

What's Happening... VG Community Spotlight

Side Tracks

2022 Freedom Celebration

The 2022 Freedom Celebration will be held on Friday, July 1 in Villa Grove.

Events include:

- Villa Grove Fire Department Touch a Truck
- Camargo Township District Library children's activity table
- Kiddie Train rides at 5 p.m.
- Bubble show at 5:30 p.m.
- Kiddie tractor pull at 6 p.m.
- Patriotic Bike Parade at 7 p.m.
- Fireworks at dusk
- Concessions will be provided by Big Al's Shake Ups, Buds BBQ, and the Villa Grove Chamber of Commerce. More information can be found on the City of Villa Grove's Facebook page.

Summer Dayz

Villa Grove's Summer Dayz 2022 program is on! Please go to www.villagrove.org to get more information and for sign-up forms.

Devilettes Trivia Night

The Villa Grove Devilettes will be hosting their annual trivia night on July 10 from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Villa Grove VFW. It will be \$10 at the door and there will be themed baskets available for raffler.

CTDL & Korner Beehive Bingo

Camargo Township District Library and the Korner Beehive are partnering to offer Bingo the first Wednesday of every month from 1 to 2 p.m. for anyone over 50. No cash but fun prizes.

Contact

If you have any information you would like included in Sidetracks please send an email to kendra@thetuscolajournal.com

VGPD activity for June: 13-19:

- Verbal Warnings-2
- Written Warnings-8
- Traffic Citations-7
- Welfare Check-2
- Activated Alarm-2
- Juvenile-2
- Assist Arrow Ambulance-2
- Assist Douglas County Sheriff's Office-4
- Ordinance Violations-3
- Domestic-1
- Mental Subject-1
- Reckless Driver-2
- Suspicious Person-4
- Suspicious Vehicle-1
- Theft-1
- Scam Report-1
- Motorist Assist-3

Cramer talks about his booming career in the fireworks industry

By Tony Hooker

Before his retirement last fall, Winn Cramer had produced award winning fireworks shows all over the world, including right here in Villa Grove. I recently caught up with Cramer, the former Event Producer for Melrose Pyrotechnics, Inc., to discuss how his three-decade career in the industry came about, the sale of the company which he worked for, and many other things.

Mr. Cramer, where did you grow up?

I grew up in the south suburbs of Chicago.

When you were growing up in the south suburbs, were you that kid that was always stringing together two or three M80's and trying to make a bigger boom?

I couldn't have been more different from that than you would think. I was never playing around with that sort

years that he was in business, he would drive a truck and then quit two or three months before the fourth of July because he couldn't financially support himself. Then, about 6 years into it, the company just took off and grew exponentially, really. He and I were a couple of months apart in age, we met when we were 12, and we're 64 now, so...

How did you come to enter competitions?

The first time we ever competed was in 2006, in Montreal, which is considered the most prestigious competition in the world. Only 8 companies (one American) are invited every year. It's your body of work that you have to submit to even be considered, and the first year that we were there, we actually won the gold. We proceeded to participate two other times in that com-

you've ever done?

The biggest show I've ever done, in fact I've been doing it for 25 years now, is the biggest show in the state of Illinois, in Itasca. We've participated a couple times in a fireworks competition in the Philippines, in South Korea, in China. We really became global.

And it all started with a guy who had to work part-time as a truck driver?

The one thing I attribute to our success is that it didn't matter if it was a huge show or one of the smaller shows we did, we treated them with the same attention and preparation. The way you get to be a big company is by not making mistakes and you put on a quality show every night?

What would you tell someone who wanted to go to work in this field of entertainment?



of thing in the backyard. It never really interested me. <laughs>

Really? That's fascinating to me.

I was fifteen years old when I went to my first show. I wasn't allowed to shoot fireworks or anything like that. All I was allowed to do was the grunt work like digging holes for mortars and stuff like that.

How many years did it take before they let you light the fuse?

Probably when I was 18. *How did you come to be the event producer, putting on these magnificent shows?*

The business was more geographically located up north, being out of northern Indiana. We worked in Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, northern Illinois and a little bit in Iowa. We didn't get involved in Southern and Central Illinois until 1991, when I first started selling there.

You grew up with the person who ran the company, and he asked you to come and help him out?

Yeah, his dad had started the company, and when he passed away, my friend started over, basically from scratch when he was 22 years old. For the first six

petition.

How much has technology changed the industry over the years?

For years, it was hand loading mortars and using fuzes to light them off. Then electronics came around and we jumped right into that so that we could choreograph musical shows with them. It's not just going out there lighting shells willy nilly. We basically have a script and we set it up off of that. You have a soundtrack and then you're literally pressing buttons over a headset. In fireworks, you have different tempos with your music, so you have to have different tempos in your fireworks, as well. You can't have all slow songs or all fast songs because of the different types of shells we have. With slower songs, you want to have shells that have longer durations in the sky.

There really is an art to it, isn't there?

For sure. It took us a few years, but we got to the point where there was no hand firing any more. Everything is scripted and pre-loaded. The shows are so much better because of the timing and everything.

What's the biggest show

I would tell them to be patient. It just takes time to become good at it. I don't know if it's as much about having a passion for fireworks. To me, it's about caring about what you're doing. No matter what type of show or who the customer is, you put in the full effort all the time. My mindset was always that I'm going to do the best I can, no matter what.

One final question. What can folks expect here at Richman Park in Villa Grove on July 1?

Being a bigger company, we have the benefit of having multiple suppliers. Different manufacturers produce different kinds of products. Variety has always been a key factor in fireworks shows. We always carried at least a year's worth of inventory. That's difficult for a lot of smaller companies. So, we can prepare different shows for whatever the customer wants us to do. It's always the music that dictates what fireworks you're going to use. You have to have a soundtrack first and then we actually program the type of fireworks to the type of music. It's not something where you just start shooting fireworks up in the air!

Hook, Line and Sinker With Tony Hooker

Unintended consequences

The pages of history are rife with examples of unintended consequences. Some have been for the positive, but many more have been of the negative variety. As early as the late 1600's, John Locke used his theory of unintended consequences to argue against lowering targeted interest rates in the finance industry. "It will make the Difficulty of Borrowing and Lending much greater. It will be a Prejudice to none but those who most need Assistance and Help, I mean Widows and Orphans, and others uninstructed in the Arts and Managements of more skillful Men. "It will mightily increase the Advantage of Bankers and Scriveners, and other such expert Brokers," and finally "That it is likely to cause great Perjury in the Nation; a Crime, than which nothing is more carefully to be prevented by Lawmakers, not only by Penalties, that shall attend apparent and proved Perjury; but by avoiding and lessening, as much as may be, the Temptations to it." Sounds like old John was a pretty smart dude.

More recently, Barbra Streisand once sued a photographer for publishing a photo of her house online. Before the lawsuit, it had been viewed exactly six times, and two of those viewings were by her attorneys, but because of the publicity the lawsuit drew, it ended up being viewed over 400,000 times. In fact, "the entire phenomenon of an attempt to hide, remove, or censor information that has the unintended consequence of increasing awareness of that information, often via the Internet," is now known as the "Streisand effect."

So, what does this rambling, incoherent prose have to do with life in Douglas County, you ask? Glad you did. You see, this weekend, I

saw what I considered to be unintended consequences in action, right here in the river city. As most know, Saturday morning was city-wide clean-up day, and at 6 a.m., eight shiny green and yellow Waste Management trucks roared into town and began collecting things from the curbside. What many might not know, however, is that on Friday night, some of the more entrepreneurial and thrifty types among us were cruising the streets, looking for treasures. In fact, I hadn't even finished hauling my rubbish to the curb before I was approached about the metal items I was casting away, and they are sure to find themselves at a recycling center rather than a landfill, and that's a good thing. It was also comforting to me that folks were finding ways to repurpose items rather than let them be hauled to the dump. The EPA reports that in the US, we generated 294 million tons of Municipal Solid Waste in 2018, the last year I could find numbers. Of this, we were able to recycle or compost around 90 million tons, which is a respectable number, but not enough. If you do the math, Americans generated almost 5 pounds of MSW per day. Crazy right? I know, given the enormous numbers that I just quoted, that what we repurposed here in VG on Friday night isn't enough to make even a dent, but it felt good that we were able to do at least that much. Think about it. If everyone in the US reduced their MSW production by 1 pound per day, we could send 50 million fewer tons of waste to the landfill each year, which would be pretty cool. As for Friday night, there was something thrilling about finding something useful for free, and the fact that it was keeping it from the landfill was, in fact, an unintended consequence.

DAR American History Award to VG's Boozer

For 45 years, the Stephen A. Douglas Chapter has awarded an American History medal to an Eighth Grade Student in each of our county schools during Eighth Grade Promotion Exercises. The Grace Jared Award is given to the student who is outstanding in his/her awareness of American History and Current Events. The teacher makes the selection considering not only an awareness of American History and Current Events but also the student's leadership and citizenship skills. Villa Grove's 2022 winner is Dylan Boozer.

This year's awardees were: Dawson McMillan, Arcola; Lilly Vanda, Arthur; Savannah Butcher, Atwood; Braxton Moody, Tuscola.

Wilhelm's to celebrate 50th anniversary



Paul and Starr Wilhelm of rural Camargo will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on July 1. The couple was married at Dahlgren Illinois, by Father Joseph Trapp. They are the parents of Lainey Schmidt of Tolono and Brandy Barriner of Pesotum. They have been blessed with seven grandchildren, Kendal, Koby, Maggie, Kylie, Brooke, Addison & Bryson. The couple will celebrate with a family dinner on July 1 and a trip to Africa.