



## NEWS RELEASE

TJ Meyers-Jansky  
1st Vice President  
414.520.2262

### For Immediate Release

**April 1, 2007—West Allis, WI - Reported by Joyce Halliburton:** On a nice sunny, cold morning, I had a pleasant drive to Pewaukee to visit with the remaining Founder of the West Allis Charities, Warren “Bud” Hirschinger. After the small talk about the weather, we sat down for an important, historical talk about the “Charities” and Western Days. The “Charities” began in 1964, when Tom Hutchinson of Star Newspapers called Bud and several other civic leaders of the community. They were Urban Ganser (real estate), Charles Arps (Allis Chalmers), Herb Velsler (insurance), Chet Mikolajek (Schmitt-Orlow Men’s Clothing), Annette Yaeger (West Allis Women’s Club), and Bud Hirschinger (West Allis City Treasurer.) At this point, the “Star Charities” was born. These leaders felt that this organization could do several things for the West Allis community; bring recognition to the city, while providing entertainment for the citizens and making it possible for local, charitable organizations to raise funds for their various needs. “To begin with, we were the Star Charities, but that was a problem. Everyone thought that it was The Star newspapers’ organization. So, in 1967, the name was changed to the West Allis Charities, Inc.,” stated Bud Hirshinger.

In 1965, under the guidance of Charlie Arps, President and Chairperson, it was decided to have a rodeo. On July 2 & 3, performances were done at the grandstand in State Fair Park. The Rodeo Cowboy’s Association, out of Denver, Colorado, was contracted for the shows. 1966 it was tried again. Schlitz Brewery promised \$5,000, both years, to help with the expenses, but only came through with \$2,500 each year. Frankie Yankovic performed and other events went on too. “Well, the rodeo didn’t go over that well with the public. In hind-site, the grandstand is not the place to put on that kind of show. The asphalt track, between the performers and the audience, is just too much distance and did not make for a good synergy,” says Bud.

Bud continued, “The first two years were not profitable at all, in fact, they found themselves \$8,000 in debt. To try to raise money, the fellas would help Joe Dragan at the races at the Fair Park. They would sell the dinners and get fifty cents for each dinner sold. The Star newspaper also helped by giving free ads in their paper. We tried everything we could think of to earn the money to pay off the debt. After a lot of soul searching, the West Allis State Bank was approached and agreed to lend the money to our group, but not without strings. Three of us members co-signed the note. In other words, if the Charities did not bring in the money, the three members would be responsible to the bank to pay it back. Fortunately, we didn’t need to.”

1967 started out with the thought that they needed someone to do the legwork and who knew promotions. They hired a fellow from a Ford dealership to help. His experience in promotions and the know-how about staging events put Western Days on the right track. “That year we were on the south end of the Fair Park,” Bud stated, “along

Greenfield Avenue, and there was an area that was called the Picnic Grove. It was grassy and had lots of trees for shade. There also was a pavilion where we had the polka bands play. (It was quite a hit with the patrons.) Also, in this area, there was a Civil War Encampment and an Indian Village. On Sunday, it was arranged with Mayor Klentz to celebrate the city's birthday with a talent show and other special events for the day. We even had a birthday cake and sang happy birthday," Bud states reminiscently. "At this time, Pabst Brewery came on board and was very helpful with the bars and promotion of the event. In the Big Tent, the bar was circular in the middle of the tent. Outlining the sides were booths, where charitable organizations came to sell their wares. Tip Top Shows provided the carnival rides."

"On the Wednesday of Western Days Week, there was a Ride-In Breakfast on the corner, where the West Allis Inn was. We had members, who had horses, come riding in and do a shoot-out and capture the bad guys," Bud said with a smile, "After a brief presentation for the public, everyone went inside the hotel for breakfast. That evening an invitation only reception took place in the Show Tent. This was our kick-off for Western Days and our thank you to the media and sponsors for their support."

"Thursday was the big parade," stated Bud, "With the media well informed, we got a lot of coverage. First of all, because at that time, there was no other parade or event of it's kind in this area. Thousands of people lined the parade route, and when the parade was over, most flocked into the grounds. Thursday was one of the biggest profit producers of Western Days. Now we were on the right track, and we were making money. It was time to start giving back to the community for all their support. We were able to give out scholarships to high school graduates and also began helping some of the citizens, who were in need. It wasn't much, but it was a start. Also, with only nine people actually running the event, we could see that that was not enough manpower to sustain such a huge undertaking. That was when it was decided a board of directors needed to be formed. We needed the movers and shakers of the community to join us and fifty voting General members would become the board of directors. All other members were designated as Associates. As General members left, Associates would make a request to become a General member, and they were individually voted into that class. This arrangement served well over the years, and there was always several Associates waiting to be voted into the General membership," Bud stated.

As for the situation of the Charities right now, Bud feels that the members need to think very decisively on what the future holds for Western Days or a different festival fundraiser. The event needs to be pulled in tighter and not be so spread out and research needs to be done to show what the general public would be willing to pay to attend Western Days. Another thought is to build up the membership with more of the community business and other civic organizations getting involved.

There used to be a lot of West Allis businesses supporting the West Allis Charities. Over time, business connections were lost, and personal contacts dissolved as members left the organization. There used to be a list of people waiting to be sponsored by an existing Charities member to become an active part of the Charities' family. A decrease in membership for the Charities is attributed to retiring members and an increase in the daily family, career, and home routines for all ages. Lifestyles and priorities have changed for the masses. The Executive Board is actively pursuing new members to share in the positive and needed contributions the Charities provides for the West Allis community.

The current Executive Board of Directors, lead by President—Bill Potocic, is in the process of establishing new Community Partners (businesses offering long-term relationships with financial & service commitments) and gaining new members (individuals offering idea generation for the future and a couple hours of service commitment per week.) “As a member of the Charities, we ask for each person to commit to helping with one or more Project fundraisers (minimum of 1 hour per week), spread the word about the organization to the community in a positive manner, and attend monthly membership meetings & any committee meetings set up by the chairperson,” states First Vice President, TJ Meyers-Jansky. “It is a great organization for people, who want to volunteer, but have limited time. We welcome everyone, not just West Allis residents.”

If you are interested in supporting the West Allis community and would like to attend a monthly meeting for the West Allis Charities, please contact Bill (414-778-0760) or TJ (414-520-2262) for additional information. An E-mail can be sent to [westallischarities@yahoo.com](mailto:westallischarities@yahoo.com) with comments, suggestions, or historical information stories with pictures you would like to share about your experiences with the West Allis Charities as an organization or at West Allis Western Days. The information may be used on the Charities’ website or in their printed literature.

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