

**An update on the COVID Dashboard**

You may have noticed the absence of our COVID Dashboard the last few editions. Somewhat ironically, considering at least one of our editors has just this week tested positive for COVID (for the first time ever) as of this publishing — it is with mixed emotions that we announce the soft discontinuation of Valley Sentinel's COVID Dashboard, which has been a mainstay of our publication since nearly the beginning. As we move forward, we want to explain the reasons behind this decision and what it means for our readers and the community as a whole.

For months, cases of COVID-19 have remained steady or dropped in our area, and many of the

tests that are taken are now done at home, with their results potentially not reflected in the data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS). Given this situation, we cannot confidently say that the data is useful in making informed decisions regarding one's health, such as whether to wear a mask or attend community events.

The purpose of the COVID Dashboard was always to inform and assist our community in making decisions based on reliable and comprehensive data from the DHS. However, given the potential for testing bias and a lack of comprehensive data, we do not believe that the dashboard is currently able to serve this purpose as effectively as we would like.

Additionally, the Federal government is ending their COVID emergency declarations, this signals a change in the pandemic's severity and highlights the importance of reevaluating our approach to disseminating information.

We want to reassure our readers that if a spike in cases occurs or if comprehensive data is made available that would assist in making informed decisions about one's health, we would be more than happy to reinstate the COVID Dashboard and print it once again.

We are also welcoming feedback from our readers and healthcare professionals on the future of the COVID Dashboard and how best to report

on the pandemic in our local area. We understand the importance of having reliable information to make informed decisions, and we are committed to providing that information to our readers. DHS data can be found at: [dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19).

We understand that discontinuing the COVID Dashboard may be disappointing to some readers, but we believe that it is the right decision given the current situation. The discontinuation of our COVID Dashboard may feel like the end of an era, but it is not the end of our commitment to providing our readers with relevant news and information. Thank you for your understanding, and we look forward to your continued support.

**The (not so) Plain and Simple Correspondent: Ray Ring on the Future of Small Villages**  
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poem mounted there.” Ray quoted it to me, a long saga whose essence is that after a lifetime of striving, however long that lifetime is, what's more important than the world's evaluation of your performance is if you can look yourself squarely in the mirror and be satisfied that you gave it your best.

The village industrial park offers free land to any business which will purchase land at \$10,000 per acre. The village reimburses the business for that money if it builds within a year of purchase and occupies its building. Ray has received many inquiries, does due diligence and often finds that the

company approaching him is doing its own due diligence: they want to know what the local labor force is, how much competition there is for it, transportation options, housing possibilities, compare land prices with other places and what the lowest wage they might have to offer to hire locals. So far one company has established its headquarters there but Ray remains ever hopeful. He just wrote and presented a document to the Sauk County Development Committee containing what he has learned over the last twelve years as village president about the challenges facing small towns and villages. He has an opponent for reelection in April but he has prevailed over

opponents before. He is philosophical about his chances, I gather, and will continue to serve in some capacity no matter what.

Ray's college degree is in business and economics. He was a sales rep over vast territories for most of his career, preparation for leadership in the village. When he retired, the homing pigeon instinct kicked in. His wife, from Spring Green, was agreeable to returning here. I know several other couples like them in the village, happy in their native habitat again, reconnecting with old friends. Their taproots are in this ground.

When I commented that I, too, prefer small town living and that there were

sweet people in Plain, he laughed. “Yeah, there's a few. But never enough.” More people, but not enough to swell the population and change the character of the place to an unrecognizable degree. I say, may it remain smallish, for those who relish the slower, intimate way of life, where most everyone recognizes you, waves and calls you by name.

*Katie, who until recently lived in Plain, has been writing for fun and profit since childhood. Self-described as opinionated, she writes in the interests of a more loving, better-functioning world for all. She may be reached at [katiewgreen@icloud.com](mailto:katiewgreen@icloud.com).*

**Meeting Our Needs — Part 4: Thank a Bug**

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unusable non-native plants do not do this. Think of those pesky Asian lady beetles. They hang out in the monoculture of soybean fields until they are disturbed via harvesting. Then they hang out in our homes. Because they didn't evolve here, they have no natural predators so they proliferate. The sheer numbers of them have decimated the beneficial native lady beetle populations. This example illustrates the importance of diversity and the problem with non-natives.

Because nature provides us with deep-rooted emotional needs, losses to our native ecosystems negatively affect our quality of life. Connecting with nature improves attention, lowers stress, even creates upticks in empathy and cooperation. It boosts our moods and



increases our cognitive development. In other words, nature helps us to think better and live happier lives! We are physically connected to nature because we need water, air, and a stable climate. We are emotionally connected because we need beauty, wonder, and things that awe us. When I began studying insects,

my days were filled with amazement — the colors, the patterns, the details — and then when I learned about the biology of certain species, my jaw dropped. As I shared these findings with folks who normally don't care about insects, they were intrigued. Their world expanded with mine!

While non-native invasive and ornamental plants can be beautiful, they are devastating to our natural world. Where they exist, our insects do not. When these areas are large enough, they trap our insects on “islands” where they fade away. When

urban yards are converted to native landscapes and unproductive areas of farms are restored and remnants are humbly managed, our insects thrive. And every living thing that depends on them thrives, including us.

Support our native ecosystems, and next time you see a bug, don't squash it, say thanks, and let it go on its life-sustaining way. It is meeting our needs.



Marci Hess

*Marci is a local ecology activist, restoration practitioner, member of Soil Sisters and SW Wisconsin Farmers*

*Union. She has been reestablishing native ecosystems for 23 years. This journey taught her that to conscientiously manage the land, one must know who lives on the land. She has documented plants, birds, mammals, and herptiles and 12 years ago began studying insects. Documenting insects in her home county of Lafayette fills an important gap between what was assumed to be here and what is actually here. The Driftless Area is especially critical because of its unique origin, and Marci feels it should be the 8th wonder of the world.*

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How many other ways to meet our needs may have escaped our notice and deserve our support? Let me know at [bpstel@msn.com](mailto:bpstel@msn.com).

*Beverly is a retired professor. She lives in a remodeled farmhouse and tends 40 acres of woodland in Richland County. When not in the woods she spends her time reading, writing and enjoying the beauty of the Driftless Area.*

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