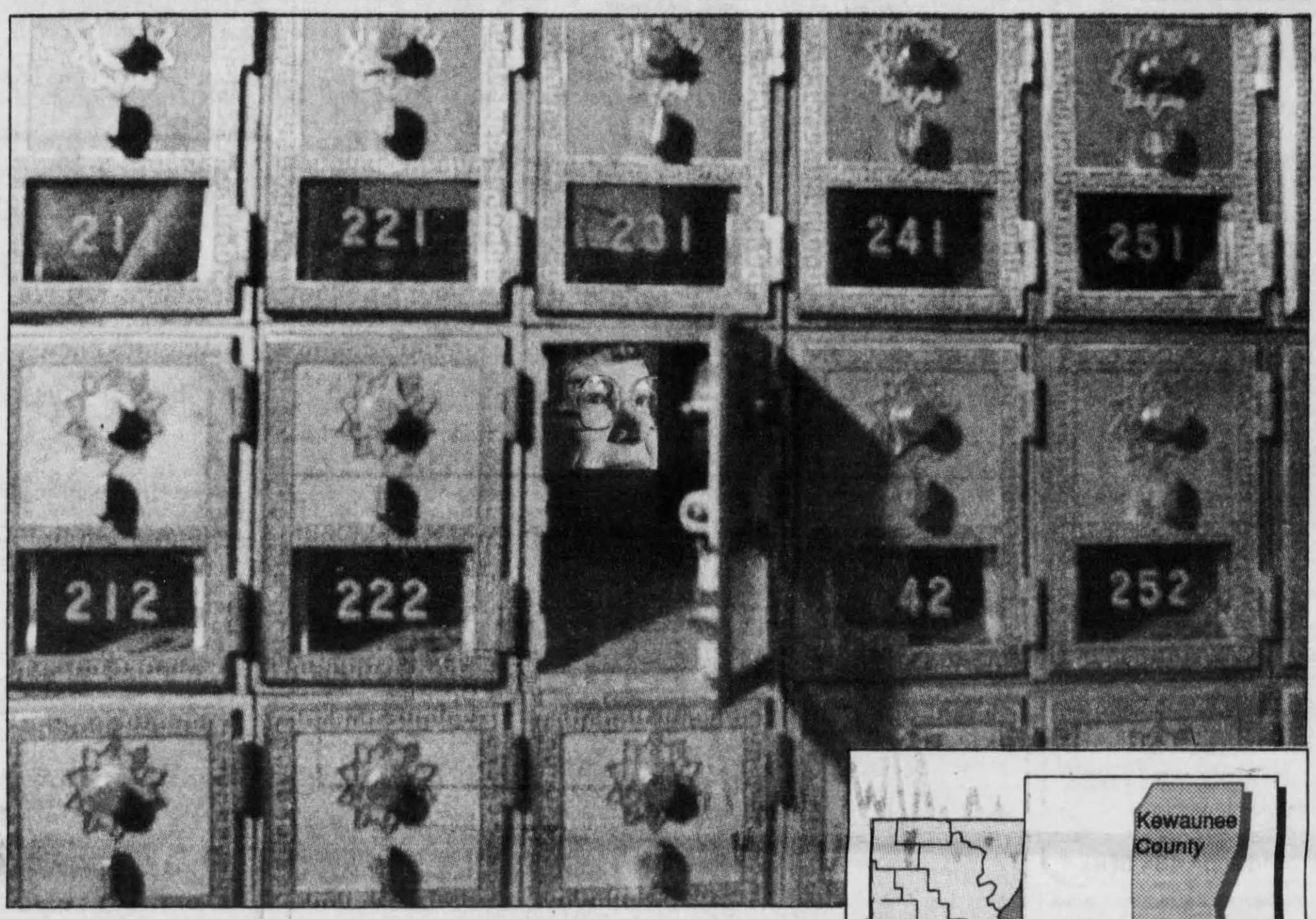
This week's community profile: Tisch Mills



Mail call: Florence Sponholtz, who assists the postmaster, works behind the scenes at the post office in Tisch Mills.

Tucked into valley, everyone's secure

By Lisa Sumter
Press-Gazette

TISCH MILLS — Residents regard this valley where Manitowoc and Kewaunee counties meet as a safe haven.

It isn't because the area once was home to a military radar base. There aren't guard dogs in every yard. The surrounding hillsides, though picturesque, don't prove a barrier to unscrupulous outsiders.

Press-Gazette photos by Ken Behrend

It's just a feeling.

Besides the typical claims of camaraderie and the quiet life, residents cite security as a benefit of living in Tisch Mills, at the crossroads of Manitowoc/Kewaunee County BB and B.

"You don't have to worry about strangers with your kids," said Laurie Stangel, E2878 Manitowoc/Kewaunee County BB. "You can send them to the store alone if you have to. People watch out for each other."

She said Tisch Mills, with its large back yards, baseball diamond and 4-H activities, is a good place for children.

Florence Sponholtz, 1813 E. Manitowoc/Kewaunee County BB moved to Tisch Mills 25 years ago with her husband, Donald, when he took a job as the "local telephone man" for the Stockbridge and Sherwood Telephone Co. Both have since retired, but she sometimes fills in for the local postmaster.

"My husband and I bike in the summer and walk in the winter," Sponholtz said. "You know every house and you don't have to be afraid to take a walk."

Residents don't have to stray far to buy a loaf of bread, belly up to the bar or see a play. There is a general store, two taverns and a bank at the center of Tisch Mills.

The historic Forst Inn, 2190 E. Kewaunee/Manitowoc County BB, a renovated turn-of-the-century boarding house, restaurant and antique shop, is home to the Little Sandwich Theatre, where amateur performers take their bows.

Although the outlying area is mostly farm country, downtown Tisch Mills is surrounded by rolling wooded hills. The East Twin River cuts a path through the community.

Tisch Mills has found favor with younger families recently. Fred Kohnle, president of Tisch Mills Farm Center, N104 Mill Lane, estimated that a quarter of the community's residents, most of them older people, moved away in the last year and young families moved in.

Despite this, Kohnle seems unsure about the future of small communities such as Tisch Mills.

"Every small community is dying slowly," he said. "The farmers are what keep the community going. A lot of them sell out and neighbors take over. The farms keep getting bigger and fewer."

Kohnle's sons, Chris, 25 and Matthew, 22, hope their father's gloomy prophecy doesn't come to pass in Tisch Mills. Chris works in the family business and Matthew plans to do so when he graduates from college.

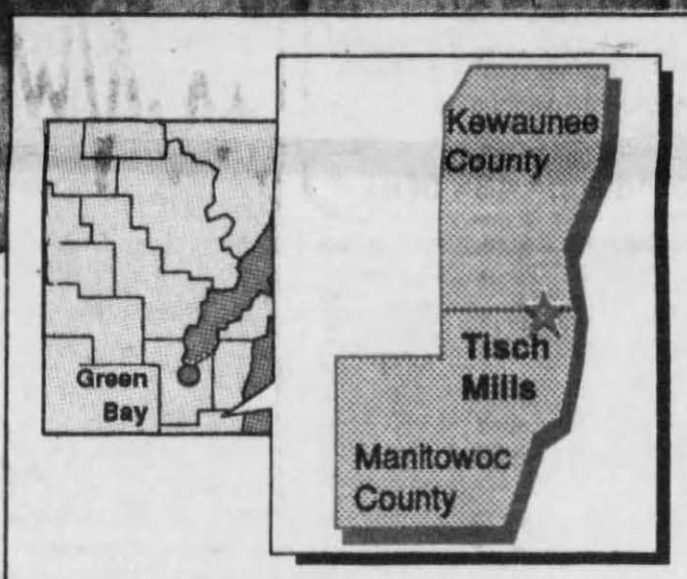
A downtown area divided between two counties might give a community a split personality. Here, children on the south side of Kewaunee/Manitowoc County BB attend Mishicot schools; those on the north side go to Kewaunee schools.

Dual-county life is somewhat taxing for Jim Kolarik, owner of Kolarik Shopping Center, 527 Tisch Mills Road. His house is in Kewaunee County and his business is in Manitowoc County, so he pays the piper in both.

There isn't division in the ranks, though. Residents band together every year for the summer picnic at St. Mary's Catholic Church, for an evening of Christmas caroling and merry-making sponsored by the Tisch Mills Fire Department, and for a jam-packed season of youth and adult baseball at the community park.

A landmark about three miles from Tisch Mills generated concern when it started operating in 1970. But today, residents say they don't worry about the Point Beach Nuclear Plant in Two Creeks and are grateful for the jobs it brought to the area. It's even an attraction for area sportsmen.

"That's the best fishing in the area for big trout," Kolarik said.



The Tisch Mills file

☐ **Population:** About 225

☐ **Name game:** The community is named for Charles Tisch, who settled here in 1867 and built a saw mill and grist mill.

☐ **Sporting:** When Alois "Squeakers" Lodl (he was given the nickname because his shoes squeaked when he walked), owner of what is now the Forst Inn, died in 1949, residents decided his dedication to sports should carry on. They formed the Squeakers Sip Club, which raised funds for and maintains the community park and baseball diamond. The "Sip" is from Lodl's habit of saying to customers, "Na sip," which in Bohemian means "fill 'er up."

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

Play time: In photo at left, Steven Schultz, on top of tire, and Matt Schleis get a push on a swing from Matt's sister, Katie, in Tisch Mills. In photo at right, Chris Kohnle grabs a pile of burlap bags in the feed mill of his family's Tisch Mills Farm Center.