

HONORED



Jeff and Rachel Schroeder have been named New Holstein's Distinguished Persons of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce and will be honored this Thursday evening at the Chamber's annual dinner at the Altona Supper Club.

MARK SHERRY PHOTO

Helping kids **PLAY BALL!** for years

BY MARK SHERRY

It is early January in Wisconsin with snow on the ground and temperatures in the single digits, but before long activities inside the New Holstein home of Jeff and Rachel Schroeder will be all about baseball and softball.

That is the way it has been for about the last 16 years, ever since the day Laurie Kutz knocked on their door and turned over the reins of the New Holstein Baseball/Softball Association to the young couple.

For their years of tireless service to New Holstein's youth in a vari-

ety of ways—as well as other volunteer activities, including Rachel's long tenure as a New Holstein First Responder—the Schroeders have been named New Holstein's Distinguished Persons of the Year for 2021 by the New Holstein Area Chamber of Commerce.

The Schroeders will be honored this Thursday evening (Jan. 6) at the annual dinner of the Chamber held at the Altona Supper Club. Their names will be engraved on the plaque along with past winners of the honor. The plaque hangs inside the New Holstein Com-

munity Center during the year.

Like all past winners of the award, Jeff and Rachel do not volunteer for accolades but to help the community—and for another simple reason. Asked if they have enjoyed their years heading up the Baseball/Softball Association, Rachel said, "Yes, I have. Our kids tell us we're crazy for enjoying it."

Jeff said he enjoys meeting and talking to people through his volunteerism and community service. Rachel added,

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"I'm proud with how we've expanded things and improved upon the parks."

The Schroeders are quick to point out that many people—including City of New Holstein officials and local business owners—have played key roles in helping to advance the youth programs and facilities over the years. Under their leadership, New Holstein has seen new scoreboards at Kiwanis Park, work done on the benches and dugouts at both Kiwanis Park and Funke Field, new fencing at both locations, new dirt mix at multiple fields, and expansion of and new equipment in concession stands at both fields.

LIGHTS ON FIELD

One of the biggest and most recent additions spearheaded by Jeff and Rachel was the addition of lights on one of the ball fields at Kiwanis Park, allowing for night games to be played there for the first time in the city's history.

Sports and volunteerism have long been part of both of their lives. Jeff grew up in Marytown, the son of Richard and Mary Jean Schroeder. He said his childhood was largely about getting together with other boys from Marytown and playing sports.

Rachel is the daughter of Ron (Deb) Dins of rural New Holstein and Rosie (Bob) Williams of New Holstein. She recalls spending time at the old city pool and hanging out in the city's parks and library during her childhood. During the years her father was on the New Holstein Fire Department, she would help out at the Firemen's Picnic or with making sandwiches at the Fire Station if the department got called out to a big fire.

The mothers of both Jeff and Rachel served as activity directors at local nursing homes—Rosie at Willowdale in New Holstein and Mary Jean at Villa Loretto in Mount Calvary—and that meant more opportunities to help out as volunteers. Rachel recalls helping residents play bingo and go on day trips.

VOLUNTEERISM RUBS OFF

Growing up in Jeff's home, the Marytown Athletic Club was a big part of the family's activities as his dad served on the board and as its treasurer, as well as being an East Shore Lions Club member.

Both Jeff and Rachel said they believe their parents' volunteerism

rubbed off on them. Rachel said, "Things don't just happen. Someone has to step forward."

Jeff graduated from New Holstein High School in 1989 and Rachel in 1991. Jeff went on to Moraine Park Technical College in Fond du Lac, earning his degree in Industrial Screenprinting. He worked in that field for employers in West Bend and Plymouth until that latter employer closed the Plymouth operations and moved them to Grand Rapids, Michigan. They made the Schroeders a good offer to move with the company, but the couple decided to stay in their hometown instead. Jeff worked for several other employers which also moved or closed over the years, but this past summer he began his duties as the director of buildings and grounds for the New Holstein School District.

The only time Rachel moved away from New Holstein was when she attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison to earn her degree in nursing. She returned to New Holstein to work in home care and hospice.

FIRST RESPONDER FROM THE START

In 2000, an effort was made to restart the New Holstein First Responders. Rachel was part of that effort and today is the last remaining original member from that restart. She still responds to calls regularly, although she said one of her current employers requires her to be more careful as to which calls she goes to so that she does not get exposed to COVID-19.

In addition to working at the clinic at Ascension Calumet Hospital in Chilton, Rachel also works for Calumet Home Care & Hospice. She said with a laugh that sometimes she sees the same patients in all three settings—as a First Responder, at the clinic, and as part of home care or hospice.

Working in hospice, Rachel said she was dealing with death almost daily—yet that did not prepare her for her most memorable First Responder call. The first summer after she became a responder, she responded to the train versus pedestrians accident outside Tecumseh Products Company. She recalls helping the coroner put body parts into bags. When she got home, the adrenaline released and she said

she was numb for days. "I can see it right now," she said of the accident.

Rachel added, "I enjoy the medical calls far more than the accidents." She said she also enjoys representing the First Responders at community events, including working at the group's annual fundraiser.

AS LONG AS SHE IS ABLE

Rachel said she plans to be a First Responder "as long as I'm able to. I can never quite give it up." She said the organization could use more members and encouraged interested people to step forward.

The couple is starting to look for their replacement(s) after their years of service to the Baseball/Softball Association. Sons Nathan, Brad and Ben are now all through the youth programs. Until a replacement can be found, they will start the annual process of preparing for the seasons. This month they will be planning meetings and registrations which take place in February and March. Practices begin in April and May. There is scheduling of games, finding coaches and umpires, ordering uniforms and equipment, getting concession stands stocked and ready, scheduling helpers, preparing fields as needed, etc.

Jeff said he used to get a week off between baseball and football seasons, but that disappeared over time as well. The couple acknowledged that they really do not know what it is like to take a summer vacation. There is something to do every day in the summer for baseball or softball. When New Holstein hosts a tournament, it is almost a full-time job during those days, Jeff said.

There also are more projects they would like to see finished, including creating a grass infield on the west diamond at Funke Field, refurbishing the Kiwanis Park batting cage, getting a batting cage at Funke Field, and figuring out how to put shade covers over the dugouts of the local fields.

As if all that is not enough, Jeff also has volunteered over the years at the Outdoors, Inc. sportsmen's club, as well as coaching various baseball and football teams. He also receives some compensation as the city's part-time recreation director.

Between 100 and 120 youths take part in baseball and softball programs each summer in New Holstein, so the Schroeders have literally touched the lives of hundreds and hundreds of children.

Call them crazy—their own children have—but they have enjoyed it.