

You Said It

“I started auto repairs when I was knee high to a grasshopper.”

~ Jeff Sell

Jeff's Auto Service / Page 16

Rumor Has It

One Times Square building owners built the permanent Big Ball, weighing nearly six tons and 12 feet in diameter, in 2008. The 2,688 Waterford Crystal triangles, are illuminated by 32,256 Philips Luxeon LEDs. The New Year's Eve Ball is now a year-round attraction, sparkling above Times Square in full public view, January through December.

Hit the Polls

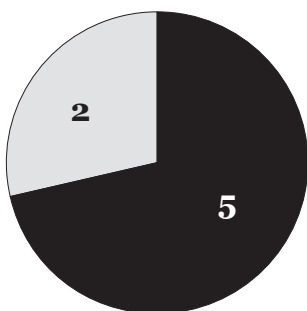
Did you stay up and ring in the new year?

Yes = 🍷

No = 🛌

Go to the *Courier Sentinel* Facebook page to find this week's poll and vote!

Last Week's Poll
Do you go ice skating?



Yes = 2 | No = 5

The mission of the *Courier Sentinel*, as a local, hometown newspaper, is to support our democracy, by publishing editorials and letters to the editor, that stimulate thought and discussion, but, because of the ongoing divisiveness following the recent U.S. presidential election, we have decided to put in place a moratorium on editorials and letters that will further inflame partisan rancor, and ill-will within our community of readers. We need a period of quiet, so we can begin to listen to one another. The newspaper will continue to run editorials, but as commentary on our local news coverage. We welcome letters from our readers that also focus on local issues, things that we cover in these pages.

Kris O'Leary,
general manager

– Editorial –

Remarkable things happen when you don't make reading a chore

Members of the *Courier Sentinel* editorial board include publisher Carol O'Leary, general manager Kris O'Leary and *Star News* editor Brian Wilson.

Who would have guessed?

When you stop making reading a chore and give people an option to read what they are actually interested in, the number of people reading for pleasure goes up.

Pat Talbot recently reported that the number of books checked out at the Lake Holcombe School District libraries are up by 45 percent over last year, at the middle and high school levels.

Talbot, as the person who oversees the school district's libraries, said he is seeing students come in and check out books for the fun of it.

"...For the first time in 20 years, I see kids checking out books multiple times during the week," he said to board members at the Dec. 19 meeting.

A key factor in this increase in reading among young people, is that the students don't have to worry about Accelerated Reading (AR) tests anymore.

Like many programs, AR has the best of intentions. Since it was first released in 1998, the goal of the program has been to raise reading achievement for students of all ability levels. In the buzzword

vocabulary of educational jargon, whenever you see the phrase "raising achievement," they are referring to having children do better on standardized tests.

There is a school of thought in education, one that many politicians like to hang their hat on, that the best way to measure school success and teacher effectiveness, is through quantifiable scores on standardized tests.

Wisconsin has an entire bureaucracy set up under state law, to grade individual schools and districts based on the performance of students on these tests. Headlines are written about scores going up or down, and politicians from the school board level to the governor's office, alternatively wring their hands over low scores or pat themselves on the back when scores are high – as if anything they did had a direct impact on how a student did on a test on any given day.

In the drive toward wanting to have a quantifiable measure of achievement, there is the inherent risk of placing emphasis on what will be on the test.

When it comes to guiding young people into being informed, rational, well-rounded adults, relying on high-stakes testing is nonsense.

It is nonsense to measure school, and by ex-

tension, teacher, success by test scores. A better measure might be to look at how many bankers, business owners, doctors, lawyers and other professionals, who were inspired by the lessons learned in and out of the classrooms in the school.

A better measure is to look at the level of community debate around issues and ideas, and if those on either side are able to articulate their ideas and work through to establish shared goals. These are more far-reaching measures of the success of the education system, than a state report card or how a student did on a standardized test.

Regardless of your age, reading is a good habit to get into. It is the same sort of exercise for your mind, as going for regular walks provides exercise for your body. AR and similar programs make reading a chore. Something you have to do and you have to do in a specific way, or face negative consequences.

Reading opens the door to new worlds and new ideas. It broadens horizons and encourages critical thinking.

Taking the chore out of reading and giving young people access to books about topics they are interested in, helps set them on the path to lifelong learning and exploration.

– Everything is an Adventure: Column by Julia Wolf –

Here's to a new year

And, just like that, it's 2023. My year ended with a pretty laid back Christmas and New Year's weekends, and another Christmas celebration coming up in January, to look forward to.



In true Wolf household fashion, most of the Christmas gifts got distributed well before Christmas came around, so we could start getting use out of the items right away. All of us have already gotten great use out of the early gifts, too.

I still had a few nice surprises waiting for me under the tree – a 2023 state park sticker, a new air mattress for when I have visitors, a photo book from a trip and an electric tea kettle.

The cats thoroughly enjoyed helping us unwrap presents, because the paper crinkles and makes noise. They couldn't help but walk over the paper every time we looked the other direction. I usually try to save some of the bigger pieces of wrapping paper and did manage to spare a few this year, but one or two nice pieces fell victim to a cat attack.

Then, there were the boxes. It is apparently a very fun kitty cat game to lay inside a big box and thrash around. I'm not sure what the goal of the game was. It could have been catching the box flaps or chasing shadows, but it could also just be the cats making as much noise as possible. Dinner and a show.

The entertainment was honestly right up there with the year the cat ran back and forth underneath the tree skirt, while we poked at the tree skirt from above, so she had something to chase.

We also played multiple rounds of guess the Christmas cookie. The game consisted of other people giving us trays of cookies for gifts and then us sitting around the kitchen table snacking on them. You never know when the cinnamon swirl cookie is actually raisin, the fudge has an unexpected kick of peppermint or the chocolate-covered crispy rice cereal treats are actually chocolate-covered almond mounds.

Everything was delicious and went pretty well with the grasshoppers we were drinking. A lot of the cookies were prettier, and more work, than anything I will ever have the motivation to make my-

self.

Other than a couple of trips to church, that was about all we did.

My New Year's weekend was pretty easy-going, too.

I visited with my grandma for an evening and we ended up watching a movie. My little dog came along for the visit, because she loves grandma's house. After she begged for treats, she must have decided she was ready to go home by the rest of her people. She made herself known and very annoying the rest of the night.

Upon going home, she made one loop around the house to discover the rest of her people weren't home either, then laid down and slept. What a dork of a dog.

My family also made a trip into town, to celebrate my brother's birthday a little bit early. We went out to eat and got some shopping done. I ended the weekend watching football and pestering the animals. Overall, it was a pretty great weekend.

I hope everyone else's holidays went well, and you have a happy and healthy New Year.

Ag Education is the Key to Industry Workforce

By Randy Romanski,
Secretary of the Wisconsin Department
of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer
Protection (DATCP)

When adults think back to our formative years, we can likely pick out a teacher or two, who fundamentally made a difference in our lives and influenced our future career paths. For many in the agriculture industry, that teacher was an agricultural teacher.

Hundreds of agricultural instructors work day in and day out, in the classroom, greenhouse, field and community, to educate our young people and build the industry's future workforce.

I recently had the opportunity to visit the Mount Horeb Area School District and DeForest Area High School, to tour their agricultural spaces and meet their agricultural teachers. I also had the chance to travel to the Menominee High School, to see their aquaponics and greenhouse.

While the investments in their school facilities were impressive, what stood out most to me, was the dedication and enthusiasm, that the teachers and students have for agricultural education.

I believe that students understand the great career opportunities available in the agricultural industry and that is why they are excited to learn as much as possible in their agricultural classes.

Each month, I have the chance to meet virtually with the 15 high school seniors who are members of the Wisconsin Agriculture Youth Council. These students begin their sessions at 7 a.m., before school, to listen to presentations, ask questions and participate in discussions, to advance their knowledge and connections across the industry.

The state's agricultural teachers and students need support from all of us, and that is why the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and DATCP, have reinvigorated the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council (WAEWDC).

This council has a dynamic membership and is committed to advancing its three goals to support agricultural educators, develop a statewide agriculture pathway and promote agricultural careers. The council recently completed its annual report, and I am proud of what has been accomplished so far and what is to come.

I encourage all of us to do what we can to support agricultural education in Wisconsin. About one in nine people working in Wisconsin, work in a job related to agriculture, and the students are our future. Stay up-to-date on the work of the WAEWDC, by visiting dwd.wi.gov. Meet the members, read the annual report, and contact us if you have ideas on how we can advance our mission.

I also hope you encourage youth to continue their agricultural education and pursue a career related to agriculture. Share with these young people how valuable it is to become or stay involved in organizations, such as 4-H and FFA. Spread the word about the Wisconsin Agriculture Youth Council, by sharing the website, agyouthcouncil.wi.gov, and ask them to apply in the future.

Most of all, join me in saying thank you to Wisconsin's agricultural educators. Educators, you are informing and inspiring our state's future agricultural workforce. Our farms need you, our processors need you, our agribusinesses need you and our state needs you.

Thank you for your commitment to our youth and to Wisconsin agriculture.