

Supply-demand, supply chain issues challenge local builders

The Luverne Building Center, local contractors and homeowners work together to overcome historic market conditions affecting local building projects.

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Banking Barns repurposes old wood with creativity, skill

Justin Kerkhove-Brandt of Banking Barns in Hills continues to make statements in custom-made furniture, with construction turning toward milling their own wood.

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Hydrangea varieties improve with color, hardiness

Luverne horticulturalist George Bonnema's quest for the perfect hydrangea ends with 'Incrediball' and 'Bloomstruck' varieties that live up to their hype.

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Master Gardeners offer resources for local greenthumbs

Rock County Master Gardeners have long been resources for gardening advice, but today we have several local 'experts' to lean on for everything from vegetables and landscaping to trees and fruit.

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"This is a business that we put our heart and soul into. And we want them to be successful. Nate (Golla) does too. I'm at a stage in my life where I can help them ... until they kick me out."

— Greg Uithoven, mentor for Luverne Lawn Care, LLC and retired Luverne Farm Store lawn services manager



Greg Uithoven (center) is mentoring the Luverne Lawn Care owners (left) Mira Uithoven and Ross Steensma who will be married this summer, and (at right) Nick and Brittany Weidert (Ross' sister). (Lori Sorenson photo)

Luverne Lawn Care LLC picks up where former Luverne Farm Store left off

By Lori Sorenson

Hundreds of local property owners and their grass are in the hands of new lawn care professionals this spring.

Luverne Lawn Care purchased the mowing and chemicals business from the Luverne Farm Store in February when the longtime local business closed its doors.

The new owners are Mira Uithoven and Ross Steensma (who will be married this summer) and Nick and Brittany Weidert (Ross' sister).

"I have always wanted to be my own boss and I have always taken pride in the way my yard looks," Nick said. "When this opportunity arose for owning my own business and taking care of yards, it seemed like the perfect business venture."



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Ross said he's following a lifelong interest.

"As a high schooler I owned a lawn mowing business and lawn care has always interested me," he said. "When the opportunity came along to purchase this business, it was something I decided to pursue."

They're operating out of the former

"We want to assure our client base that we will provide them with the same quality service that they have received in the past from Luverne Farm Store."

*— Mira Uithoven
Luverne Lawn Care*

Mel's Alignment building, which they bought from Rick Reed, and opened for business March 1.

In addition to offering lawn care services, the business is a Millborn Seed dealer with residential turf seed, agricultural pasture seed, waterway

Luverne Lawn Care LLC/see page 6B

Catching rays, capturing electricity
Luverne's first home solar panels generate power

By Mavis Fodness

The solar panels on the roofs of Pat and Katie Baustian's home and garage are not only saving the couple money each month on electricity, the panels are also reducing carbon emissions that warm the planet.

"As consumers and human beings on this earth, it is our job to use earth's resources as best we can and save them for generations to come," Pat Baustian said.

Over the years, the Baustians have done away with the incandescent lighting in their home to the more energy-efficient LED. They also upgraded appliances to reduce their home energy use and installed low-flow toilets as well.

Solar panels for the home interested Baustian solar panels/see page 8B



Pat Baustian



Ten solar panels placed on the south side of Pat and Katie Baustian's garage roof in Luverne provide electricity to the couple's two-story home, decreasing the need to buy electricity.

Another 18 solar panels are located on the south and west sides of the roof of their home on Estey Street.

To sell or not to sell ...

*How do you know when it's the right time to put your house on the market?
Here are a few questions to consider as you make your decision*

By Jen Rolfs and
Deb Aanenson
Real Estate Retrievers

The housing market has stayed competitive for months, and if you're like many homeowners, you've probably thought about selling. But is it the right time?



Deb Aanenson



Jen Rolfs



Selling your home is a big decision, and pinpointing the perfect time to make your move can be challenging.

That's why we are here to help, and realtor.com® offers its fourth annual "Best Time to Sell Report," which suggests listing a home during the week of April 10-16.

Doing so allows them to take advantage of the spring buying season's anticipated strong demand, high asking prices, quick home sales, and lowered competition from other sellers.

Preparation is key this year since the market dynamic could change quickly due to factors like rising mortgage rates, inflation and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Here are a few questions for you to consider if you want to explore what it would look like to put your home on the market soon.

Has your lifestyle changed? Most homeowners outgrow a property at some point, or they find their needs have changed in some way. A property may be too small, or you may want to downsize.

With historically low interest rates, maybe now is the time for you to build that perfect retirement or forever home.

Do you have another property or a plan for where you'll go next? Be sure to keep the logistics and busy market conditions in mind if you're

"Preparation is key this year since the market dynamic could change quickly."

buying and selling at the same time.

Let us help relieve the stress of coordinating multiple transactions and keeping everything on track.

Have you discussed the details with everyone involved? Selling your house isn't something you should do on the spur of the moment.

This sale will mean big changes, both financially and in your day-to-day life, so be sure everyone in your household is on the same page.

Have you established your goals? When you're ready, let's discuss your needs and wants to create a plan that makes sense for you.

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Still not sure if it's the right time to sell? Get in touch with us to discuss your options today.

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What's happening in Rock County?

Meanwhile, those who are curious about current market conditions may be interested in the local market report for February through the WestCentral Multiple Listing Service.

It indicates that for Rock County:

- Current listings are down 61.5 percent year to date.
- Pending sales are up 50 percent
- Closed sales increased at an amazing 150 percent.

•Current days on market have increased slightly to 80 days from list to sale.

•The monthly supply of inventory continues to remain at historic low levels.

•The median sales price for Rock County properties is also up 19.1 percent to \$190,500.

As a benefit this indicates that there is greater equity for homeowners while current interest rates remain low.

With interest rates increasing, the buying power for new buyers entering the market may decrease.

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“I won’t even have a hole in the ground and I’ll have the windows ordered. Window companies are, as far as lead times, anywhere from 10 to 26 weeks out, depending on which company and what series of window. Some are 52 weeks out. You have to have choices made a lot sooner and you have to plan a lot farther ahead than you used to. You can’t rely on things being two to three weeks anymore.”

— Nick Mead, Luverne Building Center, reflecting on supply-chain issues in building industry

Builders, homeowners complete construction projects amid historic market challenges

Luverne Building Center and customers complete construction projects with planning and patience

By Lori Sorenson

Global markets and supply chain issues have affected everything from cars and machinery to food and beauty products.

And it’s affecting people’s buying decisions and in many cases life planning.

Nick Mead at Luverne Building Center said the home building market is among the industries heavy hit by price volatility and product availability.

“We’ll bid a project, and in three to five days it’s out of date already,” he said.

“We’re up front with people, and we just let them know the prices on there are good pending availability and price increases.”

Sometimes prices change “effective immediately,” and Mead said the constant changes require extra communication with suppliers and customers.

“The biggest change for us is the extra work it takes to facilitate a project. And I think that’s the case for any industry; it takes a lot more time to get the things it takes to run your business,” he said.

“You’ve got certain things priced at the time of shipment. If you order it, you won’t know what your cost is to get it. It just depends on what the market bears at that time.”

He said prices of construction materials last summer were more than double the highest they’ve ever been.

“Lumber and plywood were probably four to six times what it’s been retail,” Mead said. “Traditionally an 8-foot 2-by-4 might cost you \$3. Last year at its high, you were seeing anywhere from \$11 to \$13 on the same 8-foot 2-by-4.”

He said a 4-by-8 sheet of plywood

Luverne Building Center/see page 4



Lori Sorenson photo/0331 HYG luverne lumber group

Luverne Building Center owner Nick Mead (far left) credits employees for the success and sustainability of the business through volatile market swings. Building Center staff pictured in the lumber warehouse are (from left) Mike Mead, Anitra Overgaard, Terry Hamann, Dan Hanenburg and Darrin Popkes.



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Luverne Building Center: projects today require planning and patience/continued from page 3B

went from \$20 to \$100 for a half-inch sheet.

“I think the biggest thing on the lumber side is just shipping — getting the trucks or rail cars into place,” Mead said, adding that labor shortages and rising fuel prices are also contributing to the challenges.

“It cost them more to get the trees out of the forest, it cost more to get the trucks to get the trees out of the forest, and those guys cutting those trees and the guys working at the mill are all requiring better benefits and better pay. ... A lot of hands touch that tree before it ever gets to our building projects.”

Mead’s business supplies local contractors with materials and offers computer-aided drawing services for building projects.

“The biggest thing we’re having trouble with is windows, and that’s related to labor and materials. Garage doors are the same,” Mead said.

“I won’t even have a hole in the ground and I’ll have the windows ordered. Window companies are, as far as lead times, anywhere from 10 to 26 weeks out, depending on which company and what series of window.”

He’s heard of some companies 52 weeks out.

“You have to have choices made a lot sooner and you have to plan a lot farther ahead than you used to,” he said. “You can’t rely on things being two to three weeks anymore.”

What does this all mean for some-



Jordan and Jennifer Siebenahler moved into their new home on Rowe Drive east of Luverne in the spring of 2021. When they approached Nick Mead at the Luverne Building Center in 2020 about building a new home, Mead advised them to wait. “That was when prices were going up, and I said, ‘You know Jordan, going into the winter, maybe you want to wait ’til spring and let things cool down a bit,’” Mead said. “But he called me a few days later and he said, ‘Nope. We’re going to do it.’ ... And he outsmarted me, because he would have paid way more in the spring. He ended up in a lot better position than he would have had he waited.”

one considering building a new home?

“I don’t know what to tell people. I don’t even want to try to tell them, ‘If you wait, the prices might come down.’

I don’t want to play that game,” he said. “I would say, from where we are now, we can only go down. We’re higher now than we’ve ever been or ever should be, but how did we get to this point in the first place.”

Pulling the trigger

When Jordan and Jennifer Siebenahler approached Mead in 2020 about building a new home, Mead said he advised them to wait.

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up, and I said, ‘You know Jordan, going into the winter, maybe you want to wait ’til spring and let things cool down a bit,’” Mead said.

“But he called me a few days later and he said, ‘Nope. We’re going to do it.’ ... And he outsmarted me, because he would have paid way more in the spring. He ended up in a lot better position than he would have had he waited.”

Luverne Building Center/see 6B

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“A lot of the time I get free rein on a project and I’m always thinking as I make it if it’s something that they will want when I’m done.” — Justin Kerkhove-Brandt, Banking Barns

Banking on barnwood ... and old unique trees

Kerkhove-Brandt is creative mind behind Banking Barns in Hills

Photos and text
by Mavis Fodness

When Banking Barns opened its doors in 2015, the Hills business dismantled barns and repurposed the decades-old wood into various home features meant to make a visual statement.

“Ever since we started, the goal of our business is, ‘Whatever we put into a house, it’s the first thing you look at, making a kind of a statement,’” said Justin Kerkhove-Brandt, who manages the business for owner Kris Gagnon.

Fast-forward three years and Banking Barns continues to make statements in custom-made furniture, with construction turning toward milling their own wood.

In 2021 Banking Banks made 25 coffee and dining room tables.

Each tabletop and base were designed by Kerkhove-Brandt with construction assisted by Banking Barns employee Tony Thooft and a local metal fabricator.

The result has been one-of-a-kind works of art with a wide range of costs.

“The average table leaving my shop is \$6,000 to \$10,000,” Kerkhove-Brandt said.

One table, made from rare Claro walnut wood from California with a black epoxy inlay and the custom bench, was priced at \$20,000.

“It is really hard to duplicate something like that, even if you had more wood,” he said.

Kerkhove-Brandt’s woodworking expertise began 13 years ago as a 14-year-old student at Hills-Beaver Creek High School.

The basic skills he learned in school were further expanded when he worked for a local woodworker before attending college to be a graphic designer.

“I didn’t really take a liking to woodworking until I was through with college,” Kerkhove-Brandt admitted.

“I received a degree in graphic design and ended up not liking it as much as I thought I would.”

His graphic arts skills are not going to waste, however.

“It did give me an idea what to do with



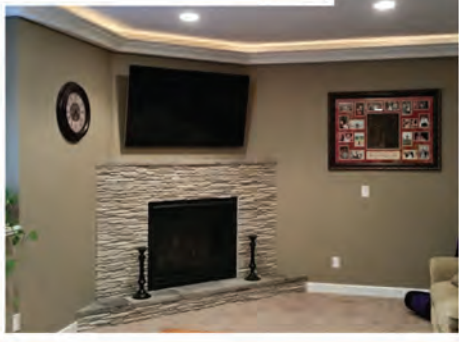
Justin Kerkhove-Brandt is the manager of Banking Barns in Hills and is the creative mastermind behind the tables and mantels displayed in the business showroom on Main Street.

Banking Barns/continued on page 12B



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Luverne Lawn Care LLC continues tradition of service and excellence/continued from page 1B

seed, and CRP mixes.

Its storefront on West Harrison Street next to the Eagles Club offers lawn and garden fertilizer for sale, plus a variety of lawn care retail products and a wide selection of rental equipment for indoor and outdoor use.

So far, the new business has taken on more than 600 lawn contracts, including the Veterans Home, housing developments and other large commercial clients.

Mira said they’re ready, but they’re bracing for unique market circumstances.

“Our challenges this year are the cost of goods going up and finding employees,” she said.

“We want to ensure our client base that we will provide them with the same quality service that they have received in the past from Luverne Farm Store.”

Young entrepreneurs have legendary backing

The two couples are young, but they have the professional backing of the Luverne Farm Store, which mailed letters to all its current customers encouraging them to remain with the new owners.

In January when Nate and Gary Golla formally announced their decision to sell the Farm Store, they said they’re pleased the business will be carried on by young, local entrepreneurs.

“We’re very excited we have some young people who are going to take it over,” Nate Golla said. “They have similar thoughts on providing high quality service, using high quality products and really working on their customer service.”

The Gollas said in the process of selling the family business, they considered its impact on the community.

“We needed to do what was right for our customers and for the area,” Nate said.

“It was important to us that business continued with companies that shared our common focus and goals.



The Luverne Lawn Care office is located in the former Mel’s Alignment building at 306 W. Harrison Street in Luverne, and the office phone number is 507-449-6124. The company can also be reached through Facebook and at info@luvernelawncares.com

And we think we found those people for lawn care and for the feed mill.”

Luverne Lawn Care will also benefit from the 40-year career experience of Mira’s grandpa, Greg Uithoven, who started the lawn care service at the Luverne Farm Store with Gary Golla.

“We started out relatively small. I think we had 80 yards to start with. We’d take a Saturday in the spring, typically around the 10th of April, and we’d take our whole crew (there would be no farm customers that day) and do them all in a day.”

At the peak of the Farm Store’s lawn care business, there were 1,000 contracts.

“They’ll vary anywhere from 2,000 square feet to 400,000 square feet to 10 acres,” he said.

“And mowing is just part of it. The treatments are the biggest part of the business.”

Gearing up for spring

So far, nearly 70 percent of those Farm Store customers signed contracts with the new company, which is busy gearing up for spring work.

“We just need a few more workers,” Ross said.

They need a lead for lawn mowing and they need a tech for fertilizing and spraying, with some of the work being full-time seasonal, part-time seasonal during the spring and summer months.

“We basically need college students,” Brittany said.

Ready or not, grass treatments start in a few weeks, and the Luverne Lawn Care owners said they’re excited to get started.

“I look forward to working with the community and serving their yards, along with getting into the farming community and providing them with cover crops and grass seed,” Nick said.

Ross said he’s eager to prove the new business is up to the challenge.

“I look forward to working with customers on day-to-day operations and showing our results with quality lawn care practices,” he said.

Greg said he’s just happy to be part of the new venture that’s keeping his old business alive.

“I’m retired. I’m 65 in June, so I want to be able to have freedoms,” he said.

“But I felt like these guys – this is a business that we put our heart

and soul into. And we want them to be successful. Nate does too. I’m at a stage in my life where I can help them ... until they kick me out.”

He said he looks forward to continuing customer relationships while also helping his granddaughter and the new business.

“When I stepped away ... this was really important to me, to not sit all day. I don’t go to coffee shops,” Greg said. “So this will give me some years of camaraderie.”

Luverne Lawn Care provides residential and commercial lawn care services in Rock County and surrounding communities, including Ellsworth, Wilmont, Leota, Lismore, Edgerton, Pipestone, St. Kilian, Garretson, Brandon, Sioux Falls and Harrisburg.

- The list of services specifically includes:
- Residential and commercial lawn care.
 - Weed control.
 - Herbicides, pesticides and insecticides.
 - Spraying and fertilizing.
 - Lawn rolling.
 - Sidewalk and driveway Edging.
 - Grass seed and CRP seed.
 - Various rental equipment.
 - Gutter cleaning.
 - Snow removal.
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New hydrangea varieties offer more color, longer blooms and sturdier stems

Bonnema offers insight on three classifications of hydrangea shrubs:

- macrophylla (mop head)*
- arborescens (smooth leaf)*
- and paniculata (panicle)*

By George Bonnema
Luverne horticulturalist

I have been a horticulture enthusiast all of my adult life, both ornamental horticulture and floriculture.

Whenever a new variety is introduced, I will probably be in line to give that plant a go and see if it lives up to the hype our media gives anything and everything new.

I am not saying that there is a problem with the tried and true, but neither do I want to miss out on the opportunity of adding a great new introduction to my landscape.

So, for this informative “lecture” I will address the countless number of new hydrangea varieties that have been introduced in recent years.

There are three classifications of hydrangea shrubs: macrophylla (mop head), arborescens (smooth leaf), and paniculata (panicle).

Mop head hydrangeas

The mop head hydrangeas in past years had not been hardy varieties for our Zone 4 climate. Their flowers are really magnificent, and colors range from white to shades of pink, lavender and blue.

Varieties of this hydrangea produce blue flowers if grown in acidic soil or pink flowers in alkaline soil — we have alkaline soil in our area. These are also the flowers florists use for cut flower arrangements.



(At left) the Endless Summer “Bloomstruck” Hydrangea is one of the most popular hydrangea varieties available, and it’s no wonder why.

This plant blooms from early summer through Thanksgiving in most growing regions.

They thrive in full sun to partial shade, making them especially versatile.

They don’t require excessive pruning to thrive, and they’re able to bloom from early summer through the late fall.



“Incrediball” hydrangeas are beloved for their stout stems and massive blooms.

When Endless Summer was introduced as the first mop head hardy in Zone 4, I was really excited.

The “endless” part of that name referred to the fact that the first early blooms of the season would happen on the previous year’s growth followed by flowers on the current growth later in the summer, indicating the plant would have stunning color for the entire summer.

The media hype got people like me inspired. So, I planted 14 of them (yes, I said I was inspired).

Well, I had them in the ground for nine years, and of those nine

years, I only had one season where the canes survived the winter well enough to produce flowers.

Added to the insult was the fact that seldom did the current year’s growth ever produce flowers.

Scratch Endless Summer off my list. It probably does better in Zone 5 than in Zone 4.

Endless Summer was followed by Summer Crush, another introduction supposedly more reliable than Endless Summer, but it hasn’t proven to be.

Bonnema hydrangeas/see page 14

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Baustian solar panels catch rays capture renewable energy from rooftops/continued from page 1B

the energy-use-conscious Baustian, who was investigating ways to replace his home’s electricity needs using green energy.

“I looked at solar panels six years ago, but the wattage was just not there,” he said.

A retired Air Force IT support specialist, Baustian’s former job with the South Dakota Air National Guard involved implementing the latest in military technology. He’s seen firsthand how fast improvements can happen.

Improvement in solar panel technology is no exception.

He first had to convince his wife, Katie, that solar panels attached to the roof of their house would be beneficial.

She said her reservations included the aesthetic look on the roof, the upfront costs and whether they would receive their investment back.

“I really finally gave in because Pat had done a lot of research over a few years and seemed confident in his thought,” Katie said.

Pat began researching solar panel systems two years ago when technology improved wattage levels. After interviewing three companies, he selected All Energy Solar out of St. Paul to install solar panels on his home.

He said he was “very impressed” with All Energy Solar’s in-house engineers and the professional way the owners conducted their business.

They examined the Baustians’ home electricity usage and designed a solar panel system to meet the average usage for the family of six at 1,300 kilowatts per hour.

“The system on the house was built during the Covid year when all the kids were home,” he said.

The Baustians were empty-nesters in November when the 28 solar panels were installed on the roofs of their home and garage on Estey Street.

All connections from the panels to the electrical grid were made outside of the home with no underground cables necessary to connect with the city’s electric service.

After just months of operation, the Baustian household is already seeing positive results from the \$50,000 investment.



Solar panels on the roof of Pat and Katie Baustian’s home and garage on Estey Street in Luverne are on the south and west sides of the rooftops to best capture the sunshine.

One meter records production from the solar panels while another meter records the home’s electricity usage. When production exceeds usage, the usage meter runs backward, lessening the Baustian family’s electricity bill for the month.

“So far this month we’ve generated 893 kilowatts per hour and are on track to generate 1,300 kWh for March,” he said. “What we are not using that day goes out to the neighbors to use.”

Two meters track the production and usage in the Baustian home. The usage meter will run backward, reducing or eliminating the family’s monthly electric bill.

Katie admits she doesn’t love the look of the panels on the roof of the house and garage but the final product is not as bad as she first envisioned.

She is happy with the power their panels are producing.

“Our city bill has gone down about \$150 a month,” she said.

“With only the two of us at home we aren’t using as much power. This summer will be a good trial as our air conditioning runs all summer.”



Pat estimates they will recoup their investment in eight to 10 years.

“After that the energy is free for the next 15 to 17 years,” he said.

The solar panels are expected to function for 30 to 35 years. The panels and installation come with a 25-year warranty.

Pat doesn’t expect problems with the panels or their efficiency over time.

“I am 58 years old now so when I am 83-84 years old, these panels will still be putting out 92 percent of the energy,” he said.

If the Baustians sell their home, the warranty transfers to the next owner.

Baustian’s next green energy investment would be an electric vehicle.

“Direct usage of solar panels doesn’t fit everybody’s home,” he said. “With electric vehicles we can further decarbonize our atmosphere.”

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Meet the Masters

The Master Gardener Volunteer Program teaches research-based horticulture principles and practices so that everyone can grow plants successfully. Rock County is fortunate to have several local Master Gardeners to turn to for advice on vegetables, trees, flowers, landscape design and more. The Rock County Star Herald reached out to local Master Gardeners about their skills and interests and about reflections on their contributions as local gardening resources.

Lynette Jauert is celebrating 25 years as a Master Gardener this year. She serves as a mentor for Master Gardener interns, coordinates the community garden in Luverne and serves as the spokesperson for the local group.



Lynette Jauert

“I became a Master Gardener because I wanted to learn more about flower gardening and realized that I have most likely killed more plants than most people have purchased in their lives,” she said.

“Trust me, 25 years later, I am still killing plants, but as a Master Gardener I have resources that allow me to better figure out why they died and how to hopefully prevent it in the future.”

Jauert said the Master Gardener program is beneficial in countless ways.

“I have expanded my gardening knowledge and now thoroughly enjoy growing vegetables, starting my own seeds, experimenting with raised beds, no till gardening and using cover crops in my vegetable plots at the Luverne Community Gardens,” she said.

“I sincerely enjoy the challenge of raising large onions, potatoes, a variety of peppers and sharing my produce with family and friends.”

Master Gardeners are helpful resources, but Jauert said gardeners don’t need to be experts to consider joining the program.



Cindy Arends

“We are a group of people who just love to garden and learn while volunteering to help the community with their gardening.”

Master Gardeners offer research-based information and encourage people to become interested in gardening with events like the Annual Plant Sale, the Garden Tour, Community Education classes, answering individual questions and more.

“I also really enjoy exhibiting at the Rock County Fair in the Open Class division,” Jauert said.

“Stay tuned to the Star Herald for new and exciting information on changes being made to entry times for Open Class.”

Cindy Arends became a Master Gardener about eight years ago, specializing in vegetables and flowers. She serves as secretary for the Rock County Master Gardeners and coordinates classes and organizes events.

“I enjoy learning and being of assistance in helping others find

answers to their questions,” she said. “Gathering with others for the May Plant Sale is fun and is always a learning experience, as will be this year’s June Garden Tour to the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.”

For Arends, becoming a Master Gardener came at the right time in her life.

“When I became an empty-nester I decided it was time to challenge myself to see if I could do online classes and become a Master Gardener,” Arends said.

“I always had a lot of questions about plants and what was happening with my flowers and vegetables, so I thought the classes would be helpful.”



Erin Hamann

Erin Hamann is a Master Gardener intern focused on vegetable gardening, no-till gardening, perennial edibles (fruit trees, bushes, vines) and

native plants.

“I decided to become a Master Gardener because I have been gardening for most of my life and wanted to use my love of plants, the environment and growing food to give back and support our community,” Hamann said.

“I’m enjoying connecting with the public and meeting other locals who have their own interest or specialties in gardening.”

She works part time for Project Food Forest and Prairie Ally Outdoor Center, the demonstration public food forest in Luverne.

“I helped teach a seed starting class this spring and it was so rewarding to help people learn new skills,” Hamann said.

I think being a Master Gardener will help advance the work we are doing through workshops and public outreach and give me ample opportunity to apply what I learned through the program.”

Meet your Rock County Master Gardeners/see page 11B





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The maximum loan amount is \$20,000 at a one-percent interest rate, repayable for a 20-year term and can be used to improve or modernize homes and do essential repairs.

Grants of up to \$7,500 are available to homeowners 62 and older and must be used to remove health or safety hazards, such as fixing a leaking roof, installing indoor plumbing, or replacing a furnace.

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In southwest Minnesota the

Maximum loan amount is \$20,000 at a one-percent interest, repayable for a 20-year term and can be used to improve or modernize homes and do essential repairs

USDA Rural Development Housing Specialists are located in Marshall and Worthington.

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USDA Rural Development loans and grants provide assistance that supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community services such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural areas.

For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov/mn.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Luverne Building Center: projects today require planning and patience/continued from page 4B

The Siebenahlers are now moved into their new home on Rowe Drive in the housing development east of Luverne. They have three children under 4 years old, and Jennifer is operating a day care center in the lower level of the house.

“We got pretty lucky,” Jordan Siebenahler said last week. “The prices were starting to go up, so we downsized our plans by about 700 square feet.”

By the time they were done, the price of their new home increased \$13,000 despite downsizing. “I said, well shoot, we should have just gone with the bigger house,” he said. “We were going to wait, but when the prices started going up again, we decided to pull the trigger.”

The Siebenahlers credited Mead and the Luverne Building Center for helping them stay ahead of supply chain issues.

“Nick was really good to work with. He helped out tremendously helping us get things here on time and helping stay ahead of the price jumps,” Siebenahler said.

“He knew shingles were going up, so he helped us get them ordered, and he knew garage doors would be delayed, so he got those ordered so they’d be ready for us.”

While their building costs were high, the Siebenahlers were able to finance their project with a 2.875-percent mortgage rate.

“We have no regrets,” Siebenahler said.

Supply, demand and interest rates

Mead said low interest rates are a big reason construction is still booming amid the supply-chain and pricing challenges.

“I think where people probably justify it now is that interest rates are low,” he said.

“Our projects may cost more, but if I’m financing it for 15 years, it saves X-dollars in interest, so that eats up some of that difference. So that cushions some of that blow of paying more.”

The feds raised interest rates a quarter of a percentage point on March 16.

“That I think will start affecting things. If you raise the interest rates and people start backing off on projects, obviously demand will come down and prices are going to come with it.

It goes hand-in-hand. It’s never just one thing, but that’s a huge part of it – supply and demand.”

Until supply and demand level off, Mead said he expects to remain busy with construction projects. “If you look at the real estate listings, there’s not much available,” he said.

“We still seem to be as busy as we’ve always been. We’ve got a lot of nice projects going on ... I think where you see the most change is in the non-necessity things. ... Like maybe I want a better-looking front door, but I don’t necessarily need a better-looking front door.

“If it’s a ‘want’ versus a need,’ we’re seeing people push the brakes a little bit. But if it’s something you gotta have, it’s no different than buying a gallon of milk. You’re not going to wait for it.”

Advice to builders

Mead said people have asked for his advice ahead of a building project, and he recommends patience.

“I would say, ‘If you’re thinking about doing something, be patient.’ Anymore we’re so Amazon-have-it-now, and it’s not a reality,” he said.

“Knowing you have something in mind that you want to do – keep in mind it will take planning. It takes a lot more planning and lot more due diligence to make sure you’ve got everything that you need and that you want in a timely manner.”

He said when he and his dad, Mike Mead, bought the business from Sam Berghorst over five years ago, they would have never imagined these sorts of challenges.

“I hope we can look back on this in 20 years and say, ‘Remember 21 and 22 how bad those years were?’” Mead said.

“Hopefully this doesn’t turn into the norm. It’s going to take some time to get back to normal, whatever the new normal will be.”

He said he’s grateful for the Luverne Building Center’s understanding customers and for dedicated employees — six full-time and one part-time.

“We’re very, very fortunate because we’ve got some awesome employees and we do our best to treat them well and they do a great job for us,” Mead said. “We wouldn’t be able to do what we do without them.”



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Meet the Masters — Rock County Master Gardeners reflect on program/continued from page 9B

We are your neighbors

The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener volunteer program started in 1977 with its first class of 25 people. Since then it has grown to include more than 2,300 active master gardeners who share U of M horticultural expertise in almost every county of the state of Minnesota. The mission of the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program is to use research-based horticultural knowledge and practices to deliver educational outreach and project-based efforts that inspire change and promote healthy people, healthy communities and a healthy planet.

PRIORITIES OF THE MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

- HORTICULTURE SKILLS**: Teaching current research-based horticulture principles and practices.
- LOCAL FOOD**: Promoting the use of sustainable techniques for growing local food on multiple scales and at various locations.
- CLIMATE CHANGE**: Teaching ways to create resilient landscapes that are adapted to our changing climate.
- NEARBY NATURE**: Partnering with local community groups to create access to plants and green space for health and wellbeing.
- CLEAN WATER**: Promoting water-wise gardening and landscaping practices to conserve water and minimize polluted runoff.
- POLLINATORS**: Educating on ways to help native bees and other pollinators thrive in home and community landscapes.
- PLANT BIODIVERSITY**: Promoting invasive species management and native species conservation and restoration in landscapes.

Laurie Bohlke has been a Master Gardener for four years and specializes in vegetable gardening. She said she became a Master Gardener to learn more about vegetable gardening and to keep learning about growing fruit trees. “I enjoy being a Master Gardener because it’s fun to get together and share information with each other no matter what type of gardening we are doing.

Cathy Honken is a Master Gardener intern focused on perennials and landscape design. She and her husband, Luverne native Ron Honken, moved back to the community 1 ½ years ago to be closer to family. “I’ve completed the Master Gardener program twice before in Indiana and in Tennessee, and since we moved back to Minnesota I thought I should go through it one more time,” Honken said. “I’ve always been interested in gardening and I have a degree in landscape design. I have enjoyed working with the various PTAs at my son’s schools and helped with Earth Day programs and chairing their grounds committees. I also designed an outdoor classroom and obtained a grant to complete the project.”

Join the Masters

Applications are accepted annually, August 1 through October 1.

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Banking Barns in Hills makes new creations from old barnwood and felled trees/continued from 5B

wood on the art side," he said.

Banking Barns used felled trees, bringing the entire trunk back to Hills, where the trunks would later be milled into wood slabs for live-edge tables, countertops or lumber for other one-of-kind home features.

The former Around the Clock fitness building on Main Street in Hills was remodeled into a Banking Barns showroom and a workshop, where Kerkhove-Brandt creates a finished product or helps do-it-yourselfers with their own projects.

Equipment at Banking Barns has the capability to cut large tree trunks, plane the slabs level and sand the slabs smooth.

They've banked enough barn wood and trees that Kerkhove-Brandt, 27, won't be able to use all the stock in his lifetime.

The large inventory allows Kerkhove-Brandt to focus on creating furniture pieces for sale or assist customers in completing projects.

Staircases, sliding barn doors, back splashes, countertops, a hunting blind, and an overhead light fixture for a pool table have been projects completed by Kerkhove-Brandt recently.

Epoxied projects is where Kerkhove-Brandt's artisanship shines.

"I've developed an eye of where to ep-



Several tables designed and made by Justin Kerkhove-Brandt of Banking Barns in Hills were featured at the Sioux Falls Home Show including this epoxied tabletop. The average cost of one of his completed tables is \$6,000 to \$10,000.

Left, Banking Barns employee Tony Thooff sands the epoxy drips from the bottom of a current Banking Barns project.



oxy on tables," he said. "It's become kind of a passion."

He's able to select a piece of wood, plane it to bring out the best finish, and create an epoxied top for the finished product.

Posts to the Banking Barns social media site show Kerkhove-Brandt taking a project from a plain rectangular frame to a finished project. He's seen chiseling, sawing and sanding wood slabs, then positioning the slabs within the frame. He mixes colored and/or clear epoxy and pours the mixture into the frame.

In some projects, he's added shell casings, mechanics tools and even car parts between the wood slabs. A clear epoxy over the materials preserves the objects inside the tabletop.

Due to the amount of epoxy products used at Bank-

Banking Barns/continued on next page

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A black and white advertisement for Schomackers Home Galleries. At the top, the company name 'SCHOMACKERS HOME GALLERIES' is written in a large, bold, serif font. Below the name is a horizontal line. Underneath the line, there are four square icons, each containing a different home-related item: a rug, a mattress, a refrigerator, and a carpet roll. To the right of each icon is a list of services or products offered in that category. The services are: 'CARPET & DUCT CLEANING', 'MATTRESSES PILLOWS SHEETS WEIGHTED BLANKETS', 'APPLIANCES & REPAIRS LG SPEED QUEEN GE FRIGIDAIRE', and 'CARPET LUXURY VINYL TILE LUXURY VINYL PLANK FEATURING KARNDEAN DESIGN FLOORS'. At the bottom, there is a dark horizontal bar with the text 'DOWNTOWN LUVERNE | SCHOMACKERS.COM | 507-227-2183' in a white, sans-serif font.

SCHOMACKERS HOME GALLERIES

The logo for Schomackers Home Galleries is a stylized illustration of a house. The house has a red roof with a white 'S' on it. The house is divided into four square windows. The top-left window shows a red rug, the top-right window shows a red carpet roll, the bottom-left window shows a red refrigerator, and the bottom-right window shows a red carpet square.

A small square icon with a white background, containing a red rug.

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A small square icon with a white background, containing a red mattress.

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A small square icon with a white background, containing a red refrigerator.

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Banking Barns/
continued from page 12B

“What’s so cool is the response you get from people — it makes it all worth it.”

— *Justin Kerkhove-Brandt, Banking Barns in Hills*

ing Barns, the business is a distributor of Maus products that includes both the table top and deep pour products for DIYers.

Banking Barns will also mill, grind and flatten wood slabs for DIYers. “We have all the machines to do all the work a sawmill does, and we end up selling wood work, milling it down for individuals or running custom cutting jobs,” Kerkhove-Brandt said.

At the recent Sioux Falls Home Show, a more natural-looking spray finish was shown to customers on a finished tabletop. A spray booth at Banking Barns allows for a faster drying time versus poured epoxy finishes. The matte finish look and Kerkhove-Brandt’s attention to detail was noticed by customers. “Every day after the (March) show, I have had an order,” he said. “Not large ones — fireplace mantels are the most common — I am surprised with the economy that we are in that there is so much building going on,” he said.

Conference tables and desks have been popular requests recently with custom-made metal bases. Kerkhove-Brandt works with a local metal fabricator to bring the customer’s vision of a decorative metal base to life. Customers’ responses to Kerkhove-Brandt’s innovations have been positive, a good feeling for the woodworker.

“Trying to meet your customers’ expectations is the hardest part of the job,” he said. “A lot of the time I get free rein on a project and I’m always thinking as I make it if it’s something that they will want when I’m done.”

A positive reaction is what Kerkhove-Brandt strives to achieve with each project.

“What’s so cool is the response you get from people — it makes it all worth it.”



In the photograph at the top of the page, a project in the making at Banking Barns combines rare Claro walnut with black epoxy for a one-of-kind tabletop.

(Center photo) The finished Claro walnut table with matching bench is complete with fabricated metal legs. Retail cost of the one-of-a-kind set is \$20,000.

(Photo at left) Justin Kerkhove-Brandt with Banking Barns in Hills sprays on an alternative tabletop finish. The conversion varnish finish protects the wood from watermarks in a durable finish with a fast drying time.



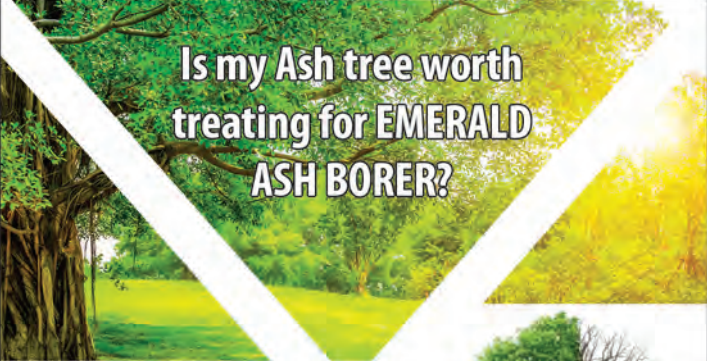
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Bonnema shares thoughts on hydrangeas - ‘Incrediball’ and ‘Bloomstruck’/continued from page 7B

A couple of years ago, I tried another new mop head variety named Bloomstruck, and that one made my happy list.

It’s a compact size and produces blended lavender/purple/white flower heads that are beautiful and give a long season of color.

Smooth leaf hydrangeas

The smooth leaf hydrangeas have been around forever. They have white flowers that age to emerald green and remain on the end of the stem for the entire summer.

We recommend cutting them down to ground level in early spring, and they come back fresh and beautiful every year.

The one drawback is that they are not well mannered; they like to travel. You plant it here and it shows up over there, too.

Anna Belle is the original variety with Incrediball being the new and improved variety, with stronger stems and fuller, larger flower heads, but still white flowers.

A couple of years ago, Invincible Spirit was introduced followed by Invincible Mini Mauvette. Both varieties produced pink flowers, but Mauvette has shorter and stronger stems.

The flowers were good, but the color lasted for about two – maximum three – weeks, which isn’t long enough for me.



Incrediball hydrangeas (below, left) are known for their sturdy stems and large blooms, including some that come in a “silvery-pink’ color. They bloom every year, even in chilly USDA Zone 3, being native to North America. Above, their striking flowers remain attractive through the seasons and they’re popular in landscapes or as cut flowers.

“I am not saying that there is a problem with the tried and true, but neither do I want to miss out on the opportunity of adding a great new introduction to my landscape.”

— George Bonnema, Luverne Horticulturalist, reflecting on new varieties of hydrangeas



Panicle hydrangeas

The Zone 4 panicle hydrangeas were limited to Peegee, which was a good variety and often pruned to a tree form. Its flaw was the flowers were so heavy that the stems were not strong enough to support them.

Then Lime Light was introduced, and this was a true winner. Strong stems with magnificent lime green, cone-shaped flower heads that faded to pink and finally rose at the end of the season. Furthermore, the flowers were persistent through the fall and winter, giving the plant winter interest for the landscape.

Lime Light was a large shrub, but breeders have worked to develop more compact versions: Little Lime, Bobo, Strawberry

Sundae, Baby Lace, Lavalamp Flare, and the list goes on.

These varieties have proven themselves to be worthy in my book. Limelight is also sold in tree form and as such is excellent because of its size and the quality and endurance of the flowers.

General hydrangea care

All hydrangea varieties have some degree of shade tolerance with the smooth leaf varieties being the most tolerant.

They prefer uniformly moist soil and, because of the size of the flower and leaf, if grown in full sun, they will often wilt, which can affect the lasting quality of the flowers.

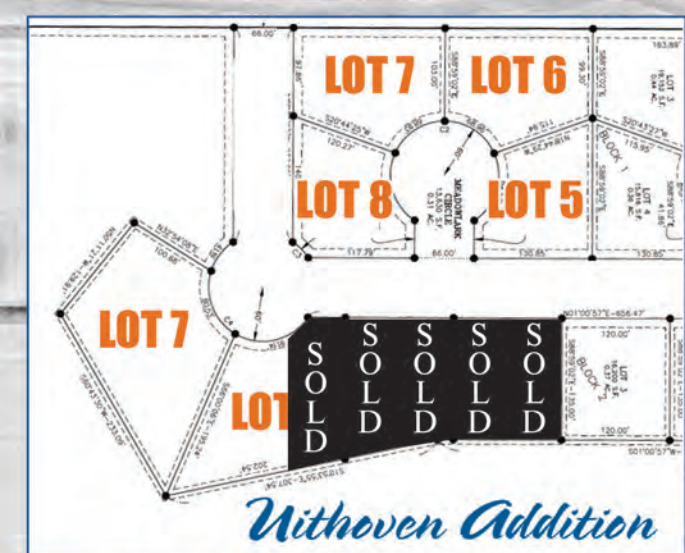
Pruning the smooth leaf varieties means cutting to ground

level every spring. If you want to work with the mop heads, you do no spring pruning until you see the new growth buds developing, then cut back to above that live bud, which is usually low.

The tall panicle varieties take some discipline to keep them in bounds. Depending on the variety, you determine how far to cut them back by looking at how much they grew last year.

Remember that you need to give them room to grow, so if it is the size you want it to be before you prune it, look at how much new growth there was last year and prune accordingly.

Disciplined pruning is a good thing when done correctly.



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