

CHEESELANDIA

GAZETTE

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ANDY HATCH, THE DRIFTLESS CAFE, AND MORE...

Join us on a road trip through the Wisconsin countryside with cheese-filled stops along the way. Up first, we spend an afternoon with Andy Hatch, the man and mind behind Upland's Cheese. From there, we're off to the Driftless region to chat over a cheeseboard with Luke Zahm, owner of Viroqua's Driftless Cafe.

WELCOME TO THE GAZETTE

The Gazette is a quarterly publication that celebrates the people and stories behind Wisconsin Cheese.

We'd like to extend a huge thank you to Andy Hatch and Luke Zahm for welcoming us into their worlds with open arms (and more than a few nibbles of Wisconsin cheese.) Additional kudos to Wisconsin-based photographer, Pete Olsen, for helping to capture the spirit of our adventures, the beauty of Wisconsin and the inspiring people we met along the way.





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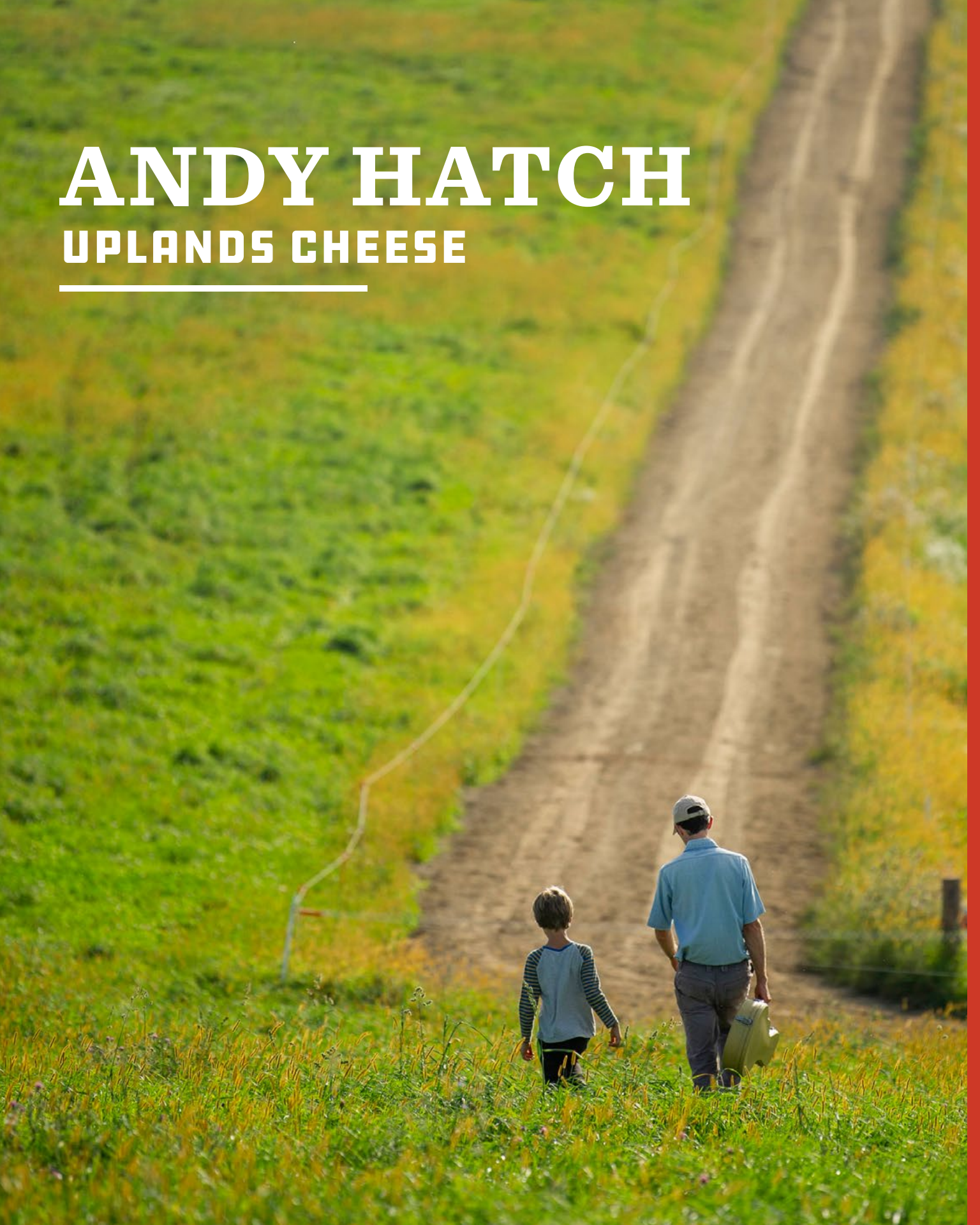
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ANDY HATCH

UPLANDS CHEESE



THE NAME "ANDY HATCH" IS JUST ABOUT AS SYNONYMOUS WITH WISCONSIN AS, WELL...CHEESE.

Whether it's fellow cheesemakers singing the praises of his contributions to the Wisconsin cheese industry, or cheese lovers using the fan-generated #andyhatchtag to show a little love on Instagram, it seems everyone has something nice to say about the Uplands Cheese owner and cheesemaker, Andy Hatch.

It was a warm, mid-September morning when we arrived at Pleasant Ridge, situated in the rolling hills of Wisconsin's Driftless region. September falls right in the middle of cheesemaking season, a busy time of year for Andy as Pleasant Ridge Reserve is made only when cows are eating fresh pasture.

We arrived as Andy wrapped up a full day of making cheese, and he asked if we wanted to start by doing a tour of "where the magic happens." Our timing was perfect; it was time to turn a fresh batch of Pleasant Ridge Reserve.

Visiting a cheesemaking facility has a sense of ritual to it. Our team covered our shoes with white booties before donning white lab coats and

sterile hair nets. They might not be the most stylish, but they are the most sanitary, which is exactly the goal in a cheesemaking facility. Clean beyond clean, Andy's place is beaming with sunshine. We stopped and chatted about Andy's love of music, playing in a local band and the mandolin as he turned the day's fresh batch of cheese.

Our next stop was the Rush Creek Reserve vault. Our visit was perfectly timed to be at Pleasant Ridge during the few weeks of fall this fantastic cheese is made. We ended our tour by stepping into the Fort Knox of cheese – a storage room of rows and rows of Pleasant Ridge Reserve cheese wheels. I'm not sure what was more impressive, the vibrant color of the wheels or the delicate smell of the cheese.

Our next stop was the rolling, green pastures of Pleasant Ridge to meet some of Andy's dairy cows. We capped off a perfect day by meeting some of Andy's family before settling in for a little Q&A with the maker himself.

WHATS' YOUR STORY?

I'm from Wisconsin, but grew up in a small town on the eastern part of the state. I wasn't born and raised on this farm; my parents didn't milk cows or make cheese. In that sense, I'm a bit unusual in the Wisconsin dairy industry, which, for the most part, is multi-generational and family based.

My mind wandered toward agriculture before it did cheesemaking. I kind of had a bug to farm and milk cows, but I wasn't in a position to inherit a farm so it wasn't going to be a straightforward path for me. I went to school for biology, then went back for dairy science.

Around the time I got out of college and started working on dairy farms, I began seriously looking for a way into farming and stumbled across cheesemaking. I was working for a corn breeder in the southeastern part of Wisconsin at the time, and milking for a couple of farms in that area, trying to decide whether to buy a farm or go back to school and become a corn breeder. I spent a whole winter in the basement of a lab, running tests on corn kernels.

It was boring and dry work. I had wanderlust, so when my boss asked if he could send me to Norway to help his mother-in-law, a recent widow, living alone on a Norwegian farm, I said, "You bet."

I went to Norway and learned to make cheese from a Norwegian woman named Oney. The methodology was pretty primitive, but also romantic and inspiring. It was a mixture of worlds; a little lab-like, which I had been drawn to, but with a tactile element. With lab work, you can spend your whole career and barely move the ball down the field. With cheesemaking, you get a tangible result every day. I ended up staying in Europe for a couple of years working as a cheesemaker and moving around the continent. I had intended to stay permanently, but a family tragedy brought me back home. Once here, I decided to stay. To be a cheesemaker in Wisconsin, you have to have a license. Part of that process requires serving apprenticeships under Wisconsin cheesemakers. I'd already made cheese for several years in Europe, so I had experience working with some cheesemaking techniques that aren't common in

Wisconsin such as working with raw milk and ripening cheese in caves. Uplands Cheese, where I am now, was making cheese in that style and had developed a pretty impressive reputation for it. I came to serve an apprenticeship at Uplands and never left.

I eventually became the head cheesemaker, and ended up buying the farm from the family when their children decided they didn't want

to do it. My wife and I bought in with another couple. We're in our late 30s now, have little kids and inherited a two-family setup from our predecessors. The two families that owned it together previously had divided things with one running the cow side, the other the cheese side. I am fulfilling a dream of raising my kids on a farm and living on a farm, working next to my family and walking to work. Cheesemaking made that all possible.





WHAT DOES YOUR BRAND STAND FOR?

It depends who you ask. When you ask my wife, it means doing something together as a family that is meaningful. If you asked our employees, it means a good, family-supporting job in a part of the state where there are not a lot of those jobs. I think it's meaningful to the community economically. Some might say Uplands Cheese is emblematic of the rise of artisan cheesemaking. If you ask a cheesemonger at Murray's in New York or Di Bruno Brothers in Philadelphia, they would say that Uplands Cheese is a farm that shows Europeans that Americans can make authentic, world-class cheese.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR ANDY HATCH ON THE FARM?

It doesn't ever really feel like work. I wake up and there's always a lot to do, however. I'm in motion between the farm side and the cheese side. I'm on the phone and computer a little bit – but it's all fun. We stop milking our cows and making cheese in the winter. That time of year gets pretty dreamy, slow and sleepy around here. It's a total contrast from the fall, during which we make half of our cheese.

WHAT'S THE BEST THING THAT SOMEONE COULD SAY AFTER EATING YOUR CHEESE?

This cheese makes me so happy.



WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF CHEESEMAKING?

There are a lot more distinctive and delicious cheeses being sold in this country today than there were a decade or two ago. We won't go backwards from that, in the same way that once people start drinking high quality coffee, they don't go back to boring, industrial coffee. I think we have developed a market, and consumers are excited about artisan cheese and what we're doing.

How we're going to grow from here, I'm not sure. Dairy economics are difficult right now, so there is not an obvious path forward. At Uplands Cheese, we're in love with what we're doing. We're not going to change wholesale, or how we approach farming and our cheesemaking. Our motivation to make more cheese is being able to say yes to customers, and creating more opportunities for our employees and children. For us, I think the future looks like better cheese and more of it.

DO YOU EVER GET CHEESE LOVE LETTERS?

We send gift boxes over the holidays, which can be ordered through our website. I hand write all of the gift notes for those gift boxes.

When someone is sending such a personal gift, you hate to pair it with an impersonal, typed message. A printed card just doesn't pair with a handmade cheese. I started hand writing the cards when we were shipping about a dozen gift boxes a year, and now we're up to about a thousand. I'll typically come in around three in the morning on a December day, make coffee, get a nice pen out and go to work writing.

The other thing I like about this tradition is that it makes me privy to a lot of really wonderful, emotional messages between people who love each other. It's a nice way to experience the sentiment people have around our cheese without me, as the cheesemaker, becoming the focal point of that conversation. I don't have to feel embarrassed and I don't have to respond. I just get to write it, see it and enjoy it. That's a beautiful thing to be a part of.

To learn more about Andy Hatch and his cheese, visit Uplands Cheese online at www.uplandscheese.com.







THE DRIFTLESS CAFE

A conversation with Luke Zahm

It's late morning when we roll into Viroqua, Wisconsin, population 4,362. With buildings lining the road into town, it's the very picture of Main Street, America. Hollywood couldn't have written it any better.

An elegant, turn-of-the-century former hotel bearing the name FORTNEY sits at the corner of Main and West Court Street. Across the way is a stately, neo-classical revival style bank built in 1908. They're a Romeo and Juliet of sorts, separated

by a span of asphalt and concrete. As the clouds begin to break and sunlight streams into downtown, it's not hard to imagine what these buildings have seen in their lifetimes. If their walls could talk, one can be certain they would have stories to tell.

A short stroll up the block from The Fortney, Google Maps alerts us that we have arrived at The Driftless Café. We're here to meet the owner, Luke Zahm.



If you weren't paying attention, you could easily walk past the restaurant and be none the wiser about what you'd be missing out on. There is no flashy exterior sign, no attention-grabbing marketing splashed on the walls or windows. A couple of humble, unassuming doors are really all that stands between the outside world and the remarkable experience within.

We're greeted by a smiling woman who warmly invites us to wait at the bar for Luke. The Driftless Café is a wood lover's dream.

From the booths to the floor planks to the trees spanning from floor to ceiling inside the building, it's a bit like secret tree house meets forest embrace. The bartender offers us a round of water-filled mason jars as we peruse a tempting list of lunch options, already toiling over what a difficult task it will be deciding what to order.

Luke appears moments later, tailed by a vibrant, jovial sort of energy. He ushers us into a large corner booth and orders the table a Driftless charcuterie board and

a round of Wisco Pop, natural craft sodas in varying flavors. "They're locally made and really good," Luke explains, putting in a plug for a fellow Viroqua brand.

The conversation quickly goes from an interview to feeling more like catching up with an old pal. Strangers to friends in under five minutes. Midway through our conversation, an older couple walks over and politely asks for a moment with Luke. The gentleman explains how they were waiting for car service and asked for a recommendation on where to go for a bite to eat. It seems he enjoyed his dining experience so much he wanted to thank the owner. I got the impression this isn't an unusual encounter for Luke Zahm.

As the conversation unfolds, the booths around us fill with diners ranging from mustachioed hipsters to rugged-handed workers on their lunch breaks. Luke regales us with tales of The Driftless Café's founding, what it means to be from Wisconsin and the impact food has on local communities.

Here's what he had to say:

ON CHEESE

Cheese is a complex ingredient in a restaurant like ours. It doesn't matter if you're from France or into the most refined flavors in the world, a lot of those come out of Wisconsin. Cheese is a point of pride for us. It's a source of integrity and strength. Cheese is a part of our Wisconsin identity.

ON IDENTITY, IDENTIFYING + THE BIRTH OF THE DRIFTLESS CAFÉ

I'm originally from La Farge, Wisconsin. Growing up in a really small town, population 745, it was hard for me to feel I had an identity or a sense of purpose and place. I wasn't a good athlete. I was a good student, but the National Honor Society wasn't knocking at my door. When I had the chance, I ran as far away from these hills as I could get, which turned out to be Chicago. At that time, being from a small town in Wisconsin was not considered cool or hip. There were a lot of questions and unknowns about the identity of being a "Sconnie."

While living in Chicago, I encountered Whole Foods for the first time in my life. I walked over to the cheese display and freaked out when I picked up a packet of Organic Valley cheese.

To be able to look on the back of a packet of cheese in a grocery store on North Avenue in Lincoln Park in Chicago and see my hometown's name printed on the label was really something. That moment was a massive wave of identity for me. These are my people. I know this. I know where this cheese comes from. I know the people who produce the milk. My mom worked for Organic Valley for 20 years. When kids grew up and left the area, the CEO gave us coupons for free products. When I didn't have money for anything, I always had free milk, eggs, cheese and butter, which can make you a popular dude – and capable of bartering breakfast for beer.

Although I was in Chicago pursuing my dream of becoming a rock star, not a chef, that afternoon in Whole Foods proved to be the start of finding my identity in food – and the road that would lead me home. After about a year and a half in Chicago, I went to Madison. By 2011, I was working for very large software company that had started a culinary program. Part of my job included recruiting chefs from other parts of the country to the Midwest. At the time, we were recruiting intensely out of the Culinary Institute of America.



“That was my light bulb moment. What am I doing? Why am I chasing chefs in upstate New York and trying to get them to come back and cook this food when I need to go home?”



When I opened the first page of the menu and read over the ingredients, the first five were from Wisconsin's Driftless region, including names like Andy Hatch's Rush Creek Reserve and Pleasant Ridge Reserve, Organic Valley and a local vegetable farmer. That was my light bulb moment. What am I doing? Why am I chasing chefs in upstate New York and trying to get them to come back and cook this food when I need to go home? I'm ready to make the commitment to move back to small town, rural America so I can shine the spotlight on the amazing things that are happening, literally, in my backyard.

That was what gave birth to The Driftless Café. We left Madison and I cashed in my 401K to buy an existing restaurant; the really risky stuff that I would never suggest anyone do. I met with any bank that would give me an appointment, but nobody would go there. Nobody wanted to touch a restaurant because it was just too high risk. I ended up sharing my struggle with a dairy farmer who was utterly perplexed by the notion that someone would come back here to focus on highlighting rural America and the food movement that was happening around our community. Much to my surprise, he offered to

loan me the money I needed at five percent interest.

I make no claims that we are the only authority on farm-to-table cuisine, but I do think I'm probably in a very small minority of restaurants that are owned or funded by a farmer. That identity is humongous for me.

ON THE ROLE OF FOOD ON COMMUNITY

In some ways food has given our community an identity, and given an identity to what it means to be from any rural town in Wisconsin. We are a small group of people surrounded by agriculture. Organic Valley employs over 1,000 people and does over a billion dollars in sales per year. That money inevitably gets spread around the community, business to business, household to household, person to person.

The café gives another voice to our community. When I was a James Beard Foundation finalist in 2017, all of the sudden people who had never heard of this region started perking up and paying attention, taking note of the number of organic farmers here and the important role local cuisine plays in small community. It sparked a sort of awareness ripple.

85 percent of our food budget at Driftless is spent within a 90-mile radius of the café. We are investing thousands of dollars with family farmers whose kids share classrooms with our own kids. We also strive to bring people together and give back to the community. When it's slow in the winter, we do a community burger night. We pick charitable causes to support throughout the year. This year, we focused on the local school lunch program after learning that once a child reaches a \$50 deficient in their lunch funds, they receive a provided lunch, but not the same lunch as all the other kids. We thought that it must really suck for any kid to feel singled out like that, so we created a slush fund for families who need it.

ON TODAY + TOMORROW

Cheese has been a huge part of the Wisconsin legacy for generations. In many instances, you have six or seven generations of people that have farmed the same parcel of land in a way that supported their families and their livelihoods. That is a rich culture tradition.

As you drive through Wisconsin, you'll notice hundreds of small towns dotting the landscape here.

Prior to the 1970s, all of them had their own creameries. Today, so many of these tiny populations center around defunct cheese factories. Arena was on the front page of the New York Times not too long ago, after having to close their elementary school due to budgets. The fact that rural America is changing quickly is an important conversation. We're starting to see fewer and fewer family farms dotting the landscape, and that has an impact on the entire revenue cycle of small towns. It's not just impacting farmers, it's hitting the landscapers, the people who haul gravel – everyone.

Farming is the fabric of America and Wisconsin. It's a lifestyle I see value in because it brings our culture to the forefront. Cheese is a measure of our success and our fortitude in Wisconsin. Farmers work hundreds of hours, seven days a week. No holidays, no breaks. Historically, they only ever took two days off...for their honeymoon. That's all they ever missed. Their work was their calling and it defined their entire lives. That way of life is dying, and holding on to it is important to me.

My dad grew up on a dairy farm, and there was always this sense

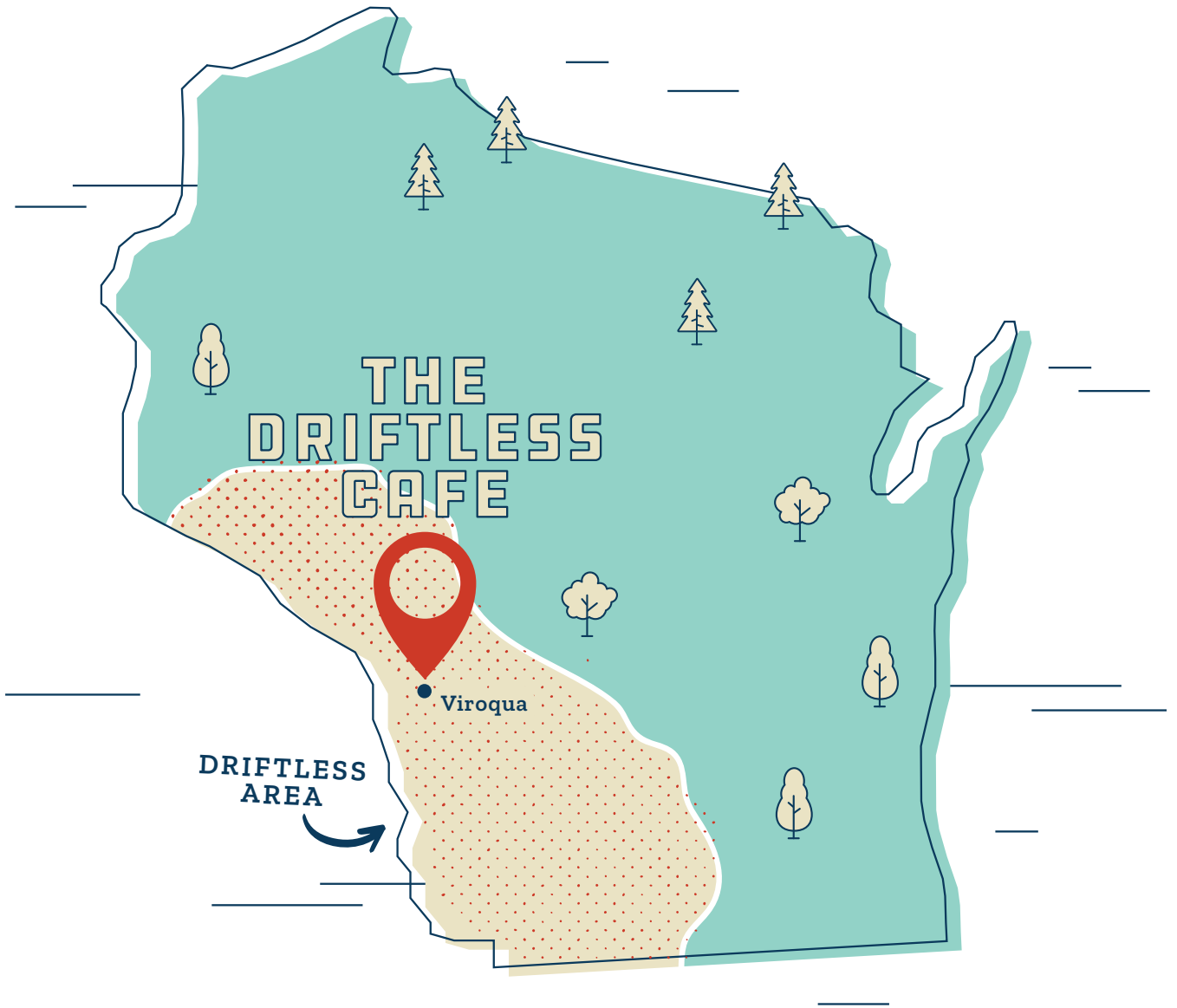
of commitment, no matter what. Whether it's 20 below zero or 95 degrees out, those animals are there and they need you. Farming is rooted in a tremendous work ethic and a tremendous amount of community. In the instance of the café, most of our employees are people who have graduated from here, gone out and inevitably come back. Our food producers are in and out most days of the week. I recently walked over to introduce myself to a woman who raved about the melon we had wrapped in prosciutto. I asked her to

turn around and tell the man seated at the table behind her...because he was the one who had grown it. That's what it comes down to. Our agriculture identity isn't just about what we do, it's the shared sense of responsibility and pride amongst all of us who call this place home. And this isn't just my story – it's all of our story.

To learn more about Luke Zahm and The Driftless Cafe, visit online at www.driftlesscafe.com.









Harvest Rind Cheeseboard

Celebrate autumn with this beautiful cheeseboard. The cheese rinds give splashes of fall colors, and a mix of fruits, meats, olives and nuts balance the bold cheese flavors.

Ingredients List

- LaClare Martone cheese
 - Roth Original GranQueso® cheese
 - Sartori Basil & Olive Oil Asiago cheese
 - Sartori Black Pepper BellaVitano® cheese
 - Sartori Chai BellaVitano® cheese
 - Sartori Chipotle BellaVitano® cheese
 - Sartori Kentucky Bourbon BellaVitano® cheese
 - Sartori Merlot BellaVitano® cheese
 - Uplands Pleasant Ridge Reserve cheese Rilette
 - Cornichons
 - Sliced salami
 - Kalamata olives
 - Green olives
 - Breadsticks
 - Thinly sliced prosciutto
 - Assorted dried fruits (apricots, papaya, peaches and prunes)
 - Bay leaves
 - Whole almonds
 - Fresh pear slices
 - Assorted crackers
- 

Instructions

Arrange cheeses on a serving board. Spoon rillete and cornichons into small bowls; place on the board. Fill in board with salami, Kalamata and green olives, breadsticks, prosciutto, assorted dried fruits, bay leaves, almonds, pear slices and additional cornichons. Serve with crackers.

Recipe Tips

Make it your own! Substitute any of your favorite varieties of Wisconsin cheese on this cheeseboard.

A rillete is a meat dish similar to a pate; it's commonly used as a spread on toasted breads.

Cheesemonger Tip

When serving cheeses with bold, rich flavors refresh taste buds with sweet fresh and dried fruits, nuts or sour gerkins. The simple flavors won't compete with the cheeses.

*You'll know it's one of ours
when you see the badge.*





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