

# A long, unique era comes to an end

**OF COURSE** it couldn't last forever, an editorial partnership that started 36 years ago, but a unique era ends this week as Editor Gary Ridderbusch slides into well-deserved retirement.

We became partners on the news scene in April 1985, when the scribbler hired Ridderbusch as assistant editor to form the team that would dictate the scope, quality and volume of news coverage for decades to come.

It began as the Satran brothers, Dan and Bob, ended their reign as co-owners and co-publishers after 32 years. They sold the paper to a small newspaper group out of Ohio, the Delphos Herald, and that year they moved longtime newspaper publisher Byron McNutt to Eagle River. I went from news editor to editor, and Ridderbusch, a recent college graduate, moved from Abbotsford to Eagle River.

So basically two reporters with roots in central Wisconsin farm country, who played high school sports and grew up hunting and

fishing on family adventures to the North Woods, put together a string of award-winning journal-

**In the  
Outdoors**  
By  
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ism that readers of the Vilas County News-Review and The Three Lakes News hadn't seen before.

That run climaxed the past decade but more so in the last four years with three General Excellence honors from the National Newspaper Association in competition with large weekly newspapers in all 50 states. And on top of that, the newspaper's first-ever Weekly Newspaper of the Year honor from the Wisconsin Newspaper Association in 2020.

**Ridderbusch ends a storied career in community journalism at the top of the heap, an honor he deserves for a work ethic that's second to none.**

This job can't be done right without a ton of sacrifices involving personal scheduling, lost family time and missed vacations. If you're in newspapering and doing it right, the job pretty much dictates what you can or can't do on any given night or weekend.

Whatever changes our readers might see will be shored up, over time, with the passing of the editorial baton to a new editor. It's a little more personal for me, as I've been greeted by the same friendly face for almost 36 years. We've not only worked together, but we've been on the same page so to speak. No arguments. Positive attitudes. No hurdles that couldn't be conquered.

And we've spent thousands of lunch hours together, cruising the

Sundstein Road or some other familiar territory looking for deer, grouse, turkeys and other wildlife, often with cameras in hand. We've caught more fish on lunch breaks (yes, usually more than an hour) than most anglers catch in a year's time, with walleyes, perch and crappies being the main targets.

We've hunted pheasants, grouse and deer together. We've gone on some fishing adventures to St. Germain, Boulder Junction, Land O' Lakes and northward into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, chasing everything from northern pike to walleyes and lake trout.

The editor's job was so demanding and Ridderbusch did it so well that for the past 11 years, it has cut into our personal adventures. So the good news is that this bittersweet end to our full-time professional work may lead to more hunting and fishing together. I'm all in on that one.

Busch, as his friends like to call him, can catch fish with the best of them. He's a master with the jig and minnow for walleyes but can just as easily revamp his boat and gear to be trolling for lake trout and salmon off some port town on Lake Superior when the wind and weather is right.

The fact that he's quick enough to knock down the mighty ruffed grouse, Wisconsin's fastest and most challenging upland game bird, is a statement on his shooting ability. So knocking pheasants out of the air, which are like flying buses compared to grouse, is no problem. And he shoots wild turkey, which of course, is more like hunting deer.

The retiring editor is finally going to have more time to do all those fun things without having to think about the next special event that needs coverage or newspaper deadline that's hanging over his head. And for somebody who loves the great outdoors, that's



The now-retired Gary Ridderbusch is not only a great reporter and editor, but an avid sportsman who loves the outdoors. —Photo By The Author

got to bring a big smile to his face.

One of the biggest adjustments for me will be trying to get through a work day without being able to pop into Busch's office to strategize about the next hunting or fishing on the docket. We've always talked a lot about the weather forecast and the right timing for a future outing, always attempting to clear the work schedule when conditions are best.

Our wives have had to put up with that sort of thing for decades — dodging in and out of family plans and other obligations in line with maximizing outdoor time

that coincides with ideal weather. They don't really understand it or even like that our priorities are messed up just a bit, especially during certain times of the year, yet their support for our outdoor addiction is strong.

And that's truly a blessing. I think Busch would agree that we can't thank them enough for that.

They say every time one door closes, another opens. And so it is with this chapter in our friendship. Time for a little adjustment.

**But fair warning to the fish and game of Wisconsin. Busch is on the loose. And he's coming for you!**



Here Ridderbusch hoists a 14-inch crappie taken through the ice.