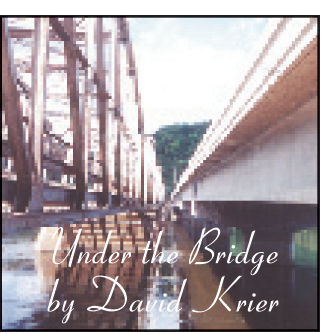


**IN YOUR DIAL**

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# The Boscobel Dial

VOL. 150—NO. 34    BOSCobel, WISCONSIN    THURSDAY, AUGUST 25, 2022    \$45 PER YEAR IN WISCONSIN, SINGLE COPY \$1.25



**“THE POST”** came to Boscobel Sunday, as in the Washington Post, one of the world's leading daily newspapers. No, they weren't on the presidential campaign trail. Actually, it was reporter Kim O'Donnel with one of the best jobs any journalist could possibly hope for. After working as a reporter in Philadelphia and Johannesburg, South Africa, Kim decided to attend the Institute of Culinary Education in New York. Since then she has cooked in restaurant kitchens, worked as a personal chef and created and hosted "What's Cooking," a weekly live chat on washingtonpost.com that has been going strong since 1999.

~ Aug. 14, 2008

**THE INTERNET** is full of sites advising wives on how they can spot a cheating husband and how to deal with it, but none say anything about Krazy Glue. One book is entitled, "How to Catch a Cheating Spouse" by Sarah Paul. Sarah says the four most common signs of cheating are suspicious cell phone behavior, smelling of another person's perfume or cologne, popping out at strange hours and suspicious internet history. As far as who is doing the cheating, the experts say that men are more likely than women to cheat and close to 50 percent of men will cheat at some point in their lives. And here's an eye-opener: The more money a husband makes, the more likely he is to be unfaithful. The reason: Having more money brings more opportunity and wealth tends to attract more women. Amazing observation Ms. Paul.

~ Aug. 6, 2009

**SPANISH** for "little fly," the pesky hordes have been a plague this summer for both man and beast. It's the female of the species that causes the problem. She needs a "blood meal" to reproduce and after that she lays her eggs in standing water—and there's plenty of that lying around this summer. The first three stages are aquatic and last 5-14 days, depending on the species and the temperature. Eggs hatch to become larvae, then pupae. The adult emerges from the pupa as it floats at the water surface. So if you have any standing water lying around dump it. The lives you kill could spare you insectous agony for 4-8 weeks, the life cycle of an adult mosquito.

~ Aug. 12, 2010

**TWO MOSQUITOES** were buzzing around when they saw a man walking down the street. One said to the other, "You bite him, I'm driving."

~ Aug. 12, 2010

*The past is strapped to our backs. We do not have to see it; we can always feel it.*

~Mignon McLaughlin,  
The Neurotic's Notebook,  
1963



## New teachers at Boscobel Area Schools

Monday, August 22 was a new hire in service day for Boscobel Area Schools. The district will have 11 new teachers for the 2022-23 school year. New teachers pictured front row (l. to r.): Allie Marks, middle school special education, Hannah Swenson, 1st grade, Kayla Gibson, school psychologist, Amy Strong, high school history, Denise Thompson, 6th grade social studies and science; back row: Taylor Halverson high school social studies, Dan Griesel 4th grade, John Herbers elementary music, Patrick Marfilus, elementary physical education, Kasie Moran special education, Shelly Biggin, 8th grade math. Boscobel's first day of school is Thursday, September 1.

## What's up with Cozy Acres?

**By JOE HART**  
 "Crazy Acres." Even some who live at the Cozy Acres Mobile Home Park call their neighborhood by its unflattering nickname.

Is it cozy? If your idea of cozy is a geriatric single-wide with busted windows, saggy siding, and a rotten subfloor, cockroaches sometimes optional, parked too-close to neighbors on a lot that might be choked with garbage—then your dream home awaits.

Say what you like about trailer parks. It's a fact that this one is more cramped, more cluttered, more decrepit and rundown than most.

Is it crazy? Depends who you ask.

Some residents have been in and out of trouble with the law for years. The park is home to five registered sex offenders, about a third of all those registered in the Boscobel zip code. Complaints include meth-heads and drunks, loud parties, and louder fights.

The Grant County Sheriff logged some 80 visits to Cozy Acres in the past 12 months, according to department records. About a quarter of those were for emergency medical services of some sort.

The rest included 14 for disturbing the peace; nine for family disputes; six for theft or property damage; four for harassment, assault, or sexual assault; and one for attempted suicide.

Each call mobilizes a gleeful pack of armchair police-scanner junkies who pepper Facebook with jeers and smears about the constant drama in "Crazy Acres."

But the people who actually live there? For them, the story is more complicated.

"We have the stigma of being, you know, 'trailer trash,'" said a resident, one of more than a dozen interviewed for this story. "For some people out here, that's true. But a lot of us are just—poor. We're doing our best with what we have."

They might be poor. They are definitely profitable. At the end of the day, the craziest thing about Cozy Acres might be just how much money can be wrung out of a run-down trailer park in rural Wisconsin.

### Handyman's special

In theory, living in a trailer park like Cozy Acres, which sits on Highway 131 about three miles west of Boscobel, is a sort of low-rent version of the American Dream. You own your own home, and as one resident put it, "It's kind of like living in the country, but with a little bit of urban."

The nation-wide shortage of housing that working-class people can afford has caused more people to buy into mobile-home living.

"Most of the people here have limited resources, and this is what they can afford," explained Bruce Zinkle, who manages the mobile home park. "People talk about affordable housing, but I don't know how many people can afford what is supposedly affordable."

For some, however, this version of the American Dream can quickly turn into something more like a nightmare.

As at most mobile home parks, residents at Cozy Acres own their trailer and rent the ground it's parked on. As such, they live in a kind of gray zone, with neither the legal protections of normal rental laws, nor the security that comes with owning your own land.

As a result, leasing a mobile home lot, especially in an older park like Cozy Acres, is one of the most vulnerable housing choices a person can make.

At Cozy Acres, where some

homes are as many as 60 years old, buying and rehabbing a trailer is no joke. Emma Anderson, who subsists on a fixed income of about \$1,000 a month, found that out the hard way.

(Most of the residents interviewed for this story asked for their name to be withheld, fearing retaliation from their landlord, neighbors, or both. Names and some identifying features have been changed.)

The elderly woman lives with her son, who serves as her health-care attendant as she fights the chronic disease that will probably take her life.

She purchased her trailer about six years ago for \$2,000. "There was one window in there that wasn't broken," she said. "I had to have the whole place fixed up: all new walls, new doors, new windows. No walls in the back bedroom. The floor had to be replaced, all the way rotted through. I had a new hot water heater put in—it fell through the floor, right through to the ground. I didn't realize this trailer was this bad. I would have walked away from it."

To make matters worse, money spent on repairs rarely comes back to the owner. A conventional home typically gains value over time. But the dollar value of a mobile home, which is considered "personal property," not real estate, continues to shrink, year after year.

One family, for instance,

bought into Cozy Acres more than 20 years ago, according to the father, whom we'll call Jake. He paid \$2,500 for his trailer, which today, adjusted for inflation, would equal \$4,301.

After 20 years of upkeep and maintenance, his mobile home is today appraised at—\$2,500.

"You'll never get your money out of it," Jake said. "You could put \$10 grand into a trailer house, and you'll never get it out."

If he'd bought a starter home on land instead, it would have doubled in value, if it followed the U.S. average of home appreciation. Even the most depressed cities in the country, (Flint, Michigan is the sole exception), saw home values increase over the past 20 years, according to data compiled by Zillow.

### Rented dreams

Still and all, lot fees are far below the average in-town rental. The base fee at Cozy Acres is just \$205 a month, according to Zinkle, which is even lower than the \$300 to \$400 charged at a typical park.

Here again, however, the vulnerable status of a trailer-park renter means those savings are too good to be true.

In addition to the base rent, residents pay for water, which is metered at each trailer. The Town of Marion charges a "parking tax" that's based on the assessed value of each mobile home. Cozy Acres charges an additional \$30 for each dog. And like any homeowner, residents pay their own electric and heat bills. Unlike a regular house, however, trailers are notoriously hard to keep cool in summer and warm in winter.

When you add up all these fees and utilities, lot rent looks more like town rent. In the coldest months, Anderson said her monthly housing expenses come within a couple hundred dollars of her monthly social security check.

The federal housing authority defines "affordable housing" as costing less than 30 percent of total income. For Anderson, Cozy Acres is nowhere near that threshold.

### Deeper in debt

Predictably, most of the people interviewed for this

(See COZY ACRES, Pg. 7, Col. 1)

## Boscobel school, police join forces

By CHANDLER BRINDLEY

When Boscobel's school year starts on September 1, one of the new staff members will be wearing a badge. That will be the new school resources officer, a (yet-to-be-determined) member of the Boscobel Police Department whose salary will be paid in part by the Boscobel Area School District.

"The officer is not the strong-arm for getting students to behave in the classroom," said Boscobel Police Chief Jaden McCullick said. "This officer will not deal with discipline issues; it is strictly legal matters where the law has been broken." That includes truancy, as the City of Boscobel has a truancy ordinance.

The officer would also be a first responder to a school crisis like a shooting. School resource officers receive special training in both community policing and crisis response.

"In the past, the school would always pay us for an officer for prom and homecoming. This will now be under a contractual agreement between the school and police department. The school district has agreed to pay \$10,000 per year toward the service," McCullick reported.

Both the school district and police department will have a "memorandum of understanding" which the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction strongly suggests. That document will spell out what the position entails, but the officer will fall under the police department's policies and procedures, McCullick stated.

Boscobel schools joins a growing trend, related in part to recent school shootings, in placing armed officers in the school. "Let's be real. Sadly, it is needed," McCullick said. Between 14,000 and 20,000 officers are on duty in schools nationwide, according to estimates from The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO).

Locally, Prairie du Chien is also adding a school resource program, and the Crawford County Sheriff's Department has a deputy that spends time at Seneca, Wauzeka and North Crawford schools, according to McCullick.

"Those districts actually pay a larger amount for the officer. It was something that the sheriff's department set up a number of years ago and has worked out really well. I think

(See SAFETY, Pg. 2, Col. 1)



The sign at Cozy Acres was recently defaced by someone who apparently didn't find the trailer park to be cozy.

### Early Deadline for Labor Day

An earlier deadline is planned for the Sept. 8 issue of the Boscobel Dial due to the Labor Day holiday.

Correspondents are asked to get ad copy to the office by Friday, Sept. 2, 2 p.m.

News copy will be accepted up to 9 a.m. Tuesday but earlier material will be appreciated and also more sure of publication.

The paper will be printed and mailed at the usual time on Wednesday, Sept. 7.

The office will be closed Labor Day.



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# COZY ACRES

Continued from Page 1

story reported falling behind on their payments, although Zinkle reported that overall, most of the lot rents are paid on time. And because the water bill is due at the same time as the mortgage, there's a chance you'll have your water cut off if you're more than 10 days late.

(There's a rumor, unconfirmed, that one family "borrowed" water for months with a garden hose from a neighbor after their service was shut off. And a housing worker for Southwest Community Action Program documented one resident who lived without hot water to save money.)

Court records show surprisingly few evictions from Cozy Acres, however. Instead, those who go in debt enter a kind of limbo.

That's what happened to one man in his mid-30s. Like Anderson, he's invested his own time and money to make his trailer habitable. When he broke a foot last year and was out of work, he fell behind on his lot rent and now says he owes thousands of dollars to the owner.

"The manager is pretty good about working with you," he said. "I'm still throwing like \$300 or \$400 a month at him, but it's going to take a while. Listen, it's middle- to lower-class income housing here," he said. "I'm making \$16 an hour at a gas station, but I'm lucky if I get three shifts a week. If you get 40 hours at a factory, you're usually making \$10. I can work at Pig for \$11. I'm just trying to make ends meet out here, and it's not great. But you can't afford to just go live somewhere else."

Instead, he stays on, trying to repay his debt and finish his remodel.

### Immobilized

Taken together, these vulnerabilities leave many residents at Cozy Acres feeling trapped. In theory, if they don't like the park, they can haul their mobile home to another. But moving a trailer can cost up to \$2,000 to \$3,000—out of reach for most owners.

And that's assuming the home can even be moved. Many at Cozy Acres wouldn't make it a mile down the highway without falling to pieces.

In reality, resident's choices are to sell at a loss, abandon their equity, or put up with the trailer park, whatever its problems. And when rent goes up, most are simply forced to eat the difference.

That's certainly how it has turned out for Jake, who has a steady blue-collar job, although with a 100-mile round-trip

commute.

"This was supposed to be a steppingstone to buying a house," he said. "It was just something I could afford back then, and it's just got me stuck out here, like in a hole. I married, went through a divorce, and I'm still stuck out here."

On a fixed income, Anderson feels the pinch even more. "I want to move. It's just one battle after the other and I've had enough," she said. "But it's going to be hard for me to get out of here. And the management knows that."

### Big money

Being stuck in substandard housing might sound unpleasant for you and me. But for someone with the cash to buy a mobile home park, it sounds like a no-brainer. In the past 20 years, investors have snapped up hundreds of parks.

Cozy Acres is owned by Michelle Gillette, who lives in Baraboo, WI. Whatever reasons she has for letting the property deteriorate, cash flow would not appear to be one. With 48 lots currently rented, that adds up to a gross rental income for Gillette of something like \$9,840 a month, or \$118,000 a year.

(Gillette turned down several requests for an interview, including a list of specific questions related to her ownership of Cozy Acres.)

In addition to Cozy Acres, Gillette owns mobile home parks in Avoca, Beaver Dam, Clinton, Wauzeka and Wisconsin Dells, for a grand total of 276 lots, according to licensing data collected by the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services, which oversees the licensure of parks.

Assuming a similar rent (which, again, is low compared to most mobile home parks), the gross rental income of all six parks would total \$56,580 a month, or almost \$700,000 a year.

Gillette built her fortune with her late-husband Dan Gillette. In 2013, the couple bought Wild Rose Ranch, a 100-acre horse ranch and upscale wedding and event center in Baraboo that features a bar, two gazebos, a heated patio, a commercial kitchen, and on-site lodging that doubles as an Airbnb, according to the ranch website. In 2020, Dan Gillette was killed in a freak accident, when what authorities called a "decorative beam" fell on him and his tractor on the ranch. After that, Michelle took over the businesses.

All told, Wild Rose Ranch (See COZY ACRES, Pg. 8, Col. 1)

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# COZY ACRES

Continued from Page 7

LLC is the owner on record for seven adjacent properties totaling 105 acres. Their combined assessed fair market value is \$1.6 million, according to Sauk County tax rolls. A nearby lot, owned by a separate LLC under Gillette's name, is valued at \$368,300.

Added to the roughly \$2.3 million assessed value of Gillette's six trailer parks, in their various tax jurisdictions, her combined real estate holdings are valued at nearly \$4 million.

In the world of trailer-park investors, however, Gillette is a small-fry. The country's largest is Equity Lifestyle Properties, which owns a whopping 140,000 lots, according to the website Mobile Home University (MHU), which coaches would-be park investors in the market. The top five owners on MHU's list own a combined 363,184 lots. And that's still a drop in the bucket: Some 20 million Americans live in mobile homes, half of them situated in parks.

MHU suggests a strategy of buying older mobile home parks, making some cosmetic improvements, and raising lot rents.

If you take the nation-wide housing shortage, add a population either too poor or too invested in their mobile home to move on, then you can easily imagine how many millions of dollars mobile home park investors make back on their money.

### Drama on the edge

When trouble boils over at Cozy Acres, it's usually Sgt. Todd Miller from Grant County Sheriff's Department who steps in. For the past 10 years or so, he's been the point of contact for Cozy Acres with Zinkle, who manages all six of Gillette's parks.

"We don't like being out there any more than they don't like us out there," Miller said. "I wish had a magic wand, for sure."

Miller explained that the department approach is to work in collaboration with Grant County social services to try to "alleviate the underlying problems" before they reach a criminal standard. Some problems can be addressed; some, like generational poverty and chronic overcrowding, cannot.

"You have a lot of people confined to a very small area," he said. "I went out there for a call, and I think there were anywhere between eight and twelve people living in one trailer. When you are confined in that small place, you're

naturally going to have problems. Your fuse gets lit a little bit easier."

Drug use is present at the park, he said, but he thinks there's less of it than people assume. "To the level that we can take enforcement action? Not at this time, or we would have," he said.

Follow the police scanner news long enough, and you'll discover that many of the 911 calls to Cozy Acres are absurdly overblown and don't pan out to be an actual issue. Like the time a caller claimed that a wedding was taking place with underage drinking, but deputies dispatched to the scene found neither.

"There are a lot of families, a lot of ex's and blended families spread out across different trailers," one resident said. "I think a lot of the drama comes from that."

Zinkle repeated this theory. "It's good, and it's bad," he said. "It makes it a community, but it seems like there's a lot of drama. I'm working with the sheriff, I'm doing what I can, but both of us have our hands tied. I can't deal with drama. I can only deal with facts."

When it comes to facts—say, repeated complaints or 911 calls—Zinkle is pretty much limited to one blunt tool: "My recourse is to give them notice to either change what's going on—or eviction," he said.

### Who's takes ownership?

Wisconsin's state laws are clear and unambiguous about the upkeep of mobile home parks: The park operator "shall maintain the manufactured home community in a clean, safe, orderly and sanitary condition at all times," while the occupants are required to do the same for their individual lots.

In practice, however, trailer parks fall between the regulatory cracks. They are licensed by Wisconsin's Department of Safety and Professional Services (DPS), a sprawling department where trailer parks are one of more than two dozen programs, ranging from fire department safety to "unarmed combat sports," that fall under DPS licensing supervision.

Unlike, say, kickboxing, which requires a signed medical examination filed with the DPS, there are no required inspections of mobile home parks—unless a complaint has been filed. DPS also handles those complaints, but the form to file one is hard to find and somewhat confusing and intimidating. No complaints have been filed against Cozy Acres.

Trailer parks are also theoretically licensed by the municipality where they are located, in this case, the Town of Marion. But this appears to be a largely symbolic licensure. No discussion of Cozy Acres, other than a yes vote for licensure, appears in the online minutes of Marion township.

Although some of the conditions at Cozy Acres would seem to threaten public health, especially children living in substandard housing, Grant County's Department of Public Health has no jurisdiction over either mobile home parks or the trailers in them.

Again, this is a feature of the unique position of a trailer-owner who leases land from a park. If, for example, a unit were infested with roaches, explains health department Executive Director Jeffery Kindrai, his department's services are limited. "If it's owner occupied, we'd issue the order for extermination on the owner, and they probably can't afford it, so that's really of no help," he said.

Similarly, the county Conservation, Sanitation and Zoning department supervises only the welfare of a park's septic system, while the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources oversees only the safety of a park's well water, which must be tested monthly for contamination.

In short, there is apparently no regulatory body at the state, county, or local level with the ability to compel either Cozy Acres' owner or its residents, to live up to the spirit, much less the letter, of Wisconsin State Statutes.

It's fallen to the sheriff's department to attempt to enforce the county nuisance ordinance, but according to Sgt. Miller, area judges have interpreted that to apply only to the mobile-home owners, not the park owner.

Faced with these multiple dead ends, county officials assembled a delegation, Miller said, to tour Cozy Acres with the hope of making change. "We brought in [State Representative] Travis Tranel, to actually come in and observe the living conditions that are out there," said Miller. "We tried to get the ball rolling that way, to see if there's any assistance the state could offer."

That, Miller said, was five or six years ago. Nothing came of it.

After 20 years on the ground in Cozy Acres, Jake put the blame for its deterioration on



Ageing trailers with little room to spare make Cozy Acres feel crowded and cluttered. A public play structure shows signs of age and misuse.

its absentee owner. "She needs to put money into it," he said. "We're all paying rent. Everybody here is sticking all this money into this trailer park, and she is not putting any money back into it. So why would we take care of it if she's not going to do it? It's about leadership."

### Road rage

Cozy Acres residents interviewed for this story shared a lot of wishes for a better park—safer, quieter neighborhoods; help maintaining their trailer homes and lots; fewer problem tenants.

But the universal dream is that the private road servicing the trailer court be resurfaced and free of potholes.

That's understandable: By early June of this year, the road was all-but-impassable, which tenants say is typical. Every last person interviewed said they'd spent scant funds on car repairs that they blamed on the potholes—popped tires, snapped ball joints, whacked suspension systems. Emma Anderson said the nurse who came to check on her illness refused to return until the potholes were filled.

Several residents said that they'd floated the idea of a rent strike, withholding their money until the road was fixed. But fear of eviction fizzled the notion.

By late July, a crew had been hired to fill the potholes—a patchwork of repairs, layered over other repairs... In places, the original concrete has disintegrated altogether, leaving a kind of hodgepodge of gravel and pavement.

Even with the potholes filled, it pays to drive slowly. Cars share the road, especially during the summer months, with kids riding bikes, or toddlers and their toys.

The exact demographic breakdown of the 48 households that make up Cozy Acres is unclear, but it's safe to say that a lot of children live here, including, in some cases, three-generation families, according to Sgt. Miller.

When it comes these youngsters, the stigma of "Crazy Acres" is perhaps most keenly felt.

Even some of the adults who live at Cozy Acres pretend they don't. "I'm embarrassed to tell people where I live," Jake admitted, even after 20 years in the park. "I just tell people I live about three miles out of Boscobel."

For children, that embarrassment is 10-fold. "There's times that the school has to maintain clothes at school," said Sgt. Miller, who also serves as president of the school board. "They get to school, they shower the kids, they change them in their school clothes. Before the end of the day, they change it back to their home clothes, and you know, it's, wow."

One mother of a 17-year-old told me her daughter reads every comment on social media about their trailer park.

A recent 911 call (about two juveniles fighting) had

Facebook in hysterics: "Cozy acres just needs its own reality tv show. Lol. Always something going on there it seems," quipped one user (21 likes). "For anyone that's never been to cozy acres it's a must see... best tourist attraction around," joked another.

That's not easy reading when you're 17 and growing up in a family that doesn't have a better option.

This mother had been living in the trailer park years back, moved out and moved on, made, she said, some mistakes, ended up back there. Now she's trying to get herself and her daughter out—again.

"I'm doing my best. It's not my forever home," she said, with a wistful shake of her head. "My daughter gets on Facebook every time this happens, and I tell her, 'Hon, you need to stay off there.' But it's like she can't. She's like, 'I just don't understand how people can be so mean.'"

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