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CHUCK DELSMAN

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JANUARY 2022

 The FREEMAN & ENTERPRISE

Lake Country

THIS MONTH

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Dockhounds debut only four months away



CHUCK
DELSMAN

Anticipation builds for home opener

It seems strange as we enter the coldest and snowiest week of the year that we're talking about professional baseball in Waukesha County, Lake Country and more specifically Oconomowoc. Let me introduce you to the Lake Country Dockhounds.

What started out as a dream for friends Tom Kelenic, Sonny Bando, Sal Bando, Tim Neubert, Tony Bryant and Mark Sellers a little more than five years ago has turned into reality. Come May, finally, there is going to be professional baseball in Oconomowoc.

After getting turned down to bring pro baseball and a sparkling new stadium to Pewaukee at the Pewaukee Golf Club (formerly



Submitted photo

The construction of Wisconsin Brewing Company Park, the home of the new Lake Country Dockhounds, is progressing on schedule. The team will open its home season May 20.

See **DELSMAN**, PAGE 4

INSIDE



\$4 million home listed in Village of Oconomowoc Lake

[Page 3](#)



Meet Tesla ... Western Lakes Fire Department's therapy dog

[Page 3](#)

Kettle Moraine launching virtual charter school

Emphasis on synchronous learning, year-round classes

By **Jake Ekdahl**
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WALES — The Kettle Moraine School District is adding a new option in its already specialized variety of school formats for students: KM Connect, a public virtual charter school.

Unlike some virtual schools, KM Connect will utilize synchronous learning, which means students and instructors are online together, interacting at the same time. Many virtual schools use an asynchronous model, which has students complete assignments on their own time.

Eric Anderson, a math teacher at KM Perform and soon to be the KM Connect Director and math instructor, said synchronous learning leads to more communication and collaboration — he said students will be developing the writing, speaking and presentation skills employers and post-secondary schools are looking for.

“We want to help our students be prepared, not just academically (but) there’s a skill base where that freshman in college has to do a presentation in front of their English class, and we want to work through that,” Anderson said. “We want our students to be able to have those” skills, he said.

KM Connect, which will serve grades 6-12,

will accept students not just from the Kettle Moraine School District but statewide and perhaps even further afield, Anderson said.

The demand for virtual instruction is evident with local virtual academies like Waukesha Schools’ eAchieve Academy seeing extreme growth in the last two years and maintaining much of it.

Anderson said KM did work on online classes prior to COVID, but during the pandemic data showed “a chunk of students that across the board in all environments, did better” when the district switched to virtual instruction temporarily. He said that chunk cuts across demographics and was somewhere around 10%.

“There is demand for a variety of reasons among a variety of families,” Anderson said.

Currently, a team of six veteran educators including Anderson are crafting curriculum for KM Connect. The school will use 6-8 week terms on a year-round schedule.

“Longitudinal research and data suggests this method minimizes content and skill loss and improves the mental and emotional health of students,” a KM Connect document states. Anderson said having shorter classes should allow for seminars with highly specialized niche topics as well.

The 6-8 week schedule may also help students become adjusted to post-secondary schedules of the future. Waukesha County Technical College recently switched to the same schedule and has touted the efficiency opportunities arising from it.

“We’re creating something, I believe, that’s really awesome,” Anderson said.

Looking ahead, classes for grades 6-11 begin in September 2022 and will expand to 6-12 the next year. Families in the district will be able to sign up soon.

Anderson said kmsd.edu will be the place to go for up-to-date information on KM Connect as the project continues.



Submitted photo

Maggie Omick holds a baby. Omick recently started her business, Lake Country Newborns.

Supporting families with newborns

Lake Country Newborns helps make their lives lighter

By **Rebecca Seymour**
Special to the Enterprise

OCONOMOWOC — Maggie Omick’s passion for lightening the load for others is contagious. The Oconomowoc resident’s positive and easygoing personality has a natural calming effect as she offers a soft landing for others in need.

After earning her master’s degree in social work, Omick worked as a child protective investigator, partnering with families in homeless situations and monitoring the safety of children in the foster program. She then helped to run a group home for pregnant and parenting teens in Waukesha, teaching life skills and newborn care.

When Omick’s own family started to grow, her focus shifted closer to home as she ran a certified day care from her house in Oconomowoc for nearly a decade.

“I provided care for babies and big kids, offering a playful and loving environment, always grateful that families trusted me with their little ones. As the kids grew, my passion for supporting families during that transitional and first year with a baby grew,” she explained.

In 2018, Omick became a professional postpartum doula for agencies located in Milwaukee and Madison, offering emotional, physical, and informational support to mothers before, during and after childbirth.

“I felt like there was a need for the services I was offering to families closer to home in the Lake Country area. When I look back at my own experiences after giving birth to my first baby, I was so tired and overwhelmed, and I probably was suffering from some postpartum depression. I should have had more support,” said Omick.

Filling the gap

Encouraged by her sister and her husband Nathan, this last July Omick founded Lake Country Newborns, providing postpartum support services throughout Waukesha County and beyond.

The business offers both daytime and overnight support and care as the family adjusts to life with their new baby. Omick has also teamed up with professionally trained newborn care specialists, postpartum doulas, and registered nurses to meet the specific needs of each family.

“Every family is different and

sometimes moms don’t know what they need help with and sometimes they just need someone to talk with and reassure them. We’re here to help with hands-on baby care basics and coaching, meal preps, baby laundry and more. We’re to fill the gaps and lighten their life load and help set the family up for a wonderful foundation,” said Omick.

Lake Country Newborns client Meghann Schultz said she was grateful for the extra support after her second baby was born.

“Postpartum doula work helped me so much as a mom with a two-year-old and newborn after my husband went back to work. I felt overwhelmed and lonely and having a postpartum doula helped me with meal prep, get some extra rest, and just feel extra support overall,” she said.

“Our community is still learning about postpartum support. There is no shame in having someone there to help as you transition into this new life with a newborn. Just to have someone to talk to and to be there so you can rest is so important,” said Omick.

For more information about Lake Country Newborns, please visit lakecountrynewborns.com.



Kelly Smith/Special to the Enterprise

Heavy equipment removes the rubble remains of the Merton Village Hall/Community Center in the 166-year-old First Baptist Church building that was demolished recently. The village purchased the church from the congregation after it built a new Grace Hill Church on Hickory Hill Drive. The sign on the right promotes the new Village Hall/Community Center that will be built on the site while the sign on the left says the village hall has been relocated during the construction.

Structural weaknesses found in Merton Village Hall building

By Kelly Smith
Special to The Freeman

MERTON — Structural weaknesses discovered during the demolition of the Village Hall/Community Center reinforced the Merton Village Board's decision not to remodel the historic 166-year-old church building.

The First Baptist Church of Merton, located on Main Street near the center of the village, was built in 1855.

In 2009, the congregation sold the building and two nearby houses to the village for \$400,000 after the new Grace Hill Church was constructed on Hickory Hill Drive, according to the Rev. Darrel Schrock.

When they purchased the building, village trustees intended to remodel it into a village hall and community center in the future, according to Village President Ron Reinowski.

More than a decade later, village officials tried to implement those plans but discovered it would be too costly to renovate the building.

Some residents were unhappy that the

board decided not to try to save the old church, according to Deputy Clerk Treasurer Julie Orfori-Mattmuller.

But it was a prudent fiscal decision, according to Reinowski.

After razing the building on Dec. 8, a construction worker told a photojournalist the demolition took longer than anticipated because the support beams for the church's spire were rotted.

Reinowski confirmed the report and said there were other signs of deterioration.

"During the demolition it became apparent that the bones of the building were not good," he said.

The demolition is one of a series of projects intended to provide more efficient working space for local government in a community that has increased its population (3,824) by nearly 70 percent in 20 years.

The village is borrowing \$2.5 million to build a 10,000 square foot village hall/community center on the Main Street site.

The building will be designed so some government functions can be carried out simultaneously with community center activities.

Reinowski said there is a demand for rent-

ing the village's community center facilities by residents, not-for-profit and community organizations, and local businesses.

The fire station is being remodeled to provide overnight living accommodations so emergency responders can be on duty at the station 24 hours a day.

An addition has been built on the Department of Public Works building at Fireman's Park to provide office space for the department as well as an indoor restroom for park visitors.

"When the dust settles, we will have a separate building for public works, a separate building for the fire department and a separate building for a village hall and community center," according to Reinowski.

For more than 50 years, local government was housed in the fire station located about two blocks west of the intersection of Main Street and Sussex Road.

The public works department had a small office on the east side of the building while village administration was in another small office on the west side of the building.

However, those offices were evacuated in early 2020.

Village officials were concerned civilian office workers and firefighters and paramedics who were sharing the fire station's kitchen and bathroom facilities were in danger of infecting each other with COVID-19.

They were also concerned the office spaces were too small for conducting business with the public during a pandemic.

The village hall was moved to the community center while trustees explored with building contractors the possibility of remodeling the building.

A contractor estimated the cost to renovate the building at about \$1.7 million, not including the cost of repairs in the structure of the building that might be discovered after the renovation began, according to Reinowski.

"Because there were no drainage tiles, the basement occasionally flooded. The heating, ventilation and air conditioning system was not adequate for a building of that size and that bathrooms were inadequate for a community center," he added.

After the decision was made to demolish the building, the village hall was moved again, this time to leased space in St. John's United Christian Church.

Reinowski said the new village hall/community center should be finished in September of 2022 in time for the village's centennial celebration and the November general elections.



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Inside a \$4.19 million home in the Village of Oconomowoc Lake.

Images courtesy of Keller Williams Realty-Lake Country

\$4 million home listed in Village of Oconomowoc Lake

VILLAGE OF OCONOMOWOC LAKE — A 7,000-square-foot, 7-acre home on the shores of Oconomowoc Lake is currently listed for sale.

According to a property listing on Realtor.com, the home is being brokered by Keller Williams Realty-Lake Country and is listed for \$4.19 million, which makes it one of the most expensive homes in the area.

At 35306 Pabst Road, the home features 5 bedrooms, 5 bathrooms, a half-bath and a 4-car interior garage. There are also an additional 5 garage spaces in a detached garage, according to the listing, and it has a private dock and pier with 350 feet of waterfront frontage.

In total, the home has 16 rooms with a game area, family room, exercise room, guest bedroom and a gourmet dine-in kitchen.

It has estimated property taxes of \$34,413, according to the listing, and has been sold twice for \$3.32 million in 2004 and \$2.4 million in 2015.

The home currently has a contingent offer. To see more photos of it, visit <https://bit.ly/3EHKnES>.



The home at 35306 Pabst Road in the Village of Oconomowoc Lake that is listed for \$4.19 million.

Images courtesy of Keller Williams Realty-Lake Country



Derek Johnson/Enterprise Staff

Tesla poses for a picture in front of the Western Lakes Fire District's boat at Station One on Dec. 28.

Western Lakes therapy dog off to tail-waggingly good start

By Derek Johnson
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OCONOMOWOC — While Dalmatians chasing fire trucks may be a thing of the past, at the Western Lakes Fire District, a black lab and an office have proved to be a more useful duo.

About a year and a half ago, Assistant Fire Chief Matthew Haerter got his 60-pound canine Tesla certified as a therapy dog for the department. Haerter said the fire board, which oversees the needs of Western Lakes, had been looking for ways to improve the mental health of its hardworking firefighters, and that he knew having a lovable four-legged friend around the station would do just that.

And since Tesla started working full-time, she's done exactly that. Haerter said most days, Tesla can be found sitting with him at one of the department's six stations that cover the greater Oconomowoc area. Haerter said that the 7-year-old dog helps firefighters de-stress and prepare for difficult assignments.

"If our people are in a good spot, they'll be able to do their jobs better," he said.

But Tesla isn't just an office dog, either. Haerter said he brings the dog with him to emergency incidents so Tesla can provide comfort to people affected by tragedy.

"It's something that allows people to release themselves from the reality of their situ-

ation," he said.

During emergency situations, he offers people some playtime with Tesla in the same way that he offers counseling services from the Red Cross. Most people take advantage of the opportunity to play with the cute canine.

During the Waukesha Christmas Parade tragedy, too, Haerter said Tesla spent the night at the dispatch center, which he said everyone there seriously appreciated during those especially stressful few hours.

And even when things are going well, Tesla still helps out. Haerter said he brings the dog out into the public whenever he can, and people are more inclined to talk with him because Tesla is an amazing icebreaker.

"It's a completely different bridge to a welcoming conversation," he said.

He also noted the department has already finished training a second therapy dog.

Haerter said members of the public, as well as other fire and police departments, can reach out to set up time to meet with Tesla. He noted that, as a full-time working dog, Tesla's availability is limited but the department can be reached at 262-567-8282.

Tesla also has her own, new, Instagram that showcases both her professional life and what she does when she's not wearing her Western Lakes fire vest. Anyone interested in viewing it can visit www.instagram.com/k9tesla.

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Retired Chicago fire chief now Lisbon volunteer

Reflects on transition between two communities

By Kelly Smith
Special to The Freeman

TOWN OF LISBON — Retired Chicago Fire Department Battalion Chief Michael “Mike” Mark has lived in two different worlds of fire service.

For 32 years, he worked his way up the ranks of the Chicago Fire Department, fighting fires in high-rise condominiums, large warehouse buildings and congested neighborhoods.

He has rescued people from burning buildings and has been rescued from beneath the rubble of a collapsed building.

His cellphone is full of photos, videos and replays of television newscasts, of his biggest and most dangerous fires.

He had a one-line speaking role as an extra in the movie “Backdraft” — a 1991 action thriller about the fictional search for a serial arsonist in Chicago.

He capped his career in 2015 when he was promoted to battalion chief and was put in charge of five fire stations and approximately 60 firefighters in the nation’s third-largest city.

There are 5,000 firefighters in Chicago responding to more than 800,000 calls annually, which is twice the number of people in Waukesha County (population 402,000) where Mark now lives.

After retiring in 2018, Mark and his wife Sharon moved to Menomonee Falls where they owned a home they had purchased from her parents.

He was persuaded to join the neighboring Lisbon volunteer fire department by its chief, and his longtime friend, Doug Brahm. Lisbon has about 50 fire-

fighters, most of them full- and part-time career firefighters or trained paid per call volunteers, who respond to about 1,300 calls annually in a community of about 10,000 people.

Mark is a division chief and training officer who works three eight-hour shifts a week and is available on call as a firefighter paramedic.

He said the transition from Chicago to Lisbon was not difficult because of his previous experience with a volunteer department.

More water, firefighters in Chicago

One of the biggest differences between Lisbon and Chicago, according to Mark, is the availability of water and firefighters.

“In Chicago there is a plenty of both. In Lisbon there is plenty of neither,” he said.

He explained there is municipal water in Chicago with fire hydrants nearly everywhere.

In Lisbon, there is no municipal water and few fire hydrants because property owners rely on private wells.

Like most fire departments in Waukesha County, Lisbon has fire engines and tanker trucks that haul water to a fire or pump it out from a nearby lake, river, or subdivision holding tank.

“A structure fire is a structure fire regardless of where it is. But here we have to bring our own water to the party. That is something you really have to focus on when planning how you are going to fight a structure fire,” said Mark.

Mark added that Chicago’s tax base is big enough to pay for full-time firefighters while rural residential communities like



Kelly Smith/Special to The Freeman

Michael “Mike” Mark, a retired Chicago fire battalion chief, is now a part-time division chief and volunteer firefighter/paramedic for the Town of Lisbon Fire Department. The helmet he is wearing is the one he wore as a battalion chief in Chicago.

Lisbon continue to rely on a combination of full-time and volunteer emergency responders.

However, because of cultural and socio-economic factors, the number of volunteers is rapidly dwindling, Mark added.

Mark has a bachelor’s degree in fire science management from the University of Illinois at Carbondale and a master’s degree in public safety management from Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois.

His career began in 1978 as a teenage volunteer with the Emergency Services Disaster Agency in Skokie, Illinois, a northwest suburb of Chicago.

Five years later, he became a full-time firefighter/paramedic in Lake Forest, where the department was a combination of career and volunteer firefighters.

Most of the calls in Lake Forest, a suburb of Chicago and one of the wealthiest communities in the country, were car accidents and medical emergencies, not fires. So, Mark joined the Chicago

Fire Department.

“I wanted to fight fires and be where the action is,” he explained.

In 1990 he met Sharon Carrick, a Marquette University alumnus whose parents lived in Menomonee Falls.

Mike and Sharon Mark have four children, all have attended or graduated from Marquette and live in Wisconsin, which prompted the couple’s decision to retire in Menomonee Falls.

Mark and Brahm, who recently retired as chief of the Lisbon department, met at a house fire.

Mark was visiting Menomonee Falls when he spotted the fire while driving on Plainview Road near the Lisbon-Menomonee Falls border.

He stopped, put on the gear that was in his car, and helped the Lisbon volunteers put out the fire.

“After the fire, he came back to the station and helped us clean up. He started to work for us as soon as he retired from the Chicago department” Brahm explained.



Submitted photo

Retired Chicago Fire Battalion Chief Michael “Mike” Mark earlier in his career at a residential structure fire in Chicago.

“I think we’re going to have the best baseball stadium in the state, other than American Family Field.”

— Tom Kelenic
Lake Country Dockhounds official

Delsman

From Page 1A

Willow Run) location, the Blue Ribbon Baseball LLC group was not about to give up on its mission to own a professional baseball franchise in Waukesha County, so it kept working and before long hit gold in Oconomowoc.

That was a little more than two years ago. And now baseball will officially arrive in Oconomowoc when the Dockhounds open their season in the American Association of Professional Baseball on the road with a three-game series against the Milwaukee Milkmen beginning May 13. They’ll follow that with another three-game set against host Sioux City, Iowa from May 17-19.

But the biggest day of the year will come at 6:35 p.m. Friday, May 20, when the Dockhounds host Winnipeg, Canada in a three-game series. They’ll play again on May 21 at 6:05 p.m., and the series will wrap up on Sunday afternoon in a 1:35 p.m. start. Finally, pro baseball in Lake Country.

“It was a little more than five years ago when we came up with the idea of having a professional baseball team in Waukesha County,” Kelenic said. “We had looked at some different locations and different leagues to play in, but we never could get anything done. And then-Mayor Dave Nold of Oconomowoc reached out to us and from there things came together quickly.

“We’re very pleased how this project has turned into something very real. I think the county baseball fans are going to love coming to the ballpark to watch us play.”

Once Blue Ribbon Baseball LLC got the ball rolling on the new Oconomowoc location, major things started happening. And here we are now with a professional team and a beautiful new stadium called Wisconsin Brewing Company Park.

Located on the southwest corner of I-94 and Highway 67, the stadium is just about ready to play baseball. The entire field consists of high-quality artificial turf and is finished. The top-notch light poles have been installed and now the only thing left to be completed is the huge, colorful digital scoreboard that will be located in the right-center field. There’s still some work to be done on the spacious grandstand and special seating areas and concession stands. Everything should be ready to go by the first of May.

The light poles will be programmed so when a Dockhounds player hits a home run, they’ll blink like disco lights.

“I’ve been in the baseball business in the state for a long time, coaching kids and building facilities,” Kelenic said. “I think we’re going to have the best baseball stadium in the state, other than American Family Field.

“We’ll have outstanding seating that will allow all of our fans to be real close to the action. Down the right-field line, we’ll have a fenced-in basketball court so are younger fans can stay busy if they’re not that into the game. We’ll have some pontoon boats people can sit it as if they’re watching from a lake. There’s going to be plenty to do when they come to Wisconsin Brewing Company Park.”

The Dockhounds will offer full concession areas along with liquor bars. Fish fries will be served on Fridays along with a wide variety of menu items that will change from week to week. Plenty of parking will be available as the stadium holds 3,800 fans.

While the 25-man roster will be set after a 10-day spring training period that is allowed to have a maximum of 30 players taking part, the coaching staff is just about full right now. Jim Bennett will be the Dockhounds manager and he brings plenty of credibility to the team with him.

Two of his assistants are certainly no strangers to Wisconsin Major League Baseball fans. Former Milwaukee Brewers pitcher Paul Wagner is the bullpen coach and former Brewers catcher Dave Nilsson of Australia is the hitting coach.

Wagner played eight years in the MLB with Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Milwaukee. Nilsson also played eight seasons with Milwaukee, finishing with a .284 career batting mark and 105 home runs. He hit .331 in 1996 and .309 in 1999. He became the first player from Australia to make the MLB All-Star team in 1999.

There will be two divisions in the AAPB. The East Division will consist of the Dockhounds, Milwaukee Milkmen, Kane County (Ill.), Gary (Ind.), Chicago and Cleveland. The West will be made up of teams from Iowa, Fargo (N.D.), Lincoln (Neb.), Kansas City, Winnipeg and Sioux Falls (S.D.). The Dockhounds will play a 50-game home season.

Some local summer baseball teams will also play some games at Wisconsin Brewing Company Park, and Kelenic said rugby, lacrosse and soccer teams will also use the facility. For more information, go to the website at Lake Country Dockhounds.

I know we’re just into the beginning of the winter season. There is still plenty of snow and cold coming our way. But when I visited the beautiful stadium a few times the last two weeks before the snow came, I was already getting a mild case of spring baseball fever.

The Blue Ribbon Baseball LLC has done a brilliant job of putting this project together in a first-class fashion. They’ve left no stone unturned. It’s going to be special summer of professional baseball at Wisconsin Brewing Company Park. I can’t wait. Hats off to a job well done!

On our team...

CHUCK DELSMAN

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