



Illuminating The Progress Of Barnesville

Street Light

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Farmers Face Troubling Year During 2026 Planting Season

By Gene Prim

Farming has always been the backbone of the Barnesville community. There was a time, a little over a half century ago when it was the only game in town. But that has changed. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the 1960s, the number of farmers in the area slowly began to shrink and the size of the farms began to increase.

That trend continued and accelerated during the 1970s and 1980s and continues to this day but at a slower rate. With today's big machinery and computerized technology one farmer can cover a lot of ground. Back in the 1950s farming a section of land or even a half section, was pretty big business. In today's ag economy, farming a thousand acres of land barely buys you chips in the game and a seat at the table.



Spring planting last year stretched out for several weeks. There was a little ground worked in late April and then the rains started. After that all seeding was done when field conditions allowed.

All of this expansion has come at a cost to communities. A few farmers farming a lot of land do not spend as much in local businesses as lots of farmers and families on small farms. The result is less customers in stores and many fewer students in the school system. In the 1970s, Barnesville was graduating over a hundred seniors each year. That number now seldom goes past 60 graduates.

There used to be an implement dealer, or two, or three in every small town. Barnesville had three, Rothsay had one, and Baker had one. They are all gone now and even the big dealerships are feeling the pinch of the contracting farm economy. Lots are full of unsold new machinery as farmers repair instead of purchasing new. Pickup truck dealers feel the same pinch. Manufacturers are also

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A joker in the deck last summer was the persistent overcast skies. Smoke from Canadian wildfires cut off sunlight. Depending upon weather conditions, sometimes the smoke was high in the sky and was just a minor nuisance. At other times the smoke was at ground level making it difficult to breathe.



Every August the sunflower fields around the region put on a brilliant golden display. The flower crop last year in most cases was disappointing. Sunflowers like dry, hot conditions and last summer was too wet for them, cutting yields.

Where Horses Heal. . .

Inside Mighty Oaks Equine Learning Center, Rollag

By Chandra Buck
Staff Writer

Tucked into the rolling countryside near Rollag is a sanctuary, one that heals horses and humans alike. Located one mile north and 1.2 miles east of Rollag, the property sits quietly among fields and trees, easy to miss unless you know where to look.

You feel it before you fully see it. The road stretches ahead past open fields, while wind moves steadily through the oaks and across pasture. Somewhere beyond them, horses are already watching. By the time you arrive, they have lifted their heads, ears forward and alert, their attention fixed not with hesitation, but with curiosity.

They do not pull away. They step closer. One at a time, they approach, noses reaching out as if visitors are something to be welcomed



At Mighty Oaks Equine Learning Center, rescued horses find a lasting refuge, living out their days in safety, care, and quiet routine. The main herd from left to right includes Gracie, Jet, Cisco, Rain, and Leo.

gradually evolved into something more intentional after years of teaching in other barns and wondering if there was a better way to do the work.

"We were working with horses we didn't train, that we didn't know, and that weren't always happy," Erickson said. So they built something different.

Mighty Oaks is not a competition barn. There are no shows to prepare for, no pressure to perform, no

expectation that every rider is working toward ribbons or titles. Instead, the focus is on horsemanship in its fullest sense.

"We stress horsemanship as much as riding," Erickson said. "Actually riding our own horses consumes about one percent of our time any given week, but caring for them takes up much more."

This philosophy shapes everything.

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From left, Amber Ferris, Angie Erickson, and Peggy Hicks are part of the women-led team behind Mighty Oaks Equine Learning Center, along with Geraldine Helmer and Ann Kramer, who help guide the program's daily operations and instruction.

rather than avoided. At Mighty Oaks Equine Learning Center, that willingness to trust is not accidental. It is built, day by day, through care, consistency, and respect.

Founded in 2019, Mighty Oaks is part rescue, part teaching barn, and part refuge. The program is led by Angie Erickson alongside Amber Ferris and Peggy Hicks, with additional support from Geraldine Helmer and Erickson's mother, Ann Kramer, an upper-level instructor who plays a steady role in both teaching and daily operations.

Together, they form the heart of a women-led operation that shapes every aspect of the experience at Mighty Oaks. Behind the scenes, Angie's husband, Cuda Erickson, helps keep the property running, building and maintaining the infrastructure that makes the work

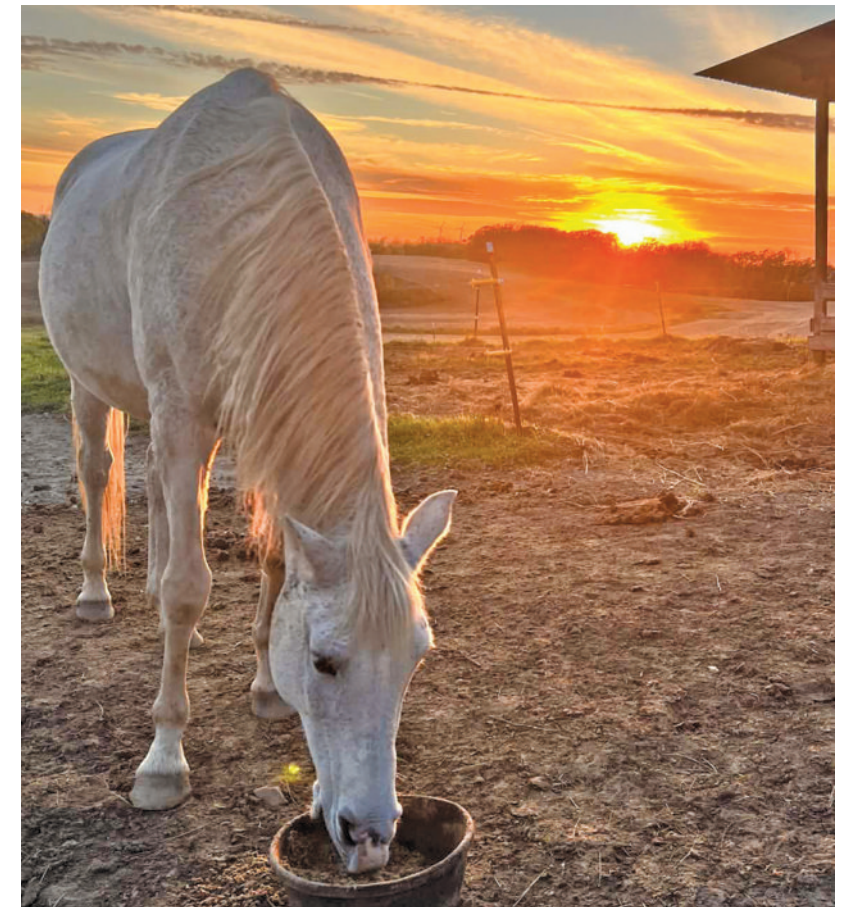
possible.

The work at Mighty Oaks is deeply rooted in family. Angie and Cuda Erickson have two sons, Christian Erickson and James Erickson. Christian and his wife, Kassandra, live in Moorhead.

James and his wife, Brooke, who is the daughter of Todd and Lori Henrickson of Barnesville, live nearby on their own farm with their son, Eli, who attends school in Barnesville.

Angie's parents, Ann and Gene Kramer of Lowry, Minnesota, remain closely connected to the operation, while Cuda's father, Wesley Erickson of Hawley, is also part of the extended family that surrounds the work.

The land itself has been home to the Erickson family since 1990. What began as a rural homestead



Beau lowers his head to a feed bowl at sunset at Mighty Oaks, where even the smallest routines reflect attentive, day-to-day care.