Small is right for Whitelaw

Residents like their tiny village just the way it is

By Lisa Sumter
Press-Gazette

WHITELAW — The tiny village of Whitelaw has seen no major industry develop within its boundaries in the past quarter century.

Most of the residents there wouldn't have it any other way.

Small business always has been the backbone of this village of 741 people, said Al Kiel, president. Something of a commuter town, Whitelaw has no major industry to anchor the community or employ a large sector of its population, he said.

Most village residents make the daily drive to Manitowoc, Green Bay or Appleton to work, Kiel said. But they do their living right in the village.

"They like their town the way it is — small business is just fine with them," Kiel said of his fellow villagers: "It's a typical small town and that's the way we like it."

Press-Gazette photos by Ken Wesely

In keeping with that philosophy, the village fathers have done nothing to lure industry here.

"We haven't looked into attracting any big business," Kiel said. "From a practical standpoint, our sewerage plant probably wouldn't be able to handle a big business."

Once the unincorporated town of Pine Grove, the village changed its name in 1907 and incorporated in 1958. A train depot was here, and freight and passenger trains made regular stops. Freight trains continued running through until the mid-1960s, Kiel said.

Standing at the foot of the town proper and looking up U.S. Highway 10 through the village, it still is a picture postcard of Small Town, USA. The street is lined with the staples of small town living — a post office, a fire station, the local grocery, a couple of taverns.

One after another, cozy, well-kept homes hint at strong civic pride. The massive structure that is St. Michael Catholic Church dwarfs surrounding buildings.

Slightly out of place is the high volume of traffic moving through the town on the highway linking Manitowoc and Appleton.

"It's good and it's bad," Kiel said of the highway. "Obviously there's a lot of traffic, and there's no sidewalk for people to walk on in most spots.

"On the other hand, people do stop as they go through," he added.

One place they stop is Grall's Amoco Station and Mini Mart. Russell "Buzz" Grall runs the business that his father started in 1939 as a three-pump station.

The gas station and repair shop have grown since then to include a convenience store. Grall plans to add a coffee shop.

Further down the road, another popular spot is Whitelaw Sausage. The village's only grocery store, the meat mar-

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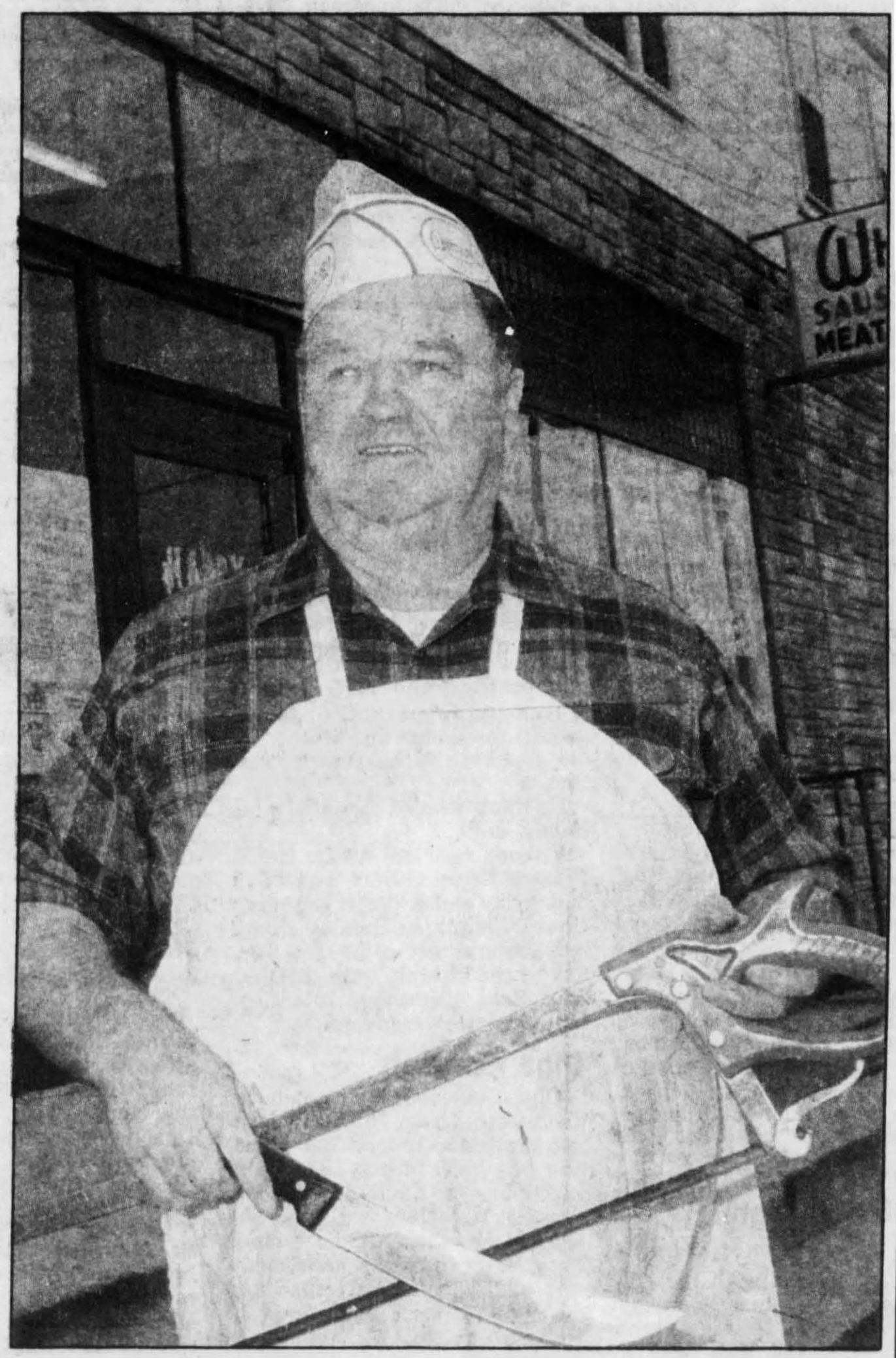
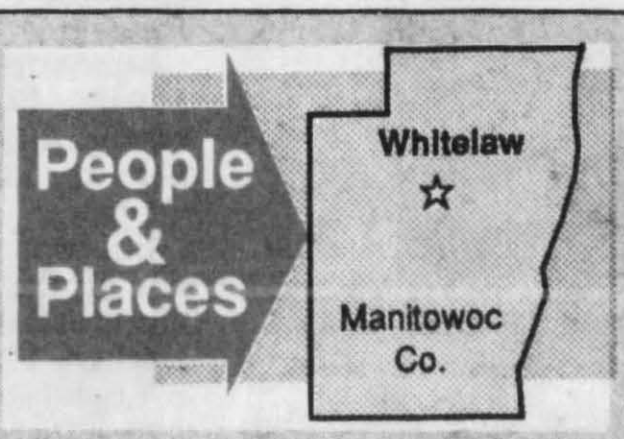


Good wurst: Alvin Stueber, co-owner of Whitelaw Sausage in Whitelaw, stands outside the grocery store and meat market. The shop is popular among Whitelaw residents and with people passing through the village, Stueber says.

The Whitelaw file

- **Population:** 741
- **1970 population:** 557
- **Year incorporated as a village:** 1958
- **Local politics:** The first trustee on the Whitelaw Village Board in 1958 went on to higher office in the state Senate. Sen. Jerome Martin, D-Manitowoc, was elected to the Senate in 1970 and served until his death in 1977.
- **Musical buildings:** The building that now houses Kohlbeck's Bar on the main drag in Whitelaw has gone through some serious changes in the past century — from church to tavern to be specific.



Owned by Jerome and Mary Kohlbeck, the portion of the structure that is now the dance hall was once St. Michael Church. The section that is now the tavern was once the Whitelaw Hotel. The two buildings merged when the church moved to its current site more than 40 years ago.

Bar talk: Art Grall sweeps the floor around card-playing customers in his bar, Whitelaw Beer and Liquor.

Main drag: U.S. Highway 10 cuts through the heart of Whitelaw. The highway is the village's link to larger nearby cities.

☐ Whitelaw

ket attracts passing visitors, as well as residents of nearby communities.

"We get a lot of people passing through town, people from other states who have heard of the place and stop in," co-owner Alvin Stueber said.

It's 10 a.m. and up the road, Whitelaw Beer and Liquor is opening for business. Run by Art Grall, 74, the tavern serves as a gathering place for some of the village's old-timers.

Nothing is fancy about the tavern with its small L-shape bar and beer cases stacked tall against a back wall. The melodies of the Sammy King orchestra drift through the building as Grall waits for his first customers.

He doesn't have long to wait. Less than 10 minutes after the front door is unlocked, four men are sitting at the bar trading small talk. They quickly retire to a table for one of their daily games of sheepshead.

A native of Whitelaw, Grall said he opened the tavern to battle the boredom of retirement.

"I was going to retire and take life easy, but I couldn't stand all that sitting around," he said with a grin.

Despite Whitelaw's homey, small-town image, civic leaders said there is no lack of growth and progress here.

Dave Radue, president of the Denmark State Bank, pointed to a 30 percent increase in population in the last three to four years. He credits the establishment of a Tax Incremental Finance district in 1981 with allowing much of the recent housing development.

A recycling program and compost area also were started in the last year. In 1982 a 12-unit apartment building for senior citizens was built.

Radue, who is an officer in the local Lions Club, said a recent project at the local park is typical of the community pride in Whitelaw. The majority of the $45,000 needed to install lights and fencing on the baseball field came from the village, Lions Club fund-raisers and community donations, he said.

"We're pretty proud of that — the businesses and residents here are very supportive of the non-profit organizations," Radue said. "It's just a nice, clean little town to live in."

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