss United States Agriculture from SD. I loved every aspect of learning the different terms and areas of the agricultural business field and I

eventually moved back home to Wisconsin to pursue a job at Kuhn North America where I am a 4th generation family member to hold a job there. I started out in fabrication and just recently have accepted a job as the Technical Publications Specialist. Since acquiring a job at Kuhn back in September I had started to spike an interest in agricultural engineering, and I finally decided to head back to school to gain a degree in Manufacturing Engineering Technology at Blackhawk Technical College and I will eventually complete a bachelors at the University of Wisconsin Madison.

One of the main reasons I decided to run for the Green County Fairest of the Fair was to be able to give back to the Green County Fair Community for everything that they had done for me as I was in my youth growing up showing livestock. My drive and determination to promote agriculture and the industry itself. The love and memories that I cherish from the Green County Fair, watching the previous Fairest of the Fairs have an amazing time promoting the fair, volunteering at fair events and watching how much they had impacted younger generations with the grace and composure that they had held.

And just a short reminder, the Green County Fair will be held from July 20-24th, and this year's theme is Barnyard Beach



Photo supplied

Sharlene Swedlund  
2022 Green County Fairest of the Fair

Party! For more information you can look at our website or our Facebook page. I look forward to an eventful, fun-filled year ahead!

### TIMES COLUMNIST

## Diversion

Just a kiss is all it takes. That, and a slight kick to the ribs gets 'em every time. Not too hard — you don't want them to get desensitized. Make it more of a nudge. Nice and subtle, but firm. They need to know you're serious.

Mostly, they need to know that you're serious about what you're asking them to do.

With that, a kissing sound and a nudge to the ribs, the horses bolt up the hill. I never get sick of it — the way they charge forward with hooves pounding, heads pumping, muscles working, tendons stretching, blood flowing — a living, breathing rocket ship and I get to ride it. The wind causes my eyes to water, and I laugh.

Our group gathers at the first stop, which happens to be a relic of farming's past; a window into agricultural history. "A tribute to my grandfather's era of farming," I call it. Our first stop is all of that, plus a fantastic view of the farm.

Everyone is excited from our canter up the hill; a few riders laugh excitedly. There is a genuine positivity in the air. For the horses, this spot is a chance to graze. It is their reward, and they know it. Their ears flicker and relax. They put their heads down and devour mouthfuls of lush, green grass.

Today is the perfect day to talk about farming, and I gather everyone around.

A freakishly late spring means that now since the weather finally straightened out, everyone is busy. Corn planters that had been snowed on just days earlier are now churning up dust and throwing a dozen and more rows of seed into the ground, planting at light speed compared to the way my grandpa did it. Fully-loaded trucks hauling seed, fertilizer, and chemical run back and forth. Manure spreaders race against time, throwing winter bedding pack out on the fields as fast as skid loaders can load them. The smell of fertilizer, insecticide, and herbicide twang our nostrils.

What a juxtaposition, to be on horseback while watching this scene!

"This here is called a diversion."

Our first stop is a berm of earth that cuts across the hillside we just ran up. "Diversion" is jargon for this berm, which is designed to arrest soil erosion.

You see, when you till up an entire hillside and expose the earth to rain, snow, and the air, the soil is liable to erode away. The purpose of a diversion, is to stop the wash and make it so any soil that is washed down the hillside can at least be captured and reclaimed. Any soil that washes won't get further than this diversion. Also, later on the ride we'll talk about green-stripping and the need to protect stream banks when we get to the wildlife area.

Back in the day, my dad and grandpa created several of these diversions on various hillsides around the farm.

It was more popular to build diversions back then.

See that hillside?

I point across the valley to where all the activity is going on and continue:

That hillside used to have waterways, contour strips, and a line of trees. As farming equipment has gotten bigger, all of those traditional conservation structures got ripped out. See that tractor and planter? Those together are worth more than a half-million dollars, but the tractor drives itself, and you can plant seed while scrolling on your phone.

Simultaneously, a sprayer tall and wide enough to drive a motorcycle convoy through unfolds its booms and roars across the hillside. It seems to create its own weather cloud as it works.

In farming, this entire scene is referred to as "progress."

One of the riders joked, "Smells like cancer."

We coax the horses forward, along the diversion and toward a fence line — the eastern boundary of the farm. In a few weeks, the blackberry bushes will produce their fruit. As a kid, one of my jobs was to pick blackberries. Also, asparagus, morels, mulberries, rhubarb, sweet corn, milk, beef, and just about anything a garden could produce.

I mention all of this, because in a few weeks we'll be able to pick fresh blackberries along the fencerows, which was a special treat for a particular group of riders from Chicago who had never heard of such a thing! Imagine, just being able to pick your food right off the vine, and on horseback nonetheless! My word, in what alternate universe does such a thing occur?

At any rate, the point here is that farming ought to compliment the natural world, rather than destroy it. It's one thing to talk about water quality, soil erosion, and the life we create for the animals we control, but quite another to go out and see it in context.

So then, I ask the group, on a scale of one to ten, how are we all doing?

— *Dan Wegmueller is the owner of Wegmueller Farms and his column appears regularly in the Times. His website is <https://www.farmforthought.org>.*



Dan Wegmueller