

Now & Then in Ripon ...

Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society



RIPON COLLEGE'S RED Barn Theater sits to the north of the Johnson Hall dormitory. It was where famous Ripon College alumni such as Al Jarreau, Harrison Ford and Frances Lee McCain started their careers. The theater was destroyed in a fire May 16, 1964. *submitted photo*

Red Barn Theatre was home to some famous RC alumni

Editors note: This is the second of three Now & Then in Ripon articles written by Ripon College students interning last semester with the Ripon Historical Society.

By Lilli Alderson

Today, theater productions in Ripon typically are held at the local high school and Ripon College's Clarence J (C.J.) Rodman Center for the Arts.

Did you know that musicals and plays were not always held there?

Previously, the Red Barn Theater was built on Ripon College's property in 1948. It was located north of the Johnson Hall dormitory. This is where some of Ripon College's famous alumni started their careers.

Al Jarreau, class of 1962, started his singing career with a local vocal group called "The Indigos," in which many other Ripon College students participated. He continued to sing and became a jazz legend and seven-time Grammy Award winner, known for songs like "We Got By" and "Breakin' Away."

Only two years after Jarreau graduated, "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones" actor Harrison Ford, along with "Gremlins" and "Back To The Future" movie actress Frances Lee McCain, class of 1966, spent a lot of time at the Red Barn Theater during their years at Ripon College before they hit the big screen.

While at Ripon College, Ford participated in the "The Fantasticks," "The Three-Pen-



FIREFIGHTERS SPRAY WATER on Ripon College's Red Barn Theater in 1964. The building was lost to a fire *submitted photo*

ny Opera" and "The Skin of our Teeth" productions.

McCain participated in "The Rape of the Belt," "The Miser, Riders to the Sea" and "As You Like It." The 1950s and 1960s were a golden age in Ripon College's theater department.

Unfortunately, on May 16, 1964, the Red Barn Theater was destroyed in a fire. It is unknown how the fire started. The fire was so big that it was said to have been seen from 20 miles away, and it took 31 firefighters to distinguish the flames; six of the firefighters were outside help in addition to 25 Ripon firefighters.

When explaining the fire to college trustees in a letter, Ripon College President Fred O. Pinkham said that the fire was "certainly the most dramatic of all productions in which the theater participated. Also, it attracted its largest audience."

While the Red Barn Theater no longer exists, its impact is still felt. After the fire, the

theater department was briefly moved to the old Grace Lutheran Church, next to where the First Congregational Church stands today. This did not work for the theater department, however, because it was smaller and more constraining than they were used to. The church was soon razed as they had built a new one in 1960.

According to local folklore, this building's demolition displaced a ghost named Raphael, who had haunted the church.

While at the church, students recalled getting locked out of the building, which was attributed to the ghost's mischief.

Since the church was taken down, the ghost Raphael followed the students and now resides in the C.J. Rodman Center for the Arts, where the college's theater productions are held today.

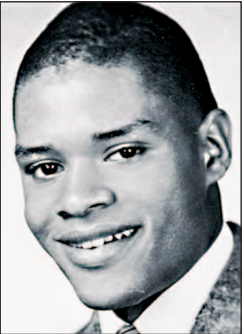
This ghost has caused a lot of trouble while at the church and now does so at Rodman, being blamed for everything from turning lights on and off to causing a leak in the roof.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information follow us at Facebook/riponhistory or www.riponhistory.org.



Harrison Ford



Al Jarreau



Frances Lee McCain

Ripon College exceeds \$75M campaign goal; sets new target of \$100M

Ripon College's five-year Forever Ripon comprehensive campaign, which is the largest philanthropic effort in its history, achieved its initial goal of \$75 million in December 2023, 18 months ahead of schedule.

While Ripon will keep the original campaign timeline with an ending date of June 30, 2025, it now will pursue an extended goal of \$100 million. As of January 2024, Forever Ripon gift production sits at \$84.7 million.

"When we embarked on the Forever Ripon campaign, there were concerns from some that the \$75 million goal was overly ambitious," Ripon College Vice President for Advancement, Marketing and Communications and Chief of Staff Shawn Karsten '09 said. "Surpassing that goal 18 months ahead of schedule speaks to the passion and commitment of our donor base and its collective belief and trust in our future."

Following a quiet phase that began in July 2020, Ripon publicly announced the campaign in April 2023 during the inauguration of Ripon College's 14th president, Victoria N. Folse.

Since that announcement, more than \$30 million in new gifts have been documented.

"The energy and success of the campaign has been amplified by its coordination with our strategic planning process," Folse said. "Both endeavors are playing critical roles in solidifying Ripon College's future by the time we

celebrate our 175th anniversary in 2026."

Since the start of the campaign, 24 new endowed funds have been created, the \$8.5 million Hopp Stadium celebrated its grand opening, construction began on the \$24.5 million Franzen Science Center and early fundraising success for the residence halls have allowed for scheduled

upgrades in summer 2024.

The extended goal of \$100 million will continue to prioritize the endowment to provide access and impact, facility enhancement to facilitate additional residence hall improvements and the unrestricted Ripon Fund.

"Ripon should celebrate this moment, particularly through our gratitude to the thousands of donors who have helped us reach this important milestone, but we're not done," Karsten said. "We have greater potential, greater needs and many constituents whom we have yet to engage."

"This is such a critical moment in Ripon College's history," Ripon College Board of Trustees chairman Mark Franzen '83 said. "For Ripon to remain relevant and competitive, we must continue to innovate and set ambitious goals, neither of which are possible without the expertise and support from our alumni, parents and friends."

To learn more about the campaign's goals and priorities, visit www.ripon.edu/forever-ripon.



Professional Women's Connection presents program on beekeeping

Do you know why bees stay in their hives in the winter?

Venture out and join the Ripon Green Lake Professional Women's Connection Thursday, Feb. 15 for an opportunity to learn more about Henry's Honey Farm. Registration and networking begins at 5:30 p.m. with the dinner and program at 6.

A family owned and operated business out of Redgranite, Wis., Henry's Honey Farm was started in the early 1930s. The business has three main focuses: Honey production, pollination and honey packaging. It also owns and operates Wisconsin Cooperative Pollination Services, which transports bees regionally for the commercial pollination of crops.

Jalyn Piechowski, a fourth generation beekeeper, will share details about the beekeeping industry, Henry's Honey Farm's passions and its products, with an opportunity for attendees to purchase local honey after the event.

Being held at Divine Passage Funeral Home, 175 North Douglas St., the event includes a taco

buffet dinner featuring ground beef and chicken, hard and soft shells, homemade tortilla chips, fixings, assorted dessert bars and bottled water. Members are able to bring in their own additional beverages. Cost for members is \$15, while guests are \$20.

Registration must be made by Tuesday, Feb. 13 at noon by visiting www.pwcwi.org.

Cancellation is allowed with full reimbursement by Tuesday, Feb. 13 at noon. Late cancellations will not receive a refund and no-shows will be invoiced for the full event amount.

Professional Women's Connection is a networking group that provides educational opportunities for area business and professional women. It focuses on professional growth, personal development and the enhancement of leadership skills.

Professional Women's Connection is not a fundraising organization. The money for the annual scholarship comes from member dues, enabling members to give back to future professional women.