

# Ridderbusch retires from News-Review

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BY ERIC JOHNSON  
NEWS-REVIEW ASST. EDITOR

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Veteran Vilas County News-Review Editor Gary Ridderbusch has called a “-30-” retirement end to his award-winning community journalism career.

“Thirty-six years of Monday deadlines — it’s time for somebody else to take over the reins,” said Ridderbusch, whose last day on the job was Monday, Dec. 6.

News-Review staff feted Ridderbusch, 62, at a retirement lunch in his honor last Thursday.

“We’ve so appreciated the quality and vision Gary has brought to the paper for the past 36 years,” said Roberta Cohen, vice president of Delphos, Ohio-based News-Review parent DHI Media. “I want to thank him for his dedication and his focus on making the Vilas County News-Review the No. 1 non-daily in the state of Wisconsin. It’s really his leadership that did that. In his understated, quiet way he has



*GARY RIDDERBUSCH*

provided tremendous leadership on the editorial integrity of the Vilas County News-Review. I wish him all the best in his retirement.”

A native of Abbotsford and an avid lifelong hunter and fisherman, Class of 1983 UW-Madison School of Agriculture alumnus Ridderbusch

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# Retire: Ridderbusch started career in '85

earned a double major in natural resources management and agricultural journalism, originally with an eye toward landing a job as a park manager or public information officer with the Department of Natural Resources. At the time, Ridderbusch figured adding a five-class double major in ag journalism would “open up some more opportunities for a job.”

It did indeed. Between Christmas and New Year's 1984, Ridderbusch interviewed with then-editor Kurt Krueger, now publisher, for an assistant editor position with the Vilas County News-Review.

Coming on board in April 1985, Ridderbusch found the News-Review a good career fit, so much so he never found a reason to venture elsewhere. Ridderbusch was elevated to editor in January 2010 when Krueger succeeded Byron McNutt as publisher.

“I've enjoyed being part of the heartbeat of the community,” he said. “You're at every event, you're recording what's happening at the city council meetings, you're reporting on what the chamber's doing. Through the newspaper, you're the historical record keeper of the community. You put out the best product you can for your community. It's pretty amazing.”

For Ridderbusch, the journalistic trade has always been a fresh, invigorating experience.

“It's the same product, but yet it isn't,” he noted. “The cool part of it is your product changes every week as you're reporting on different news stories. It's constantly changing — and you meet a ton of people. The number of people you meet and form relationships with in the course of a year is pretty amazing. And working at a small weekly newspaper you do everything, you get it all.”

Ridderbusch inherited a rich journalistic legacy from the News-Review's Satran family and Krueger, and helped carry it forward under new owner DHI Media in 1985.

“It's been a great newspaper to work for, a quality paper,” he said. “A lot of



Editor Gary Ridderbusch, left, and Publisher Kurt Krueger hold the 2020 Weekly Newspaper of the Year presented by the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. —STAFF PHOTO

subscribers. A lot of support from the business community. A lot of recognition in terms of dozens and dozens of WNA (Wisconsin Newspaper Association) and NNA (National Newspaper Association) plaques on our walls. It's been pretty rewarding, and part of that's because of a great team, including good, experienced people in assistant editors Eric Johnson and Michelle Drew. We have a good staff that takes pride in the product that they put out every week, and the Delphos Herald has carried on the quality newspaper legacy that the Satrans started.”

While looking forward to having more time to dedicate to fishing and hunting, Ridderbusch said he will miss the dynamic vibrancy of the newspaper business, particularly the relationships formed with co-workers, many spreading out over 25, 30, 35 years, long tenures that he said speaks volumes about an “enjoyable” and team-based “good place to work.”

“I'll miss the staff, coming to work every day,” he said. “We have a lot of good conversations here on every topic you'd want to discuss. That's going to be missed — that

office atmosphere with a lot of good people.”

Krueger said Ridderbusch has left an indelible mark on the newspaper which has been named the Wisconsin large weekly Newspaper of the Year five times since 2011.

“The truth is, Gary Ridderbusch was one of the best things that ever happened to the Vilas County News-Review,” Krueger reflected. “He brought talent, commitment, a great work ethic and a friendly, easygoing demeanor that was a perfect fit for our staff and the communities we serve. Gary and I were pretty much on the same page when it came to the editorial content that should fill a community newspaper.”

“Great photojournalism has always been one of our strong suits,” said Krueger. “And with the backing of a solid company and help from a great staff filled with people who strived for quality and excellence, we turned the News-Review into a publication that won hundreds of state and national awards — including General Excellence honors from the National Newspaper Association in three of the last four years. That's not to mention News-

paper of the Year in 2020 from the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. The News-Review's quality and consistency peaked in the last 11 years under Gary's leadership and direction. He retires at the top of his game, and it's a well-deserved retirement. He will be sorely missed on a day-to-day basis, but he's promised to be a future contributor of photos and stories. And that we are very happy about.”

Ridderbusch's wife, Sue, retired two years ago after 30-plus years teaching English with the Three Lakes School District. Ridderbusch said he and his wife have plans to camp and travel more and make more frequent visits to see their two adult children — daughter, Carly, in Arizona and son, Taylor, in Michigan. A “Bucket List” retirement travel destination for Ridderbusch is Alaska.