This week's community profile: Rosecrans

Whatever it is, it's 'very nice'

By Sean Schultz
Press-Gazette

Welcome to Rosecrans. Or Rosecrane. Or Rosecranz. Or Rosencrans.

Whatever they call it, this tiny community just one mile west of Maribel on Manitowoc County Z is beaming if not booming.

The book *The Romance of Wisconsin Placenames* calls the community Rosecrane, noting that it was named for a woman called Rose Crane who owned a store and tavern there. A historical photo of the old hotel there shows a lineup of military men out front and is dubbed "Rosecranz Encampment."

Press-Gazette photos by Ken Behrend

The locals call their town Rosencrans, inserting that middle "n" that really doesn't belong. It's home; that's what they know for sure.

"It's a very nice little town, very helpful," said Shirley Schneider who has spent her married life there with husband Clarence. "If something happens to one, it happens to everybody."

Schneider drives a school bus for the Denmark schools. She probably wouldn't have found work in Rosecrans itself. Where once there was a blacksmith shop, a car repair station, a hotel, cheese factory, sawmill, dance hall, hardware store and general store, today there are just two bars — the Lucky Lady and Joe's Lucky 13.

"There's no major business here at all except monkey business," Schneider said in jest.

Small town doesn't bother Schneider's neighbor, Ruth Kouba.

"Now, looking at the big cities, I really am happy that I'm here," she said.

Schneider lives next to the Cooperstown town hall, which once was a Methodist church. It still has the altar rails up front. Rosecrans residents now are about half Lutheran, half Roman Catholic, Kouba said.

While the population of Rosecrans normally adds up to nine or 10 families, it quadruples when the children and grandchildren of Dorothy and Joe Novak and Emily and Earl Jensen come back to visit. The Novaks and Jensens each raised 13 children there.

Dorothy (Dort) Novak runs the Lucky 13, which is named after her husband, Joe. She's a newcomer by local standards — she's only had the bar for 23 years.

The Novaks farmed in nearby Larrabee, then moved to the residence behind the bar when their youngest child was 5.

The bar and its customers haven't changed much since she bought it in 1968. Earl Jensen, 77, plunked down on a barstool while a few seats away, his "baby brother" Lloyd, 70, talked politics and waited for his chums to come in to play rap poker.

Earl, looking up at the bar ceiling, remembered when there was a dance hall upstairs. He said the top floor blew off in a windstorm once and dancing was done.

"We used to put a couple support posts up when they had a dance up there so the floor wouldn't fall down," he said.

He remembers another dance hall, too, the Hunters' Home, that opened at 6 a.m. "The farmers came in then and wanted their shot and a pack of tobacco," Earl explained.

Earl spent more than 33 years with the Chicago & North Western Railroad, working a handcar. He retired at age 60 and has been a house painter ever since.

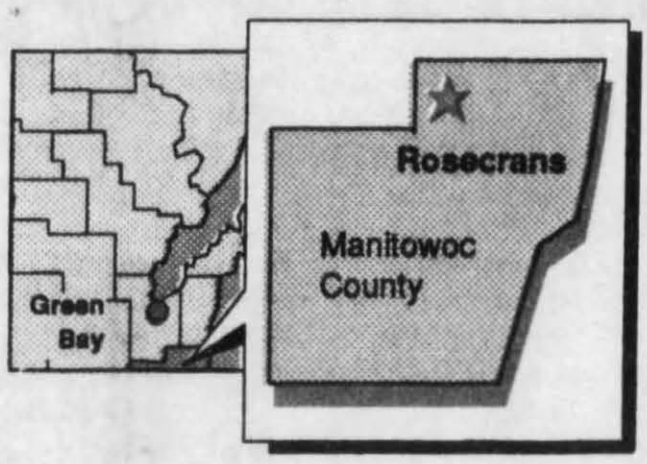
His children had a pickle contract and worked the cucumber garden each summer to earn money for school needs.

The Jensens live in a house that's more than 100 years old. When he bought it, Earl converted the wagon wheel shop to his garage.

Nothing much ever happens in Rosecrans, residents said, but they vividly remember the horror of April 4, 1972. Fire broke out at the Fair Hills Rest Home, killing 10 of the 13 elderly residents trapped inside.

Emily Jensen, a cook at the home, was summoned to the morgue to help identify bodies. "That was a horrible sight," Earl said. "I didn't go to work the next day."

Mail run: Earl Jensen, 77, a lifelong Rosecrans resident, checks for mail in front of his home on Manitowoc County Z.



The Rosecrans file

- **Population:** About 40.
- **Name:** One theory is that Rosecrans was named for Rose Crane, a woman who owned a restaurant and tavern that was a popular spot.
- **Town hall:** Rosecrans is located in the town of Cooperstown. The town hall, located on Manitowoc County Z across from the community's two country taverns, used to be a Methodist church and still has altar rails up front.

"There's no major business here at all except monkey business."

— Shirley Schneider

■ **Next week:** Euren in Kewaunee County

Really Rosecrans: Dorothy "Dort" Novak, above, boasts about her 13 children while tending bar at her tavern, Joe's Lucky 13. At left, neighbors Ruth Kouba, left and Shirley Schneider check a 1972 newspaper for details on a nursing home fire that left 10 people dead.