

# Changing Times

## *Times manager Gauger to retire at year's end*

By Debbie Foss  
Times Staff

In an interview about his impending retirement, Trempealeau County Times's general manager Chuck Gauger was true to character: He came prepared with clear timelines, replied to questions cheerfully and then excused himself to go hunting.

"I need to shower, I'm going muzzleloader deer hunting," Gauger said. The shower, he hastened to add, was to wash away the scents of civilization. He then paid for lunch, after noting the interviewer was slow with her wallet.

Gauger's retirement at the end of the year means that for the first time since 1939, a Gauger won't be involved with newspapers in Trempealeau County. From Gauger's grandparents, Albert and Elsie Gauger, operating an Arcadia newspaper, to Chuck Gauger's work to merge newspapers into the Trempealeau County Times, the family has been instrumental in newspaper and shopper development in the county.

"I decided to try the newspaper for a year" upon graduation from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in 1975, Gauger said. "And I found out I love advertising."

On his path to helping shape the fate of community newspapers in the county, Gauger did it all. He carried newspapers and shoppers to newsstands and the post

office. He sold advertising. He helped out on a web press when needed. He took photos and processed photos. He billed the monthly accounts. And he paid the bills.

Working with businesses on advertising was "selling something real."

"I love seeing the benefits of what good advertising can do," Gauger said. "I love planning out our approach. A good advertising representative has a partnership with people. If the ads we're selling aren't effective, we need to do something else."

Gauger's grandparents started the Arcadia News, later combining it with the Arcadia Leader into the Arcadia News-Leader. Gauger's father, Robert, bought the Whitehall Times in 1952. Albert Gauger helped at the Whitehall paper until his death in 1969.

Gauger helped establish the Tabvertiser — later named the Tri-County Tab before merging with the Arrow Shopper — in 1977 as a weekly free shopping guide. At the time, the Tabvertiser carried ads, coordinated by Gauger, from the Whitehall Times, Arcadia News-Leader, Blair Press, Galesville Republican and Independence News-Wave.

In 1984, Gauger became general manager for the Whitehall Times, and continued as advertising manager. He merged the Independence News-Wave into the Whitehall paper in



Chuck Gauger will retire at the end of the year ending his family's 80-year run of working in the newspaper business in Trempealeau County. (Times photograph by Andrew Dannehy)

2002. "I waited five years for that deal," Gauger said. "It opened a whole new world of accounts."

In 2010, he said he sold News Publishing Company an idea, that of buying newspapers in Galesville, Whitehall and Arcadia and combining them into the Trempealeau County Times. The Black Earth-based company hired Gauger as general manager of the merged newspapers.

The emergence of the Trempealeau County Times initially caused some concern in Arcadia in particular, Gauger said. "I heard a lot of 'we don't care what's

happening in Whitehall,'" Gauger said. "But I was convinced that this was the best way to preserve a strong local newspaper."

The transition from the three papers to one — and the move from broadsheet to the current tabloid format — occurred with just one missed edition. "It was a crazy start."

Gauger said he will miss the work of newspapers, and the people.

"We have a great staff right now (at the Trempealeau County Times and the Arrow Shopper)," Gauger said. "There is a chemistry and connectivity that is special."

At four years at the helm,

the Times's managing editor, Andrew Dannehy, just exceeded the tenure of the Times's first editor, Scott Thomson. Tracy Marsolek will direct newspaper and shopper operations, while Karla Demaske and Jeni Balk continue to serve advertisers.

"The Times plays two important roles in people's lives," Gauger said. "First is to tell our readers the who what and where of what is happening. Our second role is emotional, we need to reflect the interests and passions of our communities."

Community newspapers, he said, are indispensable. "We place too much atten-

tion on news at the national level," Gauger said. "We need to focus on what's going on in our communities. That has the greatest impact on quality of life issues."

With his retirement, Gauger may put to greater use his degree in natural resources as he hunts and fishes and, with his wife Kathy, helps manage 370 acres owned by the couple and others. Though an avid outdoorsman, he said the best thing about his university days was that he met his wife. "No doubt the best thing that ever happened to me."

The Gaugers have two daughters, Amanda and Elizabeth.