'There's lots of peace and quiet here'

Red brick church is community landmark

By Karil Van Boxel
Press-Gazette

WALHAIN — Travelers on Wisconsin 54 who pass through this unincorporated Kewaunee County community may notice only its red brick church.

St. Amand Church draws many vacationers to Sunday Mass each summer. It is the only Catholic church on the highway between Green Bay and Algoma.

St. Amand is part of a four-parish community the Rev. Florian Resheske serves.

Parishioners hope their church will survive the problems other rural churches face.

"I'd hate to see the church close," said Bertha Gaedtke, 66, a lifelong resident

Press-Gazette photos by Ken Behrend

Bernard LeRoy has been church custodian for the past eight years. He and his wife, Loretta, both 66, were married at St. Amand in 1944. The church has about 80 families as members.

The LeRoys ranch-style house on Wisconsin 54 is across from the Na-Churs Plant Food Co., a liquid fertilizer business Bernard has been in for 25 years. He sold the family's 243-acre dairy farm to son, Glenn, in 1969 when he and Loretta bought Walhain's only grocery store.

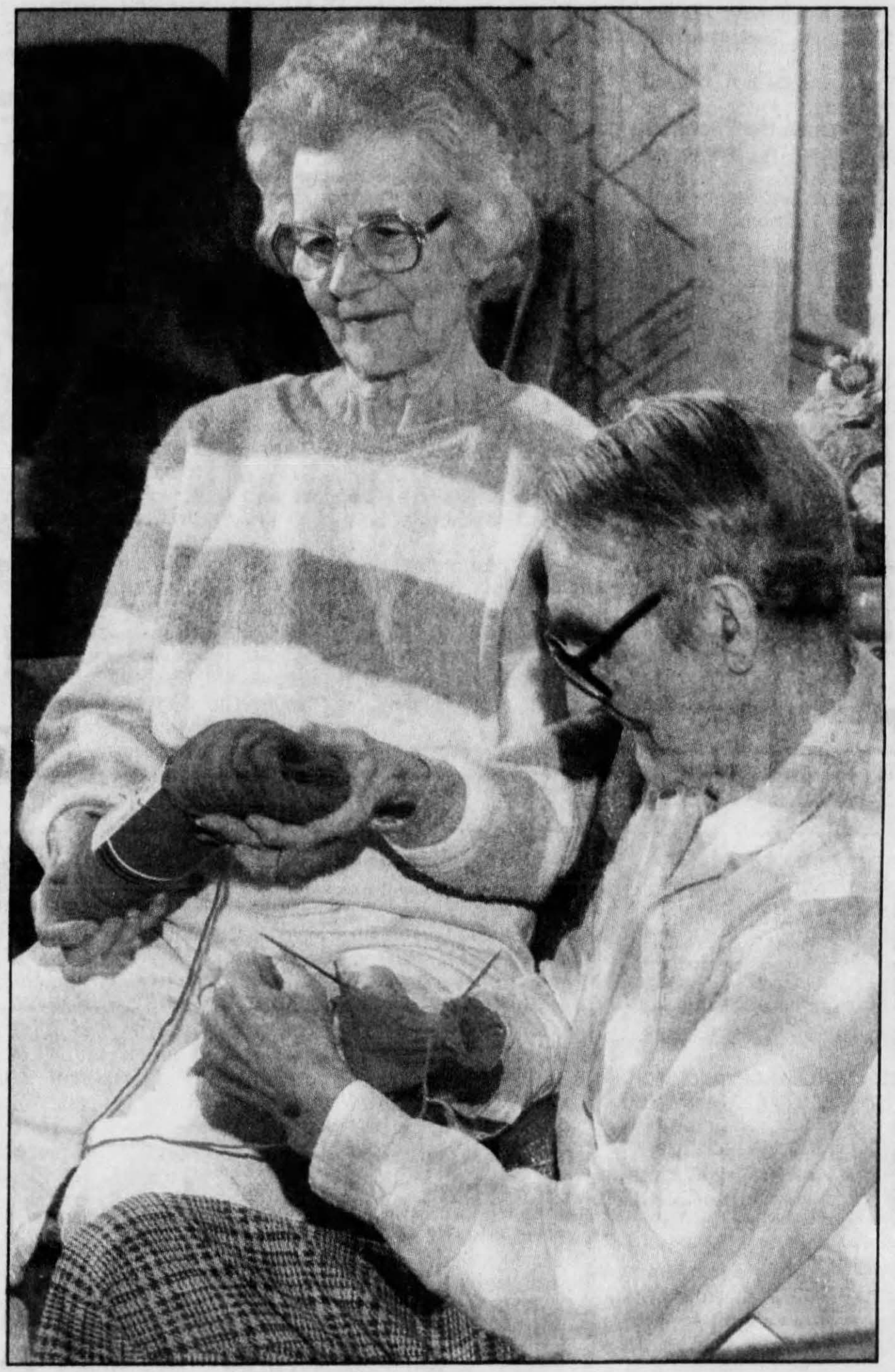
But by 1982 the store was closed and residents were forced to shop at nearby Luxemburg or travel about 14 miles to Green Bay. "We couldn't compete with the big stores anymore," LeRoy said.

The store now houses Top Shelf Trophies, owned by Dennis and Beverly Zellner. Zellner, 46, started the business after illness forced him to resign from his job as a federal food inspector.

"The business just took off when we were in the house," he said. "When I started putting things on beds and coffee tables we had to move."

Next door is Schaus Propane Service. Its three modern metal buildings occupy the site on which Frank and Ceil Vandeveld's bar and dance hall stood.

The bar burned years ago, but it is fondly remembered for its kermises.

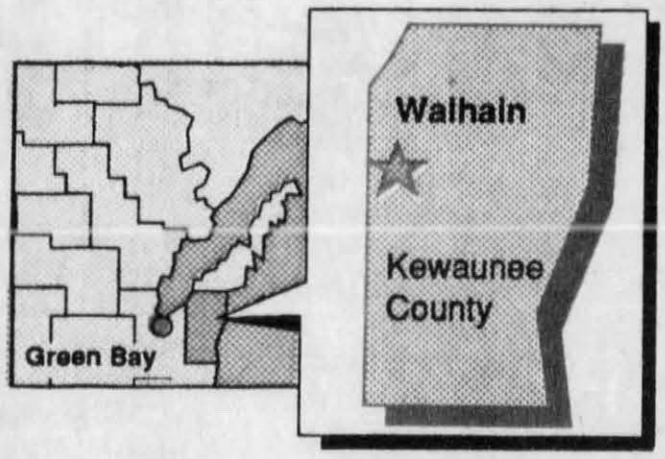


Cozy pastime: Emanuel Wery, 80, gets a hand from his wife, Anna, 74, as he knits a pair of mittens at their home in Walhain. It's a craft the retired farmer learned from his mother.

"People would get together for those two-day celebrations," said Bertha LaLuzerne, 72, of Bay Settlement whose parents, William and Anna Deterville, once owned the bar.

Ken Schaus and son, Joe, formerly of Manitowoc, supply propane and tanks to rural residents at their 10-year-old business next to the church.

"We're right in the heart of the rural community and that's where our busi-



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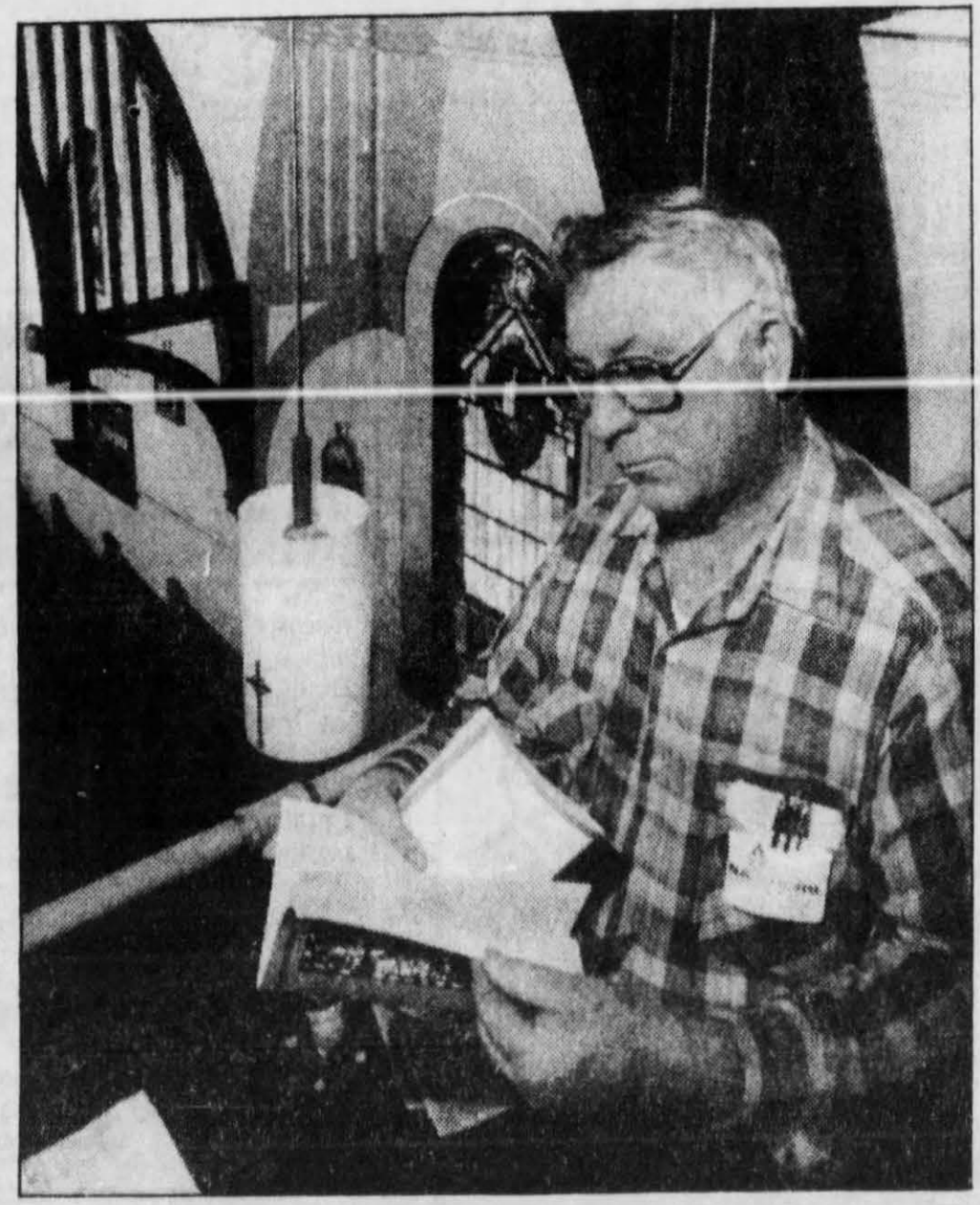

Clean up: Bernard LeRoy, former grocery store owner, prepares St. Amand's Church for Sunday.

The Walhain file

☐ **Population:** Estimated at 35 to 50 by residents.

☐ **Origin:** Florian Strickman from Walhain, Belgium, settled the area in the 1850s.

The community between New Franken and Luxemburg remains farming country dotted with picturesque red and white houses and barns.

☐ **Celebration:** Years ago, the annual kermis harvest festival meant a two-day celebration with ethnic foods, music and dancing. The fun began when a band escorted St. Amand's parishioners to the tavern next door.

Winners: Dennis Zellner, foreground, assembles a trophy at Top Shelf Trophies with his parents Clarence and Germaine Zellner, all of Walhain.

☐ Walhain

ness is," Joe, 26, said.

Joe's wife, Vicky, is the bookkeeper. They are raising three children in Walhain. "It's better than the city," he said. "There's lots of peace and quiet in the summertime and you know everybody."

Once the community had a cheese factory and two taverns. Now, only The 54 Run bar remains but that has been remodeled and enlarged. Owner Rick Ledvina, 37, built an indoor volleyball court a few years ago and also offers darts, pool and Saturday night bands.

The original bar was the Halfway Inn where weary travelers could stay the night, Ledvina said. After it burned, the tavern was rebuilt about 50 years ago.

"There are very friendly people around here. Even on weekends with bands there have been no fights or problems," said Ledvina, president of the Kewaunee County Tavern League.

Emanuel Wery, 80, may be the oldest resident of this Belgian-German community. A retired farmer, his talents include baking bread, gardening and knitting. His wife, Anna, 74, was born in Walhain.

Wery spins his own wool when he can get it, but says his production of knit items has slowed. "I only knitted 10 to 12 pairs of mittens this year."

Next week: Flintville in Brown County