

Steve Lucas, CEO

WHAT A LONG AND STRANGE TRIP IT HAS BEEN

It is the time of year when many of us look back at the year we've just ended. Here at Scenic Rivers, we have traditionally done the same. Who could have imagined that Covid-19, something none of us had heard of a year ago, would so completely change our lives? Many of our members have experienced lock-downs, quarantine, disarray, fear, sorrow, and loss. Our offices and staff were not immune, and while 2020 sure had many changes, some things remained the same.

It was our goal in 2020, as it is every day, to keep your lights on. Our priority to maintain your power is a driving force in our daily work and long-range planning. Serving our members with consistent electricity through regular maintenance of the 3,500-plus miles of line takes all 35 members of our staff. If you never lack power, then we succeeded. After all, you had more than enough things to worry about this year. We are happy to serve you each and every day, and our commitment to our members is not something we are going to change.

Each year we also hold our annual meeting, and 2020 was no different. We met virtually, but we successfully held board elections, reported on the financial status of the cooperative, and we awarded 52 scholarships, valued at \$1,000 each, to the graduating seniors of our members. Awarding these funds each year is something the board of directors looks forward to. While the directors could not personally award the scholarships, their hope for each student's success is not diminished. The directors read each and every thank you note and we celebrate the success of our young adults. We will do the same in 2021.

Annually the board of directors retires capital credits. 2020 was again, no different, and we were happy to inform

the membership in October that \$1.5 million was retired. Current members received their funds as bill credits and past members received their funds via checks per our bylaws. Capital credits are unique to cooperatives, which are oper-



ated on a not-for-profit basis. The board of directors fulfills the third Cooperative Principle (Members' Economic Participation) through the annual distribution of capital credits—something that will not change.

2020 also brought a renewed com-

mitment to caring for our local communities as a result of increased need. SREC, through Operation Round Up, met this need by donating over \$48,000 to area food banks, fire departments, EMTs, hospitals and clinics. Annually, Operation Round Up has supported our communities for many, many years. The board of directors meets to discuss the needs and awards funding as deemed most appropriate based on our bylaws. The SREC staff adopts a local family during the Christmas season and this year was no different. Our commitment to the communities we live in is a principle that remains.

So, while the year we are now looking at in our rear-view mirrors was strange, there was so much that was the same. Our commitment to our members, our communities, and our principles will not change. We are happy you are a member here in 2021 as we look forward to serving you.

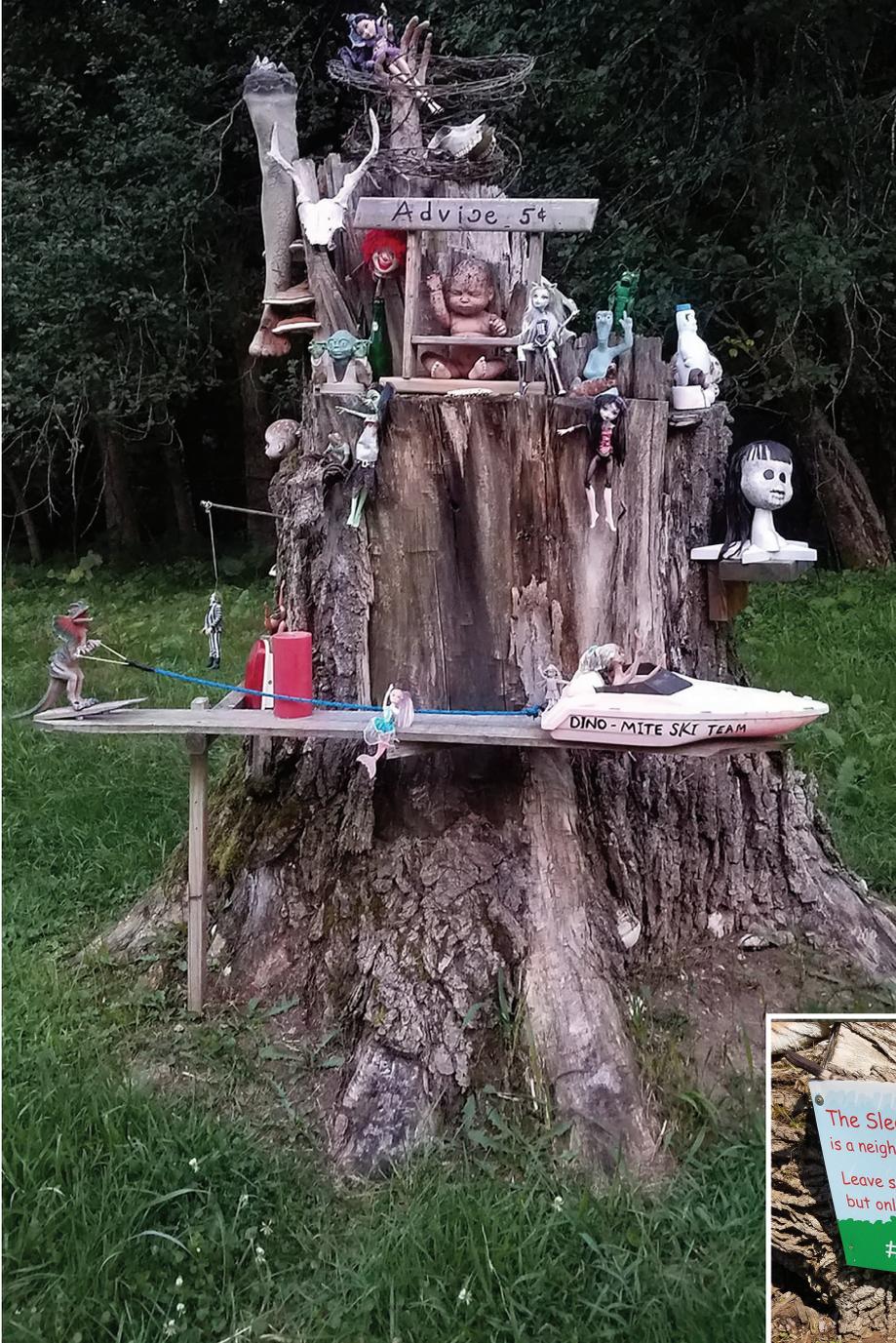


MEMBER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

January's winning photo in SREC's 2021 Member Photo Contest was taken by Mark Steffensmeier of Bloomington. All winning photos are featured in our 2021 Member Photo Calendar.

UPCYCLED ART

Creativity is a community effort at The Sleepy Hollow Stump



Those of us who were born and have lived in the Driftless region often forget, or simply do not realize, what an amazing geographic region this is. As we travel around our communities, we see the splendor of nature throughout the seasons, and the cycle of renewal is apparent to us. We will regularly see the live creatures of the woodlands including Bald Eagles like those pictured in our photo of the month, and we may or may not realize that for much of the nation, these sightings are not common. We may turn a corner and find a scene that is straight out of a nature book, but in northern Crawford County, you may turn a corner and come upon a neighborhood art project that should bring a smile to your face.

The Sleepy Hollow Art project is the ever-evolving, whimsical creation of Martha Querin-Schultz and her anonymous neighbors. The cottonwood tree stump became a focal point where Martha began adding items, but we're getting ahead of ourselves. More about that later on.

Martha and her husband, Steve, moved from Cottage Grove in 2014, having been continually drawn to the Driftless Area. They had farmed and milked on Steve's family farm until Cottage Grove started becoming crowded and Martha retired. The Driftless region in rural Gays Mills reminded Steve of the Cottage Grove he knew as a child—an area of the state where neighbors know each other by name and where the pace of life is just a little bit slower.

Like many retirees, Martha had some ideas about the things she wanted to do with her time. As a result of taking some art classes prior to retirement, Martha had discovered a love for photography, specifically painting the black and white





Martha Querin-Schultz, the creative mind behind the Sleepy Hollow Art project (opposite page) practices “upcycled art” at her Crawford County home.

photographs that she enjoyed developing. She found that she could see just where color was needed on the photos, which brought the photos to life in a new way. From there, she worked with other mediums and discovered her passion—upcycled art projects.

What is upcycled art? Well, according to Google it is “[t]he practice of reusing and recycling found objects to create new works of art—upcycling—is a movement that’s steadily grown across the country. ... It’s a way of preserving the environment and creating new art.” So, when a friend gave her some vintage patterns, Martha created her first shadow box using materials she already had and gifted the creation back to her friend.

As more friends became aware of Martha’s art, she created many gifts and one-of-a-kind pieces, some of which commemorated trips and events for her friends. Eventually, there were works of art throughout their home and Steve suggested that they simply couldn’t keep them all and from that, her small business was born. Martha’s Elegant Decay is the process of deconstructing and reconstructing to create something new and beautiful out of something old or discarded. All of the frames, mats, glass, and background prints that Martha uses in her artwork are used or “pre-owned.”

Recently, Martha received a three-ring

binder of patterns from the 1930s. “They are just spectacular,” she stated. The vintage patterns will be paired with frames Martha already has as well as other items, creating one-of-a-kind shadow boxes from what very well may have ended up in the dump. Martha is careful to cut the patterns apart by hand and she preserves the original envelopes, which she attaches to the back of each shadow box.

The binder also included handmade paper doll clothing. Many “girls” my age and older will remember with fondness the paper dolls that we gently dressed and positioned while playing. Martha creates shadow boxes using these vintage paper dolls and other whimsical items to bring the playthings to life again. While many of the individual pieces within each shadow box are vintage and even decaying, Martha is able to give them new purpose.

During her growth as an artist, Martha continued to be drawn to the outdoors—specifically, to the natural way that items decay. She would take note of items left on the land around their home. When traveling she would often photograph the decaying structures and has boxes of photos to show for it. She found that the slow decaying of buildings and items had an inherent elegance or beauty for her. Then, the cottonwood tree fell during a storm in 2016.

After the township had removed the tree from the roadway, Steve intended to remove the stump, but Martha had other ideas. Inspired by the Isla de las Muñecas (Island of the Dolls) in Mexico, an island filled with hundreds of hanging, decom-

posing dolls, Martha set out to create a space where she could showcase another love of hers, creepy dolls. Martha is a firm believer in the saying “Halloween is not a holiday—it’s a lifestyle.” She enjoys creating quirky and fun objects with discarded baby dolls and “spooky” stuff. Showcasing the old dolls has become an ongoing art project now, with friends, neighbors, and strangers adding pieces to the stump and nearby log.

Over 50 percent of the items now on display at the Sleepy Hollow Art project are from anonymous visitors. Martha and Steve cannot see the neighborhood project from their home, but they can hear the laughter and joyful sounds that travel through the valley from visitors. Some come on their UTVs as the site is on the county trail. Some are one-time visitors, and others return time and again to add new items.

Martha, like many artists, is never done and has plans to expand the neighborhood project in 2021. The “Museum of Ordinary Things” will be open to the public soon. It will be a place where visitors will be encouraged to leave new items and where Martha hopes they will sign the guest book. Art can create a lot of responses, but Martha hopes that her creation will evoke a smile, a giggle, or even a full belly laugh from time to time.

You can find Martha online at elegantdecay.weebly.com, or take a drive along our lines onto Sleepy Hollow Road in rural Gays Mills. You may just stumble upon the ever-evolving community art project too.—*Judy Mims*



Martha Querin-Schultz creates one-of-a-kind shadow boxes out of “previously owned” items like paper dolls.



New Year's Energy Savings Resolutions



Resolutions You Can Afford to Keep!

It costs nothing to...

- Set the water heater temperature to 120 degrees.
- Run only full loads in the washer or dishwasher.
- Turn off lights when you leave a room.
- Unplug electronics and chargers not in use.
- Adjust your thermostat when going to bed or leaving the home.

Spend a few dollars to save a lot more ...

- Get a water heater blanket.
- Use a programmable thermostat.
- Seal air leaks around windows, doors, plumbing, etc.
- Replace regular bulbs with CFL or LED light bulbs.
- Use a smart power strip for electronics.

To generate more energy savings, visit SafeElectricity.org

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Replace standard power strips with advanced power strips to save energy. Advanced power strips look like ordinary power strips, but they have built-in features that are designed to reduce the amount of energy used by standby electronics that consume energy even when they're not in use (also known as phantom load).

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) estimates that the average home loses \$200 annually to energy wasted by phantom load.

Source:
www.nrel.gov



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