

# Community Homestead

## Newsletter: Winter/Spring 2024



**Mission: To establish and maintain a community where individuals with developmental challenges can reach their fullest human potential**

501 280th Street, Osceola, WI 54020 715-294-3038 [www.communityhomestead.org](http://www.communityhomestead.org)

### *The Circus Mystery ~Hannah Gregor*

Every winter, we dress up and have our own mystery party. It was set in 1914 and people had a lot of interesting costumes!

The circus was traveling and then ended up in a nightclub. There was a piano and a bar. The thing was, you could walk around and ask people what they have seen or heard. Then somebody took the diamonds and a wallet and so we all sat down with our food and talked to each other to try to uncover what the clues were, and then one person from each group could go up and look at the evidence table. There were like documents and foreign money, the diamonds, two books, the bell, a birthday card and postcards.

Me and Elke were acrobats. I was pretending to be a Russian acrobat. I pretended that I trained in Russia

for a circus and I talked with an accent so I could pretend to be someone different to who I really was! I liked that because I have a lot of interest right now in learning Russian! I just ran with it. It's just fun. Hillary and Desi were trapeze and Shannon was the owner of the nightclub. Eric was the one paying for the circus. Richard had some business dealings with diamonds and was like Eric. Nastia was a horse trainer. Janette, Bruce and Kelly were circus clowns and Alex was an animal trainer from the wild west. Richard looked like the guy off the Quaker Oats box! Elke was kind of funny. Will too was really funny!

I really had no clue about who was who! I assumed it was someone, but the decoding was hard for me to understand. I thought Ceci was really suspicious. She had a third leg! Scott too, I was very suspicious of him being a superhero! It was very entertaining!



*Bruce & Janette*



*Alex H.*



*Mary & Asger*

## Fewer Cows, More Dairy ~Eric Witt

After three years of thoughtful discussion, we made the really hard decision to downsize our dairy and stop shipping our milk. This has been a commercial dairy for a hundred years so we did not take this decision lightly. So, welcome our new, community-size, dairy for 2024!

In a somewhat counter intuitive twist, the farmers at Community Homestead are learning that having fewer cows is bringing more people into the dairy barn and creating opportunities to learn about aspects of dairy processing that we took for granted before. Milkings that previously occurred in the quiet pre- dawn mornings have moved into activity times allowing new residential and day program individuals to participate. Rather than simply milking into cold storage and waiting for the milk truck to come pick it up, we've also had to learn new ways to safely handle, store and process the milk we produce. People who had limited or no contact with the dairy before are now making cheese, pasteurizing, separating cream and shaking butter. It has been a rewarding experience seeing people getting closer to our few remaining cows and gaining an appreciation for the amazing resource they provide.

As with any big change, drastically downsizing the dairy created several initial challenges that required some creative thinking and spawned a few fun projects. We built a wall in the barn and retrofitted some plumbing so that 2-5 cows can keep a portion of the barn warm this winter and prevent the water pipes from freezing. Crews applied a lot of elbow grease and steel wool to our pasteurizer, once used solely for heating calf milk, to spruce it up for a new role on the dairy. And, in one of my personal favorite projects, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century cream separator that for at least a decade had been a "Velveteen" door stop and repository for winter hats and gloves is back in service, thoroughly restored and sporting an electric motor to do the work of its original hand crank.



Joel

Looking ahead to Spring and Summer we know that there will be more challenges and problems to solve. Some we have already anticipated. Others will arise and challenge us in the moment. But if we've learned anything so far, it's that what initially seems like a headache can be



Nastia & Eric

a hidden opportunity. That some of the solutions are right in front of us, maybe just covered in a bit of dust. And that sometimes what at first glance seems like less, can truly be more.



Terra

## Dairy Barn ~Nastia Baerg

I like the herd now it's small. It's not in a rush and is actually kind of calming. We milk just two or three cows. Then have names: one is Lola, but we are all still learning their names and so are they. Some know we are calling them.

We are leaving the cows with their babies now until they wean off. I'm learning how to set up, clean the milk house before we milk the cows, so when Shannon and Eric leave on vacation I will do some of the milking, and Adrian is going to help me out. Cleaning the barn like sweeping and feeding and fluffing the beds are easier and we don't have to do it so much. We don't have to feed the indoor cows like we used to do in the winter.

We have meat cows and we feed them once or twice a day. They get so excited they jump up and down but they are smarter than you'd think!

## *Returning to the Role of Student ~Shannon Kulig*

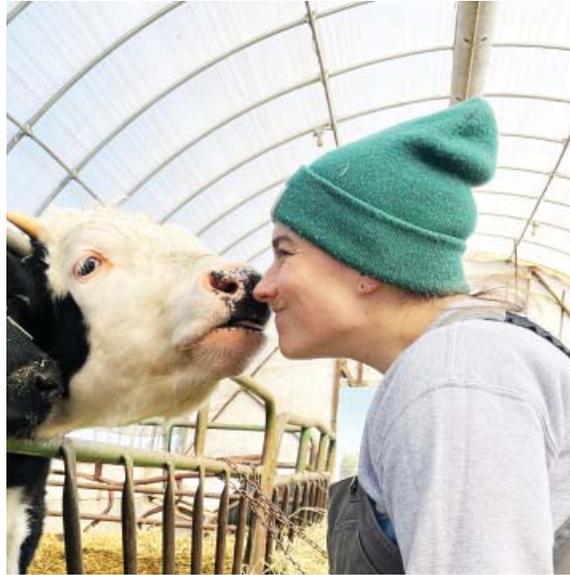
One of the several perks of participating in Americorps is a sizeable post-service education award that enters a trust upon your completion. It remains in that trust with your name on it for seven years after service. I could not believe when I looked at my calendar last May that my time to use it up had almost run out. I guess time really does fly when you are having fun.

For some time, I planned a return to school for training in assisted animal therapy. I found a certificate program at Concordia University in Milwaukee and applied, but it wouldn't use up all the award. So, at the last minute and after a lot of hemming and hawing, truly three weeks before the fall term began, I applied to the UW-Whitewater and was accepted to a master's in special education program. Last September I enrolled in two colleges and became a full time student (thankfully, save one in-person weekend, all online).

I was excited and nervous, but like to think it is going well. I have found a never-ending post-it note list kind of balance that is only sustainable because it will take a year and a half to complete all my studies. That being said I am really enjoying myself and like thinking about my everyday lived experience from an intellectual perspective.

Presently, my toddler serves as a guinea pig as I discover new ways to teach behaviors and pre-literacy skills, establish and hold boundaries, and figure out what animal welfare and therapy looks like on a working farm. It is exciting to share updates with my housemates, "Yes Janette, I am doing homework," and rope whoever is on my crew into helping me complete a project, shout out to Hillary who dutifully and silently held a script while I tried to not break eye contact with my laptop camera lens during finals last semester.

I am so grateful to those who have made it and continue to make it possible for me to pursue my higher education goals. I am also quite hopeful that my new knowledge will benefit those who I interact with every day and make me a little bit better at the work I love to do.



*Shannon*

## *Cheese Group ~Will Macaulay, Hillary Schauls, Jessie Palmer, Kelly McDaniel.*

When our dairy restructured in the fall, we began making cheese for the community with the abundance of milk we found ourselves with. Some of us had experimented with cheesemaking before on a small scale, making different cheeses on a household level. But with the new system, we have really stepped it up! We get to hand out all sorts of fresh and aged cheeses to the houses weekly - paneer, mozzarella, queso fresco, cheddar, Colby, and Gouda are some of our go-to favorites. It's always exciting to cut into a new wheel and get the feedback from the community on how they liked it!

Here are some thoughts from cheese crew members on their favorite aspects of the crew.

**Hillary:** We make Colby, mozzarella cheese in balls, that's fun to do. We make string cheese, we haven't done that in a while, we pull it, bring it together, and then we twist it. It takes two people. We deliver them to the houses.

**Jessie:** My favorite part is helping Hillary. You're nice, Hillary! I love cheese. I love stirring. Helping to stir milk in the pan. I like the hard cheese.

**Kelly:** We should try making cheese curds, you know they squeak when they go in your mouth! Stirring the cheese until it becomes cheesy.



*Alex & Hillary*

*One more big effort folks for the apartments!*

As you can see, we are awfully close to getting our beloved apartments built. We are getting a shovel in the ground this May with the faith that we can all raise that last \$150,000 so people can move in!

Here it is in sunflower form. This is how you can help us color those last petals!



*Donate online*

*[www.givebigscv.org/organization/Community-Homestead](http://www.givebigscv.org/organization/Community-Homestead)  
to have your donation matched on April 30*



Give Big SCV (St Croix Valley) is on April 30 and we are aiming to raise \$60,000 on that one day (phew, I know!)

Double your donation when you donate online on April 30. And secure even more matching dollars from Give Big itself. Big impact on April 30!

So why new apartments?

Here are just two voices on that subject:

**Scott, who moved into one of our original apartments a year ago...**

I lived by myself in the city before and it was difficult. I was just anonymous and lonely, ride a bus alone, pick up my meds alone, have lunch with a bunch of people I didn't know, go back to my apartment alone. It was hard to find my niche.

I can find my way here, my place. My apartment gives me a solid base, a start to my day, my own little fridge makes me feel more at ease. Also, I get to be part of a bigger "family", coming to meals and sharing my day with others gives me sense of organization. It's a good feeling, a set of goals to accomplish.



*Scott*

**Nastia thinking of her future apartment...**

Everywhere I go and everywhere I've lived, I don't know what my place is, down below people or up high, and I don't know how to stay in the middle, to be like other people. I was always telling myself it's going to be fine and hold my breath until I can try to get used to things.

Here, I like living in Morning Glory with everyone helping out but I want to live in an apartment in community. Peace and quiet, think what my day is going to be, think what I am going to say. Be more relaxed because sometimes it's too many people. And I can't never figure people out, takes me a while.

I love the animals here, walking and knowing I am safe, people like and understand me, and doing things like camping, hiking looking for rocks, riding bikes, meeting new people.



*Nastia*

In an apartment I will go house by house to have dinner, breakfast, lunch. If I get annoyed I can leave and go to my own quiet place, have lights, pictures, cat prints, plants!

**This is direct and lifechanging. 100% of donations go right to building homes.**

## Christmas ~Christine Elmquist

Because we only had winter for two weeks this year, Christmas feels like a long time ago. However, as a pretty big community festival at the end of a busy craft season, we'd like to tell you about it!

Every year, for the past 30, we have pulled off a version of the Oberufer Shepherd's play. Traditional in Camphill, communities and Waldorf Schools, this is the nativity, largely seen from the shepherd's point of view. Traditional only to us, we trade lines, shorten them, cut them, and generally rearrange things to best include the talents of our current actors.

This year, we were short a few people and then seven people suddenly broke out with Covid a week before Christmas. No rehearsals for us. And possibly no actors anyway. We seriously hunkered down and masked up hoping to contain this one outbreak so we could all mingle freely together by Christmas Eve. And it worked! And yes, by dramatically adapting the play once again with very few lines and many songs, audience included, we glued the whole narrative together. The day before our Christmas Eve performance, we were able to have our first rehearsal (many still masked).

This kind of challenge tends to bring about its own opportunities. Celebrating together feels more like a privilege and less like an obligation when it is threatened and all our efforts were on pulling something, anything, together! The increased level of audience participation was really fun: let's incorporate that next year. And more time off the schedule gave us a chance to reorganize our costume closet and throw away the more ancient angel-sheet-wear and that squashed hat that used to be used for the Star Singer.

For disappointed cast members looking forward to lots of lines, the consolation is having twelve whole months to learn them for 2024!



Hannah, Desi, Bruce & Chelsea



Nastia

## Working at the Christmas Tree Farm ~Elvis Cormican

The St Croix Valley Christmas tree farm was a new job for me, I've never done any of that kind of work for a community job before. There were a lot of friendly people and it was very easy going at some points and at some points it was super, super, rushed. That was because it was getting closer to Christmas and people were getting their Christmas trees.

Nastia and I were doing a new attraction called N'ice fishing and that was pretty cool to experience. What this is is like ice fishing but it took everything from ice fishing and turned it into where you had fishing poles shaped like ducks and had them with some line and then this plastic Christmas bulb on the

end of it. I was upstairs, interacting with little kids. I helped taking the money, and put it in the cash register and give them their baits and letting them choose their ducks. The loon was the favorite because of Minnesota. There were 3 holes in the barn and Nastia who was downstairs in the barn filled up the balls with candy. Kids got three chances to use their fishing bait which was rubber fake bait to catch that candy.

The best bit of it was seeing the kids faces light up after they caught candy and helping the kids and their adults do what they were doing.



Elias, Jessie, Will, Oscar, Bruce & Issac (winners of the New Year Scavenger Hunt)

## *Goodbye to Sean Jones 1977-2024*

Sean was a warm and enthusiastic friend to all of us at Community Homestead. Jokingly describing us in terms of “rainbows and unicorns” he reminded us always of why we are here and what we aspire to.

Sean was the moving force for the Country Banquet, an annual and amazing farm to table event, mobilizing and inspiring his culinary students and fellow chefs to create delicious dishes from our organic food. We will miss him.

It is difficult to imagine the Country Banquet without him but even harder to imagine this wonderful event not being continued. Fortunately, others are ready to pick up the reins and we look forward to developing our partnerships with Chef Pierre Rabbia who has been part of this before, and with Chef Jason Ross.



*Janette and Sean Talking things over*

## *Sports games and going out ~Scott Cummings*

I went with Elke to the MN vs Purdue volley ball game. Everyone was tall, 6’3”, 6’5”. It was at the U of M campus at the Williams Arena. Purdue won, two games to one and it was the best of three. It was a high standard of quality play. I like beach volley ball. I’ve seen that at Bradford Beach. I’ve seen Tom Cruise playing volley ball in Top Gun.

I went to a hockey game, a woman’s game, very fast-paced and good playing. It’s the second hockey game I’ve been to in my life. I saw the Milwaukee Admirals game about twenty years ago. This was a better game.

I also like going to Stillwater, it’s a charming place on the St. Croix River. Its just good to hang out with the community, eat pizza, go places, spend time with community members like a second family.

*Joel, Johanna, Scott & Elke*

## *Coming and Going ~Christine Elmquist*

We have had a lot of short- term folks visiting and helping out over the last six months. Most recently, we said goodbye (au revoir!) to Raphael from France, Josh from California, Marin from Japan, and Johanna from Germany. Honestly, this all seems like a long time ago!



*Marin, Elvis and Johanna*

Having volunteers from different countries really adds a zip of cultural exchange to the community and currently we are lucky to be enjoying the wonderfully cheerful Elke from Berlin, and new arrival Demi and her 4 year old son Titi from Nigeria, via Madison, WI. Continuing gratitude goes to Sam Backland, Lois Peterson, Lynne Schauls, and Kim Wright who come in their spare time to help in all sorts of areas from wool-combing to farming.

In April we look forward to meeting Daisy from England, Noah from Belgium, and all our school groups in May. Meanwhile we are previewing some lovely summer volunteers!

Families and old friends of Community Homesteaders, we also appreciate your flexibility and willingness to help us sustain the community here, and to lend a hand wherever you can!



## *My Miami Key West Vacation ~Scott Cummings*

Steve picked me up at Miami airport. Steve, Gerry and I went to lunch at Smith and Wollensky, a really fancy restaurant. We sat around for 2 hours with drinks until our lunch table was ready. It was very social and we were talking to everyone who was coming by with their dogs. We saw the cruise ships coming in then we had lunch, surf and turf which is seafood and steak. Very elaborate meal!

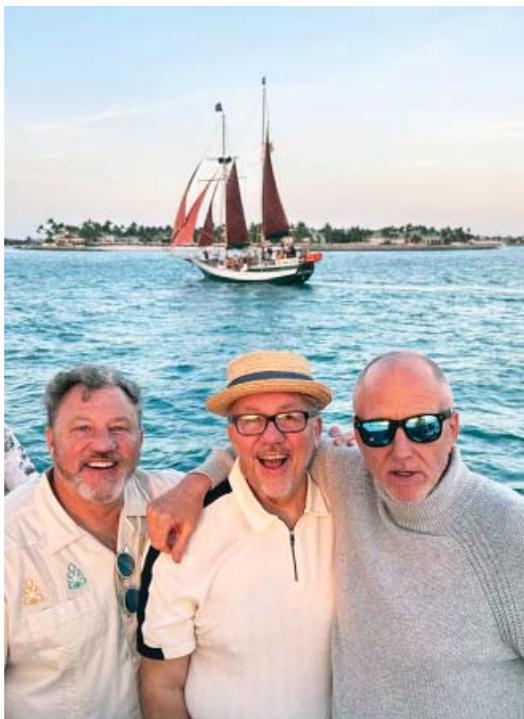
We went to a shopping mall and bought some clothes and shoes. We had a lovely meal with Marilyn and Tonico, Steve's friend from Brazil. And that was grilled steak and pork and we had a couple of beers and talked about old times, Malawi, Brazil, Clint Eastwood, movie stars.

Miami beach was really well groomed. It stretched for miles and miles and you

could not see the end of it. We drove to Key West the next morning. It was a four hour drive. We went to the Santa Maria hotel, went for a walk on Duval St. and saw lots of shops, bakeries, bars, t shirt shops, cigars....a lovely street and lots of going on there.

We did a lot of things, the Hemmingway Museum, (Hemmingway had like 25 cats), went to a bookstore, went to the Cuban Coffee Queen. My other brother Sean and his wife Julie came and we went on a boat ride and we had appetizers and cider and chatted with some of the boat goers. The weather was good. I ate scallops and talked about old times at the Little Heaven restaurant. We saw a guy playing guitar and we gave him \$10.

I told Steve and Sean it was the best vacation I had in years. It was Steve and Gerry's idea and I appreciated it. They pulled out all the stops!



*Sean, Steve & Scott*



*Elke & Scott*

## *The Roller Derby ~Kelly McDaniel*

Brendan was driving the big van and was trying to find a parking spot. It was in Minneapolis.

The roller derby teams were wearing helmets and kneepads and roller skates. They wanted to protect their heads. They were playing loud eighties music!

They were skating at a skating rink which had fences and the people were banging into each other-that's what they do. They were trying to go around each other. There were a few matches and we did not get back until 11 something.



*Anja & Hannah*

## *Trip to Madison ~Hillary Schaust*

We went to Madison, Nastia, Kelly, Hannah, Christine and Richard all went. Jacob and Quyen came to join us. We visited Jose and Marianne. Anya is their baby. She is cute She was born on August 8 before my birthday. I held her.

We saw plants at the flower museum. We saw orchids, red and pink. We walked around outside and got coffee, and I got a mocha.



*Kelly, Scott, Joel, Hillary & Alex F. taking a hot drink break at the Java Moose in Grand Marais MN*

***Donations Aug 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023 - Mar 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024***

- |                              |                                     |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Natalie Alper-Leroux         | Kathleen Papatola                   |
| Jacqueline Avritt            | Milad Rakhsha                       |
| Margy & Gary Balwierz        | Kathleen & Jody Reagan-Anderson     |
| Audree Bass                  | Tomas Rumreich                      |
| Nancy Beck                   | Barbara Stinson                     |
| Therese & David Benck        | Stephen Tierney                     |
| Dan & Melinda Bennett        | Ken & Mary Tomes                    |
| Terence Borgerding           | Evelyn Valen                        |
| Laura & Bill Briggs          | Laurie Carlson & William Voedisch   |
| Winston Chuck                | Thomas Williams                     |
| Elizabeth Coffey             | American Online Giving Foundation   |
| Jeff Comins & Laurie Schmidt | Charities Aid Foundation of America |
| Maddie & Asher Elmland       | Circle of Life Foundation           |
| Ronald Erickson              | The Hugh J. Andersen Foundation     |
| Ann Fate                     | Humana Inc                          |
| Kimberly Faurot              | LPL Financial                       |
| Henry & Jennifer Gordon      | Network for Good                    |
| Peter Gove                   | Thrivent Financial for Lutherans    |
| Paul & Pamela Grand          | United Way of Central Maryland      |
| Susanne & David Grumman      |                                     |
| Diane & John Herman          |                                     |
| Madelon Holder               |                                     |
| Kelly Johnson                |                                     |
| Kelvin & Ann Kobernick       |                                     |
| Tim & Jill Kulig             |                                     |
| Joel Nester                  |                                     |
| Margareta & Vance Olivier    |                                     |

***Coming Events***

***Saturday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 10am - 4pm***  
***Community Homestead Spring Craft Fair & Bake Sale***  
 519 280th St Osceola WI 54020

***Tuesday, April 30<sup>th</sup> ALL DAY!***  
***Give Big SCV - a day of online giving***

***Saturday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 9am - 4pm***  
***Osceola Rhubarb Fest***  
 A town wide celebration of summer and all things rhubarb (come find us at the Pie Booth)

***Saturday June 23, 4pm-8pm***  
***The Chef's Garden Party***  
 Wine in the flower gardens, hor's d'oeuvres by the herbs, charcuterie under the skies. Amazing Farm to Table event created by the chefs and students of St Paul College. Fund raiser for our new apartments. Tickets online at:  
[www.communityhomestead.org](http://www.communityhomestead.org)

***Ways to Help, Connect and Create...***

Volunteer! for more information email:  
[christine.elmquist@communityhomestead.org](mailto:christine.elmquist@communityhomestead.org)

***Please remember to donate online on APRIL 30***



***www.givebigscv.org/organization/Community-Homestead.***

***Every donation can leverage extra money, and will be doubled by a generous match!***

or Donate to the lasting future by giving to the new Endowment Fund, recently set up by Joel's family at *The St Croix Valley Community Foundation*

You can mail a check with a designation in the memo to:

**Community Homestead**  
**501 280th St**  
**Osceola WI 54020**