

Joseph Verstegen

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen!

I'm Joseph Verstegen—but since I joined the Little Chute police force everyone calls me "Cop Joe" (show photo of Cop Joe). I was born in Little Chute in 1878 to one of Little Chute's founding fathers- Arnold Berstegen and his second wife, Catharine Vanderaa. My dad had 24 children and I was one of the youngest. This is a photo of our house. (Show Photo of house). You can still ride by my childhood house—it is at 231 Grand Ave. near the Fox River. I am the youngest one in the photo.

Anna Van Gompel and I got married in 1903. We built a house on Grand Avenue where the current post office is now located. We lived in the middle of Little Chute and raised our family of 13 in the good Catholic, Dutch tradition. (show family photo). We had family and friends over constantly. That is one of our traditions- it is called gezelligheid. In Dutch, Gezellig means an unplanned and unorganized visit. Goodness knows we had people stopping by all of the time! Always we had pastries to offer them during the day and often at night we brought out the brandy and the beer to be gezellig- Being gezellig means not holding yourself aloof and mixing easily and without ceremony. That's us all right. What a good time we had here in this wonderful village with our family and friends!

I've had many jobs here in Little Chute. I worked in my Dad's Zealand Flour Mill and an area paper mill before going into the lumber business. My brother-in-law, Martin Hartjes, and I brought the Little Chute Lumber and Fuel Company. Our lumber company was one of the leading businesses in the village. I was known for my generosity. When Nicholas Dercks lost his big barn in a fire, he didn't have to money right away to buy lumber. I said, "Nick, we'll take care of it". I delivered the building supplies and Nick paid me back later.

I enjoyed the lumber business and hoping to improve my business, I bought the bigger Standard Lumber Company in Appleton. I never should have done that! The Depression hit and I lost my business. I was no longer one of the richest men in Little Chute.

This is when I began my career in law enforcement. First, I became the Undersheriff for Outagamie County, then a Village of Little Chute Marshall and finally, the Police Chief of Little Chute in the late 1940's until I retired the 1956. (show last photo of Joe)

Law enforcement in Little Chute has certainly changed since the 1940's. We had to fill the coal hopper at the public school, check the pumps in Doyle Park, and check all of the doors in the downtown. We also had to notify citizens that if they didn't pay their water bills, their water would be shut off the following day- I never liked to do that.

When the Little Chuters remember me, they tell tales of getting their diver's license—Don Hermsen said on the day he took his road test with Cop Joe that I had him drive from the Village Hall to KcKinley street and I said "That's good enough-I've seen you diving around town and you're OK!.. When Irene Peeters took her driver's test she drove up Mill Street, drove across Grand Avenue, and ran up on the nun's lawn. She passed!!

We took care of our village and its citizens in many ways. One day I was driving home from Appleton and I was 7 high school softball players walking along side the road. They looked tired so I had them pile into my cop car and gave them a ride to Little Chute.

It was wonderful to grow up and live in Little Chute! We all worked very hard, but had a good time too with our family and friends.

I am Greg Verstegen and I am Joe's grandson.

Little Chute Historical Society Cemetery Walk 2008



