



ALEXANDER MCLENDON



# Ocooch Mountain Echo

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# Echoes we are hearing

## TALK OF THE REGION

UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER VALLEY

### Flotsam: Floating Circus to Perform Throughout the Driftless Next Summer

Next summer, a floating band of actors, circus artists and musicians plan to float the Mississippi River from Minneapolis to St. Louis with stops all the long the way for impromptu free performances. The group is actually seasoned for the journey at this point after running Oregon's Willamette River from Corvallis to Portland in 2019, and following the Sacramento River into the San Francisco Bay in 2022. 2023 will be the Mississippi River and plans are beginning for a trip down the Ohio River in 2024.

If the tenor of their performances follows the trajectory of 2022, the setting (and Set) will be one in which global water levels have risen dramatically, mutant fish have replaced humans as the dominant species and there are just a few intrepid humans (our Flotsam cast) who dare to travel on a ramshackle boat performing for whoever happens to gather along the shore.

Boat-builder and cast member Jason Webly told the San Francisco Daily, "My hope is that it's something other than a variety circus show. Something that feels light and like a fairy tale, and has whimsy and audience engagement. And in some way kind of nods to the crises of this time without either being didactic or wallowing in it."

The troupe of musicians, circus performers, and puppeteers travel from place to place on a handmade raft, giving free performances in towns along the way. During the tour, the raft is their mode of transit, their stage, and often their home.

The cast of characters is an eclectic mix of seasoned performers including SARI BREZNAU, the Director of UP UP UP Crane Truck Circus - based in the Seattle area; IRA ECHO, a violinist, dancer, street performer and music composer from New Orleans; ERIC PARTHUM an adept juggler, object manipulator, visual artist, dancer, and circus arts teacher; DREA LUSION a mime, dancer and puppeteer who is one half of the Oakland-based international award-winning company, Figmentally; MATTHEW "POKI" MCCORKLE a mime, sleight of hand magician, and comedian. Poki's award-winning solo acts have been presented in Vienna, Nürnberg, and Berlin, and he has performed in Dubai with Cirque Éloize, one of Canada's leading contemporary

circus companies; SADYE OSTERLOH is the former director of The Toy Boat Circus School in Asheville, NC and co-founder of UP UP UP Crane Truck Circus; KALAN SHH, who the New York Times describes as "NYC's Most Avant-Garde Nihilist Subway Performer"; and JASON WEBLEY a troubadour and street performer based in Everett, WA, who is a two-time winner of the "Boat Most Likely to Kill Pilot" award at the Camp Topsy Rotten Boat Building Contest.

*Stay tuned for an update in our Summer issue. For more information and a look at the current plan for Summer of 2023 follow them here: [www.rivercircus.com](http://www.rivercircus.com)*



PAUL KAUL



VIROQUA, WISCONSIN

# Thoreau Micro College

*Interview with Jacob Hundt*

Interview by Emily Trenholm, photography contributed by Thoreau College

*One of the inspirations for founding this magazine was the fact that so much of the material published about the Driftless area did not include more detail on the people that were making interesting things happen. I think the interesting and majestic landscapes help to attract and inspire the people who live here. I also think we can inspire one another through our stories. The following is an interview of one of the major innovators in education in the region. - PF*

When I first visited Viroqua, I received a tour of Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School. My tour guide pointed out the Waldorf-inspired high school just across the street, mentioning one of its co-founders had just started a college. Later I learned that my tour guide had neglected an important detail—Jacob Hundt had helped found the high school while he was attending. As I became more involved with his latest initiative, Thoreau College, this detail would come to define Jacob in my eyes—a practical visionary who, when

faced with a problem, rolls up his sleeves and commits to creating the solution himself.

**Emily:** Could you begin, Jacob, with some of your most formative experiences?

**Jacob:** Well, I grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm. My dad's family is from the Middle Ridge/Coon Valley area in Wisconsin, going back to the 1870s. My parents were both legacy Wisconsin dairy farmers, it goes back seven generations in my family, and my parent's return to the land coincided

# Local events and adventures

## GET GOING DRIFTLESS

VIROQUA, WISCONSIN

### Bad Axe Records



CONTRIBUTED

Attention audiophiles: there's a new spot to check out in downtown Viroqua, across from the Driftless Café. Bad Axe Records boasts a broad and deep selection of mostly vintage vinyl, with some new pressings as well.

Stepping into Bad Axe Records, you catch the mood of the moment from whatever record is currently spinning. Behind the counter, owner Scott Klimek stands ready to share his encyclopedic knowledge or answer your vinyl-related questions. The bins are replete with records of many genres and price points, each with the power to evoke a specific time, place, memory or dream.

Scott grew up in Marathon, Wisconsin, and later made his way to California, where he sold radio ad time, among other sales jobs. After a wildfire destroyed everything he owned, he re-assessed his priorities. As a long-time collector of vinyl, he started to think about running a record store.

By the time he and his family moved to the Driftless region, Scott's record store idea had shifted to a low, remote simmer. Then a chance encounter--and long conversation--with Driftless Books owner Eddy Nix led to Scott opening a micro-shop inside Eddy's Viroqua bookstore. When an opportunity recently came up for Bad Axe Records to expand into a storefront in downtown Viroqua, Scott jumped on it.

If you want to peruse the Bad Axe collection, you will have to do it in person. Rather than maintain an online store, Scott focuses on providing customers the tactile experience of flipping through vinyl to discover an unexpected treat or a long-lost love. If you are interested in vinyl and appreciate the thrill of the search, stop in.

-Arthur Bernstein

LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN

### BLUFFLAND TRAVERSE TRAIL

The Bluffland Traverse is a point-to-point route running from the Northern end of La Crosse county to the Southern end following the Mississippi River and the Bluffs that overlook it. The route identified is a hiking route that utilizes a combination of road, gravel bike path, shared use trail, and other single-track trails on public property to connect the county and its various communities. It has been over 100 years since Ellen Hixon led the acquisition of Grandad's Bluff and the surrounding area, which became Hixon Forest. Over the past 20 years, conservation and recreation leaders in the La Crosse, Onalaska, Holmen and La Crescent communities have worked to create public conservation lands and trails. What started as 750 acres around Grandad's Bluff has become 3000 acres of public and public-access bluff lands.

Working on the overall plan has been the La Crosse Area Planning Committee in conjunction with city officials and Seven Rivers Region Outdoor Recreation Alliance and the Mississippi Valley Conservancy. A key feature of their work has been the establishment of trails. The overall planning has been an impressive partnership between public, private, and non-profit groups focusing on a shared goal.

The Bluffland Traverse will go all the way from Holmen to Goose Island south of La Crosse. Eventually, the Outdoor Recreation Alliance of groups in both Minnesota and Wisconsin intend to connect the Bluffland Traverse trail to the Flyway Trail (essentially joining the Bluffland Traverse in Onalaska), which starts in Winona and is working its way downriver to meet the Great River State Trail, which runs all



JONAH WESTRICH

THE DRIFTLESS REGION

# Discovering the Ocooch Mountains

The Driftless Region refers to the unique geological wonder that encompasses part of four states in the upper Midwestern United States (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois), in fact the area covers 24,000 square miles and is actually larger than the land base of the states of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. For two million years, glaciers advanced and retreated without touching this region, forming a kind of geological island. Glacier melt water dammed up around Lake Superior and Glacial Lake Agassiz eventually breached, creating catastrophic floods that filled the area's river basins like the Mississippi River Valley from bluff top to bluff top between modern day channels. The massive meltwater carved these valleys hundreds of feet deep with bluffs being undercut and collapsing to form epic, sheer cliffs that provide amazing vistas for hikers.

Ocooch Mountains are a centuries old name for the unglaciated, Driftless territory of southwest Wisconsin, northeast Iowa, northwest Illinois and southeast Minnesota. "Ocooch Mountain" first appeared on maps in the early 1800s. "Ocooch" was a transliteration by English speakers from likely Winnebago and/or Ioway First Nations people who speak Siouan. "Ocooch" has been connected to a word Hoguc, pronounced Ho-gooch. Hoguc being a name for Baraboo or Baraboo River, on the western edge of the Driftless region. There are also sources that connect the word "Ocooch" to the Ioway, whose language has many similarities to Winnebago Ho-Chunk. The Ioway reference refers to Ocooch Mountains as Snowy-Lodge Mountains, Paxoje (PAH--ko-chee) or an area of rugged beauty. The area is home to hundreds of small farms, artists, musicians and adventurers.



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