

# Group helps families surmount homelessness

By Tony Ends  
Editor

**BRODHEAD** — It's good that a nation of three-, four- and more car garages still finds time at least once a year for a Thanksgiving feast in the house.

Despite all the economic ups and downs, Thanksgiving is a welcome time off the road to savor the basics — healthful food, shelter, warm clothing — at home.

I'm as guilty as anyone in America of spending so much time in the car that I forget the most essential of possessions under the family roof.

For Brodhead and other cities in Green County, the annual holiday of family feasting this past week marked just such a moment for collective reflection about the importance of shelter.

Supporters of the county's 5-year-old homelessness remediation program quietly celebrated "Family Promise of Green County Awareness Week."

"I'm thinking about decorating our house, baking for neighbors and spending time with family and friends," wrote Family Promise Board President Angie Parr, in a holiday letter to supporters and friends Thanksgiving week.

"I have also been thinking about the 39 families and the 45 children that have been served by Family Promise this past year alone," Parr stated. "Their feelings about this time of year may

be different than mine.

"I'm sure they're thankful to have an organization like Family Promise to get them through this tough period in life, but I also know this time of year is stressful for them. How do they buy their children Christmas gifts, will they have a Thanksgiving meal, where will they have Christmas, will they be able to bake cookies with their children?"

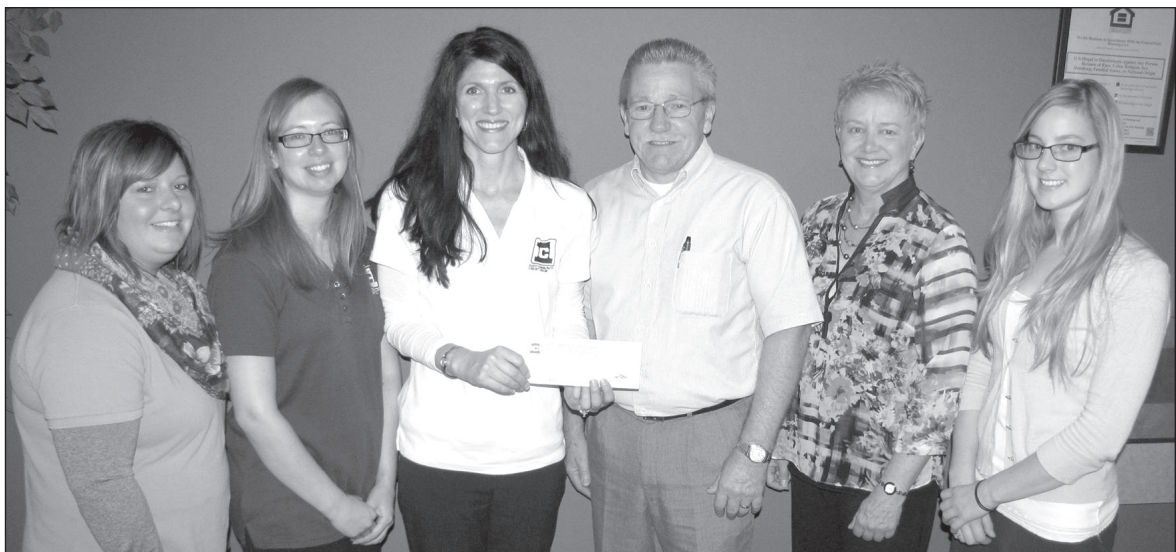
Families in Albany and Brodhead were among those who got emergency assistance thanks to Family Promise this past year.

According to its website, the non-profit organizes and directs work of 13 congregations in Green County. They each host three to five families (up to 14 individuals) about four times a year — for one week at a time. Overnight lodging is provided from 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. the next morning.

The host congregations provide that overnight lodging, breakfast, brown-bag lunch, dinner, and hospitality, too.

Between sheltering nights, a Family Promise day center acts as a home base for guest families to meet basic living needs. It also gives them a spring board from which to work their way out of homelessness and toward stability.

People in Green County who answered with Family Promise the needs of more than 70 people struggling against homelessness



Courtesy Photo

**Monroe's First Community Credit Union celebrated International Credit Union Day recently by taking up a collection for Family Promise of Green County. Between members, staff, and a matching donation from the credit union, the group presented Network Director Rick Gleason with a check for \$465.54. Pictured here, left to right, are credit union employees Kari Hicks, Stephanie Dee, Suzanne Meier (Branch Manager), Rick Gleason (Family Promise), Cathy Wehinger, and Courtney Wilcox. Family Promise has been operating in Green County since November of 2011 to provide temporary housing for homeless families.**

this past year also had a hand in other great accomplishments.

Parr's letter ticked off six Family Promise successes in 2015:

Ten families graduated from Family Promise and achieved "sustainable independence."

Homeless Prevention Service helped 16 families, relocating them with minimal disruption to their lives.

The organization began its first social work intern program with UW Whitewater.

Family Promise implemented new training programs to include budgeting, stress man-

agement, resume writing, nutrition and parenting.

The group linked people it served to work experience opportunities of Forward Services/W2.

Mentors started helping some of Family Promise of Green County's shelter guests with independent living skills.

In the year ahead, Family Promise hopes to find a way to meet another need — transportation.

Family Promise needs a van to get families to the day center and necessary appointments, chil-

dren to school, adults to interviews and job training.

Serving with Parr on the Family Promise Board of Trustees this past year were Pastor Randy Booth, Deb Weis, Fairy Elmer, Jon Brunner, Bob Beck, Ann Bush, David Olsen, Kimberly Cross, Victoria Solomon, Kris Wisnefske, Sara Latimer, Stephanie King and Linda Nack.

To contribute and support them in the services they provide — or to help them address the need for a van, contact them through familypromisegreen-county.org or call 328-2600.

# Protecting what we need and love from denial

Denial, as I understand it, is a misguided way a human being protects himself from realities he can't bear to face.

In my own life and experience, denial has never resulted in anything good.

Some people I've seen finally come to terms with their denial were able with courage, truth and compassion to recover from the personal damage.

Yet in the public arena, one must admit historically that the wreckage abided too long by a people in denial becomes ever more catastrophic.

Consequences can reach a point of no return.

In recent weeks, I came across a term that illustrates the vital importance of collectively coming to grips with public denial.

The term has been used variously in different contexts by no less than the National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Department of Energy.

Supposedly intelligent people, powerful and influential people, have used this term to justify public policies affecting everyone, everywhere in America.

They employed the concept to call for a nation to embark on actions that achieved narrow economic outcomes, with far-reaching human, social and ecological impact.

"National sacrifice area," is this term they used.

The very thought to me of any inhabited area, stretch of fertile soil, or homeland being written off — sacrificed for any reason — is shocking.

As a farmer indebted to soil science, I know that microscopic life essential to the cycle of plants, animals and humans is abundantly present in every inch

of fertile ground.

I understand that nearly 99 percent of the nation who do not farm now, don't recognize this vital source of all life under their feet.

Yet that a sizable number of us all are in denial and have abided this notion of "national sacrifice areas," sometimes generation upon generation, for more than a century and a half, is disturbing.

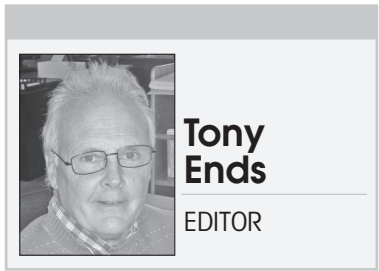
People who've stood to gain — who did greatly gain — from designating regions of the country "national sacrifice areas" often persuaded majorities of people that these lands were remote, that few would be affected.

History has shown the reach, the consequence, of sacrificing areas of the Earth has often proven these arguments untrue. Eventually, all of us are affected. All of us share in the sacrifice.

Relatively cheap energy was often the motivation for despoiling and sacrificing an area to extract minerals resources.

Coal and nuclear power plant proponents each have found reasons to employ the term "national sacrifice area," the one for extracting its fuel at great cost to much life, the other for storing its deadly radioactive waste.

I discovered the extensive



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effects of the former just out of Marquette's graduate school of journalism in 1980. Within a few months, I'd taken a job with the National Forest Service to gain writing experience in its information office.

Its regional office in Milwaukee flew me to the smallest of its forests in southern Indiana and Ohio to write press releases about their work.

At the time in Ohio, the Forest Service was trying to reclaim small parcels of land left ruined and poisoning surface water as the result of mining practices.

As background to the press release writing, I was made aware that mining had destroyed nearly a third of Ohio's surface area since coal was first taken from its earth in 1800.

A staggering 3.7 billion tons of coal has been removed from beneath once forested rolling hills and mountains in Ohio in that time.

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Coal taken from a single mine, Ohio's biggest mine, would fill rail cars 1,000 miles long.

Is the image of that solid volume — now disintegrated and burned into gases — yet impacting us all to this day, everywhere around the world, not staggering?

Fines mining companies had to pay for ruining water and landscape were at the time trivial.

Yet the price the same companies demanded to use the same heavy mining equipment to reclaim even 1.5 acres of ruined and abandoned ground to the Forest Service was more than \$1 million.

In a book called "What are People for?" I recently read quotes from an activist trying to defend his coal mining neighbors in a "national sacrifice area" of Appalachia.

Crippled miners, their families living in hovels or very spare housing conditions, ruined landscapes made uninhabitable even for microscopic life — for whose wealth, he asked. Was the sacri-

fice worth it?

Journalists Chris Hedges and Bill Moyers have more recently exposed other forgotten corners of this country where Americans are trapped in endless cycles of poverty, powerlessness, and despair as a result of economic activity.

Hedges has called these places "sacrifice zones." Moyers & Company has explored how areas like Camden, New Jersey; Immokalee, Florida; and parts of West Virginia suffer while the corporations that plundered them thrive.

It's always easier to recognize what people past or present have been influenced to deny, have tried to deny, to protect themselves from what they cannot face.

Has the fertile Upper Midwest become a "national sacrifice zone?" Is Wisconsin in certain ways becoming a "national sacrifice zone?" If we are, how can we protect what we need and love from our own denial?

**6th Annual Enchanted Sugar River Christmas**  
Downtown Albany  
Saturday, December 5th, 4:00-5:00 p.m.  
**Santa Arrives at 4:15 p.m.**  
COME JOIN IN ON THE SING-ALONG OF HOLIDAY FAVORITES

Hot chocolate, coffee and treats.  
Get a bite to eat or warm up with a drink at one of Albany's Fine Dining Establishments  
5:00 p.m. — Lighting of the Village Christmas Tree

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**Virginia King & Gary Armitage have been chosen to light this year's tree**