

# R Lake Geneva REGIONAL NEWS

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C1



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### LAKE GENEVA



ERIC A. JOHNSON, EJOHNSON@LAKEGENEVANEWS.NET

Jeff Mrnak, pit master with Racine-based Mrnak Premium BBQ Meats & Eats, fries up a griddle filled with house-cured, double-smoked maple bourbon bacon strips on Saturday at the 2022 Bacon Fest, held May 14-15 at Flat Iron Park in downtown Lake Geneva.

## Bacon up a good time

Second annual Bacon Fest draws large, enthusiastic crowds to downtown

ERIC A. JOHNSON  
ejohnson@lakegenevanews.net

The temperatures weren't the only thing that was sizzling in downtown Lake Geneva on Saturday, May 14, as the second annual Bacon Fest kicked off the summer tourism season at Flat Iron Park with a tasty, bacon-in-

fused bang. Under sunny, cloud-flecked skies with a gentle breeze rolling in from scenic Geneva Lake, thousands of bacon-lovers followed their nose to the park May

14 for the two-day festival, which continued on Sunday, May 15.

An ebullient celebration of all things bacon, Lake Geneva Bacon

Please see **BACON**, Page A5

■ **To read more:** West end reporter Eric A. Johnson shares his take on Bacon Fest in his column *Shooting the (lake) breeze*, see B3.

## Preparing for chief's retirement

Lake Geneva Police & Fire Commission discuss hiring process

DENNIS HINES  
dhines@lakegenevanews.net

Members of the Lake Geneva Police & Fire Commission have begun discussion on the process for hiring a new police chief.

City officials are in the process of hiring a new police chief to replace current Police Chief Michael Rasmussen who is set to retire later this year.

The police and fire commission members discussed how they possibly want to proceed in searching for a new police chief during their May 5 meeting.

Police and fire commission member Chuck Saul said they are set to continue to discuss the issue during their June 9 meet-

ing, which is scheduled to be held 6 p.m. in the city hall building, council chambers, 626 Geneva St.

Saul said no decision has been made at this time for how the commission members plan to select a police chief.

"The Lake Geneva Police and Fire Commission will be debating how to proceed with the selection of our new police chief at our next meeting," Saul said in an email message. "No other decisions have been made regarding the selection process."

Police and fire commission member Spyro Condos said, during the May 5 meeting, some commission members proposed that the search includes a candidate from outside of the Lake Geneva Police Department.

Condos said he wants to hire a candidate who currently works for the police department, because there are several officers who work for the department who are qualified to become the next police chief.

Please see **RETIREMENT**, Page A4

## Yerkes to begin offering tours May 27

DENNIS HINES  
dhines@lakegenevanews.net

At long last, the historic Yerkes Observatory will soon be open for public tours.

Tours of Yerkes Observatory, 373 W. Geneva St. in Williams Bay, will begin the Friday before Memorial Day on May 27, the observatory has announced.

Yerkes has already started taking reservations for those first tours at [www.yerkesobservatory.org](http://www.yerkesobservatory.org).

Throughout the observatory's

120-year-plus history it mostly has been used for research and study, not for public touring.

The observatory was constructed in 1897 and used by the University of Chicago for research labs, dark rooms and classrooms to study astronomy and astrophysics.

Officials from the University of Chicago closed the observatory in 2018, then donated the facility and 50 acres of surrounding

Please see **TOURS**, Page A4

## East Troy's Cobblestone demolished

STEPHANIE JONES  
sjones@lakegenevanews.net

EAST TROY — It's an end of an era for East Troy's historic Cobblestone Inn.

Demolition started Thursday, May 12 on the historic Town Square hotel built in 1846 and by Tuesday, May 17 all that remained was a pile of old cobble-

stones. It's said to be the oldest three-story Cobblestone in the state.

For more than a year, groups including the East Troy Historical Area Historical Society tried to save the building, but the cost to fix it and maintain it proved too great.

Located at the corner of

Church and Main Street, the Cobblestone Inn was built on a

Please see **COBBLESTONE**, Page A4



**Watch now:** Put your smartphone camera over the QR code to see videos of the demolition. **NEWSVU**



STEPHANIE JONES, REGIONAL NEWS  
Demolition began on Thursday, May 12, of East Troy's historic Cobblestone Inn.



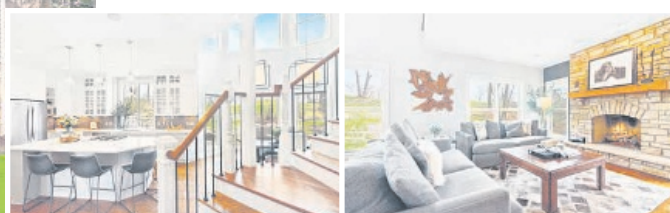
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# Bacon Fest coming to Mount Pleasant next

**DENNIS HINES**  
dhines@lakegenevanews.net

The sounds and smells of bacon sizzling soon will be coming to the Mount Pleasant area.

Representatives from the Wisconsin Valley Media Group—parent company of the Journal Times, Kenosha News and Lake Geneva Regional News—will host Bacon Fest Aug. 5 and Aug. 6 at Roma Lodge, 7130 Spring St. in Mount Pleasant.

Bacon Fest is set to feature food and non-food vendors, live music, children's activities, face

paintings and games. The Roma Lodge bar also will be available for festival-goers to purchase drinks.

"Whether you like bacon or not there will be something there for you, whether it be entertainment or other food options or mixed drinks," Kelly Wells, marketing and events manager for Wisconsin Valley Media Group, said.

The event will include about 30 vendors selling food, candy and craft items or sharing information about the products and services their business or orga-

nization offers.

This is the first year that Bacon Fest has been held in the Mount Pleasant area; however, a similar event has been held in the City of Lake Geneva during the past two years—most recently May 14 and May 15.

Wells said the media group decided to host a Bacon Fest event in another community based on the success of the Lake Geneva event and felt the Mount Pleasant area would be an appropriate location.

"We're looking to take the large

success of the Lake Geneva event and expand it to other areas of the tri-county area," Wells said. "Mount Pleasant is a nice place. It's close to Milwaukee, so we're hoping to attract people from that area and the surrounding areas as well."

Representatives from the media group have been planning the Bacon Fest event throughout the winter.

"We finally found a good location in Roma Lodge," Wells said. "So we have been working with them to use their facility."

Anyone interested in being a vendor during the event may contact Wells at 262-656-5662 or email kwells@lee.net.

"Vendors of all types are welcome," Wells said. "For food vendors, there is a requirement that you have to sell at least one bacon-inspired item, but they're welcome to sell other options, too."

Tickets for Bacon Fest cost \$5 in advance and \$10 at the door and soon will be available for purchase by visiting [www.baconfestwi.com](http://www.baconfestwi.com). Weekend passes also will be available.

## Bacon

From A1

Fest was sponsored by Wisconsin Valley Media Group, parent company of the Lake Geneva Regional News, Kenosha News and The Journal Times in Racine.

The 2022 Bacon Fest featured a variety of bacon-themed cuisine, as well as other food concessions, a full schedule of live music, and a variety of children's activities including face-painting, yard games including cornhole, a giant Jenga tower and ladder ball, and a Saturday afternoon pin-the-tail-on-the-pig contest.

Bacon Fest, which sold out its cache of 2,500 advance sale tickets last year in its inaugural COVID-limited single-day run, again sold out its stock of 2,500 advance sale tickets according to Wisconsin Valley Media Group marketing and event manager Kelly Wells, who called last year's inaugural event "a great success."

Wells said Bacon Fest was originally slated to launch in 2020 as an indoor event. COVID changed the plans for Bacon Fest, delaying its launch by a year and pivoting the event into an outdoor festival at lakefront Flat Iron Park.

"We'd been looking to expand into sponsoring some fun types of events, and who doesn't love bacon," Wells recalled of Bacon Fest's launch.

Expanded this year into a two day event promoted as "History in the Bacon," Wells estimated the crowds for the weekend's Bacon Fest at nearly 5,000 attendees

"There was a big line to start and everybody was excited to get in," Wells said of Saturday's Bacon Fest crowd. "We have a ton of vendors. There's a big variety. There's your typical bacon items, but also your unique items—bacon chocolate sweets, bacon hot sauce, rosemary candied bacon, a pig roast. We've expanded on the offerings from last year. Who doesn't love bacon?"

While the May calendar still says spring, Bacon Fest has quickly become the Lake Geneva area's new harbinger of the summer tourism season, followed by this weekend's three day Lake Geneva Jazz Fest, sponsored by Wisconsin Valley Media Group May 20-22 at Lake Geneva House of Music, N3241 Highway H.

Said Wells of the 2022 Bacon Fest, "There's a very good summer vibe—the weather's beautiful, we're on the shores of Geneva Lake, we've got great entertainment, a good variety of vendors, kids activities..."

Bacon Fest vendors included American Made BBQ—Pig Roast, Elena In-Home Catering & Isotropic Networks, Fiddlesticks



ERIC A. JOHNSON, EJOHNSON@LAKEGENEVANEWS.NET

Two-year-old Brielle Richio of Kenosha enjoys a sweet treat funnel cake on Saturday at the second annual Bacon Fest at Flat Iron Park in downtown Lake Geneva.

On Wheels, Fork N Fry, Jammin' Concessions, Johnsonville, Lake Geneva Pie Company, Lefty's Too, The Lumpia Lady LLC, MM&E BBQ, Rustic Oven Wood Fired Pizza, Smilin' Dawgs, Sweet Caroline MKE, Ultimate Confections, Sweet Treats Candy & Sweets, the Baker House, Wisconsin Style BBQ, and the nonprofit Walworth County Food Pantry & Diaper Bank.

Stinebrink's Piggly Wiggly, Waterford Bee Co., Mid City Grill and Leafguard were also at the two-day festival.

### Festival gets high marks

The 2022 Bacon Fest earned high marks from vendors and attendees alike.

"It's a great event," said Fontana resident John Hughes, president of the Walworth County Food & Diaper Bank, a second year Bacon Fest vendor and event partner. "We love it. It's a wonderful event and really the first Lake Geneva event of the season, the first chance for people to get out together and enjoy the weather, enjoy the lakefront."

The Walworth County Food Pantry & Diaper Bank served up a "Bacon Up a Solution to Hunger" bacon chili and cornbread fundraiser. The pantry also operated the cash bar at the event. A Sunday afternoon meat auction at Bacon Fest further benefited the Walworth County Food & Diaper Bank.

Hughes said 100% of the nonprofit organization's proceeds from

Bacon Fest will be used in support of the food and diaper bank, which serves some 1,500 Walworth County residents each week.

Also among the Bacon Fest vendors was Rhonda Mrnak, owner of Racine-based Mrnak Premium BBQ Meats & Eats.

"We're excited," said Mrnak, whose husband Jeff serves as the pit master. "It starts off our season. This is a fun way to start. It allows us to be creative."

Exhibiting their creativity, the Mrnaks were serving up a variety of bacon dishes at Bacon Fest, including slices of house-cured double smoked maple bourbon bacon, smoked bacon-wrapped "Texas Twinkies," bacon skewers featuring Wisconsin cheese curds and three different flavors of bacon, BLT tacos, bacon po boys, bacon flights, a bacon-loaded mac and cheese, their "big pig split," barbecue slices, bacon'd beans and "sweet, fatty and lovely" burnt end pork belly "bacon candy."

"A lot of time people take brisket and make burnt ends out of it," Rhonda said of bacon candy. "We started making it with pork belly and it tastes like bacon candy. It is sweet, it is fatty, it is lovely—bacon candy."

The nation's enduring bacon mania comes as no surprise to Mrnak.

"It's fatty and crispy and yummy," she noted. "That's what makes it so popular."

Among the ranks of return-

ing Bacon Fest vendors was Peter Pucillo from Elkhorn-based catering company Bistro Italiano.

"I am here to provide the masses with as much bacon as they can eat," Pucillo said. "Bacon cheese curds, bacon mac bites, bacon cheddar fries—bacon, bacon, bacon, bacon."

Pucillo said interacting with Bacon Fest attendees makes all the hard work that goes into working the intensive two-day festival a joy.

"I enjoy the people," he said. "The people out here are phenomenal. They're absolutely great. Everybody's here to have a good time—relax, have a couple drinks, eat some good food, listen to some good music and just party on."

Among Bacon Fest's new vendors was Chad Shortridge of Bristol, owner of American Made BBQ, a start-up entrepreneurial venture celebrating its first anniversary next month.

"I'm super excited about Bacon Fest," he said. "I enjoy cooking. I especially enjoy cooking the food I grew up on. I'm from Virginia—this is the food of my people. This is what we do down there. If I can make people happy with the food I'm cooking, that's the goal."

Shortridge kept busy at Bacon Fest serving up candied pork belly, candied bacon twists and eastern North Carolina chopped pork sandwiches infused with crumbled bacon.

A career 19-year Navy man, Shortridge is looking to retire in around 18 months.

"This is my retirement plan," he said of American Made BBQ. "It's something I love doing. I love providing for people. I love pop-up events like this. You get to meet other vendors, especially from the barbecue world, the customers are always awesome, it's fun to talk to people and get to know them a little bit and watch them enjoy your food."

Among the returning Bacon Fest attendees was Robert Godbey who made the two hour drive from Joliet, Ill. with his wife Karen and their 1-1/2 year old granddaughter, Autumn Noel.

"We were here last year and we wanted to come again this year," Godbey said. "There a lot of different vendors this year. I'm glad to see it. I like bacon—everything about it. The bacon cheeseburger, the candied bacon, the loaded bacon fries, chocolate covered bacon... Who doesn't like bacon?"

Karen agreed.

"There's so many different things to try," she said. "It's something to look forward to every year now."

Making her first visit to Bacon Fest was Gabrielle Sims of Kenosha.

"It's fun," she said. "We'll come again."

Walking the grounds and talking with folks, it didn't take long to discover that Bacon Fest attendees and vendors alike are drawn together through a common love for bacon.

"Bacon is nature's candy," Bistrot Italiano's Pucillo said. "What's there not to like? It's versatile. You can do just so many things with it. It's a flavor enhancer, it's a meal on its own and it's just plain tasty. There are so many different ways it can come."

### Two days of music

While namesake bacon reigned supreme at Bacon Fest, another big draw for festival attendees was a full two-day slate of entertainment.

Bacon Fest musical performances at the picturesque Flat Iron Park gazebo kicked off with the "Electrica" high school student group at Lake Geneva House of Music, featuring Serenity Jensen and Weston Holmes of Elkhorn, Audrey Gahart and Jay Kaiser of Kenosha, brothers Tommy and Tyler Herner of Genoa City and Lyra Hetland of Burlington performing under the direction of House of Music coach and instructor Shane Madsen.

"Performing is fun in general," said Gahart, a vocalist and drummer making her second appearance at Bacon Fest. "It's a good way to express yourself, feel how you want to, and show other people that feeling. And when you're performing at Bacon Fest, you always smell bacon, which is great."

Other entertainers at the Flat Iron Park gazebo on Saturday included the acoustic rock, pop and country music of the Judson Brown Duo, the Biscuit Creek traditional and progressive bluegrass band, and Miles Over Mountains, a progressive bluegrass band from the northern suburbs of Chicago. Entertainment Sunday included Americana band Tiny Country, the Lars Bell Band and Milwaukee 5-piece country string band The MilBillies.

### Another helping

Missed Bacon Fest in Lake Geneva last weekend or perhaps want to relive all the bacon-infused fun one more time this summer?

Fear not. Wisconsin Valley Media Group will fry up some more fun this summer with another Bacon Fest celebration, this one slated for Aug. 5-6 at Roma Lodge, 7130 Spring St. in Mount Pleasant, west of Racine. The event is slated to include about 30 vendors selling food.

Tickets for the Mount Pleasant Bacon Fest cost \$5 in advance and \$10 at the door and soon will be available for purchase by visiting [baconfestwi.com](http://baconfestwi.com). Weekend passes also will be available.

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