

# Lake Country

## THIS MONTH

Chenequa • Delafield • Hartland • Merton • Nashotah • Okauchee • Pewaukee

### Oconomowoc Lake home sells for \$6.7 million

By Katherine Beck  
Special to the Enterprise

OCONOMOWOC LAKE — Unique style. Beautiful views. Pristine waters. The attributes of a lake home at 4475 Sawyer Road in Oconomowoc Lake got one Oconomowoc couple so excited that they bought the home for \$6.7 million before it even went on the market.

Jon Spheeris, owner of Coldwell Banker Elite and a broker with The Spheeris Team, said the 10,280-square-foot home was a one-party listing, meaning it never hit the market. Spheeris said he told the couple about the property and they worked with the sellers to negotiate the sale. This is not uncommon in Lake Country. Spheeris said there is another home in the area that isn't on the market yet, but has five buyers interested.

The single-family Sawyer Road home, which boasts six bedrooms, was built in an architectural style that the new owners found attractive, Spheeris said.

"What appealed to the new owners is its setting is spectacular and the uniqueness of the home," Spheeris said. He described the house as being constructed in a style similar to a Colorado lodge.

This is not the first lake home for the new homeowners who are simply swapping one lake for another.

Increasingly, Spheeris said people are seeking homes on lakes with high water clarity, as well as the always important views and amount and quality of the



Photo provided by Jon Spheeris

This home at 4475 Sawyer Road in Oconomowoc Lake sold recently for \$6.7 million before it was even placed on the market.

lake frontage. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources ranks water clarity for lakes around the state and posts the information on its website, which is a tool that would-be lake owners are using to determine on which lake they want to reside.

Although lake property

overall is desirable, Spheeris said, there are some lakes that are considered the "Champagne Lakes" of the area: Oconomowoc, Pine and Beaver. While they are the most popular, they are also the most expensive. Nagawicka and Pewaukee lakes also are popular among

homebuyers. Spheeris said each lake has a different appeal and each person is seeking something different, from wanting a quiet lake to a busy lake with lots of activity, while others are looking for a lake that is more suitable for a certain activity, such as sailing.

Lakefront homes are sell-

ing pretty quickly if they are priced right, Spheeris said, and he expects that to continue as the future of the luxury home market, and lake homes in particular, continue to look strong.

"I think for more people, their homes are more important to them since the pandemic," Spheeris said.

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# Wauke Mills closing after 70 years

Brothers behind feed mill business plan to retire

By Kelly Smith  
Special to The Freeman

CITY OF PEWAUKEE – “I am heartbroken!”  
“Where am I going to get birdseed?”  
“The squirrels are going to miss you.”  
Those are some of the reactions of the generations of loyal customers of Wauke Mills on Waukesha County Highway F who recently learned the feed mill is closing after 70 years in business.  
Handwritten signs posted on the doors and walls of the mill explain why it is closing and symbolize how the owners, brothers Mike and Richard Borenitsch, have done business together all of their lives: no frills, friendly, honest and straightforward.  
“PLAN AHEAD! WE WILL BE RETIRING AND CLOSING THE BUSINESS JULY 16. THANKS FOR 70 GREAT YEARS!”  
Their father, Ted Borenitsch, purchased the business in 1952 when the grist mill, located at Madison and St. Paul Avenue in Waukesha, was grinding out livestock feed for “Cow County, USA.”  
The mill was located on land owned by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad.  
Dubbed “The Milwaukee Road,” the railroad company sold the land in 1973 and Borenitsch was forced to relocate the mill on farmland he owned in the Town of Pewaukee.  
At the same time, according to the brothers, the customer base gradually began shifting from farmers interested in livestock feed to homeowners moving from the city into the country interested in birdseed, wildlife feed, grass seed, fertilizer and soft water and sidewalk salt.  
The brothers took over the business in 1989.  
They are quiet, friendly and unpretentious, as they work



Kelly Smith/Special to The Freeman

The Borenitsch brothers, Mike, left, and Richard, are in the office and showroom of the Wauke Feed Mill, a business the family has owned for 70 years. It is closing because the brothers are retiring and selling the building and land on County Highway F, north of the Capitol Drive intersection.

together behind the counter in the showroom adjacent to the cavernous warehouse in the steel and wood frame building.  
The walls of the showroom are lined with large bags of feed, seed and salt blocks along with shelves of bird feeders.  
There is a wide variety of birdseed and peanuts packaged in paper or plastic bags on display in the center of the store.  
All transactions are cash or check — no credit cards.  
“They are a lot of trouble, and the fees are expensive,” Mike Borenitsch explained.  
“We have some customers who are small-business owners who also don’t use credit cards and they don’t have a problem with us not having them,” he added.  
Pat Castelli and her husband, Peter Newman, of Pewaukee have been customers for about four decades.  
They were among a steady flow of customers who came to

the store last week to make their purchases and offer congratulations on the brothers’ retirement plans but express sadness the landmark business was closing.  
She explained to a reporter the mill provided “one stop” shopping advantages where she could purchase seed for birds, corn and peanuts for wildlife, and Solar Salt in bulk packages that the brothers carry to her car.  
But hauling those 50- and 100-pound bags of corn, barn lime and livestock feed, from the warehouse loading dock to waiting SUVs, has taken a toll on the brothers, which is one of the reasons they are retiring.  
“It is hard on your body. I am 70. My brother Mike is 74,” Richard Borenitsch explained.  
The brothers opted not to try to sell the business.  
“Nobody buys these businesses anymore. Feed mills just close,”

Mike Borenitsch said.  
A developer has purchased the building and 11 acres on Highway F, about 100 yards north of Capitol Drive.  
The brothers acknowledge there are a lot of customers like Don Welzien of Delafield, who wonder where they will go for seed, feed and other supplies when the mill closes.  
“For 25 years I have bought my birdseed and salt there. I don’t know what I am going to do; I am going to have to find another source,” Welzien said.  
“I might try Merton,” he added, referring to the mill in Merton that the brothers are recommending to their customers.  
“They are two wonderful businessmen who have provided the community with salt, birdseed, feed and other quality products at a fair price. And it is fun to go there and shop. They are going to be missed,” Welzien said.



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# Goodbye school, hello summer!



PEWAUKEE — There were a ton of emotions on the last day of school June 10 in the School District of Pewaukee. Teachers, students and parents cried, cheered and comforted each other. Photos were taken at Pewaukee Lake and Horizon Elementary Schools.

Photos courtesy of the School District of Pewaukee



A rendering of a living room at The Waters at Okauchee Lake.

## Okauchee Lake condos expected to be completed soon

Most units have already been sold; one went for \$1.8 million

By Dan Colton  
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OKAUCHEE LAKE — A condominium development on Okauchee Lake is expected to be completed soon.

According to Peter Renner, owner of Renner Architects, The Waters at Okauchee Lake project includes 10 high-end condos with underground access to a private boat house and boat slips. Seven of the units have been sold, the last one for \$1.8 million, Renner said.

Renner said the condominium market is in high demand across Lake Country. The Renner firm initially wanted to build in Oconomowoc but moved their sights to Okauchee Lake after being unable to secure a location in the city.

“(The Waters at Okauchee Lake) is a whole new animal for Lake Country,” Renner told The Freeman. “They have nothing else like it.”

Along with elevator access to an underground tunnel leading to the lake, Renner said the development boasts concrete floors that are 14 inches thick and walls with 10 inches of concrete for enhanced acoustic privacy.

Depending on the floor, all units have decks or terraces overlooking the water, and each unit has access to subterranean garage parking spaces. The building has about 350 feet of lake frontage.

On the interior, project designs show timbered ceilings and maple doors, wooden trim and flooring. Each bedroom has its own bathroom.

The project was expected to be completed last year, but issues with manpower — “Competent people are overworked,” Renner said — coupled with ordering delays pushed the finish date back, he said.

“We still have to get final approval from both the town and the county, but we don’t see why there would be a problem,” Renner said.

Renner Architects has worked on condos in Milwaukee including the Breakwater, Harbor Front/Hansen’s Landing and the Waterfront.

Renner said he hopes to build more condos around Lake Country, and the town’s tax base is set to benefit from the development.

“I think the assessment for the former restaurant there was \$1.1 million, and now it’ll be somewhere between \$10 million and \$15 million,” he said. “That’s a lot of taxes, and the police never come.”

Renner added. “If we had more sites, we’d build more. There is a huge unmet demand in Lake Country.”





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# County Board OKs wage increase for Sheriff's Department

By Karen Pilarski  
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WAUKESHA — On May 24, the County Board approved a proposal to increase wages at the Waukesha County Sheriff's Department in a 20-5 vote. Supervisors Jeremy Walz, James Heinrich, Christine Mommaerts, Keith Hammitt, and Ted Wysocki cast the dissenting votes.

The topic was brought up due to increased turnover and difficulty in finding quality law enforcement candidates. The Sheriff's Department's employee turnover rates are "exceeding the county's capacity to attract and train employees in a timely manner," according to board documents.

"This is the result of a wage analysis that was done after we lost some deputies. We've seen the local municipalities pay more and who had less forced overtime," Supervisor Jacob LaFontain said.

LaFontain said there have been labor shortages in every occupation and industry and law enforcement is no exception. He said due to other "national factors" it may be worse.

The documents said interest in law enforcement has been decreasing in recent years for multiple reasons, including the pandemic and career perceptions.

The proposal is to go immediately to a \$3 per hour wage increase for deputy sheriffs and detectives to maintain what they have in the department.

LaFontain added the solution wasn't a magic bullet or fix for every issue facing the department.

"It's another tool the sheriff's office can use to bring themselves up to staff and bring down overtime stressors," LaFontain said.

The money to pay for the wage increases would come from American Rescue Plan Act funds. County Chairman Paul Decker said when looking at what the county has for ARPA dollars, this proposal was the best use for those funds.

## Supervisors respond

Supervisor Darlene Johnson was concerned about other Waukesha County Sheriff's employees who are not supervisors. Johnson said many of those employees might ask why they are not receiving a raise.

"I'm a little concerned some people are getting part of this (wage increase) and some are not," she said.

She asked if there was a possibility of tabling the item until budget review time.

Heinrich expressed how the issue with WCSD retention might have to do with morale and not necessarily pay.

"Part of the problem might be morale. If you find out you will get a \$6,000 raise a year, your morale will probably go up. But on the same token, if we don't pass this what do you think will happen to their morale?" he said.

Heinrich added the sheriff's department is not the only area where there is a hiring issue.

Wysocki said all the arguments supporting the proposal should be made during budget time.

"If we put the cart before the horse, we are going to be in a world of hurt," he said.

Wysocki and other supervisors mentioned connections to law enforcement and hav-



Karen Pilarski/Enterprise Staff

Waukesha County Sheriff Eric Severson speaks during the Waukesha County Board meeting on May 24.

ing appreciation for them.

"That's not the issue in front of us. This is a budgetary thing," Wysocki said.

He added he is not arguing the merits of the proposal but said, "it's just the wrong way to try to do the right thing," he said.

Supervisor Christine Howard said by increasing wages it is a chance to make a correction. "If we keep doing the things the way we've always done and stick to this box called the budget season, how are we going to react to when we have to make decisions on when it has to be done?" she asked.

Supervisor Larry Nelson spoke against the possibility of tabling the discussion.

"I think this is the most important HR issue facing the county. 10 years ago it was an issue and now we're at the point where it is a crisis," Nelson said.

Nelson said there is an issue with overtime and if the board approves the increase they will retain more people in the WCSD who might be thinking of leaving.

"One of the reasons I think we have a great county is the quality of our county employees. What we pay our employees sends a message not only to those employees but everyone else," Nelson said.

Nelson said people should think of the ARPA funds as a "pot of gold" which will disappear in two years and won't go back to the taxpayers.

"This is a pot of gold that solves a 10-year problem," Nelson said.

Waukesha County Sheriff Eric Severson spoke during the meeting after listening to the supervisors' comments. He touched on the comments concerning correctional staff.

"As my job as sheriff, it is to provide you with accurate information so you can make decisions and I feel that some of the information might be steering you towards a misunderstanding of the facts," Severson said.

He said the HR department along with his office and Department of Administration have done an analysis of the correctional officers' wages and "they are in market."

"It would be inappropriate for me to come to you and ask for a wage increase for employees whose pay were in market and that pay is not contributing to the staffing issues in the jail," he said.

# Wisconsin DNR is monitoring a black bear spotted around Waukesha County

By Karen Pilarski and Dan Colton  
Enterprise Staff

OCONOMOWOC — A black bear came up on an Oconomowoc resident's deck on the night of June 2, according to Brad Koele, wildlife damage specialist with the Bureau of Wildlife Management, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

The sighting was on the northwest side of Oconomowoc off of McMahon Road. The bear knocked into a bird feeder and eventually left without incident.

"We suspect it is the same bear seen in the past two weeks in Dousman, Wales, Waterford and Oconomowoc," Koele said.

At this point there are no plans to trap the bear. Koele said it is being monitored and so far it is not displaying any aggressive behaviors.

"At this point the bear is behaving totally normal. The bear is coming out at night and not during daylight," he said.

Black bears are not unheard of in the southern part of Wisconsin, Koele said. Last year bears were spotted in Jefferson and Dane counties.

The black bear's primary range is located in the far northern third of the state. Due to a growing population, bears are becoming much more common in the lower two-thirds of the state.

"It is the slow expansion of the bear range. We have a very healthy population in the state, about 24,000 black bears," Koele said.

June is breeding season for bears. The bear from Oconomowoc was on the smaller side but could be a cub born last year.

"The mama bear pushes away the cubs from last year," he said.

## Resident recalls sighting

The resident photographer — who asked not to be named out of privacy concerns — said he became suspicious that a large animal was roving through his yard on the night of June 1 after raccoon-proof steel cans containing birdseed were knocked over and the feed was consumed.

"(My wife) said it was a bear, just kind of kidding," he said. "She was right."

On June 2, he was up late in the night and looked out to check on a bird feed barrel when he saw the bear looking in through his window.

"So I grabbed my phone," he said with a laugh. "He was headed for the barbecue and I scared him off. I could've gotten better pictures of him, but I was trying to preserve my expensive barbecue."

The man said he doesn't think the bear is as young as the DNR claimed. He's seen bears at his cabin in western Wisconsin and from people who hunt them.

"That was no yearling," he said. "It was 300 pounds if it was a pound."

# Black bear sighting reported in Oconomowoc



Provided photos

The black bear seen in Oconomowoc on the night of June 2 is believed to pose no threat to residents. Department of Natural Resources officials say the animal has not been displaying aggressive behaviors, and it is likely the same bear spotted in Dousman, Wales and Waterford over the past couple of weeks.



## Nuisance bear prevention

There are numerous steps that anyone can take to prevent or stop nuisance bear issues.

The best thing to do to prevent bears from coming on to your property is removing food sources such as bird feeders, pet food, trash and cleaning off grills.

"Clean off your grills for food residue and keep your garbage cans in your garage," Koele said.

If you see a bear, it is important to harass it, such as making loud noises.

Don't approach the bear. From a safe distance make noises to try and scare it away, Koele said.

This can be as simple as yelling at the bear, banging pots or pans or honking an air horn to discourage the bear. Another tip is to keep an eye on your animals such as dogs. People have been hurt trying to get between a bear and a dog.

"Make sure you look out into your backyard before letting your dog out," he said.

If bears are demonstrating bold or aggressive behavior, contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services to conduct an investigation. Phone lines are monitored seven days a week. Having issues with a black bear on your property or in your neighborhood? Call the USDA Wildlife Services, Southern Wisconsin: 800-433-0663.

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