This week's community profile: Krakow

Slow, steady pace suit them fine

By Lisa Sumter
Press-Gazette

KRAKOW — When the 1990 census figures came out, Krakow didn't generate headlines.

The area, less than 30 miles from Green Bay, isn't buzzing with home construction or industrial development. The everyday pace here is slow and steady. Growth follows suit, occurring mainly as families move in and replace older residents. Most of the residences never were assigned house numbers. The postmaster knows where the mail needs to go.

"I think the community probably has hit bottom and is going back up," says Rob Ripley, who owns Ripley's Produce, Route 2, Green Valley Road, with his wife Eileen. "It's just like any town that doesn't have a big business or industry. But I think the area will gain people."

Press-Gazette photos by Sandee Gerbers

The country atmosphere and a desire to escape the faster pace in the city will attract people to Krakow, Ripley says.

Unlike Krakow, the Ripleys' wholesale produce business has grown — from 22 acres when it started in 1976 to 300 acres today. Their largest crops are cantaloupe, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage. They also grow strawberries that customers can pick.

But the business has grown too big and will be scaled back, Ripley says.

Running the business is hard work — about 12 to 14 hours each day from April to October.

"You see other people where two of them are working and bringing home $65,000 and they have weekends off and four weeks vacation," Rob Ripley says. "But then, during the prosperous times you think, no, we'll stick with this."

Children in Krakow attend the Pulaski School District. In their spare time they build forts, walk on nearby trails and fish in the Pensaukee River.

Adults are active at St. Casimir Catholic Church and in school activities.

Fairview Elementary School is nearby on Wisconsin 32. Principal Iren Hucek says the small-town flavor of the area spills over to the school.

"The neat thing about Fairview is that it is the typical school of old," she says. "It's refreshing that in our modern, busy, hectic world that people have time for one another."

Like many small communities, Krakow has its stories of a once-bustling main street and active business center.

Ray Brzezinski's family once owned much of the community. His father, Julius, started a cheese factory in Krakow before World War I and Julius' brother, Wencil, returned home from the war to become the community's first postmaster.

Ray Brzezinski, Main Street, and his three brothers joined the family business as it expanded to bulk oil, a feed mill, a pickle salting station, lumberyard, four farms, a grocery store and slaughterhouse.

Ray and his wife, Bernice, have seen businesses such as a bowling alley, taverns, hardware stores and most of the former Brzezinski holdings close. Main Street, once the main highway through the community, is relatively quiet. Auto salvage and repair businesses, a supper club, taverns and a meat market remain.

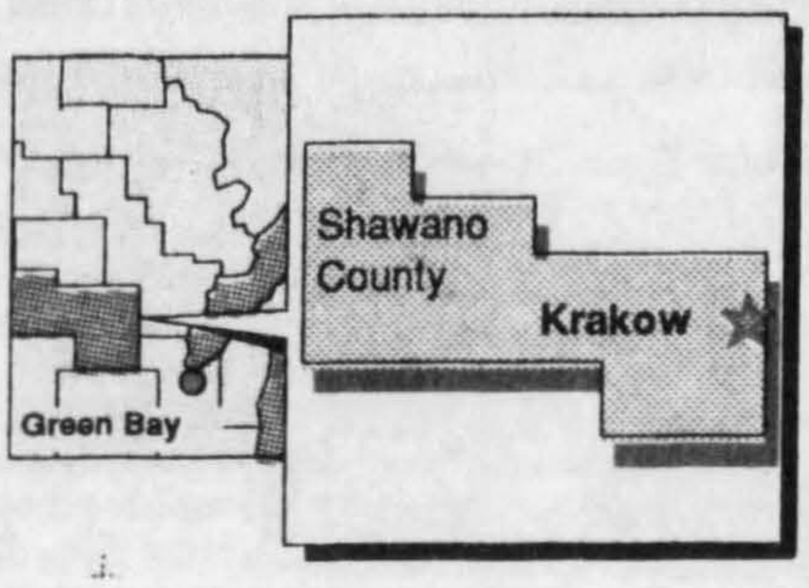
Fewer small farms are in the area. Many were gobbled up by larger operations.

Krakow Foods on Main Street is a popular stop for people looking for homemade sausage. Store owner Harold Blazei said his specialties are polish sausage and kiszka, similar to blood sausage.

"I've seen people from Chicago and Milwaukee and they come through the checkout with large quantities," says employee Doreen Chart, Julius Street. Once a predominantly Polish area, Krakow is "mixed up" ethnically today, Brzezinski says. He remembers speaking Polish with the older customers at his family's store and at church.

"I was Catholic and I only went to confession in Polish," he says. "Then I went into the service and I had to learn to go to confession in English."

Sweet samples: Rob and Eileen Ripley of Krakow taste watermelon at their business, Ripley's Produce.



The Krakow file

- ☐ **Population:** About 200.
- ☐ **Play ball:** Krakow had three baseball teams, including the Bonecrushers and Picklers and one of the area's first lighted diamonds in the 1940s.
- ☐ **Dancin' days:** When St. Casimir Catholic Church needed to pay off a large mortgage in 1935, it built a dance hall called Riverview Pavilion. Dances were held every Sunday.

■ **Next week:** Poland in Brown County

Meat treats: Krakow Foods owner Harold Blazei, left photo, stands in the meat department. Above, Irene Hucek, Fairview School principal, watches pupil Chris Eggert..