*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**How a goat became Northfield’s biggest celebrity**

The unincorporated town of Northfield is located in the northwest corner of Jackson County where Interstate 94 exits at Wisconsin Highway 121 between Osseo and Hixton, 34 miles southeast of Eau Claire.

The town celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2007. It’s perhaps best known as the location of Superior Fresh, the nation’s first indoor Atlantic salmon farm in the United States. The large facility sits on the hilltop above the town; its purple lights can sometimes be seen glowing in the distance from miles away.

The late William F. Dettinger is one of Northfield’s notable residents. He was born in the town in 1880 and served 12 years as a Progressive Republican in the Wisconsin State Assembly. But now some would say the hamlet’s most famous resident is not a person but rather a goat — the “Northfield Goat.” Passersby on I-94 sometimes spot the goat along the cliffs near the 100-mile marker about 2 miles southeast of town.

Concerned citizens have called 911, but whenever anyone comes near the goat it scrambles up the rocky ledge. It’s well-known to the Wisconsin State Patrol. A spokesman said the patrol has sent squad cars when calls are received, but said as long as the goat isn’t in the traffic there’s not much they can do.

Other motorists have taken photos or videos of the goat and have posted them on a Facebook page for The Northfield Goat of Jackson County, Wisconsin.

The goat has a name — Betsy. She’s owned by Roberto Bernabei-Grassi, who returned from the Marines in 2018 to his family farm near Northfield. His old goat had died so he bought a new kid, just eight weeks old. He brought the goat home in his car; it escaped when he opened the door.

Bernabei-Grassi and his father caught Betsy, but it was a precursor of what was to come. The farm already had three fainting goats. Betsy was to be the fourth but she turned out to be a Nigerian Dwarf. Don’t let the name fool anyone. The goats are by no means miniature; they can jump and climb. The kid eventually escaped the goat pen by clearing a 6-foot fence.

“We tried to chase it but it ended up getting out again,” Bernabei-Grassi said.

And then Betsy disappeared.

He thought she was probably dead, but about a year later he was driving on I-94 when he saw her again — atop a rock outcropping near the 100-mile maker not too far from the farm. He stopped and confirmed it was her.

Bernabei-Grassi received phone calls from authorities, asking him if he owned the goat. Yes, he said. But catching Betsy is another matter. She has so far stayed out of traffic, scrambling back up the cliff when approached.

Goats have incredible agility; they can even climb trees. That combined with an intelligence equivalent to dogs and their ability to revert to the wild makes the cliff a perfect hangout for Betsy — who has managed to survive two winters so far.

“I thought about trying to get her again but she’s happy out there,” Bernabei-Grassi said. “And everybody likes her, so I figure I’ll let her be.”

Meanwhile Betsy’s fame continues to grow. Her Facebook page has more than 1,200 likes and 1,400 followers. Bernabei-Grassi said he’s received phone calls from as far away as South Carolina from fans traveling through the area.

Goats can live 15 years or more, and clearly Betsy has eluded any predators so far. If she continues to elude traffic, she may be a roadway fixture for years to come.

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at chardie1963@gmail.com.*

051420-agrv-life-hardie-1: Jean Bengston posted this photo of Betsy on Facebook.

051420-agrv-life-hardie-2: Roberto Bernabei-Grassi took this photo of Betsy as she was riding in the car after he purchased her. Her horn was bleeding at the time but has since grown back.

051420-agrv-life-hardie-3: Karla Demaske posted this photo of Betsy on Facebook.

051420-agrv-life-hardie-4: Rob Patrick posted this photo of Betsy on Facebook.

051420-agrv-life-hardie-5: Tammy Maassen posted this photo of Betsy on Facebook.

051420-agrv-life-hardie-6: Google map – Northfield is located in northeastern Jackson County, Wisconsin, about 34 miles southeast of Eau Claire.