

Trout Talk

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**Farming, carving
and everything
inbetween**

Page 3

**Couple enjoys retirement at Bennett Spring
by Shelby ATKISON**

NOVEMBER - FEBRUARY 2022/2023

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Farming to carving and everything inbetween

Couple leads fulfilling life through “retirement” at state park

BY SHELBY ATKISON
SHELBY@LACLEDERECORD.COM

Vic and Susan Eckmann were regular visitors to Bennett Spring State Park during their time as farmers in Illinois. They loved the serene scenes and peaceful people they encountered on their trips and made friends in the area naturally during their visits.

“My first time down here was in 1953. We’ve always just loved it here,” said Vic. “We have made a lot of friends here and so when I retired from the farm, I told my wife that’s where we were going to move to.”

The couple purchased a home on property just outside of the state park, which Vic describes as being on the thumbnail of the river.

“Where we live right now, our closest neighbor is a mile away. We never see anybody other than deer and turkeys and wild animals out there, but it’s fun. We enjoy it,” he added. “It makes everyone we get to interact with at the park that much more special. We’ve really made some awesome friends here.”

One of the people the couple kindred a friendship with was Jim Rogers – concessionaire of 20 years at the park.

“Jim was an unbelievable person,” Susan said. “Whenever we’d visit he would always look at me and say, if you ever decide to move here, you’ve got a job... and so when we turned the farm over to our son, I thought, I’m not ready to retire. It was great to have the opportunity to work at the park store. I just love it here.”

Though the idea was upsetting to Susan at first because of their grandchildren, Susan has family in the Columbia area and has been enjoying the beauty of the Ozarks near Bennett Springs for most of her life, so she was ultimately excited for the move.

“I started working at the park in the year 2000 just after we moved here,” explained Susan. “The whole experience has just been incredible.”

Susan and Vic both have been employed by the park for over two decades since. While Susan was working at the park store, Vic would find himself pining for things to do.

See ‘RETIREMENT’/ page 4



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Susan (left) and Vic (right) Eckmann have lived and worked at Bennett Spring for the last 22 years.

LCR Photo/Shelby Atkison

Retirement

from page 3

Though he was retired from the farm life, he needed something to keep him busy.

"First, I worked at the hatchery for years and years. I knew all of the people there and I just asked them one day if they needed any help," Vic said.

"They said they could use somebody for weekends and holidays and I thought, well that's perfect since Susan is working in the store... this will work out just fine."

Once Vic retired from the hatchery several years later, Jim Rogers offered him a job at the park store.

"I've worked my whole life but I thought, I'm getting up in my 80s and I need to slow down, make more time for fishing, wood carving, and what I want to do. So now, I just come in a few days a week," he explained.

See 'RETIREMENT' / page 5



Contributed Photo

Vic Eckmann says he's been a Bennett Spring State Park visitor since the 1950's and has always enjoyed the natural environment and beauty the park offers. Upon moving to the state park area, he and his wife have found peace and solitude in the surroundings. Susan says she especially loves seeing the leaves change colors in the fall, as pictured to the left. The state park is home to many hiking trails for those interested in exploring the seasonal scenes.

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Retirement

from page 4

"The part I missed the most when I wasn't working was all the people that I have met. Over the years we've been here, the friendliness of the people is what sticks out the most. We just have a good relationship with all the people here."

As a long-time visitor to the park and resident for over 20 years, Vic and Susan often share memories of the park's earlier days with new visitors.

"When we first moved down here, there wasn't a concrete dam. There was an earth dam... people can't ever believe that. I like to show folks pictures of the way the park used to be," he said. "It connects them to the park and it's cool for people to know the history of the place they're visiting."

See 'RETIREMENT' / page 6



LCR Photo/Shelby Atkison

Vic Eckmann keeps himself busy though he moved to the state park to retire. He's worked in the hatchery, as well as the park store and creates wood carving artwork on the side. Pictured to the left, Vic is pictured inside the Bennett Spring Park Store holding a piece of art that he created. The piece hangs on the wall in the back of the shop. According to Vic, customers place orders for custom artwork and wood carvings by calling or coming by the store and chatting with him.

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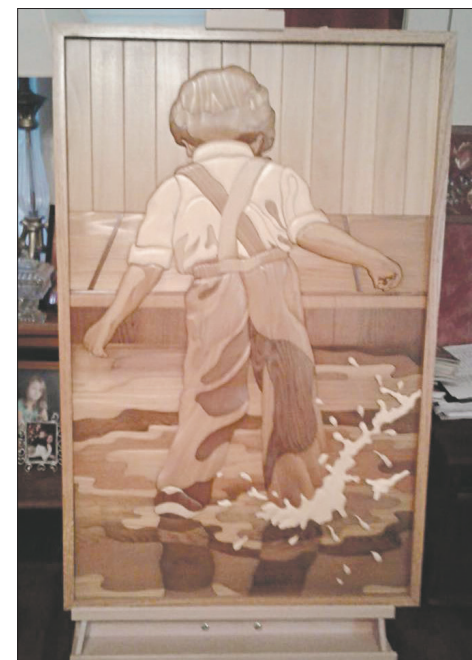
Retirement

from page 5



Contributed Photos

The pictured artwork by Vic was made through the intaglio carving process. The appearance of different colors in the artwork comes from the different natural color of the varying types of wood that were used in making it.



Another fun fact Vic likes to relay to people is that the stream isn't natural, it's manmade and the current location of the hatchery used to be a lake, where the old mill used to be.

"Where the store is now, it was a baseball diamond," Vic recalled. "When we used to come camp and back in the 50s and 60s, there would be inmates from the jail coming to work in the park. And all of us camping would throw a big feed... We'd have a big meal and then play a softball game at the end of the day before they had to go back...

it was great and everybody had a great time. It's interesting how much of the park has changed since then. You wouldn't know it just by looking at the park now."

Aside from their gigs at the state park, the couple also enjoys a shared hobby; wood carving. They belong to the Lake of the Ozarks wood carvers club in Camdenton and host meet each Wednesday at the Lebanon-Laclede County Library from 9-11 a.m. to carve and chat with fellow wood carvers.

"We both have loved to carve for a long, long time so we were happy

to find this club," Vic said. "We have just as many wood carvers in Lebanon so we meet every week and share our love for the art and show each other what we're working on."

"I actually started carving because my father did. When he broke ribs at a factory, he picked that up and I just thought, if my dad can do it... I can too." Susan added. "It's such a fun thing to share with Vic and others in the club now too."

Though COVID slowed down the club's meetings, they're back stronger than ever and show their

art at the Laclede County Fair and the Camdenton Wood Carvers show at the lake each year. Vic also carves custom pieces and takes special orders through the park store at Bennett Spring. He specializes in intaglio; where every color in the art is that of the natural wood. The process shows how different types of wood make up the different colors in the artwork.

"Those who want to talk about an order can just come in or call the store," he said. "I love bringing people's ideas to life and it really is art that can last a lifetime."

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Pics from the park



Contributed Photos

Left, Scott Kollasch poses with a three pound lunker he caught using gray scud in Zone 2 earlier in October. Right, Gary Kniepkamp from St. Jacob, IL shows off his 6 lb catch crackle back from Zone 2.

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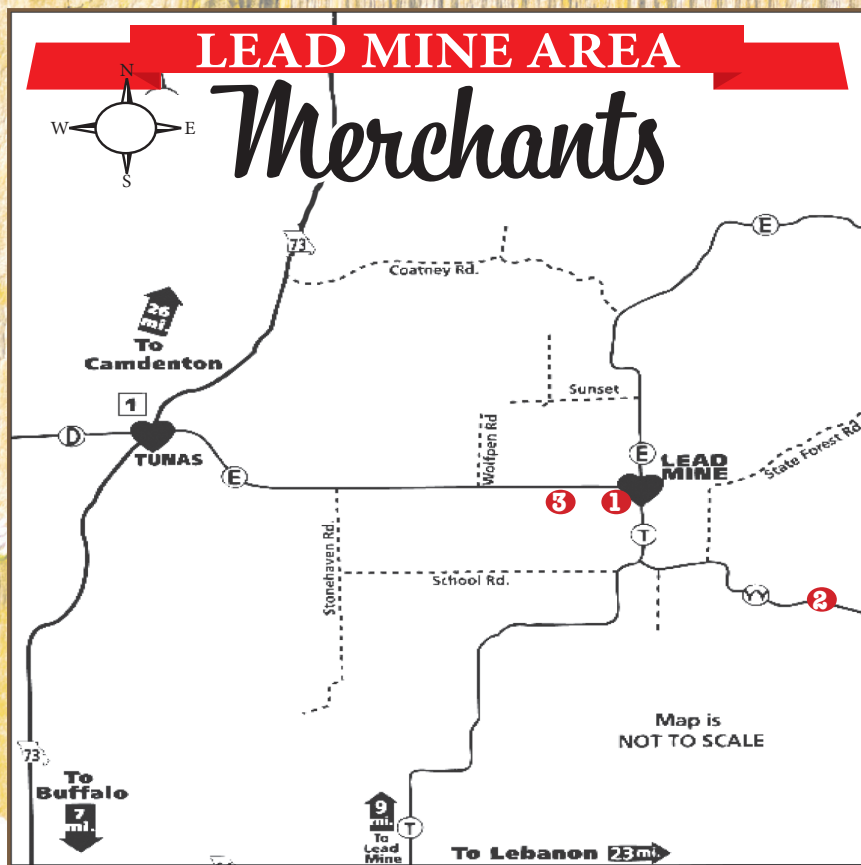
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Contributed Photo

A family affair! Pictured are Rick and Greg Hollenbeck with their respective 4.75 lb and 3.3 lb catches during an October fishing excursion.

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First catch at Bennett Spring State Park



Contributed Photos
Fall is a great time to take to the streams at Bennett Spring State Park. The weather is cooler, the fish are biting and the waterways are lined with hopeful anglers. Pictured are two first-time fishermen who successfully caught their first fish earlier in October. Left, Georgie, age 6, holds a fish he caught during a fall fishing trip at Bennett Spring. Right, Charles, age 9, shows off his first-ever catch with a smile outside the Bennett Spring Park Store.



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Contributed Photos
Left, 3-year-old Ava sports a smile as she lugs her lunkers to the Park Store for a photo opp. Top right, Brody, age 8, shows off his fall catch in front of the Park Store. Bottom right, 10-year-old Sage holds up a string of lunkers he caught earlier in October.

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Trout Talk

BENNETT SPRING STATE PARK AND SURROUNDING AREA





Get in the zone

A look at Bennett Spring State Park rules and regulations:

FISHING REGULATIONS

The spring branch is stocked daily during the regular fishing season, which is March 1 through Oct. 31. Daily permits are required to fish on the spring branch and zones are set aside for different kinds of lures. Permits are available at the park store. For more information, call (417) 532-4307.

ZONE 1: From the hatchery dam upstream to the end of the area. Only flies are permitted.

ZONE 2: From the hatchery dam to the whistle bridge. Only flies and artificial lures are permitted.

ZONE 3: From the whistle bridge to the Niangua River. Only soft plastic

bait (unscented), natural and scented bait are permitted. All flies and artificial lures are prohibited, even if natural bait or scent has been added.

Zone areas are marked in the park and maps are also available in the Park Store.

Trout Fishing Hours

July: 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

August: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

September: 7:30 a.m. to 7:15 p.m.

October: 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

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