

OUR VIEW

Gem Days – the start of something great

Owatonna residents know they live in a gem of a city.

Home to the first of Louis Sullivan's "jewel box" bank designs, people often refer to the community as a hidden gem. And when they do so, they're talking about Owatonna's many treasures – its people, schools, churches, businesses, trails, parks, legends and history.

That's why it's appropriate that the city now has Gem Days, a week-long celebration of everything the community offers.

Co-chairs of the event, Cindy Stelter, owner of Central Park Framing in Owatonna, and Karen Pehrson, director of Conventions and Tourism, say Gem Days, which runs through July 25, is the beginning of what they hope to become a bigger, annual community event.

We hope so. Sharing the community's treasures, sprinkled with some fun, is a laudable goal.

Between now and July 24, Gem Days offers something for everyone.

Thursday is Community Day – shop the sidewalk sales and listen to a community band's concert in the park. Friday focuses on Family – watch a movie in the park and participate in the Crazy Hair contest in Central Park. And don't forget Market Day on Saturday – visit the Farmer's Market and stick around for music by Tim Dallman in Central Park.

A complete schedule of events can be found on Page 5B or at gemdays.org.

Check it out and join the celebration.

He was a giant in 4-H and livestock industry



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

Steele County has lost a giant when it comes to 4-H and the livestock industry.

Last week, Jim Grass, 91, of Owatonna died. During his lifetime, Grass piled up some pretty impressive accomplishments that have been noted in this newspaper at various times.

Grass showed hogs at the Minnesota State Fair for nearly 70 years. He started his amazing run in 1947. That achievement was noted in 2014 when a photo of the Grass family and details of their story was placed on the story wall of the fair's new History and Heritage Center.

At the time, Grass was believed to be the

oldest and longest-running showman in the state.

"It just gets in your blood," Grass told me at the time. "And once it gets in your blood, it's hard to leave."

Surprisingly, showing hogs wasn't Grass' favorite memory of the fair. Instead, it had something to do with love. While at the fair in 1949, he met Erliss Anderson, who became his wife in 1952. She died in 2011.

But State Fair was only a part of who Jim Grass was. He had been instrumental in the success of the 4-H Livestock Auction at the Steele County Free Fair. The auction began in 1945 and most recently, in 2019, raised \$88,000 for the 4-H program.

What did Grass have to do with the auction?

Well, he took it upon himself to go out ahead of time to recruit area businesses to purchase animals at the fair from the 4-H members. He called many business owners on the phone as well as going out to see them in person. If

the businessmen didn't have time to come to the fair for the auction, Grass gathered information and made the purchases for them.

In 2018, Grass ended up with a list of 40 businesses that he purchased animals for during the auction.

Suffice to say, Grass helped orchestrate one of the most successful 4-H livestock auctions in the state. He said the thought never crossed his mind of giving up on 4-H. "I think it's a good organization. You get involved in something and you just don't quit."

Tracy Ignaszewski, 4-H program coordinator, told me in 2018, "He is the face of the auction."

This past January, 4-H honored Grass with the Friend of 4-H award for all his devotion to the youth program.

Fortunately, for Steele County, Grass taught his daughter, Julie Grass of Waltham, in recent years to pick up the torch and continue with the auction tradition.

Grass also served one term on the Steele County Fair Board.

However, Dan Deml, current fair president, said Grass' biggest contribution to the fair was his support of the 4-H auction.

He was also a huge supporter of the Steele County Pork Producers Association. Grass could often be found going around the area grilling pork burgers for different events. "He was an incredible supporter," Deml said.

In addition to the county, Grass excelled on many other levels. Among his various honors, Grass was inducted into the Minnesota Livestock Breeders Hall of Fame, the highest honor for a livestock producer. He also received a Distinguished Service Award from the National Barrow Show.

He was a humble man who will forever be remembered as a giant in the livestock industry as well as the county's 4-H program.

This county is incredibly fortunate to have had someone like Jim Grass going in hot pursuit of his true passions.

YOUR VIEW

This is a fantastic newspaper

To-the-Editor:

This week's paper, July 14, is fantastic! It has so many great articles that it is amazing that so much can be put into one issue. With most of these articles pertaining to our own Steele County, and newsworthy items for everyone.

When I opened the first page and started reading, each of the articles were so interesting and informative. Even the "Your View" letters were interesting, sort of like a small informative article, but written by a reader.

Every page has nice to-the-point articles, not a long dragged out article that seems like the writer is trying to fill space.

Then when I turned to the second section, I found another very interesting article about the MS River Road Run. Wait, that is about my wife and I. So, I am a little bias on this article, but Rick did a fantastic job of putting together a very informative article about our Ride and Fund Raising.

Every page of the

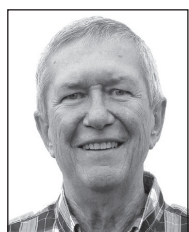
paper had some great news, not a bunch of large filler advertising, that looks like they cannot get any articles to put in the paper. The Steele County Times also does not have a big pop-up on its website that says, "Support Local Journalism" and want you to donate money to that newspaper. I have asked if they are a 501c organization, but I got no response.

As Matt Kottke said in his letter in "Your View," subscribe today to the Steele County Times and tell your friends to subscribe.

You can also give a subscription as a gift to your friends so that they can keep informed of what is happening in Steele County. I would like to suggest that if a student is going to college, send them a subscription.

And now, Rick and his team need to start all over for next week's paper. Keep up making this the fantastic newspaper!

Carl Wieman
Owatonna



Reflections
HOWARD LESTRUD

It has been over a year that Blooming Prairie Police

Chief Greg Skillestad has had to endure a critical evaluation given him in June of 2020 by City Administrator Andrew Langholz.

The review has been amended so that information in that evaluation cannot be used against him.

The Blooming Prairie City Council approved the settlement and it is time for us to turn the page. Skillestad is relieved that the matter is over with him withdrawing his appeal to the Minnesota Department of Administration. He has turned the page.

Chief Skillestad stands tall in light of

Skillestad is still the top BP cop

this public exposure. He is well respected by community businesses and by the city residents. He is also a leader in policing seen in small towns.

Skillestad and his family are loved by many in Blooming Prairie. They are all active in community activities.

He came to Blooming Prairie in 2014 as its police chief. His credentials were strong, having most recently served as a deputy with the Steele County Sheriff's Office.

We know Skillestad as a well qualified leader of the Blooming Prairie Police Department. He is well trained in respect to policing traditions and trends. He also has strongly required his officers to uphold the highest of law enforcement standards.

Skillestad is a fixture in the community because he loves Blooming Prairie. The feeling is mutual.

The chief is no figurehead. He is the top cop who steps out behind a desk, and is most willing to pull patrolling duties and most willing to walk the streets of this progressive southern Minnesota community.



Greg Skillestad

Greg Skillestad is appreciated by many local residents. He deserves a hardy THANK YOU from the community for keeping this small town safe for all.

When Skillestad is not doing his cop duties, he is making kids and adults laugh, forgetting the stresses of the day. He does this with his magic show. Yes,

Skillestad is Greg the Great as he promotes his magic shows.

Skillestad just recently performed two magic shows at the Dodge County Fair.

He is firm and fair in providing law enforcement. He protects the laws and also protects the safety of the citizenry of Blooming Prairie and the safety of those visiting this progressive community.

Chief Skillestad, we are sorry that you have had to literally be a target on the firing line. For what? We don't really know.

This mountain of a man deserves to have the page turned in respect to his overall performance. He has always expected the most out of himself and from his officers who protect the city.

Citizens should take time to salute Skillestad for his efforts to keep everyone safe in Blooming Prairie. Skillestad is indeed GREG THE GREAT.

CLARIFICATION

The Steele County Times would like to clarify a story that ran in the July 14 edition on the settlement between the City of Blooming Prairie and Police Chief Greg Skillestad.

The headline incorrectly stated that the chief's bad review was dismissed. Accord-

ing to the agreement reached between the city and Skillestad the bad review will remain in the chief's personnel folder, but it can't be used against him should any future disciplinary action be taken against him.

The Times apologizes for the error.



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MINNESOTA
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2020—9 state awards
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2018—6 state and 4 national awards
2017—2 state and 3 national awards
2016—8 state and 6 national awards
2015—7 state and 4 national awards
2014—3 state and 3 national awards
2013—7 state and 2 national awards
2012—2 state awards
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