

## BUSINESS

## Say "Cheese!"

Evers visits Hill Valley Dairy retail store, talks up benefits of Main Street Bounceback Grant Program

ERIC A. JOHNSON  
ejohnson@

As part of ongoing June Dairy Month celebrations, Gov. Tony Evers made visit June 2 to the Hill Valley Dairy retail store at 510 Broad St. in Lake Geneva.

Hill Valley Dairy received \$10,000 in grant funding from the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program, which has helped more than 4,500 small businesses and nonprofits statewide.

"We were eligible for the Main Street Bounceback Grant because we opened up the cheese shop during the window of time that included the [COVID-19] pandemic," said Hill Valley Dairy artisan cheesemaker Ron Henningfeld, who co-owns the business with his wife, Josie. "We were able to apply for a grant and received funds which helped us tremendously as a small business. It helped us pay rent and also hire staff and pay wages as we started up this store on one of the main streets here in Lake Geneva."

Since its February debut, Henningfeld said the Hill Valley Dairy retail store has met with a "happy and enthusiastic" reception from local residents and visitors alike, both existing customers from its area farmers market clientele and other sales outlets, as well as new customers.

"As the new cheese shop here in Lake Geneva, they're pretty excited to walk in the door and check things out and buy some cheese from us and leave with some great cheese," he noted. "Our brick-and-mortar store is another extension of our business where we can connect with our customers. Because we are a very small artisan cheesemaker, we are very in contact with our customers. This store gives us open hours where customers can come to us any time they need cheese. For us, it gives us a permanent physical space in the community where we not only offer our good cheese, and cheese made by our friend cheesemakers in Wisconsin, but also a space where, hopefully, we can be a good influence on the community by running a good business ... and being involved in community activities and organizations. This brick-and-mortar gives us a place where we can be anchored out of and hopefully have a bigger impact for our business, for the dairy farm and other cheesemakers we support, and mostly for Lake Geneva."

#### Dairy farm dates to 1942

Cheesemaker, retailer and wholesale Hill Valley Dairy, founded in 2015, makes its hand-crafted artisan cheese with milk from the Henningfeld Family's multi-generational East Troy dairy farm, currently home to 60 milking dairy cows. The family dairy farm was founded in 1942 by Henningfeld's grandparents, Roman and Marion, before passing to his parents, Roman and Carol, and most recently to his brother and sister-in-law, Frank and Colleen.

"We're still a small, relatively young cheesemaking company, but small and growing, and this cheese shop is part of our growth, another branch to the business," Henningfeld said. "The dairy farm is in the family, we've got the cheesemaking and now we have our main [retail] outlet here."

Henningfeld, a 2007 UW-Madison agriculture and biology alumnus, apprenticed in cheesemaking in 2009 at his alma mater's Babcock Dairy Plant in Madison.

"It really stems from growing up on the family dairy farm," Henningfeld said of his interest in cheesemaking. "In college, this idea of cheesemaking got in my head. I did some home cheesemaking and it seemed really interesting—and it was interesting. I got drawn into the idea of cheesemaking to stay connected to the family farm and involved in working with my family, my brother and, of course, the dairy industry here in Wisconsin ... The way I got into cheesemaking was meeting a lot of the other cheesemakers in Wisconsin. I worked for a couple of other cheesemakers for five, six years before starting my own business."

Enjoying great popularity, Henningfeld reported that the fledgling store's strong performance is already spurring an expansion into an adjacent storefront at 512 Broad St., which will house

a cheese-tasting bar expected to open later this month.

"It'll provide space and seating where people can enjoy cheese on site, where you can get a cheese flight or cheese-tasting board," he noted. "We also have the permits where we'll be able to pair cheese up and sell with wine and with beer, simple charcuterie, things like that."

In addition to its retail store, Henningfeld said Hill Valley Dairy sells its small-batch artisan cheeses through ten different retailers at present, largely in Walworth County but as far afield in southern and southeastern Wisconsin as Madison and Milwaukee. Hill Valley cheeses are also being used by four area restaurants.

Recently, Hill Valley Dairy also received a \$20,000 Dairy Processor Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, one of 19 awarded statewide to help dairy company owners improve or expand their operations. Henningfeld plans to use the grant funding to develop a business plan and finance plan to construct a cheese production facility as part of its burgeoning operations. Hill Valley currently rents space at a Milwaukee creamery to produce its small-batch artisan cheeses.

Supporting fledgling small business entrepreneurs like Hill Valley Dairy through initiatives like the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program is an important economic development tool for Wisconsin according to Evers, who said there's been "huge interest" in the program, which is accessed through the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC).

"It's one of the most rewarding things that I've done as governor—having people being able to reach their dreams, be productive and make our economy better," Evers said, noting 52% of Wisconsin residents are employed by small businesses. "It's been a huge investment but a really important one. We have 4,500 new entrepreneurs in the State of Wisconsin—from Milwaukee to Lake Geneva to Up North—that are now opening up stores and doing great things. I've had a chance to visit many of them, including this couple here."

Evers came away from his June 2 visit impressed with the Hill Valley Dairy retail store created by the Henningfelds, who are assisted by cheesemonger Ethan Sherman and store manager Carey Fowler.

"They're doing a great job, they've got it all down," Evers said. "They've got the milk part of it, the cheesemaking part of it and they sell it. They're a really great couple that have their heads screwed on right and were able to use this small grant to reach their dreams. It's all good."

Among those joining Evers during his visit at the Hill Valley Dairy retail store was Lake Geneva Mayor Charlene Klein.

"I think it's a great thing," Klein said of the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program award to Hill Valley Dairy for the development of its retail store. "I always want to have support for our small businesses here in town."

#### Grant program expanded

On May 10, Evers and WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes announced the investment of an additional \$25 million into the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program. Including the May 10 announcement, the state's total investment in the program stands at \$75 million. The additional investment will enable 2,500 more small businesses and nonprofits to fill empty storefronts throughout the state.

A recent analysis of state allocations showed that as a share of federal aid received by states, Wisconsin ranks second in the country for aid directed to economic development and first in the country in aid to businesses.

"The impact we've had through our Main Street Bounceback Grant Program over the last year has been tremendous, truly helping small businesses and main streets in every corner of our state," Evers said. "We've heard from folks across the state about how these funds have helped them take their businesses to the next level. We've also seen firsthand how these in-



ERIC A. JOHNSON PHOTOS, EJOHNSON@LAKEGENEVANEWS.NET

As part of June Dairy Month, Gov. Tony Evers (center) made a June 2 visit to the Hill Valley Dairy retail store at 510 Broad St. in Lake Geneva. Pictured with Evers, from left, are store manager Carey Fowler, cheesemonger Ethan Sherman, and Hill Valley Dairy co-owners Josie and Ron Henningfeld.



Cheesemaker Ron Henningfeld, co-owner of Hill Valley Dairy, points out different varieties of his small-batch artisanal cheeses as Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers shops for cheese during a June Dairy Month visit.

vestments have helped support local economies in downtowns and communities that are now filled with unique businesses that otherwise might not be there today. I'm proud of our work making strategic investments in small businesses and I'm excited that ... we'll be able to continue our work supporting main streets and communities across Wisconsin.

The Main Street Bounceback Grant Program was first announced in April 2021 and since then more than 4,500 small businesses and nonprofits across all 72 Wisconsin counties have been approved for \$10,000 grants to help them move or expand into vacant commercial spaces.

"From barbershops to candy stores and from physical therapists to local economic development groups, the businesses and organizations that have received Main Street Bounceback grants vary widely," Hughes said. "But what we're hearing from all of the communities where these businesses are opening is the send of excitement that they bring. Whether it's a new restaurant, a hair salon or an accounting business, there's a feeling that there are new reasons to come to our downtowns and spend a little more time there."

The deadline for grant applications for the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program has been extended to Dec. 31, 2022, and grants will be awarded on a first come, first served basis until all the funds are disbursed. WEDC is working with nine regional economic development organizations to quickly disburse grant funding to eligible businesses and nonprofit organizations.

More information about the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program and how to apply is available on the WEDC website at <https://wedc.org/programs-and-resources/main-street-bounceback-grants/>.

#### About Hill Valley

The Hill Valley Dairy retail store, 510 Broad St. in Lake Geneva, is open Thursday-Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on Sundays and Mondays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The store is closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

For more information, call 2620684-9524, email [hillvalleydairy@gmail.com](mailto:hillvalleydairy@gmail.com) or visit [www.hillvalleydairy.com](http://www.hillvalleydairy.com).



Gouda is among the small-batch, hand-crafted, artisanal cheeses offered by East Troy-based Hill Valley Dairy at its Lake Geneva retail store, 510 Broad St. Selections created by cheesemaker Ron Henningfeld, co-owner of Hill Valley with his wife Josie, also include cheesecurd, cheddar and Luna and Alina.



The Hill Valley Dairy retail cheese shop at 510 Broad St. in Lake Geneva, opened in February, received \$10,000 in grant funding from the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program, which has helped more than 4,500 small businesses and nonprofits across all 72 Wisconsin counties.