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OskaLucid presents 'The Rivals'

CHANNING RUCKS
STAFF WRITER

OSKALOOSA — Oskaloosans are getting a chance to take a step back in time this week thanks to OskaLucid's 15-person production of "The Rivals" at the Woodhaven Amphitheater.

With its idyllic outdoor setting — like something straight out of Shakespeare — the Woodhaven Amphitheater is the perfect place to enjoy a bit of classical theater. Refurbished last year and complete with new benches thanks to local Eagle Scout Taylor Drost, the venue will have yet another chance to shine

this week when OskaLucid performs 18th-century playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan's "The Rivals," a comedy that explores themes of love and romance, mistaken identity and societal conventions.

OskaLucid founding member Greg Ewart, who is directing this year's play, says that he wanted to continue with the theme of classical theater that began with the group's production of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" last summer.

"We did Shakespeare last summer," Ewart says. "I wanted to remain within the classical theater realm, whilst also going outside of Shakespeare."

Ewart describes "The Rivals" as a romantic comedy of errors, containing all the necessary elements for a proper summer romp.

"The Rivals' is a story about three romantic rivals. Depending on which character you ask, it would be four, because one of them has a second, secret identity," he says. "It's a story about a lot of people who really just have been made very silly by the conventions of the time in the kind of upper crust of England, when it was written."

"Throughout the play, there's a lot of confusion," Ewart adds.

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Channing Rucks/The Herald

Two actors rehearse a sword fight from OskaLucid's upcoming production of "The Rivals."



Photos by Ayrton Breckenridge | The Herald

Brothers Robert (left) and Jeff DeRooi stand by their family's Century Farm designation at the DeRooi family farm.

THE DEROOIS: WHAT A FARM IS WORTH

Jeff and Robert DeRooi carry on their father's fight against the South Central Regional Airport

CHANNING RUCKS
STAFF WRITER

Editor's note: This is the fourth of a five-part series on the status of the proposed South Central Regional Airport and the farmland where the government wants to build it.

A farm can record history as well as any book. The years gone by are evident in a bit of tiling here, the remains of an old livestock barn there. A tour of the property can be a showcase of all the hands that have worked the land over its years of production.

For the DeRooi family, who work what is now a 700-acre farm west of town, their family's Century Farm tells a story that started with Jan DeRooi, a young immigrant who journeyed from the Netherlands to Mahaska County in the mid- to late-1800s. Four generations later, now in the hands of his great-grandsons, the land Jan farmed still records his family's history.

Jeff DeRooi, Jan's great-grandson, estimates that his great-grandfather immigrated to the United States in the latter half of the 19th century. As Jeff remembers the story, Jan came to this country as a young man and made a living working in agriculture.

"Initially, I think, he came over here when he was in his early 20s from Holland with his cousin. They started, I think, working for farmers just as hired hands, and then his cousin got homesick and went



Jan DeRooi originally called the property "Elm Home Farm" in honor of the trees that used to grow there.



Today the DeRooi farm is used to grow row crops, hay and fat cattle. In John DeRooi's day it was a dairy operation with 40-50 holsteins.

back," Jeff says.

Upon arriving in Mahaska County, Jan bought a 200-acre farm on contract and grew potatoes to help pay it off. After buying the property in 1898, Jan and his wife,

Wilhelmina, built a life for their family on the land and eventually named it "Elm Home Farm," after all the trees that used to grow on

See **FARM** on A2



Provided photo

Lucy Borkowski has been raising awareness of the PLN genetic mutation in Dutch communities, including Pella and Sioux Center. She is pictured (from left to right) at Thursdays in Pella with Jessi Galligan, Carol Jansen and Dean Jansen.

Dordt undergrad raises awareness for genetic mutation in Dutch population

CHANNING RUCKS
STAFF WRITER

PELLA — A Dordt University student researcher is raising awareness about a genetic mutation that causes heart problems in people of Dutch descent.

Lucy Borkowski just wanted to complete a summer research project as a supplement to her undergraduate biology degree at Dordt University in Sioux Center. She never expected that her work would lead to her joining an international effort to educate the public about a genetic mutation capable of changing people's lives.

Working under professors Tony Jelsma and Deb Bomgaars, Borkowski undertook a project focused on raising awareness of the PLN genetic mutation, common in people of Dutch, and particularly of Frisian, descent. It was supposed to be an eight-week project to raise awareness of the mutation in the heavy Dutch population in Sioux Center, but Borkowski's success took it further.

"It was so successful," Borkowski says. "We started making a lot of noise over here in the Northwest Iowa corner [from] the PLN Heart Foundation, which is an organization based in the Netherlands. I got in contact with them while I was doing this project over here at Dordt, and they were interested in what I was doing, and they decided to hire me as a part-time researcher-slash-communication coordinator."

Now working for an international organization, Borkowski's work focuses on PLN advocacy, reaching out to individuals and the media to connect potential carriers of the mutation with medical professionals who can help.

In layman's terms, the PLN genetic mutation causes an excess of calcium ions in the heart, forcing the cardiac muscle to work harder than usual to keep up with the

imbalance, resulting in a thickening of the heart cell walls. Symptoms can present as chest pain, difficulty breathing, decreased tolerance for exercise and heart palpitations. The mutation can cause heart failure, atrial fibrillation, tachycardia or sudden cardiac death. The earliest onset of symptoms is usually in the mid-20s, while the latest is around the mid-40s. In rare cases, individuals can be asymptomatic.

The Frisian strain of the mutation, which Borkowski says occurred more than 700 years ago, was first discovered in 2010 by Litsa Kranias, director of cardiovascular biology at the University of Cincinnati. Worldwide, it's estimated that 20,000 people are affected by the mutation, with 15,000 located in the Netherlands. The rest are located across the globe in countries including the United States and Canada.

Borkowski says she has received questions about what can be done to prevent the mutation. Unfortunately, because it's genetic, it's also unpreventable.

"It'll be passed down through family members," Borkowski says. "And since it's autosomal dominant, that means there's a 50 percent chance that if someone in your family has it, that you can pass it along to [your] children, and it's not sex-linked, so it'll affect men and women the same. It doesn't prefer one or the other."

There's currently no cure for the condition, but there are treatments available that can lessen symptoms like chest pain, difficulty breathing, decreased tolerance for exercise and heart palpitations.

"One of the biggest things I'm trying to work on is trying to get people connected with genetic testing," Borkowski says. "That's the only way to know if you have it, is to receive a genetic test. People that should receive a genetic test

See **DORDT** on A2

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Abreu sails to \$8,000 All Stars score at Knoxville.

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25 years ago today in The Herald

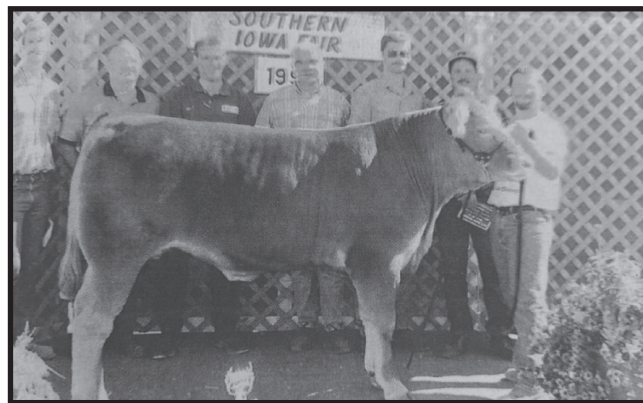
Week of August 1, 1998

NEWS

A cutter above the rest. Levi Taylor, 17, of Oskaloosa, won fifth place at the National Finals Rodeo in Colorado. His rodeo field of expertise is in cutting. Taylor is a North Mahaska High senior who was also named to the 1998 Wrangler All-Star Rodeo Team.

SPORTS

Mahaska Nationals win state title. Jack Sodak raced home on a wild pitch with two out in the bottom of the seventh to give the Mahaska National tournament team a 5-4 win over Urbandale at the championship in the state Little League tournament. Tyler Fenton pitched 5 ? innings before Brett Swim came on to finish off Urbandale.



Choice steer. Brian Chamra's 1,325 pound steer won the 1998 Grand Champion Market Beef prize at this year's Southern Iowa Fair. The steer, "Puff Daddy," was sold at Friday's auction for \$1.07 per pound to a group made up of five businesses. Pictured from left to right are: Irv De Bruin of De Bruin Trenching; Leland Denburger and Jay Kime of Farmers Cooperative Exchange of Oskaloosa and Pella; Jim Lorber of Gattton Realty; Rich De Bruin of De Bruin Electricity; and Tom Jackson, the Mahaska County Farm Bureau president. Holding the steer is Chamra.

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FARM

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the property.

Jan died young of a brain aneurysm in 1911, passing the generational torch on to his son, Joe, who would see the farm through the worst economic crisis that Americans have ever seen, preserving it for generations to follow.

"My grandfather, Joe, took over," Jeff says. "He went through the [Great Depression], of course, and was able to hold on to [the farm]. And then my dad, he was born in 1933."

Jeff's father, John DeRooi, served in the military in the early 1950s. He farmed alongside his own father for many years before finally taking the operation over when Joe retired.

The farm kept John plenty busy. He ran a dairy operation, eventually milking 40-50 Holstein cows along with his son Robert. He also grew corn, beans and hay. It was hard, time-consuming work that didn't stop just for holidays or special occasions.

"I remember dad saying the day he got married, it was hotter than blazes — and they didn't have air conditioning in those churches back then — but he was baling hay up to an hour or two before the wedding, and then he quick threw on his 'duds and went and got married," Jeff says.

John and his wife, Gladys, went on to have five children: Valerie, Kent, Keith, Robert and Jeff.

Farming is intense work that requires a lifetime of commitment. For the DeRoois though, it's a way of life that has been instilled in them since they were children.

The family stopped the dairy operation in the early 2000s, and today the farm is used to raise row crops, hay and fat cattle. It's also been used to raise hogs in years past. Working the land is what the DeRoois know. It's in their blood. It's their family's legacy.

"I think [legacy] is what drove each generation. We grew up [farming] right alongside our father," Jeff says.

And it's not just more than a hundred years of family legacy that makes the DeRooi farm so valuable. The DeRooi farm has a Corn Suitability Rating of 89.44, making it some of the best farmland in Iowa. The state itself has an average CSR of 68 and is widely considered to be the home of some of the best farmland in the world, according to the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Office.

With Iowa's famous "black gold" soil rich beneath their feet, the DeRoois say that farming their land is a way of life that they wouldn't give up for the world.

"I wouldn't do anything else," Jeff says. "We were taught side by side with him, and I think that's how they all are ... It's changed a lot since my great-grandfather came over here, compared to today, but we have



Ayrton Breckenridge | The Herald

Robert DeRooi holds a photograph of Elm Home Farm taken sometime between 1942 and 1946.

to grow with the changes. But as far as just the ethic of day-in-day-out farming, that was instilled in us."

It's an ethic they've worked hard to pass on to the next generation, in spite of all the challenges they've faced along the way.

Every farmer routinely faces drought, fluctuating markets, commodity shortages, storm damage and more in the day-to-day work of producing food. For the DeRoois, however, the greatest threat to their family farm has come not in the form of environmental disaster or a fickle global economy, but in the plan to build a new airport in Mahaska County, using their Century Farm for part of the land.

It was in John's time running the DeRooi farm that the family first became aware of the South Central Regional Airport Agency's plan to build an airport on Mahaska County farmland west of Oskaloosa, and that it would require part of their land. His sons, Robert and Jeff, say the knowledge weighed heavily on their father right up until he died two years ago.

"He thought about it all the time, because he was so worried about it," Jeff says.

Now, John's children are left fighting for their land rights; for the privilege of being able to pass the family farm on to the fifth generation of DeRoois who are ready to farm it.

"It's unnecessary," Jeff says. "My dad always said it's a want and not a need."

"It's wasted a lot of money," Robert says. "Us fighting it, them trying to get it through, the planning of it. A lot of money went down the [drain]. But you've got to pay to fight it."

"That's what bothered my dad, is that, you know, we didn't ask for any of this," Jeff says. "We had to jump in and defend ourselves, and lawyer up."

Jeff says his father faithfully attended all the airport meetings that he could, but that the government response from the then-Mahaska County Board of Supervisors and the SCRAA board was disheartening.

"He'd never miss a meeting, and then they'd just pretty much laugh at him, or wouldn't answer any questions. You know, just shrugged it all off as hot air," Jeff says.

"Back then, the supervisors

were different than what they are now," Robert says. "They were all on board [with the airport] then. Then we got them all voted out and that changed."

"Actually, the one that pretty much pushed it through is now a sitting senator in the statehouse," Jeff adds.

Robert says attitudes don't seem to have changed much since his father was attending meetings. He calls his interactions with the government about the airport "one-sided."

"Everybody will tell you that you go to meetings, you talk, you ask questions. They just sit there and look at you, the city council or SCRAA. They never ask a question," Robert says. "We'd speak and ask questions, and they'd just sit there."

"The first few years we asked a lot of questions," he adds. "They never got back [to us] with an answer."

Jeff describes trying to get into contact with government representatives to talk about the airport like a frustrating game of hot potato.

"We would write letters to the [Federal Aviation Administration]. They'd always say 'Contact your local boards and discuss it with them.' Well, they never talked to us, so they just go back and forth," he says.

Jeff and Robert say they have never personally been approached by representatives from SCRAA or other entities about purchasing their land, but that they did receive what Robert refers to as "appraisals," offering them \$15,000 to \$16,000 per acre for the 25 acres of DeRooi land required for the airport. That offer was received as recently as 2022, according to Jeff.

Recently, airport officials have begun trying to shift the runway so that they can offer airspace easements to some of the landowners and reduce

the amount of land needed from the rest. The DeRoois say these overtures haven't changed their minds at all, and that they have no intention of selling their land.

"I have no interest in it, whatsoever," Robert says.

City officials, including Mayor David Krutzfeldt and City Manager Amal Eltahir, claim that a new airport is an essential part of Oskaloosa's economic development.

The DeRoois are skeptical of those claims.

"I'd like to see the research to back it up," Robert says.

"All they're going off of is what the Department of Transportation throws out there, and that they said that airports enhance some economic development in certain cities," Jeff says. "You can find out that there's towns that are flourishing without an airport."

The brothers point out that Oskaloosa already has multiple airports located close by. They also call into question the future demand for an airport in Oskaloosa.

"Airports ain't used like they used to be," Robert says. "People do everything video-conference, and they don't fly ... That all changed with COVID, too. Everybody went to not in-person meetings. They're video-conferencing."

For the DeRoois, the prospect of a new airport holds no appeal when weighed against passing a Century Farm down to the fifth generation of DeRoois to farm it. Their family's roots on their farm go back into the 1800s, and they'd like them to continue as the years go on.

Like Jeff says, they wouldn't do anything else.

Channing Rucks can be reached at crucks@oskyherald.com.

DORDT

CONTINUED FROM A1

is if they have a family history of cardiac conditions, and then if they are from a Dutch descent originating in the Friesland area.

"But people do migrate, move around a little bit, so you don't have to be [from] Friesland to have PLN. If you have family history of people passing away kind of from a younger age from unknown cardiac conditions, that would be an indication that you could or should receive a genetic test."

Borkowski is working with Invitae, a global genetic screening company that offers at-home testing for people who suspect they might have the PLN mutation. Individuals can also visit a cardiologist or genetic counselor to be screened for the mutation. Borkowski is continuing her efforts to connect with doctors in the Pella and Des Moines areas, and notify them of the PLN research and its relevance to the local Dutch community.

Insurance companies may cover some of the cost to get genetic testing for the mutation, and if one person tests positive for PLN, Invitae will provide free testing for the rest of their family members.

Borkowski says she has had difficult days when people discover that because they have PLN, their life expectancy has been significantly reduced. She has also met individuals with PLN who are asymptomatic and have lived their entire lives none the wiser. The good news is that, through her advocacy work, Borkowski has been able to raise awareness and identify more than

30 cases of PLN in North America.

"Before I started, there were less than 15 people in North America that were identified with PLN," she says. "As of May of this past year, we had about 50 people identified, so definitely more people are aware of it now that I've started, and it's usually like once I find one person that has it, it's just a matter of recruiting and finding out if the rest of their family members have PLN. Once you find one, you just trace it back in a family."

Recently, Borkowski presented information about PLN at the Pella Historical Society, hoping to educate the predominantly Dutch population about the mutation. Pella Historical's Assistant Director Jessi Galligan says the message is important for a community that prides itself on Dutch culture.

"We were thrilled to host her and her colleagues here in Pella," Galligan says. "We definitely believe that the message is important to get out in Dutch communities like ours. As a cultural institution in Pella, we find it very important to be a part of things like this, and we are happy to be involved."

For more information about the PLN genetic mutation and genetic testing, visit the PLN Genetic Mutation Awareness Facebook page, connect with Borkowski on LinkedIn or email her at lcyrbrkws19@dordt.edu. For information about home tests offered through Invitae, visit invitae.com/en/providers/test-catalog/test-02251.

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