



# MONROE COUNTY HERALD

Your Local State Award-Winning Newspaper

## Little Falls night blaze sees home destroyed



On Saturday, February 26th, 2024, the Sparta Fire District fought a fire in Little Falls. Fire Chief Mike Arnold reported that he and his crew were on the scene for five hours. The home was a total loss. Contributed photo from Fire Chief Mike Arnold.

By BENNY MAILMAN  
Editor

On Saturday, February 24th, The Sparta Area Fire District was dispatched to a reported house fire, around 8:42 p.m. The address was 4603 Abbotsford Avenue, in the Town of Little Falls; the home of Frank Koehler and Karen Wieman.

Upon arrival, Sparta Area Fire District Chief Mike Arnold saw that the two-story farmhouse was fully engulfed. The trees and grass around the Koehler homestead, which was built in 1890, were also on fire.

Chief Arnold said, "The homeowners left around 7 p.m., to go shopping in Black River Falls. When they arrived

home, they found their home on fire and called 911, to report the fire." While there were no human injuries reported, a dog and 2 cats perished in the fire. The older two-story home was a complete loss, and the Red Cross is assisting the family with immediate needs.

On the origin of the fire, Chief Arnold said, "The fire started in the area of the wood stove, located on the first floor."

The Fire Department was on the scene for five hours and they were assisted by the Sparta Ambulance Service, Cataract First Responders, Black River Falls Fire Department, Melrose Fire Department, Farmington Fire

**'LITTLE FALLS'**  
cont. on pg. 5



Tomah Fire was dispatched at 5:17 p.m., on Friday February 23rd, to battle a blaze that broke out at 1102 Superior Avenue, the business of Sassy Girl Aroma. It took over 12 hours to suppress, with Fire Chief Tim Adler needing to strike a MABAS Box Card 3, for the first time ever, in Tomah. The inset photo is from the same vantage point as above. It is the backside of the business, where the fire originated. Sacred Space, located at 1104 Superior Avenue, was also heavily damaged in the blaze. Contributed photos.

## Tomah Fire Dept. battles business blaze for 12 hours

### Businesses and tenants band together with strengthened bond

By BENNY MAILMAN  
Editor

On Friday, February 23rd, at 5:17 p.m., the Tomah Fire Department was summoned to a structure fire, at 1102 Superior Avenue. The business building belonged to Sassy Girl Aroma, a family-owned candle store. Over one-million gallons of water was needed

to subdue the inferno, and eventually the entire building had to be pulled down. While there are further investigations that will be undertaken, the Herald was able to interview Tomah Fire Chief, Tim Adler, and neighboring business owner, Ann Schleicher, owner of Sacred Space.

Tomah Fire Chief, Tim Adler, has been fighting fires for 35 years, in the city of Tomah. On the Friday night fire, Adler said, "We know where the area of origin is. It was in 1102 Superior [Sassy

**'BLAZE'**  
cont. on pg. 2



## To build or not to build in Burns

### Small town Wisconsin fighting to stay small

By JOHN GESSNER  
Staff Writer

Recently, on February 13th, the town of Burns conducted a public meeting concerning the proposal to rezone agricultural property to commercial and housing property. In particular, the legal wording reads, to rezone the "Farmland Preservation District to a Commercial District C." The parcel in question is owned by Todd Miller, and it runs adjacent to the south side of

the intersection of Highway 162 and Highway 16.

Acting as the agent for Mr. Miller, is CNC Land Investment LLC, La Crosse, Wisconsin. The proposed plan is to develop the agricultural land, to allow the applicant, or others, to possibly build a future shop for an undescribed business; to possibly build up to 11 each, 160 ft. x 60 foot apartment complexes and 12 each, 180 ft. x 60 ft. self-storage complexes; to build a 40 ft. x 500 ft. self-storage complex; or to put the property to any other commercial permitted use otherwise allowed in the Commercial District "C". As explained by the developer, the description of a "future

shop" refers to a lateral drilling company and other associated condition features related to the business.

Burns is a town in northeastern La Crosse County, between La Crosse and Sparta. The town prides itself on embracing the "Small town Wisconsin" rural lifestyle, with a population of approximately 1,000 people. Most of the residents live in single family homes, or on family farms that date back five generations. The proximity to La Crosse allows for small town living, with access to big city amenities. Burns is also a

**'BURNS'**  
cont. on pg. 5



It was a packed house, at the Town of Burns public meeting, held on February 13th. Community members are trying to keep the small community from becoming a heavily traveled and populated area. Herald photo by John Gessner.

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## BLAZE

*Continued from Front Page*

Girl Aroma]. We ended up pulling in an excavator last night. We basically pulled the whole scene apart, in order to get the fire completely out. That pretty much ruins any opportunity to be able to go in there and be definitive on the cause.”

Chief Adler then explained that there can never be speculation or guessing on the cause of a blaze; that investigations must prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, what caused the fire. “We have ideas, but we will need to talk with the owners, to see what they had in that area that may have caused the fire.”

Adler then informed the Herald that the fire occurred in the garage, behind the building. “Right back by the alley, that’s where the fire initiated. We just could not get that fire out. We kept putting water on it, and putting water on it, and putting water on it ... it just would not go out. That is why we called in the excavator, to pull everything down and we just sunk it all, pushing it into the fully-flooded basement. Then the fire finally went out.”

### How They Keep Going

When pressed by the Herald on how Chief Adler and his crew are able to keep up the strenuous task of fighting fires, with the physical toll, heat, smoke, and stress, Adler had a few answers. “For the majority of the time, we run on adrenaline,” Adler started explaining. “Then there are the reinforcements that we can draw on. When I was able to assess what kind of fire we had, I was able to call on mutual aid.” Adler then explained that Fort McCoy is Automatic Aid, and reports to any confirmed structure fire in Tomah. “With mutual aid, I personally asked for an engine from Oakdale and one from the Town of Lincoln, and they came immediately. I realized that we still did not have enough resources here, so then I called a MABAS Box Card 3.”

### What is MABAS?

MABAS is an acronym for Mutual Aid Box Alarm System. As explained by Chief Adler, MABAS is a prearranged box-card system, with designations 1 through 5. Chief Adler was able to call into the Monroe County 911 Dispatch and just tell them that he needed a Box Card 3. “Then I knew I was getting four ladder trucks, X amount of ambulances, and X amount of engine companies. I called them and said, ‘Strike a Box Card 3,’ and I had Mauston, New Lisbon, Hixton, Elroy, West Salem. They all came to assist us in battling the fire.”

Chief Adler explained that there is a staging officer, who lines all the supporting help up. Then directs them when they are needed and where to go. “Usually we stage them all in a huge parking lot, but we do not have a lot of those, so we just closed down Superior Avenue and staged them there,” Adler remarked.

Adler then went on to inform the Herald that part of Box Card 3 was to have another fire company, in this case Black River Falls, come and sit in Tomah’s fire department, to protect Tomah, in case of another fire breaking out, while Tomah Fire was fighting the blaze at 1102 Superior Avenue. “We do the same things for them, and everybody else,” Adler added.

In the post-blaze interview, Chief Adler stated that this fire was the first time that Tomah ever had to utilize MABAS. “We review the MABAS cards every year, to make sure we make the changes that need to be made, always improving. It worked really well.”

There were a total of 88 people fighting the fire. “We ended up dumping a million gallons of water on it,” Adler stated. “At 1 p.m. we had the fire under control. Then we went into overhaul stage, where we picked away at the corners and made sure that we soaked everything down. There are always hotspots, and we have to make sure that they are all taken care of.”

“It was a long night,” Adler told the Herald. “I have a couple of guys in their 70s in my department, and they were all there last night, for the entire time.”

### The Sacred Neighbors

While physical and mental energies were focused on the inferno engulfing 1102 Superior Avenue, the neighbors at 1104 Superior Avenue also suffered a devastating destruction. The business is Sacred Space, and the Herald had been there just a couple weeks earlier, talking with owner, Ann Schleicher, about the monies her nonprofit, Treasured Chests, had just raised for several entities that help local women in their fight against breast cancer.

As can be expected from the inhabitants of Monroe County, Ann’s immediate focus of concern was on others that were affected by the tragic loss of business and home. “Friday afternoon my heart broke,” Schleicher started out. “It broke for my wonderful neighbor, Julie, from Sassy Girl Aroma. I watched their incredibly hard work over the previous year, to turn that building into their business. They suffered such a tragedy over the winter, and now this. Watching their hard work turn into rubble ... it just carries immense sadness.”

Schleicher also had tenants living above her business. She stated, “My heart also broke for my tenants and my other neighbors. My tenants didn’t just lose their place to live, they lost their job because they were also working for Sacred Space. I was numb.”

Ann Schleicher reached out to the Herald, expressing her gratefulness for those who have reached out to her already. “The outpouring of community support has been amazing! Not just the Tomah community, but from all over. I cannot express how grateful I am and how grateful every person affected is. This is what humanity is all about! We still have a lot of work to do and still need support, but we are off to an amazing start.”

As more on the story breaks, the Herald will print updates. For now, Ann Schleicher has provided the following avenues to give help, as well as a short description on those in need of that help. “We are taking donations of all kinds (not monetary), at 1018 Kilbourn Avenue, in Tomah. Please drop off at the garage, which is located on Woodard. Here are sites that you can donate to as well. We all thank you.

- Bobbi Cook - single mom of three - <https://gofund.me/44366b02>

- JJ and Haley - new parents to Kairi (born this winter) - <https://gofund.me/9ff38f51>

- Dustin and Amanda - Dustin was a Sacred Space employee. Amanda was just laid off from Meca last week. Amanda has an 11-year-old daughter - <https://gofund.me/9ff38f51>

- Kelsey and Tom - Kelsey also worked at Sacred Space. They have three children. - <https://gofund.me/6c133719>

- Sassy Girl Aroma - Julie just lost her son this winter and now lost her business. - <https://gofund.me/59952185>

- Jeff and Ann Schleicher - Owners of Sacred Space. Jeff lost his job due to plant closure and Ann’s job was operating Sacred Space - <https://gofund.me/e4a810d9>

- Ho-Chunk Nation Museum - their business was damaged by water - You can donate through Venmo - @ho-chunknationmuseum

Ann Schleicher ended the interview by expressing her gratitude for Tomah and the amazing people that make up the incredible community. “If people have any questions, they can call me personally, at 608-343-6704, or email me at [crochet4ever@gmail.com](mailto:crochet4ever@gmail.com). They may send a message to my personal Facebook page [Ann Schleicher] if they have questions or want to donate and need further direction.” Schleicher stated that they will be organizing places for cash donations, which will be divided up between the businesses and tenants. She informed the Herald that there will also be a fundraiser in the near future.



Fire Chief Tim Adler, and 88 other fire fighters, battled a ferocious and stubborn fire, for a dozen hours, last Friday, February 23rd, on the 1100 block of Superior Avenue. Some fire fighters on Chief Adler’s crew are in their 70s, and they fought alongside the other firefighters for the entirety of the blaze. Contributed photo.



The origin of the Friday night fire was on the alley side of the business. Over 1 million gallons of water were pumped onto the fire, and the structure still had to be pulled down, to ensure a fully suppressed fire zone. Contributed photo.



The aftermath of the unforgiving inferno left hearts in the Tomah community aching. The incredible disaster left not only businesses reeling, but tenants homeless. The community is already donating and helping out, with fundraisers being planned for the near future. Herald photo by Benny Mailman.



Across the street, Ann Schleicher and some helpers are boarding up Sacred Space, Ann’s business that she has built up into a thriving sanctuary of calmness, where everyone is welcome to come in and feel safe and relaxed. Herald photo by Benny Mailman.









On February 17th, the Sparta Innovations STEM Academy earned fourth place, out of 14 teams, at the Science Olympiad Regional Competition, in Boyceville, Wisconsin. Contributed photo.

# Sparta STEM Academy places 4th in challenging tournament

The Sparta Innovations STEM Academy earned fourth place, out of 14 teams, competing at the Science Olympiad Regional Competition, at Boyceville High School, in Boyceville, Wisconsin, on Saturday, February 17th, 2024.

The Science Olympiad Regional Competition consisted of fourteen schools competing in more than two dozen scientific and engineering challenge events, focusing on all areas of science, engineering, and technology.

The Sparta ISA team was led by 1st place finishes in the

categories of: Dynamic Planet and Reach for the Stars, and 2nd place finishes in Fossils and Picture This. The team also earned several 3rd place medals.

The Science Olympiad mission is to host competitive tournaments and professional development workshops that showcase innovative STEM content to students and teachers, throughout the United States.

According to the Wisconsin Science Olympiad website, Wisconsin Science Olympiad involves close to 100 school

districts in Wisconsin, in tournaments for elementary, middle and high school students. Tournaments are hosted at middle schools, high schools and several universities, throughout Wisconsin, with Science Olympiad “season” beginning with a December tournament and culminating in State Tournaments, typically held in March or April. The winner of the state tournaments is invited to the national tournament, which is rotated throughout the United States.

# Monroe County Poster Contest Winners Going to State Competition

By JENNIFER RODRIGUEZ MORAN  
Contributing Writer

The Sparta American Legion recently hosted the 2024 Monroe County Land Stewardship Awards Banquet, for all ages. Awards were given to Conservation Farmers - Jackie & Harvey Menn; Conservationists - Joey Esterline & Scott Giraud; and Tree Farmers of the Year - Kim & Barbara Zuhlke. At the banquet, all eyes were also on the conservation posters that were created by young artist-conservationists, throughout Monroe County, for the Conservation Awareness Poster Contest.

All attendees were excited and eager to learn who had won the poster contest, but nobody was more anxious than the artists themselves. Ryker Flock & Teva Ebel-Naber placed first in their age groups, in the Western Area contest. Kaylee Becker placed second.

### Art and Conservation a Winning Combo

A cleverly designed placemat was found at each place setting at the awards banquet, featuring a colorful and conversation-starting collage of the winning posters. “May the Forest be With You, Always,” was this year’s theme for the annual Youth Conservation Awareness Poster Contest, sponsored by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) for Stewardship Week 2024.

The contest was open to all area youth, grades K-12, and yielded many entries in Monroe County. Lily Lefebvre, Monroe County Land Conservation Department (LCD) - Soil & Water Conservation Specialist, was the lead organizer for the Monroe County Poster Contest this year. Lefebvre explained, “The names are

listed on the placemat for all the county winners, K-9. The K-1 and 2-3 winners were all from Queen of the Apostles and the 4-6 and 7-9 winners were all from STEM Innovations Academy.”

First place winners Ryker Flock and Teva Ebel-Naber will be continuing on to the State Competition at the Wisconsin Land & Water Conference. The Conference, which will be held in Green Bay, in early March, is already sold out.

### Inclusive Contest Welcomes all Area Youth

Lefebvre says she enjoyed organizing the poster contest this year, especially since she remembers entering the contest herself, as a youth, in Northern Wisconsin. A mass email invitation went out to area schools, in which the rules for the creative contest were shared. They included the dimensions of the poster size – 12” x 18” or 14” x 22”. Crucial to the contest was the theme for 2024 – “May the Forest be With You, Always,” which must be written somewhere on the poster. Posters may be created with the use of paint, crayon, colored pencil, charcoal, stickers, paper or other materials, but absolutely no computer-generated posters.

Lily went on to say that there were many entrants and ideas, and that it’s so exciting that two of our Monroe County winners are going on to the state competition. There were over 100 entries this year, a big jump from the 20 or so, which are usually received. Lefebvre hopes that even more will enter next year. All youth, schools, and homeschoolers in Monroe County, are welcome to participate, and are encouraged to reach out to the Land Conservation Department, or email lily.lefebvre@co.monroe.wi.us in anticipation of next year’s contest. Prizes and honors are

awarded at each level: county, state, and national.

At the state level, Wisconsin Land and Water explains that “Posters are evaluated based on conservation message, visual effectiveness, originality, universal appeal, and individual artwork. Past poster contest themes have included: Healthy Soils are Full of Life, Dig Deeper Mysteries in the Soil, Soil to Spoon, Conservation Habits = Healthy Habits, and Water is Life.”

The National Association of Conservation Districts goes on to state, “The NACD Poster Contest provides students from kindergarten through 12th grade, a chance to have their art displayed nationally. Winning posters reflect the annual NACD Stewardship theme and highlight the work of conservation districts and their associations in protecting and enhancing natural resources. The contest starts locally, advances to state levels, then national. National winners receive recognition at NACD’s annual meeting.

All participants are encouraged to create posters that celebrate inclusivity and the importance of our natural resources. Education is a critical element of the conservation effort at the local, state, and national levels. Educating young people about the benefits of conservation helps to ensure that the next generation will be wise stewards of America’s natural resources.

In 1955, the National Association of Conservation Districts began a national program to encourage Americans to focus on stewardship. Stewardship Week is officially celebrated from the last Sunday in April to the first Sunday in May. It is one of the world’s largest conservation-related observances. The program relies on conservation districts

# Monroe County to lift seasonal weight restrictions

The seasonal weight restrictions placed upon Monroe County highways will be removed effective, Tuesday, February 27th, 2024. The restrictions on each individual highway will remain in effect until the signs have been removed. All weight restrictions on bridges will remain in effect, as posted at the bridge.

Restrictions on vehicle weight are placed each spring, to reduce damage, while the road base is unstable. This year the restrictions were posted on February 2nd.

The typical limit on most Monroe County highways is 40 tons total vehicle weight. Permits to transport oversize and overweight loads may be requested, by submitting an application to the Highway Department. Application

forms, the Policy on Vehicle Weight Restrictions & Permits, and a fee schedule, may be found on the Highway Department webpage, at [www.co.monroe.wi.us](http://www.co.monroe.wi.us).

For further information, please contact the Highway Department by telephone, at (608) 269 – 8740, or via e-mail, at [highways@co.monroe.wi.us](mailto:highways@co.monroe.wi.us).

sharing and promoting stewardship and conservation through field days, educational programming, and workshops, to educate citizens about the need to care for our natural resources.

Many district activities extend beyond the one-week observance, to include an entire year of outreach. Stewardship Week helps to remind us all of the power each person has to conserve natural resources and improve the world. When everyone works together with their local conservation district, that power continuously grows. The 2024 Stewardship week will be celebrated April 28th -May 5th, 2024.”

For more information on art and conservation at county, state, and national levels: Monroe County: [co.monroe.wi.us/departments/land-conservation](http://co.monroe.wi.us/departments/land-conservation) State: [wisconsinlandwater.org](http://wisconsinlandwater.org) National: [nacdn.net](http://nacdn.net)

Monroe County Historical Society Presents:

Free Admission!

Annual Spring Arts - Crafts and Country Gifts Show

Saturday, Mar. 2, 2024  
8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Sparta Senior High School  
506 N. Black River St., Sparta, WI

Food available for purchase on site

Ample parking in the school lot

**TOMAH AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**JOIN US!**

**FACILITY INFORMATIONAL SESSIONS**

The Tomah Area School District is in the process of reviewing our facility needs and planning for the future. We will be holding several informational meetings to inform the community and to receive feedback that will help shape the direction.

**We encourage you to attend one or all of the meetings!**

<b>WHEN &amp; WHERE</b>	February 27   6:30 PM - Middle School Cafeteria
	March 5   12 PM (noon) - Robert Kupper Learning Center Cafeteria
	March 5   6:30 PM - High School Cafeteria

Please note that a community survey will be conducted in the spring.

**For more information contact:**

Dr. Mike Hanson  
TASD District Administrator  
ph: (608) 374-7004  
email: [MikeHanson@tomah.education](mailto:MikeHanson@tomah.education)  
[www.tomah.education](http://www.tomah.education)

## WIAA SECTIONAL GYMNASTICS DIVISION 2 AT WEST SALEM

# Sparta's Bjorkman wins bars, places second in all-around

By NATE BEIER  
Sports Editor

There's bound to be pressure as the tournament trail unfolds. For Sparta's Gabby Bjorkman that pressure nearly cost her a return trip to the WIAA state gymnastics meet.

Nearly. Bjorkman had a number of surprise finishes in terms of scores and placings, but still managed to secure second place in the all-around competition on top of winning the uneven bars during Saturday's Division 2 sectional meet at West Salem on Saturday, February 24.

Bjorkman and the Sparta team opened its sectional meet on beam. The sophomore

capped Sparta's event with a score of 8.8. By comparison, Bjorkman's last three conference meets had her score over 9.0 in the event.

Sparta's lead gymnast would go on to place eighth in the event. Cracking the top six in any event - the spots that automatically qualify for state - would prove difficult for Bjorkman, though.

Bjorkman took 10 on the floor and then fell to eighth on vault - the event she qualified for state in during 2023.

The last rotation of the day put Sparta on the uneven bars and Bjorkman unleashed a finale to take note of with a routine that garnered the top sectional score of 9.25.

First year head coach

Makayla Chew said that there was disappointment from Bjorkman in scores from Saturday, but believes that things will be different at this weekend's final meet of the season.

Chew said that Bjorkman was dealing with tightness in her calves throughout the week leading into Saturday's sectional, and that seemed to her to be a contributing factor in ailing scores.

"She had a lot of pain in her calves. It was big for floor and beam," said Chew.

The focus this week is to drill and be ready for the WIAA state meet this weekend. The focus on keeping things loose and having fun will, hopefully, precede the pressure to

perform, said Chew.

### SPARTA NOTES

Sparta competed with a shorthanded squad Saturday.

The team only fielded four girls in two events and just three in the others.

The last meet of the season for Paige Ehlinger, Madelyn Leigle and Kaylie Sheppard yielded positives, even if it didn't include a state berth.

Coach Chew pointed out that Leigle added a new skill - a stride circle - on bars. She also pointed out that Ehlinger kept her feet up during her own bars routine and Sheppard, who made her sectional debut, performed two back walkovers on beam.



Sparta's Gabby Bjorkman performs her floor routine during Saturday's sectional. The sophomore won the bars and was second in the all-around competition. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

## WIAA STATE WRESTLING DEVON LIETZAU, SPARTA



Sparta's Devon Lietzau hoists Beaver Dam's Avery Femrite high off the mat during the 132 pound fifth place match at the Kohl Center in Madison on Saturday, February 24. Lietzau held on to win 3-2 to take fifth overall in his state debut. Herald photo by Derek Montgomery.

# Podium finish

## Sparta's Lietzau rebounds from semifinal loss; takes fifth at state

By ZACH RASTALL  
Assistant Sports Editor

Wrestling in the Kohl Center as part of the state tournament for the first time can be a daunting, sometimes overwhelming task. If you let the moment become too much, your time in Madison can be over in what feels like the blink of an eye.

Alternatively, you can take the route Sparta junior Devon Lietzau did in his state debut, where, by the end of his first day of wrestling at the Kohl Center, he already clinched himself a spot on the medalist podium.

Lietzau shined in his first appearance on the state stage, placing fifth in the

Division 1 132-pound bracket at the 2024 WIAA State Individual Wrestling Tournament. The event was held from Thursday, February 22 to Saturday, February 24 at the Kohl Center in Madison.

Going into his first match on Thursday, Lietzau admitted that the significance of the stage and the grand environment brought out some butterflies.

"It was very nervous. I didn't really feel myself," Lietzau said. "I was just trying to block everything out and not think about it. It's just another tournament."

Clearly, Lietzau's attempt to dial in on nothing but the match at hand was a rousing success.

In his opening match at state on Thursday, Lietzau, the No. 5 seed in the Division 1 132-pound bracket, defeated Beaver Dam/Wayland Academy junior and No. 12 seed Avery Femrite via a 9-3 decision to advance to the quarterfinals.

Later on Thursday evening, Lietzau followed that up with a win over River Falls junior and No. 13 seed Jonas Longsdorf via a 7-2 decision to book his spot in Friday night's semifinals and guarantee himself a spot on the medalist podium at the end of the tournament no matter what happened from there.

"The first day, I was really tired from

LIETZAU cont. pg 10

## WIAA STATE WRESTLING TOMAH

# Finch leads Tomah's trio of state qualifiers with podium finish



Tomah's Cameron Finch wraps up and returns Bay Port's Trevor Finger to the mat during a 144 pound consolation match Friday morning. Herald photo by Logan Everson/GX3 Media.

By ZACH RASTALL  
Sports Writer

A sectional title and state tournament appearance was already going to make this a successful junior season for Tomah's Cameron Finch. Punctuating that with a spot on the medalist podium at state was just the cherry on top.

Finch headlined the trio of Tomah wrestlers who made the trip down to Madison, as he placed sixth overall in the Division 1 144-pound bracket at the 2024 WIAA State Individual Wrestling Tournament, held from Thursday, February 22 to Saturday, January 24 at the Kohl Center.

Finch was the No. 5 seed in his weight class and opened up the tournament on Thursday afternoon by pinning West Salem/Bangor senior and No. 12 seed Brett Plomedahl 3 minutes, 35 seconds into their preliminary round match.

In Thursday evening's quarterfinals, Germantown junior and No. 4 seed Eli Rabideau bested Finch via an 11-5 decision that sent Finch into the consolation brackets.

Finch had himself a stellar day in Friday's wrestlebacks, starting with him defeating Bay Port senior and No. 13 seed Trevor Finger via a 10-0

major decision. He followed that in the afternoon by beating Waukesha North sophomore and No. 9 seed Ben Lauer via a 6-0 decision to guarantee himself a spot on the medalist podium.

In Saturday's action, Union Grove junior and No. 3 seed Cole Dummer defeated Finch in a 7-0 decision in the consolation semifinals, then Stevens Point senior and No. 7 seed Jake Hall pinned Finch at the 1:46 mark in their fifth-place match.

"It means a lot," Finch said of his podium finish. "I think I can definitely work on a lot of things throughout this next year and be able to improve."

In addition to Finch, the Timberwolves had two girls

TOMAH cont. pg 10

## MORE STATE WRESTLING

Photo gallery and stories to come

Check Thursday's edition of The Monroe County Herald for more in-depth stories and images from the WIAA state meet

**MORRIE'S**  
Tomah Chrysler Dodge Jeep RAM Ford  
1200 N Superior Ave, Tomah, WI 54660







Sparta's Paige Ehlinger flips along the sideline of the floor during Saturday's sectional at West Salem. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

Division 2 Sectional @ West Salem

VAULT

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top vaulters from West Salem, Sparta, and other schools.

BARS

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top bar performers from Sparta, West Salem, and other schools.

BEAM

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top beam performers from West Salem, Sparta, and other schools.

FLOOR

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top floor performers from West Salem, Sparta, and other schools.

ALL-AROUND

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top all-around performers from West Salem, Sparta, and other schools.

TOP 3 EVENT SCORES

VAULT

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top vault scores from Blount, West Salem, and other schools.

BARS

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top bar scores from Sparta, West Salem, and other schools.

BEAM

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top beam scores from West Salem, Onalaska, and other schools.

FLOOR

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top floor scores from LaCrosse, Holmen, and other schools.

ALL-AROUND

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top all-around scores from West Salem, Sparta, and other schools.

TEAM

Table with 3 columns: WT, NAME, SCHOOL. Lists team scores for various schools including West Salem, Onalaska, and Bloomer.

Division 2 Sectional @ Platteville

VAULT

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top vaulters from Wyoming, West Salem, and other schools.

BARS

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top bar performers from Wyoming, West Salem, and other schools.

BEAM

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top beam performers from Wyoming, West Salem, and other schools.

FLOOR

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top floor performers from Wyoming, West Salem, and other schools.

ALL-AROUND

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top all-around performers from Wyoming, West Salem, and other schools.

TOP 3 EVENT SCORES

VAULT

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top vault scores from Platteville, Rosharon, and other schools.

BARS

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top bar scores from Wyoming, Rosharon, and other schools.

BEAM

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top beam scores from Wyoming, Brooklynn, and other schools.

FLOOR

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top floor scores from Rosharon, Platteville, and other schools.

ALL-AROUND

Table with 3 columns: PLACE NAME, SCHOOL, SCORE. Lists top all-around scores from Wyoming, Platteville, and other schools.

TEAM

Table with 3 columns: WT, NAME, SCHOOL. Lists team scores for various schools including Dodgeville, Reedsburg, and Southwestern.

WIAA GYMNASTICS SECTIONAL RESULTS



West Salem's Morgan Siekert gets an inverted view of the floor while finishing a pass during her floor routine at Saturday's Division 2 sectional. Siekert won the all-around, vault, beam and floor titles in her final sectional appearance. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

West Salem aiming for return to state after dominating sectional performance

By NATE BEIER Sports Editor. The momentum continued for the West Salem gymnastics co-op at Saturday's WIAA sectional meet in at West Salem.

The Panthers posted a meet-best score of 142.525 to win their sectional for a second-straight season. That finish will carry the WS co-op into the state meet where the team will try to repeat with bringing home state hardware. The Panthers finished second last year in the team competition after scoring a 138.000.

the co-op, which includes gymnasts from West Salem, Aquinas and Bangor, as perennial power Whitefish Bay returns to state after placing second at their own sectional after posting a team score of 134.5.

At the Mount Horeb sectional, Elkhorn - last year's third place team - scored a 140.600 on Saturday. Meet host, Mount Horeb, tallied a 137.900. "They are relaxed, they are talented and they know how to compete," said O'Hearn. "They thrive in competition."



Scan to visit the WIAA site for state gymnastics information

pushed ahead a score of 137.275 to make the program's first trip to state as a team since 2011.

INDIVIDUALS TO STATE

Leading the way was all-around winner, Morgan Siekert. Siekert continued her undefeated streak in the AA competition after compiling a combined score of 37.000. The senior won vault, beam and floor Saturday afternoon.

Siekert was the first of three all-around athletes to advance to state - a program first for West Salem.

Natalie Peterson (Aquinas) and Kennedy Garbers both finished in the top five and will compete in Saturday's individual state competition.

Bangor's Camdyn Lyga posted a new personal best on vault with a 9.0 and qualified for state in the event. Lyga also made a return trip to state in floor.

Hailey Ives and Olivia Maki both punched tickets to state with top five performances on beam. It is the first time for either to qualify for state individually.



ABOVE West Salem's Natalie Peterson (Aquinas) transitions between uneven bars during Saturday's sectional meet. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

LEFT West Salem's Camdyn Lyga (Bangor) shares a celebratory hug with assistant coach Orin Schwier after setting a new personal record on vault. Herald photo by Logan Everson/GX3 Media.

EDITORIAL

# A literal milestone - the 400, 000 mile club

## THROUGH MY LENS

By NATE BEIER  
Sports Editor



I love seeing the look of shock on anyone's face when I take my car in for an oil change or repair work.

When the mechanic sees or hears me tell them the number of miles that my Buick has, there's usually some level of surprise that can be read through their facial expressions or vocal reply.

This past weekend, though, I reached a literal milestone that I have no choice but to discuss here.

I pushed this 2011 Buick Lucerne to (and over) the 400, 000 threshold.

Yes, you read that right, that's five zeroes behind that number four. That's a ton of miles, I guess. To most car owners, surpassing the 300K mark causes palpitations, but to me, we're just getting into the good stuff. Cars are meant

to be driven, and I guess I really take that to heart.

Here's the thing, though, this automobile nearly failed at making it to that milestone.

On January 23, I trekked to De Soto and Kee (Lansing) for a series of four basketball games. I went on a non-normal route - highway 56 out of Viroqua - in hopes of making up some time since I was a little behind. Little did I know how important that decision would be.

You see, for the past year or so, I've known that I've had transmission issues and knew that eventually the ol' car would give out. That night it would happen. However, fate found a way to take care of me by guiding me on this 'path less taken' versus a very hilly Highway 82 run. I got through my games, made my way back to Viroqua and, right at the dangerous intersection by the Walgreens, I found that my car wouldn't go anymore. Fortunately I had a county cop right behind me who called in a Viroqua officer to assist and we managed to push this vehicle into a resting spot in a nearby parking lot.

Now, for most people, the



The 400,000 mile milestone is one that I've reached with two different vehicles, the most recent was just a week ago. Herald photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

idea of replacing something as significant as a transmission on a car with 399,000 miles on it would be something of folly. For me, though, I had already committed to reaching the 400K line and sunk what we will call 'a significant amount of money' into getting my wheels back on the road. The folks at Sleepy Hollow in Viroqua didn't argue, either. On February 13 we were back on the road, looking to settle the score with the odometer.

I made sure to keep an eye on the counter leading to last weekend (Feb. 17) when I

reached my literal milestone. I kept a countdown in a journal throughout the day. Every 10 miles I wrote down my location and built anticipation for the big moment. I had an approximate location in mind and waited for the moment to arrive.

At 5:49 p.m., a mile or two north of Pigeon Falls on Highway 53 it happened. I watched that odometer roll over to 400, 000 and I pulled over to celebrate. My celebration consisted of taking photos of this beautiful Buick on the stretch of road where

it achieved one of its greatest victories as a machine.

You see, my first car, a 2003 Buick Century, had its odometer stop working ahead of the 400K point, but because I kept diligent records of my miles, I determined it cruised to something around 430, 000 miles before it had to be retired - and that retirement was only because it hit a deer and I moved into the current vehicle I have. I tried to keep driving it here and there, but eventually, it wouldn't go anymore. I know it had more life left in it, though.

This car, my 2011 Lucerne, should have more time on the road left also and I intend on piling on as many miles as I can, though I know its road time is limited. The time for replacing this ride is coming fast. I didn't want to make a hasty decision on switching vehicles, though, and that's why I chose to put more dollars into it.

My point for this anecdote is this, I reached the 400,000 mile mark and I think that's a big deal. I spent too much money to do it, but thought it was a cool story to invest in. I spend a lot of time in my car, so it becomes a best friend of sorts. I enjoy knowing that I squeezed the most I could out of this machine and I think it knows that, too - you know because partners know what the other is thinking.

To that big, bad Buick - you're a mighty mile eater. There isn't a vehicle I'd rather roll out in.

However, if someone has a lead on a replacement vehicle, well, I'll entertain those notions as well. Good things don't last forever and neither will this car.

## WIAA STATE WRESTLING PARKER MLSNA, CASHTON

### Cashton's Mlsna finishes shy of podium

By ZACH RASTALL  
Assistant Sports Editor

Cashton sophomore Parker Mlsna came up just short of earning medalist honors in his state debut, but he's given himself plenty to build on for the remainder of his high school wrestling career.

Mlsna won his first match and then dropped the next two at the 2024 WIAA State Individual Wrestling Tournament, held from Thursday, February 22 to Saturday, February 24 at the Kohl Center in Madison.

Mlsna competed in the Division 3 106-pound weight class, where he encountered some familiar foes.

In his preliminary round match on Thursday evening, Mlsna, the No. 8 seed in the bracket, defeated North Crawford/Seneca junior and No. 9 seed Jaren Grimsled via a 3-0 decision. Mlsna had beaten Grimsled the previous week at sectionals.

In another sectional rematch in Friday's quarterfinals, Pecatonica/Argyle junior and top seed Aidan Gruenenfelder scored a pinfall victory over Mlsna at the 3:26 mark in their match. Gruenenfelder proceeded to win the state title in the weight class.

That loss sent Mlsna to the consolation bracket. Later on Friday afternoon, Coleman sophomore and No. 4 seed Parker Owens defeated Mlsna via a 5-2 decision to deny Mlsna a spot on the medalist podium.

#### WEST AROUNDUP

West Salem/Bangor's Emily Anderson (34-10) battled her way back through the consolation rounds after losing a quarterfinal match 18-3.

Anderson won three of her last four matches, including a 4-3 decision for fifth against New Berlin East's Natalia Poplawski.

At 144, Brett Plomedahl (41-11) met Tomah's Cameron Finch for the third time in as many weeks. This time, however, the duo weren't squaring off for a meet title. Instead, the pair were hoping to extend their own seasons one more match.

In the end, Finch came through with his third win in-a-row against Plomedahl with a second period pin.

Cody Peterson (26-7) opened his state run against South Milwaukee's Connor O'Donell and was promptly dismissed after being on the wrong end of a 9-2 decision.

## Sparta's Lietzau overcomes semifinal defeat to finish fifth in 132 pound bracket



Sparta's Devon Lietzau ties up with Beaver Dam's Avery Femrite during the first round of wrestling on Thursday, February 22 at the Kohl Center in Madison. Lietzau would go on to win 9-3 and would eventually face Femrite again in the fifth place match on Saturday morning. Herald photo by Derek Montgomery.

### LIETZAU

cont. from pg 7

weight cutting, but I was able to pull it off," Lietzau said. "Just knowing I secured a spot on the podium felt really good. Took a lot of pressure off the rest of the tournament."

In the semifinals, Lietzau suffered his first state defeat when he was pinned by Oconomowoc sophomore phenom Kellen Wolbert at the 3:57 mark in their match. Wolbert, the No. 1 seed in the bracket who previously won the Division 1 120-pound state title as a freshman, went on to capture the state championship in the weight class.

The semifinal loss sent Lietzau into Saturday's wrestlebacks, where New Richmond junior and No. 3 seed Luke Kamish scratched out a close win over Lietzau in a 4-2 decision in the consolation semifinals.

However, Lietzau was able to end his state tournament experience on a high in his fifth-place bout, which wound up being a rematch against Femrite.

The match was tied at 1-1 in the third period after both wrestlers earned an escape

point. After Lietzau got his escape from a bottom position, he was able to follow it up with a takedown that he maintained into the late stages of the third period.

Femrite eventually escaped with just under 15 seconds left in the match, but wasn't able to pull off a last-ditch takedown in the dying seconds. The clock ran out and Lietzau secured a win via a 3-2 decision to put the finishing touches on his fifth-place showing.

"It means a lot because I didn't even make it to state last year," Lietzau said of his podium finish. "Placing this year means a lot to me."

On the whole, it was a successful overall performance for Lietzau in his state debut — one that can serve as both a proof of concept for all the hard work he's put in thus far and a fuel that can help drive him further going into his senior year.

"He wrestled tough the entire time. I'm super proud of him," said Sparta head coach Buck Engel. "He's a joy to have in the room, he's a workhorse, he's just a driven kid. It's fun to know I have another year with him."



Sparta's Devon Lietzau works to finish an escape from Oconomowoc's Kellen Wolbert in the 132 pound state semifinal match Friday evening. Herald photo by Derek Montgomery.

### TOMAH

cont. from pg 7

competing in Madison at the state tournament: seniors Zandra Mason and Elisa Bowie.

Mason was making a return trip to Madison after placing fourth in the 132-pound weight class as a junior. She competed as the No. 6 seed in the same weight class this time around.

Mason quickly won her opening match by pinning Milwaukee Tech sophomore and No. 11 seed Jada Piert at the 1:03 mark in the preliminary round on Thursday. Later in the day, Brillion senior and No. 3 seed Sophia Galoff pinned Mason 40 seconds into their quarterfinal match.

I hope it helps build our program a little bit more, gets more girls involved and see what we can do.

- Jeff Von Haden, Tomah head wrestling coach

In Friday morning's wrestlebacks, Mason defeated Random Lake sophomore and No. 14 seed Arianna Smith via a 7-0 decision. However, Mason was pinned at the 4:08 mark in her following match against Mukwonago senior and No. 2 seed Josie Stachowski, ending Mason's state run and leaving her one win short of a return trip to the podium.

In the girls' 152-pound bracket, Viroqua senior and No. 6 seed Madi Zube pinned Bowie, the No. 11 seed, with 24 seconds left in the third period of their opening round match. That wound up being Bowie's only match at state.

While both Mason and Bowie would've liked to stick around the Kohl Center a little longer, the fact that they earned state bids and got to end their high school wrestling careers in Madison is nothing to glance over — especially since this is still just the second year of girls' wrestlers getting to take part in the customary state tournament.

"It's awesome. It's something they'll never forget," said Tomah head coach Jeff Von Haden. "I hope it helps build our program a little bit more, gets more girls involved and see what we can do."

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## LEGAL NOTICES

### STATE OF WISCONSIN CIRCUIT COURT MONROE COUNTY Notice to Creditors (Informal Administration) Case No. 24 PR 17

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF:  
 Karen M. Crooks  
**PLEASE TAKE NOTICE:**  
 1. An application for informal administration was filed.  
 2. The decedent, with date of birth 09/07/1956 and date of death 02/11/2024, was domiciled in Monroe County, State of Wisconsin, with a mailing address of 517 Garfield Avenue, Sparta, WI 54656.  
 3. All interested persons waived notice.  
**THE COURT ORDERS:**  
 4. The deadline for filing a claim against the decedent's estate is 05/30/2024.  
 5. A claim may be filed at the Monroe County Courthouse, 112 S Court Street, Sparta, WI, Room 2300.

Diane Berendes  
 Probate Registrar  
 02/21/2024  
 Attorney Kathryn D. Schmidt  
 122 E Oak Street, Sparta, WI 54656  
 (608) 269-4800  
 2/26, 3/4, 11 WNAJLP

### ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS SOUTH POINTE BUSINESS PARK - PHASE 3 CITY OF SPARTA

MONROE COUNTY, Wisconsin  
 The City of Sparta will receive and accept bids ONLY through QuestCDN.com via the online electronic bid service (QuestvBid) for the construction of South Pointe Business Park - Phase 3 until Thursday, March 21st at 11:00 AM. All bids will be downloaded and publicly read aloud during a virtual public bid opening that will be held at the day and time of the bid closing. All planholders will receive information via Quest on how to join the virtual meeting prior to the bid opening. The work for which bids are asked includes the following:  
 Clearing and grubbing.  
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 Grading and restoration for approximately 4,800 linear feet of stormwater bypass swale.  
 Approximately 235 linear feet of HDPE storm sewer and 180 linear feet of RCP storm sewer including endwalls.  
 All other surface/turf restoration work including erosion control.  
 Bid Alternate A includes installation of approximately 1,100 linear feet of ductile iron water main extension including all fittings and appurtenances and approximately 650 linear feet of PVC sanitary sewer including all associated structures and appurtenances. The anticipated substantial completion date is October 18, 2024 and final completion date is November 1, 2024. Planholders list will be updated interactively on our web address at <http://www.msa-ps.com> under Bidding. Copies of the BIDDING DOCUMENTS are available at [www.questcdn.com](http://www.questcdn.com). QuestCDN Vbid system requires Bidders to purchase BIDDING DOCUMENTS from QuestCDN. You may download the digital plan documents for \$45 by inputting Quest eBidDoc #8378615 on the website's Project Search page. Please contact QuestCDN.com at 952-233-1632 or [info@questcdn.com](mailto:info@questcdn.com) for assistance in free membership registration, downloading, and working with the digital project information. No proposal will be accepted unless accompanied by a certified check or bid bond equal to at least 5% of the amount bid, payable to the OWNER as a guarantee that, if the bid is accepted, the bidder will execute and file the proper contract and bond within 15 days after the award of the contract. 1230 South Boulevard, Baraboo, WI 53913. The certified check or bid bond will be returned to the bidder as soon as the contract is signed, and if after 15 days the bidder shall fail to do so, the certified check or bid bond shall be forfeited to the OWNER as liquidated damages. No bid may be withdrawn within 60 days after the actual date of the opening thereof. Pursuant to Section 66.0903, Wisconsin Statutes, the minimum wages to be paid on the project shall be in accordance with the wage rate scale established by local wage rates. OWNER reserves the right to waive any informalities or to reject any or all bids. Published by the authority of the City of Sparta.  
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6	7	8	2	4	3	5	1	9
1	5	3	7	9	8	4	2	6
8	3	5	1	7	6	9	4	2
9	1	4	8	3	2	6	7	5
7	6	2	4	5	9	3	8	1

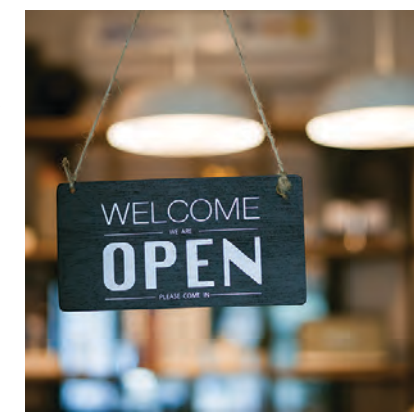
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# 5 advantages local business have over the competition

Small businesses on Main Street and big box chains have been competing for consumers' attention for decades. Historians say that big box stores were born in the early 1960s when Wal-Mart, Target and Kmart entered the retail landscape. It's been more than 60 years since these chains arrived and they certainly have garnered their share of devotees. Big box businesses have size, inventory and often price on their side. However, when consumers look beyond those factors, it's easy to see all of the benefits small businesses offer that the big box stores cannot.



## 1. Passionate owners and operators

Walk into a big box store or other business and you may find a handful of dedicated employees, but not quite at the level of small businesses. Small business owners prioritize the customer experience because they know they need to work hard to retain customers. This translates into knowing the products well, and sharing as much knowledge as possible with customers. Big box businesses vulnerable to heavy staff turnover often do not have a vested interest in the brand.

## 2. Work the local niche

What makes big box retailers so familiar to shoppers is one can stop in a store in the middle of Nebraska and likely find the same items as a store in Hawaii, with only a few subtle differences between the locations. Big box companies work with the same suppliers and ship the same products all over the world. Customers seeking personalized items and services for their particular regions are better off utilizing local small businesses that can bring in regional vendors more readily.

## 3. Better shopping experience

Big box stores draw customers during peak times when they're home from school or off from work. That often translates to long lines both at checkout and at customer service or return counters. By contrast, there may be no apparent rhyme or reason to when shoppers visit small businesses, meaning there likely will not be crowds. It's much more pleasant to browse wares without having to contend with shopping cart traffic and people blocking aisles.

## 4. Advanced technology

Big box companies have invested millions of dollars into their point-of-service systems and other technologies, which means it can be a very slow transition to new options as times change. Small businesses generally can shift to newer, better technology more readily because they do not have to do so on the same scale as their larger competitors.

## 5. General agility

Changing technology on a dime is not the only ways small businesses excel. They can experiment in other ways, such as a home contractor offering a special price deal for a certain period of time, or a clothing store experimenting with new in-store decor. Big chains cannot pivot that quickly, and any changes must be approved by corporate and implemented across all centers.



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**MONROE COUNTY HERALD**

1302 River Rd.  
Sparta, WI 54656  
608-269-9797



Four St. Patrick's students participated in the local Diocesan Bible Bowl last month and they took second place! Congratulations to our team members: Emma Kitowski (3rd), Matthew Lazzari (4th), Bryce Kitowski (5th) and Matthew Bores (6th)!

TO SET UP YOUR AD FOR THE MONROE COUNTY HERALD

**...CALL (608) 269-9797**

# Happy Retirement

Lorri Johnson is retiring after 40 years at Wesco and we are really going to miss her.

Please stop in, call, or email Lorri to wish her well. Her last day is February 29.



301 E Oak Street  
Sparta, WI 54656  
608-269-2115  
lorri@shopwesco.com  
**WESCO HOME**  
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Anita and Brandy Leis of Heat Master in Tomah donated a Whitetail Hunter Crossbow to the upcoming nasa banquet on March 23rd. The crossbow will be one of five prizes on the Flying Squirrel Raffle. Both Anita and Brandy also volunteer at the banquet and help raise funds to support nasa events throughout the year. Nasa of Tomah thanks them for their donation and their efforts to help others in Monroe County. Contributed photo.

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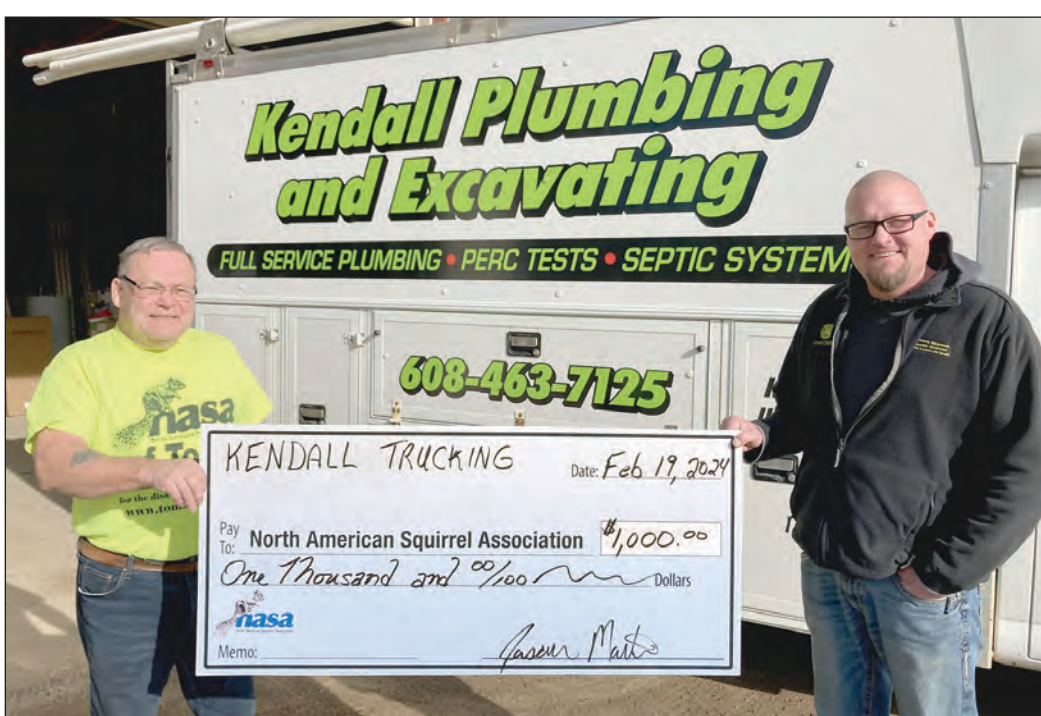
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Jason Martin (right) owner of Kendall Trucking presented a check for \$1,000 to nasa volunteer Dan Boehm. Nasa welcomes Jason and Kendall Trucking as a new donor. The donation will be used to sponsor the Red Squirrel Raffle featuring a rifle, shotgun, a pistol and a bow. Businesses and individuals have until March 15th to make a donation to the annual fundraising banquet and may do so by calling 608-343-7234. All proceeds from the banquet will go towards providing free outdoor activities to the disabled, elderly, and veterans. Contributed photo.



Nasa volunteers Dan Boehm (l) and Dave Stutzman (r) accepted a generous donation in memory of Micheal Ebersold who passed away in December. Mike had a captains table at the annual banquet and was an enthusiastic supporter of the North American Squirrel Association. His support now spans three generations. Presenting the check were Mike's grandchildren (from left) Cael and Maddy Pollack and Anabel Peacock. Not pictured were parents Kurt and Amy Pollack and Sarah Peacock. Contributed photo.

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