

Price \$r



"IT'S ABOUT THE PEOPLE"

Together | Helpful | Friendly

*We Remember
We Celebrate
We Believe*

Couillardville 2025

Get to Know Your Neighbors!



Mike and Cindy Bittner in their beautiful home they built on Crawford Road

Mike & Cindy Bittner Leading Couillardville 2025 Gathering

Mike and Cindy were the inspiration for focusing our 2025 Couillardville celebration on the current residents of Couillardville. They further volunteered to be the Co-Chairs of this year's event, based upon

the shared commitment by Ken and Erin Sikora to be the Couillardville 2025 North Side Co-Chairs. (North side of the Oconto River of course.) The Sikoras live on the former Matravers farm.

This newsletter is dedicated to getting to know Mike and Cindy and their commitment to our community a little better. The attached is based upon an interview on January 30th, 2025.

My name is **Mike Bittner**. I was born in Chilton, Wisconsin, in 1957. My dad's name was John R. Bittner. His dad was John P. Bittner and my mom's name was Loretta Schmitz.

My dad was a workaholic, and he was also someone that was driven to get ahead in the world. So, we started out when I was a little boy, milking like 30 cows in 1962; he built the first milking parlor in Wisconsin. And I will never forget that because we were on Channel 2 News, because it was such a big deal. When I left that farm in 1983, we were milking close to 300 cows. It was one of the biggest herds in the state. By today's standard, it's not so much, but at that time it was huge. We worked hard every day. It was difficult to get a day off because we had so much to do on the farm. We didn't have any hired help, so we learned to work.

There were nine children. I was the oldest son. I had a sister a year older than me. Then the youngest one was 17 years younger than me. As some of us left home the younger ones had to step in and do the work. We did everything. We didn't have people coming in to do hoof trimming for us or veterinary work, unless it was serious. We just did it ourselves. All of us kids learned it. So right from top to bottom, everybody got a good work ethic. Plus, they learned how to do a lot of things that you wouldn't learn if you didn't grow up on a farm.

We had a lot of fun. The Manitowoc River ran probably about a mile along our frontage, and we practically lived on the river. When we were little kids, we went frog hunting, we went turtle hunting, we went bullhead fishing, and that was our recreation. We learned to hunt and fish from my mom and dad. Mostly from my dad when we were young. And I still love to hunt and fish. That was what we did for fun when I was growing up on the farm.

I worked at Bond Pickle Company. I started there in 1983. I worked my way up. I became the plant manager there. When Bonds was sold, it was sold to Green Bay Foods, and I went to Green Bay and became a manager there. I had basically two jobs my whole life. My whole career was pickles.

Cindy I worked for the County for a while, which got me on track of my career path. After receiving a degree in Human Services I worked for a company in Green Bay running a day

program for people with disabilities. Later, I got promoted into a human resource job. And from that time till the end of my career, I was in human resources. My maiden name was DeHut, and I was born in Oconto, Wisconsin, in 1958. My mom's name was Jean Mayo. My dad was Donald DeHut. My Mother wasn't from this area, but my dad grew up in Oconto.

Not unlike Mike. I grew up on a farm. We had six children in our family, so we all worked for the farm, except for my youngest sister, who is 17 years younger than me. She was like a baby. She's the only one that didn't help with all the farming stuff because my parents retired from farming when she was a child. To make extra money for the farm, we picked pickles every year and sold them to the local pickle plant. This allowed my dad to add on to the farm or buy a piece of equipment. It helped to make the farm be able to support our family. We did lots of things on the farm like picking rocks,

Mike and his brother working on their home farm



making hay, gardening and of course caring for and milking cows. It was a lot of work. But just like Mike, the river wasn't that far away. And when we had moments when my dad wasn't dictating what we were doing, we were down to the river fishing or riding our bikes in the neighborhood.



Cindy and two older brothers on their farm with barn in background.

The entire neighborhood was farming families. Kids from the neighborhood would get together after milking time and play touch football or shoot hoops. We had fun that way.

Our farm was in the town of Little River. We were located not too far from the County A River Bridge. My grandparents had the farm before we lived there. I don't believe it was a farm before that. I believe they were original farmers there. I remember pictures of my grandparents outside on the front porch, and there's a

picture of the road in front of the house, which was like a trail, and that's not that long ago. It's weird to see that so much has changed since then.

When we were out picking pickles, which is a hard job, it's really hot out, and you're not happy being there but my dad would make it fun for us. He would tell us funny stories, sing us funny little songs that he probably shouldn't have taught us. He would make up some competition like who could get to the end of their row first or have the most bags of pickles at the end of the day. Things like that made it fun.

My dad would peel us a cucumber at the end of each pickle row. We would sit on our pails and eat it and just chat. I think we shared some good times together doing that, even though it was hard work.

Mike We both graduated from Oshkosh. That's where we met. I went to farm with my dad immediately following that. That situation didn't really work out so we moved up to the Oconto area and we bought a house on Highway 22. Then I started hunting around the area, and I hunted on this very land that we live in now. They closed the highway one summer to do repairs, and it was so quiet. When they opened it back up again, we both said we can't stand it here anymore. It's so loud. We bought our current property at Carl Crawford's auction because I wanted to have a place to hunt. It

made sense for us to later build a house on that property, so that's exactly what we did. We built our house in 2002.

Cindy I think things have evolved over the time we've been here. People have come; people have gone. The neighborhood has changed periodically. I think it's a good situation now. We know most of our fellow neighbors and at times we help each other out. We sometimes get together with some of the neighbors for walks or campfires or picnics. I think there's several of them that I could call and say, Hey, I need help with this or that and they would help us out. I think that's the relationship we have with many of them and it's nice.

Mike Well, I noticed a big change in our perception after we both retired because suddenly, we didn't have to go to work in the dark, come home in the dark. Suddenly, we were here, and we were able to do stuff every day, and we really developed some good relationships with some of the neighbors around the area, and I really enjoyed that. Some neighbors will call up, Hey, you want to come for coffee this morning? and we'll go there, or they come here. You want to have dinner tonight? We will do that with them. We never could do that before when we were working because we simply didn't have time.

Cindy Yeah, it does make a big difference that we have a lot freer

time. And we got a group here that we mingle with, and then there's a group down over by the river we mingle with. And sometimes they mingle together because we'll invite them all over for a campfire. Everybody who wants to come brings a chair and we enjoy each other's company.

How do your children feel about Couillardville?

Mike My older son, Kale has never lived here. He had gone to college already by the time we moved to our current location. My younger son, Tyler, lived here with us for a year. He loves it here. He loves to be able to go to the river and go fishing and just walk out back door and walk in the woods and go hunting. However, we were just visiting him the other day where he lives in Jackson, Wyoming, and he said to me, "I can never picture myself going back to Wisconsin to live", because he found his own place that's maybe a little better than here in his eyes, at least. I don't know if either one of them would ever come back here to live. However, my older son, Kale just got done building a house on the river down on Steelhead Run. He operates it as a vacation property when he isn't visiting. He likes to come here for short visits, but he doesn't want to stay here forever.

Cindy Kale likes to visit and have the regular experience of

Wisconsin versus being in California all the time.

It works out we're right close. If he has problems at his vacation property, we just go over there to help him out. He spends maybe a month a year here. He did quite a bit when he was building, but now things are running smooth, so it won't be as much.

Mike This place is "home" for both of our sons, and I think everybody enjoys going "home" sometimes. It's still your home, the area.

What has made Couillardville special?

Mike I guess the people more than anything. We have the neighbors that we really enjoy. Leon, your get together in the summer, we really enjoyed that because we met other neighbors. But it's all about the people around here. It's what makes home-home.

Cindy Yeah, and it takes a while to build relationships. It doesn't happen overnight; you have to work on it. Then sometimes people leave, and you got to start over again. We try to introduce ourselves to new people when they come. It takes work to make those contacts into relationships. Besides just a wave as you pass each other on the road, if you want a little more, you have got to work at it. We like entertaining people. We like to have people

around, so we do initiate a lot of get togethers. Sometimes we wish other people would, too, but they don't always, and that's okay. That can be our role. I think everybody enjoys it when we arrange get togethers. So, we will continue to do that.

Your hopes for Couillardville 2025?

Mike Well, I really enjoy meeting new people, and I really enjoy knowing about everybody around here and a little bit about them. So, what I'm really hoping for is to meet some other people that I haven't met yet and maybe develop a little bit closer relationship to them so that we all know our neighbors.

Cindy I like to live in a world in which people are kind to each other. The more you get to know people the easier it is to really see them as just another human like yourself. We find we are not so different from each other. It's good to know a little bit about your neighbors and to recognize that sometimes they might need help, or you might need help, and we can all do that for each other. It's important to be kind and generous with each other.

Mark Your Calendar
COUILLARDVILLE 2025
August 16, 2025
Meadow Brook Farm