

LAKE DISTRICT OFFICE

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 Nature Preserve Technician

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TWENTY SUMMERS ON LAKE RIPLEY WITH OFFICER ARMANDO BRAZZONI

This week I had a chance to interview Armando and thank him personally for his service to Lake Ripley and Oakland township. He has touched so many of us with his professionalism and we can't thank him enough!

After nearly two decades of service on Lake Ripley and in the Oakland township, Officer Brazzoni is retiring from the Oakland Police Department and their Lake Patrol, leaving behind a legacy defined not only by public safety, but by compassion, education, and community connection.



Armando (far right) and Dave Warner (left) assisting boaters.

What began as an unexpected opportunity in 2007 grew into a career that touched countless lives. At the time, Armando was serving as a patrol officer in Palmyra when he learned of an opening with the Lake Ripley patrol. Despite having little boating experience, he stepped forward, committed to learning the role and seeing it through. After completing training and teaching himself the workings of boating law enforcement, he quickly found a calling on the lake.

"I fell in love with the place, the community, and the job," Armando recalled. "Twenty years later, here we are."

Over the years, Armando's responsibilities expanded beyond the water. Already an experienced patrol officer, he transitioned into road patrol work in Oakland while continuing his duties on Lake Ripley. Through his dual role, he helped strengthen coordination between lake patrol officers, local law enforcement, and the Sheriff's Department, creating a more efficient and effective public safety presence.

TWENTY SUMMERS CONTINUED

One of Armando's proudest accomplishments was helping reshape the Lake Patrol program itself. Working alongside fellow officer Dave Warner, he helped demonstrate the value of having multiple patrol units operating simultaneously on the lake.

I asked Armando about his greatest successes, and it became clear that he values the relationships he's built far more than any law enforcement statistics.

Throughout his career, he worked to change perceptions about law enforcement by emphasizing education, fairness, and approachability. That philosophy led to a voluntary boat inspection program that allowed residents to learn about safety requirements before receiving citations. He also rewarded children who wore life jackets with ice cream coupons, turning safety lessons into positive experiences.

Many of Armando's favorite memories involve the friendships that grew from simple acts of service. One of his first weekends on patrol, he assisted a stranded couple on a malfunctioning WaveRunner. What began as a routine service call became a lasting friendship. "Another time I saw a fisherman stranded in the bay and as I approached I saw it was your Dad and was able to help him back to

the pier," Armando shared.

Beyond law enforcement, Armando has dedicated his professional life to education. Since 1995, he has worked with students with intellectual disabilities and autism, specializing in supporting students with challenging behavioral needs. He continues to teach at Alexander Hamilton High School in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Whether in the classroom or on patrol, a common theme has guided his work.

"I love serving and helping people," Armando said. "That's why I loved being a cop so much."

As Armando closes this chapter of his career, Lake Ripley is left with safer boating practices, stronger relationships between residents and law enforcement, and countless examples of kindness and service. For many on the Lake, he was far more than a patrol officer. He was a teacher, mentor, helper, and trusted friend.

Thank you for your service, Armando.

Chair

Jimmy DeGidio



Armando patrolling on the jetski.

A COMMUNITY TO WHICH WE BELONG

Aldo Leopold wrote in 1948, "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect...That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology... The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants and animals...", and of course, us! We the people.

One might suppose that the 'Lake Ripley community' is just those folks living around the lake. Lake Ripley would say otherwise; that this community includes everything within our watershed...all of our yards, farm fields, and woodlands, the streams, wetlands and the groundwater underneath, because all the waters are connected hydrologically.

Lake Ripley's water is replenished not only by its inlet stream and rainfall, but also by the underlying groundwater.

Groundwater replenishes us, too! Groundwater provides drinking water to all of us in the Oakland Township, as well as to 70% of Wisconsin citizens! When we are good water citizens, and use our water respectfully, we are helping our lake too.

When we plant raingardens and lakeshore buffer gardens, and restore prairies and wetlands, these places help recharge the groundwater around the lake. Every conservation effort helps secure a good future for Lake Ripley.

We all love our lake. Let's remember to also love our lake's community, all of its watershed – from the smallest yards to the largest woodlands, our streams, wetlands, and the groundwater too! And us! We're all part of the community to which we belong.



DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES

By: Andrew Sabai – Nature Preserve Technician

Dragonflies are familiar to anyone enjoying time along the lake. A little less known are their close cousins, the damselflies, with whom they compose the insect order (group) Odonata.

Dragonflies have the familiar giant compound eyes that are reminiscent of old helicopters. They hold their wings straight out at their sides, whether in flight or at rest. Damselflies are more dainty; their body parts are thinner, their eyes are smaller, and they hold their wings above their long abdomen when at rest. Both are good fliers.

Damselflies and dragonflies have two very different life stages. Adults lay their eggs in water. The eggs hatch into tiny, voracious predators that feed on everything from plankton to small fish, though they are more likely to be eaten by fish. Dragonfly larva are sometimes sold in bait shops under the name 'hellgrammites'. Some species spend up to four years in the aquatic larval stage before crawling out of the water and metamorphosing into the flying adults we are familiar with. Most will live out their relatively short adult lives as insect-eating predators near the waters they grew up in, but a few species, like the Green Darner, are migratory.

As swimming predators as larvae, and flying predators as adults, dragonflies and damselflies play important roles in both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. While voracious predators, they are also important prey items for birds and fish.

Wisconsin is home to some 160 species of dragonflies and damselflies. How can there be so many kinds of what seem to do or play the same role? The answer is that individual species have found many niches in the environment in which they can do better than other species. That niche could be specific diet requirements, times of year when they are active as adults, a particular plant they may be associated with, water hardness, flowing vs. non-flowing water. The list of variables is long!

Because these creatures have such diverse niches and environmental requirements, cataloging them in a given area can tell us a lot about that place and serve as an indicator species. This is one of the reasons why this summer, the Lake District has teamed up with members of the Wisconsin Dragonfly Society to survey the wetlands and streams of the Lake District Preserve. With their help, we answer what dragonflies and damselflies are inhabiting the area and, in doing so, provide us clues to the health of the surrounding habitat.

Beyond telling us about the local environment, they are important and fascinating on their own. We will report what we find in future surveys in one of our upcoming issues of the Ripples...



Common Baskettail Dragonfly (*Epitheca cynosura*)



Ebony Jewelwing Damselfly females *Calopteryx maculata*



Lake Manager, Lianna, and President of the Wisconsin Dragonfly Society, Edgar Spalding, during one of the surveys.

LESSONS FROM A FARMER

Wisconsin is America's Dairyland, and agriculture is woven into nearly every aspect of our state's identity. When people picture Wisconsin, they often image rolling hills dotted with red barns, grazing cattle, and fields stretching towards the horizon. From above, those fields form a patchwork of crops separated by winding roads and waterways. These millions of acres are far more than picturesque scenery – they are the foundation of Wisconsin's economy, an important part of its culture, and a major influence on the health of our lakes, rivers and groundwater.

To better understand modern farming and its relationship with conservation, I spent a morning with Karl Hundt, owner of 'Hundt's Hickory Hill Ag Services' and one of Oakland's no-till farmers.



Overlooking one of Karl's soybean fields.

Karl and his wife Rachel farm over a thousand acres of land, with the majority of those acres in Oakland township. Unlike many Wisconsin farmers, Karl is a first-generation farmer. His passion for agriculture began early and in high school Karl worked for Herb Altenburg, a local farmer who taught him the basics of farming. Karl learned a lot from Herb and throughout his time on Herb's farm, his love for farming continued to grow.

Although farming was always his dream, Karl initially pursued another career. He earned a degree in mechanical engineering from the Milwaukee School of Engineering and spent nearly a decade designing harvesting equipment for MacDon Industries. Throughout those years, however, he never left farming behind. He continued helping on Herb's farm while saving toward a future of his own.

Eventually, Karl took a leap of faith and in 2018 purchased 110 acres of vacant land along Highway 12. It was the first farm he could truly call his own. "I like being challenged," Karl explained as we stood in one of his cornfields discussing his operation. "I like being my own boss, and I love crops." But passion alone isn't enough to build a farming operation. "That's the hard part about trying to farm from scratch—you need enough acreage to be able to do it full time."

That opportunity arrived when local farmer Bill Rohloff (featured in one of our 2023 newsletters!) decided to slow down and offered Karl the chance to rent 450 acres from his "Awesome Acres" farming operation. The additional land gave Karl the confidence to leave his engineering career and become a full-time farmer.

Today, Karl grows corn, soybeans, and wheat as cash crops using no-till farming, a practice that minimizes soil disturbance while improving soil health.

Rather than plowing fields before planting, Karl focuses on setting up his planter for no-till operations. This allows him to plant directly into the previous year's crop residue. Before planting, weeds are managed with herbicides, and the seed itself comes from another of Karl's businesses—he is also a Golden Harvest seed dealer.

No-till farming is often paired with cover crops, which are planted after the cash crop has been harvested. Species such as clover, radishes, rye, wheat, oats, and others help anchor soil with their roots, reducing erosion while adding valuable organic matter as they decompose, and providing fertility for the following cash crop.

LESSONS FROM A FARMER CONTINUED

Karl primarily uses clover, alfalfa, radishes, and wheat as cover crops. Wheat also serves as one of his cash crops. After harvesting wheat, the remaining residue provides excellent ground cover, helping reduce weed pressure before corn is planted the following season.

The benefits of no-till farming extend well beyond the farm gate. Because the soil remains largely undisturbed, organic matter accumulates more quickly and binds soil particles together into stable aggregates. Healthier soil is better able to absorb rainfall, reducing erosion and limiting the amount of sediment and nutrients that wash into nearby waterways. For communities that depend on clean lakes, rivers, and groundwater, these practices can make a meaningful difference.

No-till farming allows Karl to operate with fewer pieces of equipment and less labor. “By maintaining a lean line of machinery, I have been able to grow my farming operation while minimizing debt,” he explained. Even a “lean” lineup is impressive, including a combine, planter, drain drill, grain handling equipment, two tractors, and a sprayer. Still, owning only the equipment he truly needs has allowed Karl to expand his acreage while keeping his business financially sustainable.

Throughout the morning, Karl generously shared both his knowledge and his perspective on farming. I quickly realized that farming demands far more than planting and harvesting.

Farmers must be flexible. They must be patient and resilient. Entire days of planting can disappear to weather, insects, or hungry deer. And they must be remarkably versatile. Depending on the hour, a farmer may be an entrepreneur, mechanic, agronomist, meteorologist, engineer, accountant, or equipment operator. As we walked around his farmstead, Karl casually mentioned designing a grain storage bin that he is constructing—a perfect example of the wide range of skills modern farming requires.

Perhaps what impressed me most was how much observation goes into every decision. Karl



Karl Hundt standing in one of his wheat fields.

studies each field closely, paying attention to soil conditions, crop performance, and previous rotations before deciding what to plant next. Farming, I learned, is as much about careful observation, patience, and problem-solving as it is about hard work.

Wisconsin's fertile soils began forming nearly 20,000 years ago as glaciers retreated across the landscape. For thousands of years afterward, native prairies grew, died, and decomposed, gradually building some of the richest agricultural soils in the world—all without the aid of tillage. Modern no-till farming seeks to work with those natural processes rather than against them, protecting soil while maintaining productive farmland for future generations.

Spending time with Karl gave me a deeper appreciation not only for the work that farmers do, but also for the thoughtful management that goes into producing crops while caring for the land. Practices like no-till farming and implementation of cover crops demonstrate that agriculture and conservation can go hand in hand, preserving the health of Wisconsin's soils and waters while ensuring that its farming tradition continues to thrive.

LAKE RIPLEY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
2027 PROPOSED BUDGET

	<u>2025 ACTUAL</u>	<u>2026 BUDGET</u>	<u>2026 JAN- JUNE ACTUAL</u>	<u>2026 JAN-DEC ESTIMATED</u>	<u>2027 BUDGET</u>
Revenues:					
Real Estate Tax Levy	217,556	234,022	106,476	251,931	258,710
Total Revenues	<u>217,556</u>	<u>234,022</u>	<u>106,476</u>	<u>251,931</u>	<u>258,710</u>
Operations:					
Landowner Cost Sharing	15,000	-	-	-	-
Weed Harvesting	17,850	18,280	2,434	18,200	18,400
Preserve Restoration/Management	27,250	32,750	17,591	32,750	32,750
Staff Payroll/Fringes/Taxes	95,528	105,051	32,854	105,051	110,155
Insurance	9,678	9,800	8,870	9,800	9,700
Legal & Accounting	6,000	5,500	7,761	7,761	10,500
Dues & Conferences	1,850	2,100	1,244	1,500	1,500
Office & Community Outreach	11,650	15,250	3,327	15,250	14,575
Commissioner Stipends	3,200	3,600	900	2,000	2,000
Rent	1,900	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800
Capital Reserve, Land/Equip Acquisition	20,000	46,500	26,425	46,500	45,080
Miscellaneous & General Lake Mgmt.	7,600	11,300	3,110	11,300	12,250
Special Programs	50	-	-	-	-
Total Disbursements	<u>217,556</u>	<u>251,931</u>	<u>106,316</u>	<u>251,912</u>	<u>258,710</u>

LAKE RIPLEY
PROTECTION
FUND

Restricted Fund: \$0

Starting Balance 1/1/2025: \$130,531

2025 Activity:

2025 Interest Earned (from CDs) \$4,094
Used Restricted Funds for land purchase \$128,854
Final Balance 12/31/25 \$5,771

2026 Estimated Activity:

Interest Earned \$0
Cost-share completed \$5,771

Anyone wishing to see a detailed budget may come to the District office at the Oakland Town Hall, N4450 Cty Hwy A, Cambridge, during normal business hours. Please call ahead to make sure the office is open at 608-445-4536.

Estimated Balance 12/31/2026 \$0

Total Lake District Indebtedness as of 8/2026: \$409,384.94

Budget Hearing

August 15, 2026
9 a.m. at Oakland Town Hall
N4450 County Road A
Cambridge, WI, 53523

Annual Meeting

Immediately following budget hearing
Oakland Town Hall

- I. Call to Order
- II. Approval of 2025 Annual Meeting Minutes
- III. Nomination of Board candidates, Statements of candidates, and Election - two open positions (Names on Ballot: Jimmy DeGidio and Steve Bieschke)
- IV. Chairman's report
- V. Treasurer's report
- VI. Approval of the budget and tax levy

VII. Discussion and possible action on other business that can be legally considered by the District

- a. Resolution for Inlet Restoration
Project discussion and possible action.

VIII. Tabulation of vote and election of board members

IX. Adjournment

Meeting of the Board of Directors

Immediately following Annual Meeting
Oakland Town Hall

- I. Call to Order and Roll Call
- II. Election of Board Officers
- III. Adjournment

Note: Public Comment will be taken at discretion of District Chair

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Budget &
Annual Meeting
info inside

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