

## AROUND THE COULEE REGION

### Man found hurt in lot

A man who was found lying under a van in a pool of blood in a downtown La Crosse parking lot remained hospitalized Sunday night.

According to a police department report, Andrew Reed, 19, of 1510 Badger St., was found by two passersby at 1:50 a.m. Sunday in the parking lot of Metz Baking Co., 435 S. Seventh St. He was partly under a van which had Iowa license plates, the report said.

According to police, Reed was bleeding profusely from a three-inch gash above his right eye, his nostrils were filled with blood and a scratch was visible on his thigh.

A front tire and the lower portion of the driver's side of the van was splattered with blood, the report said, but police

suspected the van was not directly involved with the incident.

Reed was taken to Gundersen-Lutheran Medical Center where he was listed in good condition Sunday night. Police are continuing their investigation.

### Fire damages playground

LA CRESCENT, Minn. — The La Crescent Fire Department is investigating the cause of a fire Sunday that destroyed half the wooden playground equipment at the La Crescent Elementary School.

Fire Chief Bernie Buehler said the fire was reported at 12:45 p.m. and appeared to have started in the protective ground surface that is made of rubber tire chips.

School Superintendent Kenneth Runberg said the wooden structure was designed for use by first- and second-graders and was installed in the late 1980s.

Climbing structures, a slide, a walking bridge and a walkway were among the wooden sections that were damaged and will need to be replaced, as will the protective surface, Runberg said.

He said the school district's insurance agent will determine the financial damages.

### Chemicals cause concern

A load of chemicals was being held for safe keeping by the La Crosse Fire Department Sunday night after the driver of an extended-cab pickup truck got nervous about the load he was hauling.

Assistant Fire Chief Glen Jones said the chemicals, in one- to five-gallon containers, were identified by their labels and included acids, caustic sodas, glycerides and two bags of fertilizer.

Jones said the driver reportedly pulled

the load into the parking lot south of Ardie's Restaurant, 400 Lang Drive, and contacted police about 8:45 p.m.

"There is limited danger for explosability or flammability, but as with any acid, it creates a health hazard if anybody becomes exposed to them or comes in contact with them," Jones said.

No one did come in contact with the chemicals, he added. "They're sealed nice and neat."

The chemicals were taken to the La Crosse city garage on Isle la Plume, where agents from the Drug Enforcement Agency in Minneapolis will inspect them today, Jones said.

The driver, who refused to be identified except to law enforcement officers, said he loaded the chemicals at an auction, but became concerned about them before arriving at his destination, which he declined to identify.

## CHRIS HARDIE

# The Great Pumpkin story ends up a mess



Hardie/Of the Tribune

In case you haven't noticed, Halloween is just around the corner.

The somewhat elaborate Halloween displays showing up in yards should be clue enough, but the real sign is an increase in the number of those cheesy looking pumpkin leaf bags everyone has on their lawns.

So far the only Halloween decorating done at the Hardie house — except for those authentic cobwebs in the corners — are some decorated pumpkins on the front porch. But it's just not the same as last year, when our sagging veranda was home to West Salem's largest pumpkin — a voluminous veggie that weighed several hundred pounds.

The pumpkin may be familiar to those faithful readers out there — which at last count was up to 10 (including family members) — because I wrote about it last year. But what I didn't tell you was what happened to the pumpkin after Halloween.

So here, as they say, is the rest of the story.

After Halloween passed, I wondered what to do with a 300-pound pumpkin. It was too big to compost and I doubted if I could find a trash bag big enough or strong enough to throw it away with the weekly garbage. And no one seemed to want to recycle it into pies.

Then my dad called one day in early November to say he was stopping by on his way to pick up a part for his farm equipment. Since he had his pickup truck, I asked if he could take the pumpkin back to his farm — where he could use it to fill a huge ditch or put it to some other good use. The farm was, after all, where the pumpkin came from.

He agreed and we rolled the pumpkin across some boards into the back of the truck. Like many farm trucks, Dad's pickup no longer has a tailgate because the sides of the pickup have bowed out from thousands of loads over the years.

The pumpkin had a natural flat spot where it had sat on the soil while it grew, but Dad decided to prop it up against the cab so people could see its painted face.

I thanked Dad again and he drove away. Happy that I had solved the pumpkin disposal puzzle, I got ready for work.

A few minutes later I was on my way to work when I was slowed by a traffic jam, something that always puts me in a foul mood. Ahead of me was a street department truck blocking the lane.

As I passed the truck, I drove over some orange stuff in the street that a worker was busy scooping up. The junk smeared all over the bottom of my car. It was obvious that some jerk had smashed several pumpkins on the street in some type of senseless, childish post-Halloween vandalism. That ticked me off even more.

A couple of days later I talked with Dad again and I asked him how he disposed of the pumpkin. He started to laugh and said the pumpkin never made it home.

Dad said he was turning the corner with the pickup when the precariously perched pumpkin rolled out and smashed into pieces on the street. Since he was in a hurry to pick up the farm equipment part before the business closed, he stopped long enough to push the pieces of pumpkin to the side of the street so the traffic could get through.

Dad intended to stop on his way home to pick up the pieces, but by the time he returned, all that remained of the pumpkin was a few scattered bits of orange.

By then it finally dawned on me. I asked him where the pumpkin was pulverized. Sure enough, that orange stuff that I saw on the street was the remnants of the pumpkin.

It just goes to show you that labeling anonymous jerks can be a dangerous practice.

Chris Hardie, the Tribune's assistant city editor, says he's going to do something scary this year for Halloween, like balance his checkbook. Call him at 791-8231.

# Building a healthy habitat

For Roald Gundersen, making certain his house is environmentally friendly is key

By GERI PARLIN  
Of the Tribune staff

Most of us think of our homes as sanctuaries — places where we can be safe from the hectic pace of the outside world. Shut the door at night, we think, and we are shutting the door on the day's problems and worries.

But what you may actually be doing, said Roald Gundersen, is shutting yourself into an unhealthy environment.

Gundersen, who is an architect and one of the people who worked on Biosphere 2, the environmental project near Tucson, Ariz., where eight people lived enclosed among 3,800 species of plants and animals for two years, said most houses emit toxins and contribute to the colds and other ailments we suffer. All sorts of materials, including carpeting and insulation, can contribute to indoor pollution, he said.

That's not what Roald and his wife, Kitty, wanted in their house. So they decided to build their own environmentally friendly home in a patch of woods in North Chipmunk Coulee, near the La Crosse-Vernon County line east of Goose Island.

Though Gundersen is an architect, he had never built a house, so the whole experience has been an adventure. He and Kitty have learned as they have worked, changing plans or using materials that are available on site.

That has led to architectural innovations that make this dwelling uniquely their own.

A poplar tree acts as the base for the couple's loft bedroom. With the help of other tree branches, it spreads out to become the balcony railing for the loft. The trap door to the

upstairs has a rope pull with hardware that came right off the couple's property.

"We found it in a stream and it had a hole in it," Gundersen said. He pulled the stone over to a tree branch and hooked it onto the tree. "It even has a locking feature."

To cut toxins and costs, the house is insulated with straw bales. The straw bale has an R-value of 50, said Gundersen, and is readily available in this area. Plus, it doesn't give off harmful emissions.

Sand from the site was used to make the plaster for the walls. The beams are linden and poplar trees taken off the property. They were not cut into boards, so there was little waste material, which also helped cut down on the cost, Gundersen said.

"Construction is expensive because you have to make accurate dimensions," said Gundersen. But with the use of more sculptural materials such as the trees, he said, there is less waste and less need for precision.

The A-frame house has a wall of windows that looks out over a pond and to the wooded bluffs beyond. That wall of windows opens out to a porch which spans the width of the house. Underneath the porch and the house, the base for a greenhouse is in place. But they won't get around to actually building the greenhouse this year, said Gundersen, who keeps coming up with ideas for the house.

"We're still only about a fifth of the way there."

But he and Kitty are getting there in a way that suits them and in a way that Gundersen thinks will suit other people.

"If I'm to be successful at what I'm doing, I have to make it possible for other people."



REFLECTION: Roald Gundersen sits on the deck of his environmentally friendly house, located next to a pond in North Chipmunk Coulee, south of La Crosse



LOOKING UP: Roald Gundersen in the doorway of the living room.



### WORKSHOP:

Roald Gundersen will teach a workshop about load-bearing straw bales on Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 28 and 29, on his property. There will be hands-on experience in the construction method. The cost is \$120 per person or \$200 for a couple. A \$20 deposit will reserve a spot at the workshop. For reservations, call 784-1614. Registration deadline is Oct. 26.

◀ LOFT: A poplar tree acts as a base for the Gundersens' loft. The kitchen can be seen at the rear of the lower level.

Photos by  
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