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SERVING KENDALL, ONTARIO, NORWALK AND WILTON

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SCENIC BLUFFS **HOSTS GRAND** REOPENING PAGE 3



BROOKWOOD'S POWELL RECEIVES KOHL SCHOLARSHIP PAGE 8



KENDALL LEGION HONORS LONGTIME **MEMBERS** PAGE 8



UP IN SMOKE

Multi-million-dollar scheme crushes Kendall's dreams

By Karen Parker

County Line Publisher Emerita

he plan was grandiose in scope. It would have brought hundreds of jobs, a huge boost to the property tax base, and even more prosperity to the village of Kendall than it had seen since it was a hub for the Chicago and Northwestern railroad 125 years ago.

The attractive, full-color prospectus promised a huge processing plant, an office building complete with an outdoor fountain, and dozens of new housing units. This explosion of affluence would level the playing field with the county's larger cities such as Tomah and Sparta,

But like the 17th century tulip craze in Holland or the Bernie Madoff Ponzi scheme or, closer to home, the emu trend, it all ended badly. Caught up in the frenzy were nine investors, some of them local, who lost more than a million dollars, a village board, a retired Wisconsin legislator, one of the area's leading construction firms, and many oth-

If there are any heroes in this story, they are probably Diana Cannon and Adam Montgomery. It was Cannon who stepped forward and blew the whistle on Bio-Sunn, and Montgomery, an investigator with the North Dakota Securities Department, took up her cause.

"I thought I was helping the town," mused Cannon in an interview with the County Line as she considered the \$640,000 she had invested in Bio-Sunn. The smallest amount of any of the investors was \$20,000. All total, \$1.3 million was invested.

Cannon, 61, is a La Crosse native and graduate of UW-La Crosse. She lives in Greenwich, Conn., where she co-owns Modern Staging, a business that stages upscale homes for sale. She also owns farm property on Highway 131 south of Tomah. She said she had heard about the Bio-Sunn proposal from area farmers who were growing hemp and from her brother-in-law, Rick Gruen, who owns Dorset Valley School Restaurant between Wilton and Kendall.

who drew her investment in the against Bauer as well as an earlier project. Peterson runs a marketing case when he was ordered to repay

Kendall and has a history of working on economic development issues in the area. Until the end of 2020, he was contracted by Monroe County to attract business and to work on economic development.

Peterson told the County Line he first heard about Bio-Sunn through Andrew Johnson, a Kendall resident who had contact with the Bauers in North Dakota.

"I only acted as a recruiter of investors," said Peterson, who noted his son-in-law was one of those investors. Peterson said he did not invest.

"I know people think I was getting paid by Bio-Sunn," he said. "But I got nothing out of the deal."

The major player in Bio-Sunn was Lewis Bauer of Douglas, N.D. Or perhaps his residence is Garrison or Nekoma, depending on the document. According to his own biography included as part of the prospectus for Kendall investors, Bauer owned a 3,000-acre agribusiness raising wheat, barley and other crops in addition to industrial hemp. He also characterized himself as an agribusiness and environmental consultant at North Dakota University.

"Puffery," commented Adam Montgomery from North Dakota Securities. Still, Bauer appears to have attracted a number of wellcredentialed professionals to his team. He even included a letter of support from Organic Valley.

But during two years of digging, with the help of Cannon, Montgomery discovered that Bauer had a checkered past and, indeed, this was not his first entanglement with the Securities Commission.

In 1993, Bauer pled guilty and agreed to pay \$115,000 in restitution to the Farmers Home Administration after selling grain he had pledged as security against an FmHA loan. Bauer had used the funds to launch Bio-Sunn's entry into the business of manufacturing machinery to create paper products from flax. Bauer also received \$100,000 in taxpayer money, but by 1994, the Bismarck Tribune reported the flax project had ground to a halt. North Dakota court records show a number of judgments and advertising company based in \$5,000 to a Webster Groves, Mo.,



Brickl Brothers of West Salem prepared extensive drawings for the office complex and renovated former elementary school building. The Braund house nearlby would have provided living facilities for the company's senior executive.

man. Bauer was charged with selling securities without being registered with the state.

Which is precisely what brought down the Kendall Bio-Sunn project.

On Feb. 10, the North Dakota Securities Department announced final order against Bio-Sunn Technologies Inc.), Lewis Bauer, Equity Fund International (EFI), and Christopher Williams, ordering the respondents to cease and desist from selling unregistered securities, acting as unregistered brokerdealers and agents, and engaging in fraudulent or deceptive practices in the offer and sale of securities. Also ordered was that the respondents repay investors the full amount they invested plus interest, and ordered civil penalties totaling \$1,080,000, which may be used for investor restitution.

Bio-Sunn's involvement with Equity Fund International (EFI) complicated things even more. As the project grew to epic proportions, Bauer engaged EFI and Christopher Williams to underwrite the project. But Williams said he needed funds to pay bank fees and other costs totaling over a million dollars.

"That should have set off red flags," said Montgomery. Those fees were absurd, he added.

Meanwhile, the fledgling hemp industry was struggling. Growing the crop was difficult. Processing

plants and markets were not developed. Prices for corn and soybeans recovered, making alternative crops less appealing.

Lee Nerison of Westby, who served as the local representative in the state legislature and helped pass the bill licensing hemp growers, said he now questions his support.

'We just didn't have the market," he said. But it was Steve Peterson, he recalls, who asked him to head up the Wisconsin Industrial Hemp Growers Association. Peterson created a website for the group. Nerison said they never met, and the whole thing faded away. But the website lists Nerison's phone number and an $address\,to\,a\,building\,on\,Highway\,71$ that Bio-Sunn was planning to buy and never did.

Cannon said she became suspicious when Bio-Sunn came back asking for more money. She declines to say how much more she invested, but she noted that everything appeared professional. Investor meetings were primarily held over Zoom, so she never met her fellow investors. Investors were admonished not to share any Bio-Sunn information with the public. Those inquiring about the company usually received a phone call from Bio-Sunn's attorney. Initially, investors were told they would receive their investment back within three days of the receipt

See Bio-Sunn, page 2

• Town of Wilton — 86, yes; 38, no

Norwalk-Ontario-Wilton

School Board — *Julie Radke, 832,

Breakdown by municipality

lison, 89, and Julie Radke, 85

138, and Anna Allison, 30

130, and Anna Allison, 35

6, and Anna Allison, 3

23, Anna Allison, 9

and Anna Allison, 1

80, and Anna Allison, 29

Village of Ontario — Anna Al-

 Village of Norwalk — Julie Radke, 89, and Anna Allison, 27

Village of Wilton — Julie Radke,

• Town of Clinton — Julie Radke,

Town of Forest — Julie Radke,

• Town of Ridgeville — Julie Radke, 94, and Anna Allison, 30

• Town of Sheldon — Julie Radke,

• Town of Wellington — Julie

• Town of Wells — Julie Radke, 3,

• Town of Whitestown — Julie

Town of Wilton — Julie Radke,

Royall School Board — *Melissa

• City of Elroy — Melissa Murray,

Village of Kendall — Melissa

Murray, 493, and Thomas Trepes, 457

Breakdown by municipality

Radke, 122, and Anna Allison, 18

Radke, 56, and Anna Allison, 35

and Anna Allison, 265

Vlasak named Kendall Citizen of the Year



At the Kendall Lions Club's Fundfest auction and dinner on Saturday, Lynette Vlasak was named the club's Citizen of the Year. For more photos of the event, see page 5.

The Kendall Lions Club named Lynette Vlasak its Citizen of the Year at its Fundfest on Saturday. The club read the following tribute to Vlasak.

This year's recipient of the Citizen of Year Award is well known in our area as a go-to person if you want something done and a person always willing to help others. Please welcome our Citizen of the Year — Lynette Vlasak.

Lynette is retiring this spring from her position as Kendall Public Library Director after 16 years on the job. During that time, she oversaw the growth of our library by both spearheading fundraising and as acting as general contractor for the addition. Lynette looks at the library as a "full-service" place and makes it that way. She has made our library not only a friendly place to get your books, but also a place to meet friends and neighbors. Lynette organized a monthly book club of over 25 members. Her Sit n' *Knit enjoys Thursday afternoons, and, yes, Lynette knits* — *just dish cloths* though. The Friday-morning coffee group shares their time and is the go-to group for her projects. Maybe after retiring, she will have time to rejoin the mahjong group. Our Amish neighbors are comfortable using our services and appreciate her help with getting tax forms, ordering special books and

N-O-W referendum approved overwhelmingly; challengers win at Royall, Wilton

Norwalk-Ontario-Wilton School District voters approved a \$24.9 million building referendum by a wide margin Tuesday.

Passed by 786-360, the ballot question asked voters to support a new gymnasium and track, classroom renovations, and a new auditorium, among other building projects.

Local contested races yielded some board changes as well on Tuesday. In Wilton, Missy Coldren defeated Jamie Evans 107-73 for the village board president position. Challenger Jennifer Thompson will join incumbents Sid Thayer and Lorrie Bever as Wilton Village Board

And in the Royall School District, challenger Melissa Murray defeated longtime incumbent Tom Trepes by 493-457.

The following are the unofficial results from Tuesday's election. An asterisk denotes a winner of a race.

N-O-W School District referen-

dum: 786, yes; 360, no Breakdown by municipality

- Village of Norwalk 82, yes;
- Village of Ontario 114, yes; 25, no
- Village of Wilton 126, yes;

- Town of Clinton 6, yes; 3, no
- Town of Forest 24, yes; 11, no • Town of Ridgeville — 93, yes;

• Town of Wellington — 118, yes;

52, no

- Town of Sheldon 123, yes;

151, and Thomas Trepes, 126

- Town of Clifton Thomas
- Trepes, 41, and Melissa Murray, 21

Murray, 62, and Thomas Trepes, 41

- Town of Glendale Thomas
- Trepes, 110, and Melissa Murray, 99
- Town of Plymouth Melissa Murray, 99, and Thomas Trepes, 88

See **Election**, page 2

 Town of Wellington — Melissa Murray, 15, and Thomas Trepes, 10

• Town of Wells — 0, yes; 4, no • Town of Whitestown — 50, yes;



See Vlasak, page 2

The County Line

Vernon County Sheriff's Report

Sunday, March 26: Tiffany Wozny of Richland Center was backing out of a parking stall at the Kickapoo Kwk Stop in Readstown. Wozny hadn't seen the vehicle driven by Cameron Steyer of Readstown parked next to her, and she struck the front driver's side fender of the Steyer vehicle with the front passenger's side fender of her vehicle. There were no injuries. Both vehicles received functional damage.

Sunday, March 26: Leah McLees of Viroqua attempted to negotiate a curve on Nottingham Road in the town of Jefferson, but she was unable to. McLees lost control of her vehicle, left the roadway, and struck a utility pole. McLees did not report any injuries. The vehicle had functional damage and was not towed.

Tuesday, March 28: Faith Wheat of Merrill, Wis., struck a deer in the roadway on Highway 14 in the town of Coon. The vehicle had functional damage, though Wheat did not report any injuries.

Thursday, March 30: Kevin Wuest of Fond du Lac, Wis., was traveling westbound on Highway 14 in the town of Viroqua when he struck a deer. Wuest did not report any injuries. The vehicle received functional damage.

Friday, March 31: Richard Clark of Viroqua struck a deer while traveling eastbound on Highway 14 in the town of Hamburg. Clark had no apparent injuries. The vehicle received functional damage.

Vlasak

(Continued from page 1)

finding books for their schools. Our community now has a monthly movie night with pop and popcorn thanks to her help. If you can't come get your books, she'll bring them to you.

As a longtime member of the Kendall Lions, Lynette shows her organizational skills. She has been past president and has accepted the position of co-president for this next year. Lynette knows what has to be done and when. She helps with the auction, the yearly senior fruit baskets (you should see her people list), the road litter pick-up and probably best of all as "the party planner." If you did not know, Lynette is on the committee for the Ken-

dall Gathering. the large reunion of Kendall folks over Labor Day weekend. She has pride in our community and provides newspaper articles to share what is going on in Kendall.

Lynette is also willing to step forward if someone needs help. She has allowed others to use her vehicle in a time of need. She brings food from the food pantry to those who cannot get there. Lynette many times drives others to appointments or meetings or can find someone who will do it.

Our 2023 Citizen of the Year, Lynette Vlasak, is always there to help. Thank you, Lynette!



The Bank Of Ontario Will Close At Noon On Good Friday, April 7 Have A Great Easter Member FDIC

The County Line

An award-winning community newspaper serving Norwalk, Ontario, Kendall, Wilton and Elroy

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■ Bio-Sunn

(Continued from page 1) of final project funding.

But days and then weeks ticked by, with one excuse after the other: it was the pandemic, the needed people were traveling, they had contacted the wrong bank personnel handling this type of funding, etc. In 2021, North Dakota issued a ceaseand-desist order and levied fines for selling securities without being registered in the state. In a hearing, EFI attorneys argued it did not need to register, as it was a Georgia company. The court did not buy that argument, and thus the final order was issued last month.

So was it a fraud from the get go or a great idea that fell on

While Adam Montgomery's agency is pursuing the business on registration violations, it clearly references fraud in the final order.

Peterson sees it differently. His belief is that hemp production is associated with drugs; therefore, no bank would finance the project, thus forcing Bio-Sunn to turn to more questionable

An early skeptic of the scheme was Art Keenan, a Kendall



The plans were breathtaking. "But I kept asking myself, why Kendall?" he said. He said he never did get a satisfactory answer.

Village Board member in 2018, when the idea was proposed.

Peterson says he no longer has anything to do with Bio-Sunn. It is his understanding that the company pulled back to its North Dakota operation. But it should be noted that not only has the company taken down its Facebook page and site, but also no one is answering the phone either.

Neither Diana Cannon or Adam Montgomery have heard from Bio-Sunn or EFI, even though the deadline to repay the investors and the state fines come due next week. On the good news side (if there is any), Montgomery said any repayment will go to the investors before paying the state fines. Cannon says that is all she wants. "I don't want anyone to go to jail," she said.

Montgomery said he has the utmost regard for Cannon, who was willing to step forward and pursue the matter. Too often people are embarrassed and would rather take a financial beating than admit they had been had.

In Garrison, N.D., the last town to be disappointed by Bio-Sunn, the head of local economic development said, "That's what happens when you encourage development and you don't always check everything out."



Andrew Johnson



Lee Nerison

Election (Continued from page 1)

• Town of Wilton - Me-

lissa Murray, 5, and Thomas Trepes, 3 • Town of Wonewoc - Me-

Steve Peterson

lissa Murray, 31, and Thomas

Village of Kendall

- Village President *Richard Martin, 100
- Village Trustees *Marlin Prell, 93; *Michael Crnecky, 84; and *Eric Schoenfeld, 81

Village of Norwalk

- Village President *Levi Helgren, 94
- Village Trustees *Sharon Karis, 97; *Greg Decker, 96; and *Nicky Genske, 83
- Municipal Judge *Douglas Gnewikow, 111

Village of Ontario • Village President -

- *Mike Parr, 129
- Village Trustees *John Hansen, 101; *Amber McElhose, 94; *Dylan James De-Witt, 81; and Sue Rego, 63

Village of Wilton

- Village President *Missy Coldren, 107, and Jamie Evans, 73
- Village Trustees *Jennifer Thompson, 111; *Sid Thayer, 100; *Lorrie Bever, 99; Cindy O'Rourke, 71; Hank Erdman, 69; and Jen Wallman, 38

City of Elroy

- District 1 *Robert Schroeder, 50
- District 3 *Carlton Peterson, 63

Town of Clifton

- Town Board Chair —
- *Tom Trepes, 118 • Supervisor 1 — *Kevin
- Cook, 120 • Supervisor 2 — *Dennis
- Boeder, 123 • Town Clerk — *Mary
- Cook, 119 • Town Treasurer — *Chris

Woggon, 127

Town of Forest • Town Board Chair —

- *Mark Keith Davison, 154 • Supervisor 1 — *Robert
- McCoy, 102; and Tim Re-• Supervisor 2 — *William
- Schiller, 159
- Town Clerk *Karen Thompson, 153
- anne Johnson, 154

• Town Treasurer — *Di-

Town of Glendale • Town Chair — *Nic Betts,

- Supervisor *Brian Gus Hyer, 154

• Supervisor — *Steven

• Supervisor 1 — *Greg

- Murray, 155
- Town Board Chair *Keith Giraud, 145
- Town of Ridgeville

- Larson, 136 • Supervisor 2 — *Jerry
- Haney, 144 • Town Clerk — *Rita Wil-
- liams, 155 • Town Treasurer —
- *Kathy Cale, 150

Town of Sheldon

- Town Board Chair *Leroy Baldwin, 171
- Supervisor 1 *Kenny Schmitz, 169 • Supervisor 2 — *Mark
- Calhoun, 165 Town Clerk/Treasurer —

Town of Wellington

• Town Chair — *Gerry

*Deborah Ferries, 169

- Supervisor *Doug Birkholz, 140
- Supervisor *Donny Pasch, 121

Town of Whitestown

- Town Board Chair *George Wilbur, 156
- Supervisor 1 *Andrew Benck, 156 • Supervisor 2 — *Mona Spohn, 134, and Doug Del-
- ling, 51 • Town Clerk — *Cori Wil-
- Town Treasurer *Casey Oium, 172

Town of Wilton

- Town Board Chair -*Christopher Chambers, 131
- Supervisor 1 *Jan Brandau, 133
- Supervisor 2 *Travis Woods, 134

Vernon County advisory referendum — 6072, yes; 3,528, no

- Breakdown by local municipality
- Village of Ontario 79, yes, and 59, no • Town of Clinton — 112,
- yes, and 102, no
- Town of Forest 96, yes,
- Town of Whitestown 111, yes, and 74, no

Court Judge — *Timothy J. Gaskell, 4,785; and Angela Palmer-Fisher, 4,605 Breakdown by

Vernon County Circuit

- local municipality • Village of Ontario -
- Timothy J. Gaskell, 70, and Angela Palmer-Fisher, 54 • Town of Clinton — Timothy J. Gaskell, 128, and Angela
- Palmer-Fisher, 83 • Town of Forest — Timo-
- thy J. Gaskell, 97, and Angela Palmer-Fish, 66 • Town of Whitestown —
- Timothy J. Gaskell, 106, and Angela Palmer-Fisher, 77 Justice of the

Supreme Court

- Village of Kendall Daniel Kelly, 61, and Janet C. Protasiewicz, 48
- Village of Norwalk Daniel Kelly, 78, and Janet C. Protasiewicz, 46

Daniel Kelly, 85, and Janet C. Protasiewicz, 51 • Village of Wilton — Janet

Village of Ontario —

- C. Protasiewicz, 94, and Dan-• City of Elroy — Janet C. Protasiewicz, 173, and Daniel
- Town of Clifton Janet C. Protasiewicz, 74, and Daniel Kelly, 71
- Town of Clinton Daniel Kelly, 115, and Janet C. Protasiewicz, 101 • Town of Forest — Daniel

Kelly, 97, and Janet C. Prota-

- siewicz, 73 Town of Glendale — Daniel Kelly, 146, and Janet
- C. Protasiewicz, 74 • Town of Ridgeville — Daniel Kelly, 93, and Janet C. Protasiewicz, 72
- Town of Sheldon Daniel Kelly, 136, and Janet C. Protasiewicz, 49
- Town of Wellington Janet C. Protasiewicz, 92, and Daniel Kelly, 83 • Town of Whitestown —
- Daniel Kelly, 102, and Janet C. Protasiewicz, 84 • Town of Wilton — Daniel Kelly, 106, and Janet C. Prota-

siewicz, 47

Court of Appeals District 4

- Village of Kendall
- Chris Taylor, 91
- Village of Norwalk Chris Taylor, 100
- Village of Ontario Chris Taylor, 101
- Village of Wilton Chris Taylor, 135
- City of Elroy Chris Taylor, 224
- Town of Clifton Chris
- Taylor, 103 • Town of Clinton — Chris
- Taylor, 171
- Town of Forest Chris Taylor, 143
- Town of Glendale -
- Chris Taylor, 167 • Town of Ridgeville —
- Chris Taylor, 123 • Town of Sheldon — Chris
- Taylor, 145 • Town of Wellington —

Chris Taylor, 130

- Town of Whitestown Chris Taylor, 129
- Town of Wilton Chris Taylor, 120

WI ballot measure: **Conditions of release** • Village of Kendall — 71,

- yes; 38, no • Village of Norwalk — 68,
- yes; 49, no • Village of Ontario — 84,
- yes; 49, no • Village of Wilton — 120,
- yes; 61, no • City of Elroy — 205, yes;
- 90, no
- Town of Clifton 87,
- yes; 46, no • Town of Clinton — 132,
 - Town of Forest 106,
- ves: 64. no • Town of Glendale — 134,

yes; 71, no

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- Town of Ridgeville 110, yes; 56, no • Town of Sheldon — 121,
- yes; 56, no • Town of Wellington —
- Town of Whitestown 110, yes; 72, no • Town of Wilton — 104,

120, yes; 50, no

yes; 41, no

WI ballot measure: Cash bail considerations

- Village of Kendall 70, yes; 38, no • Village of Norwalk — 72,
- yes; 46, no Village of Ontario — 89,
- yes; 44, no • Village of Wilton — 120,
- City of Elroy 209, yes; • Town of Clifton — 87,
- ves; 47, no • Town of Clinton — 141.
- Town of Forest 103,

yes, 65, no

- Town of Glendale 137, yes; 69, no
- Town of Ridgeville 113, yes; 53, no
- Town of Sheldon 125,
- Town of Wellington —
- 120, yes; 64, no • Town of Wilton — 101,

WI ballot measure: Welfare

- yes; 13, no • Village of Norwalk —
- Village of Wilton 156, yes; 28, no
- yes; 24, no • Town of Clinton — 185,
- yes; 29, no • Town of Glendale —183, yes; 29, no
- Town of Sheldon 172,
- Town of Wellington 153, yes; 22, no • Town of Whitestown —
- Town of Wilton 139, yes; 11, no

percent • Village of Norwalk —

- Town of Glendale —
- 58.49 percent • Town of Wilton — 48.73
- percent

- yes; 52, no
- 122, yes; 48, no • Town of Whitestown —

yes; 46, no

- work requirement Village of Kendall — 96,
- 106, yes; 14, no Village of Ontario — 123, yes; 15, no

- 54.46 percent • Town of Wellington —