

Mueller reflects on career at MFL MarMac McGregor Center



Denise Mueller officially retires as MFL MarMac Middle School Principal this month. Mueller spent 28 years as a teacher, guidance counselor and principal at the McGregor Center—a place she called her second home and second family. (Submitted photo)

By Audrey Posten

Denise Mueller officially retires as MFL MarMac Middle School Principal this month. Mueller spent 28 years as a teacher, guidance counselor and principal at the McGregor Center—a place she called her second home and second family. “It’s been a great career here. A really good place for me,” she reflected. Although working with kids was a career

goal for Mueller growing up, she went to Northeast Iowa Community College in Calmar for business instead. It wasn’t until she was married and living in Elkader that her husband encouraged her to pursue education. “I took night classes and did everything I had to to get my degree in elementary ed, and art was my minor. My first job then was here as an art teacher,” Mueller recalled.

She eventually moved into sixth grade reading and language, teaching that for 13 years before looking for other opportunities in the educational realm. “At the time, we were looking for a guidance counselor here. I did not have that degree, but I said I’d be willing to get it. So I was the guidance counselor for a year and then they looked at me and said, ‘What would you think of being the assistant principal?’” Mueller said. She was both guidance counselor and assistant principal for one year, a job Mueller acknowledged was difficult when you have to both counsel and discipline. There was one year of being only assistant principal before Mueller took over as McGregor Center principal full-time.

“Did I always think I was going to be a principal? Absolutely not,” she said, “but other people saw that in me, I guess. That’s how I ended up here.” Mueller said evolving technology—especially the recent growth of artificial intelligence—has

been among the biggest changes in her career. Nothing was more disruptive, though, than the COVID-19 pandemic. “Trying to navigate that when nobody’s ever been through anything like that before, and learning from home and then trying to get the kids to come back to school,” she reflected. “It really seemed like, after that, we had a lot more social-emotional things that came up. Sometimes school is that safe place for kids, and they didn’t have that for a while. They didn’t have meals every day or they didn’t have that adult that was connecting with them.” “I think that was a very difficult time, but we made it through it,” she

said. Out of the pandemic came the Zen Den, one of the resources Mueller was most proud to implement at the middle school. The space allows students to decompress, when necessary. Mueller also enjoyed birthday meals, where students could invite one or two people from outside the school—or a staff member or student if no one was available—to eat lunch with them. “I would put chandeliers in the little gym and tablecloths and have music playing and they could have their special person come in,” she said. In 2025, MFL MarMac held an eighth grade graduation for the third

year. Mueller championed the event as a way to prepare eighth graders and send them off to high school. “It kind of got them in that mode of being a little bit more responsible,” she said, “and it brought so many people in: their grandparents, their parents, friends. Every one of them gets mentioned during the night in some way, and that’s good for everyone to get a little recognition.” Mueller also loved special activities at the McGregor Center: Red Ribbon Week, character ed days, homecoming. “All those extra events where you get to dress up and

See MUELLER, page 4



Get ready to “sip” back and relax on the banks of the Mississippi River while sampling regional beers and wines—and for the first time ever, barbecue—at the Lazy River Beer and Wine Festival in Marquette on June 28. (Times-Register file photo)

Lazy River Beer and Wine Festival adds barbecue

By Audrey Posten

Get ready to “sip” back and relax on the banks of the Mississippi River while sampling regional beers and wines—and for the first time ever, barbecue—at the Lazy River Beer and Wine Festival. The annual fundraising event, organized by the McGregor-Marquette Chamber of Commerce, will be held from 2 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, June 28, on the Marquette riverfront. Organizers are spicing things up with the new barbecue competition. “When the city of Marquette inquired about having a barbecue cook-off, it seemed only natural to try this new feature out at Lazy River. The sights and smells of ribs on the grill will add to our summer theme and festive riverfront atmosphere,” said

McGregor-Marquette Chamber of Commerce Director Mary Anderson. “Our meat is provided thanks to sponsorship from Mississippi Meats of Prairie du Chien.” Attendees will be offered limited sampling of barbecue along with unlimited wine and beer samples and a commemorative glass. Wineries that will be at Lazy River this year include Marquette’s own Eagles Landing Winery, as well as Promiseland Winery from Guttenberg, Wineshiek Wildberry Winery from Decorah, Stone Cliff Winery in Dubuque and Frisky Fox Winery near Riceville. The list of breweries is Old Man River from McGregor, Alerton Brewing Company of Independence, Big Grove Brewery, TLC Brew Works of Holy Cross and Potosi Brewing Company.

Anderson said attendees can also vote for their favorite beer or wine product, with prizes sponsored by KCTN FM 100. “Put that together with joyful, foot-stomping music featuring Blues Hall of Fame members Joe and Vicki Price, and you’ve got all the ingredients for a good time,” Anderson added. Along with the barbecue samples, a pulled pork meal will be available for purchase. There will be a tent and seating on the grounds, but attendees are welcome to bring their own chairs to sit in the shade or along the river. Tickets can be purchased online at <https://www.portsofdiscovery.com/chamber-events> and will also be available at the gate.

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