

Back in the day

Poynette native recalls his unusual part-time job at the State Game Farm 72 years ago.

Kathryn A. Kahler

If you're a teenager with a part-time job nowadays, you likely work in retail or a fast-food venue. Even rural teens who work on farms probably can't make the claim that 88-year-old magazine reader Bob Vosen, Fond du Lac, made in a letter to the editor last year.

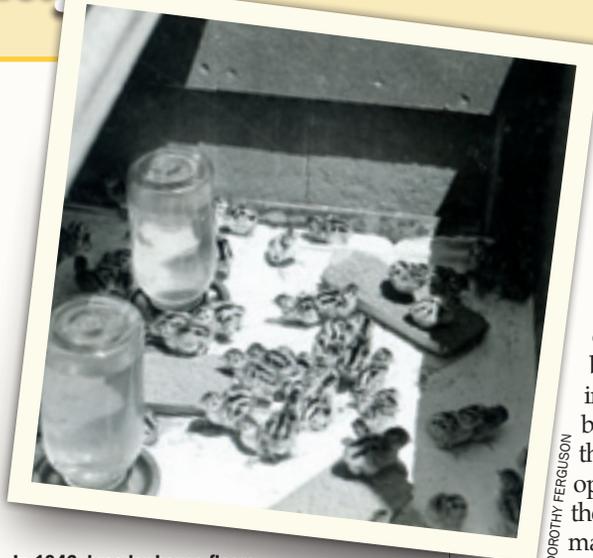
"During high school in 1943," Vosen wrote, "I was employed at the State Game Farm in Poynette. I washed pheasant diapers."

Say what? A lot has changed in 72 years, but diapers for pheasants?

"In the brooder houses where the chicks were," Vosen explained, "they had these flour sacks that they laid out on the floor where the chicks would feed. And of course, they defecated all over them and they had to be taken out and washed. That's what I did. We had an old wringer washing machine that stood out in the field hooked up to electricity. That was my job to throw those things in the washer."



Chicks are reared in environmentally controlled and bio-secure buildings.



DOROTHY FERGUSON

In 1943, brooder house floors were spread with cottonseed hulls or pine shavings and then covered with white cloth.



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Today, chopped straw has replaced cloth floor covering.

A search of the *Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin* from the era provided a step-by-step account of "Tips on Pheasant-Rearing" (May 1949), including these details on the diaper thing: "Preparing the brooder house for chicks is most important. Be sure to disinfect the house using a good commercial disinfectant, scrubbing thoroughly, and allow to dry out. This cleaning should be done five days before you put the birds in the brooder house. Spread litter on the floor about two inches deep, using treated cottonseed hulls or good pine shavings.

"Regardless of the type of brooder houses used and when the birds are confined to them, be sure to cover the litter with cloth (white if possible) or rough paper. Never use slick or smooth paper as this causes the birds to slip and spraddle their legs. Continue the use of cloth three or four days."

The word "disposable" was a foreign concept in the 1940s, so of course, the cloth "diapers" were washed and reused, probably for several years.

"We now use chopped straw in the

brooders, without cloth covers," according to Tom Gilles who has fed, watered and nurtured pheasant chicks at the Poynette Game Farm for the last 34 years. These days, pheasant chicks are reared in two environmentally controlled brood-rearing barns erected in the early 1980s to increase bio-security measures and the efficiency of chick rearing operations. From mid-April to the first week of July, approximately 92,000 chicks are started in the brooder buildings. In the fall, after selecting next season breeders, approximately 75,000 pheasants are released on public hunting grounds as mature adults.

And even though the modernized procedures no longer include washing diapers, the chopped straw is cleaned out with each new batch of chicks and spread on the fields or composted.



MEET BOB VOSEN



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Bob Vosen wore many hats while living in Poynette. After his high school stint at the game farm and a few summers at the fish hatchery in Woodruff, in 1952 he was appointed Poynette village manager by Harley W. MacKenzie, former director of the Wisconsin Conservation Department. Vosen was also assessor, village commissioner, supervisor of the water and sewer departments, and did a little dog-catching, before moving to Fond du Lac where he worked 30 years for the Wisconsin Department of Revenue.

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