



Side Tracks

your
express
route to
upcoming
VG events

VGH GBB vs Arcola
01/03 @ 6:00 pm

VGH Frosh BBB @ SJO
01/03 @ 6:00 pm

VGH BBB vs LSA
01/04 @ 6:00 pm

VG Devilettes and Jr
Devilettes @ Charleson
Competition
01/05 times TBA

VGH Frosh BBB @ PBL
01/05 time TBA

VG School resumes
01/08

VGH BBB @ SJO
01/08 at 6:00 pm

VGH GBB @ Chrisman
01/08 at 6:00 pm

VG Booster Club mtg
01/09 @ 6:00 pm

VGH GBB @ Pal-Hut
01/10 at 6:00 pm

VGJH VB vs St Thomas
01/10 @ 6:00 pm

VGH BBB vs CGB
01/11 @ 6:00 pm

VG Devilettes and Jr
Devilettes @ Clinton
Competition
01/12

VGH GBB @ LOVC tourney
at Martinsville
01/12-01/17

VGH BBB @ Judah
01/12 at 12:00 pm

VG PTO Mtg
01/14 @ 6:30 pm

VGJH VB @ Bement
01/15 at 6:00 pm

VGH BBB @ Chrisman
01/15 at 6:00 pm

If you have an upcoming event that you would like to see featured in Sidetracks, email us at vgnews@mchsi.com or call us at 832-4201

Koss: building a better future for VG

By Tony Hooker
Staff Writer

When Bill Koss sees something that needs done, he does it.

It was that way when he was building a career in the construction industry that spanned over forty years, and it's that way today, while he's enjoying retirement. That drive to see things through to completion has compelled him to lend a hand wherever he sees a need. That drive also is why he was recently named Volunteer of the Year by the city of Villa Grove. I recently caught up with Koss to discuss his service to the city, his career, and many other things.

Why are you out there on a blustery afternoon, painting the letters on the front of city hall?

<laughing> I see something that needs done, and I want to try to make something a little better.

Have you always been that way?

Since I've retired I've got more time!

What did you do for a living, and where?

I was a carpenter in Champaign.

Which company did you

work for?

Several, but mostly it was with Carter Construction. We did a lot of work at the Mall and the U of I and places like that.

Did you do apprenticeships, or were you self-taught?

My dad was a carpenter, and when I was old enough to swing a hammer I started in. Then, I went through an apprenticeship.

Did you grow up in Villa Grove? Did you graduate from Villa Grove High?

Yes, in 1973.

I mentioned one of the projects you've worked on, but I see you all the time out at the ball park, down at city hall, over at Harrison Park. You're always doing things like that. Is it more that you want the city to be better, or more that you've got time on your hands, or a combination of the two?

It's because I want it better. There are things that the average person can do and every little bit helps. It's also on account of Cassandra. (Mayor Cassandra Gunter) She's trying to make this town a lot better, and if she's willing to do it, I'll help her as much as I can.

The cool thing is that you



Billy Koss receives his volunteer of the year award from Mayor Cassandra Gunter.

have a skill you've acquired through a career of hard work, and you can take that skill and apply it to whatever needs done. I believe that there are a lot of people around Villa Grove that have skills they can contribute but

don't know how to do so. Would you agree?

Yes, that sounds right.

I hear you did some mowing this summer?

Yes I mowed, I helped with the leaves once. We painted the city building. Just what

ever needed done.

Were you that way as a kid? Looking for ways to help?

I used to say that my dad stayed up nights thinking of things for me to do! <laughs> He kept me busy!

Your father was a local carpenter?

He was a union carpenter in Champaign, also.

Did he do side work then?

He did side work. He had rental property.

That's really where you started learning your trade then. How long did you work as a carpenter?

Thirty six years.

You mentioned Marketplace mall. What are some of the notable structures that you worked on in your career?

Buzzard hall, down at Eastern. The Danville Library, and when they put the food court on at Marketplace we helped with that. Actually, when they built Marketplace Mall, my dad worked on it.

When they remodeled Bergner's I worked on that.

What would you say to someone who's got that skill and they don't know how to put it forth?

Really just talk to someone at the city. Talk **Cont. pg. 7**

Douglas County Agriculture: Staying busy in the cold months

Douglas County Agriculture December 2018

There has been very little field activity so far in December. Some fertilizer was applied, or stalks chiseled, when the ground was frozen enough to hold a tractor up but for the most part we have been at a standstill on fieldwork. We have changed oil in a couple tractors and done some other maintenance. A heated shop is nice on a raw Illinois day and we spend a lot of time in ours. We spent a couple days cutting back trees and sprouts along fencerows and house lots. Most Mondays we take a load of hay to the Arthur Sale Barn for the hay auction. Down there we get a glimpse of a little different kind of agriculture than the corn and beans we see every day.

I spent part of a day renewing my pesticide applicators license. To purchase and apply many of the weed and insect controls we use, farmers have to undergo training every three years. This year there were 4 hours of lectures about various aspects of pesticide labeling, use and safety by University of

Illinois Extension and then a 50-question test administered by Illinois Department of Agriculture. There were around 200 people taking the training. The education is fairly intense, and the test isn't all that easy. The consumer should be assured that we use pesticides intelligently and carefully.

Another farmer sent me an email he had received from a person concerned farmers would wear the soil out and be unable to produce food. I remember from history class that one reason given for the colonists in early America moving west was the soil was worn out and they needed new fields. We have been farming in Douglas County for around 150 years. Productivity continues to go up however; even after that period of time. When the US Department of Agriculture begins to estimate next year's crop size, they will use a trend line yield slightly higher than the preceding year and be close to correct barring a severe weather problem. Better farming techniques, hybrid seeds and the technology I have talked so much about all contribute to this produc-

tivity.

I have also talked a lot about soil testing to see what nutrients are in the soil and what need to be added. The big crops we have been raising remove a lot of nutrients and farmers are careful to replenish those essential factors for plant growth. A bushel of corn removes about .4 pounds of phosphorus and .3 pounds of potassium, two of the most important plant nutrients, from the soil. If these are not replaced, soil productivity will soon drop off. One philosophy of fertilization is to replace the nutrients removed when the crop is harvested. If we can couple fertilizer application with a yield map and global positioning application, this may be the best way to apply fertilizer. Right now, most fertilizer is applied based on soil tests done in a grid pattern with GPS. A target is chosen for the level of a certain nutrient in the soil and fertilizer is applied to reach or maintain that level. A test every three or four years benchmarks those levels for us.

Some think that the use of fertilizer is masking the dam-

age we are doing to the soil. I don't understand that point of view. We are maintaining the soil to be able to grow good crops next year and the years after. The swampy prairie that covered most of the county prior to modern times was good at holding the soil in place and gave us the deep black soil we farm now. It wasn't a big food producer, however. Modern agriculture is feeding the world and keeping the soil in shape to do

that again next year as well. In reading farm publications, I find a great awareness of the need to farm responsibly and sustainably. I think the industry is making great strides to that end.

On the first weekend of December, Farm Bureau members from around the state gathered in Chicago to debate policy, reward activity excellence and reconnect with old friends from past meetings. We call **Cont. pg. 7**

Signs of the Season

By Jim Balmer



Frosty the Snowman spotted in Villa Grove, IL. Photo by Jim Balmer. To comment on any of the photos featured in Signs of the Season email us at vgnews@mchsi.com or send a letter to Villa Grove News PO Box 20, Villa Grove IL 61956. Comments may be published in future editions of the newspapers.



Paul's Machine in Villa Grove hosted the CEO class for a tour. The company mission of "We Build Solutions," perfectly describes the work done by the company as they build, maintain and repair industrial equipment for many diverse industries. Eddie Cler led the group, pointing out work done by engineers, machinists, fabricators and millwrights. The tour ended with a fascinating demonstration of the water jet cutter.

