

FOX VALLEY REVIEW

VOLUME II | ISSUE 6



JUNE 1, 2026

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ROOTED IN *Community*

*Stories of Growth, Remembrance,
and the Things That Bring Us Together*

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*A Story of Inclusion, Dignity,
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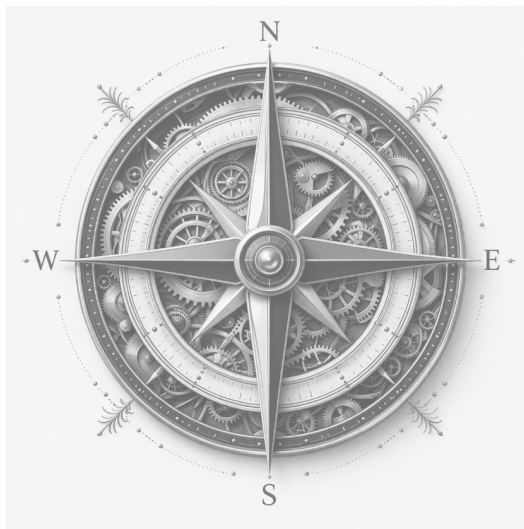
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Penguin: A craftsman restores more than instruments; he preserves stories, sound, and community through the art of guitar repair.

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01 Mission & Vision



WHO WE ARE

WHAT WE DO

WHERE WE AIM TO GO

FOX VALLEY REVIEW is a regional digital magazine dedicated to curating and elevating the voices, stories, events, and cultural expressions of the towns and communities along the Fox River. We strive to inform, inspire, and connect residents through thoughtful storytelling, critical reflection, and celebration of the local from neighborhood events to regional art, food, and civic life.

We envision a more connected and culturally vibrant Fox Valley where every town and resident sees themselves reflected in the stories we tell. Through inclusive journalism, creative expression, and civic commentary, Fox Valley Review aims to become the cultural compass of the region, building bridges between communities, generations, and ideas across the river.



June arrives with warmth, celebration, remembrance, and renewal across the Fox Valley. As summer settles in and our communities gather for graduations, backyard conversations, festivals, gardening, and family traditions, we are proud to present another issue of Fox Valley Review rooted in storytelling, reflection, and community connection.

First, I want to extend heartfelt gratitude to our contributors, photographers, writers, readers, and growing Facebook community for continuing to believe in and support this publication. What began as an ambitious vision for local storytelling has steadily evolved into something much greater: a sha-

**FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR IN CHIEF
DR. BAUDELAIRE K. ULYSSE**

red space where history, art, culture, memory, and community intersect. I also want to thank our friends at Global Brew Tap House for hosting another wonderful Fox Valley Review Release Party. The evening reflected exactly what this publication strives to cultivate: community, conversation, creativity, and fellowship. Special thanks as well to our Associate Editor, Diane, whose thoughtful "Growing the Fox Valley Community" initiative brought attendees together through the simple but meaningful act

of sharing flowers and plant seeds. Watching members of our community exchange stories, laughter, and hopes for what might bloom in the coming weeks was a beautiful reminder that growth often begins with small gestures. This spirit of growth and healing echoes throughout this month's issue. In these pages, readers will find Cynthia's moving essay (Alone Together in the Fox Valley Series) on gardening, belonging, grief, and discovering one's "fellow flowers" within community

“

*LET THIS BE**YOUR WINDOW, YOUR MIRROR,**YOUR INVITATION!*

”

spaces dedicated to nature and restoration. Granny returns with a nostalgic trip through Saturdays at the Aurora Market, reminding us how public spaces nourish not only our stomachs, but our souls. Jeff takes us beneath the lights of Cirque Italia through the eyes of a father and daughter rediscovering wonder together. We also continue Three Missions from Home, a deeply emotional account of wartime loss, remembrance, and the extraordinary humanity that emerged in the

aftermath of tragedy. Elsewhere in this issue, we spotlight perseverance and dignity through a touching encounter with David K., whose nineteen years of service at Jewel Osco remind us of the importance of inclusion, opportunity, and recognizing the value in every member of our community. We also feature reflections, poetry, photography, artwork, and voices that continue to shape the evolving cultural fabric of the Fox Valley.

A NIGHT OF LOCAL CULTURE

From friendly games of darts to meaningful conversations, gifts, prizes, shared food and drinks, and laughter throughout the room, the evening captured the very essence of the Fox Valley: community-driven, creative, welcoming, and full of life.





MAY RELEASE PARTY | GLOBAL BREW | SAINT CHARLES, IL



June also calls us to reflect on several important observances: Father's Day honoring fathers, grandfathers, mentors, and those quiet figures whose sacrifices and guidance often shape generations; Flag Day reminding of the enduring ideals of our nation; Juneteenth, recognizing freedom, resilience, and the pursuit of justice, equality, and human dignity.

As always, thank you for reading, sharing, contributing, and growing with us.



Growing the Fox Valley Review Community

And The Seeds Shall Sprout

WRITER: Diane

PH: Staff

We are entering the celebration season, anticipating graduations, summer breaks and vacations, Mother's Day, Father's Day, weddings, and, in general, looking forward to slowing down, relaxing a bit, and deservingly enjoying ourselves, our families, our friends, and our outdoor surroundings.

Here at Fox Valley Review, we are also anticipating something special: approaching one year since the inaugural launch of this digital publication.

This milestone accomplishment began with ideas for storytelling and has since become so much more than a sketch of a digital format, words written on a page, or visions of what this publication might become.



"We invited attendees

to plant, water,

and grow something beautiful."

“Please join us as we continue to celebrate, connect, and grow together.”



Aside from the eight or so stories our writers share each month, and the many beautiful photographs spotlighting the landmarks, activities, and events throughout the Fox Valley’s geographically spacious and culturally rich communities, we have grown a loyal following within the Fox Valley community for which we are deeply grateful.

grow something beautiful, which we hope to later feature and celebrate in pictorial form in future issues of Fox Valley Review.

Please join us as we continue to celebrate, connect, and grow together.

Accordingly, at this juncture, we wanted to pause, to acknowledge, recognize, and celebrate our valued writers, to whom we are indebted, along with our readers and Facebook followers who continue to grow with us month after month.

At our May Release Party, we invited attendees to celebrate the Fox Valley Review community in a simple but meaningful way: by getting out into their outdoor spaces and gardens, however big or small, and planting flowers of their own.

Whether accomplished gardeners or enthusiastic beginners, participants were encouraged to plant, water, and



“Whether accomplished gardeners or enthusiastic beginners, participants were encouraged to plant, water, and grow something beautiful...”

Legacy Series

Three Missions from Home: A Fox Valley

Story of War, Loss, and Remembrance



03

Part II: The Marked Day

Premonition, Loss, and the Quiet Acts of Humanity That Followed

THE 'X' IN THE CALENDAR

WRITER: Sue & Diane

PH: Sue

Interestingly, my mother once shared a premonition she experienced during the war, a quiet but persistent sense of foreboding that something was not right.

At the time, during Alvin's tour of duty,

she had moved into her in-laws' home in Big Rock. From there, she wrote to him often, seated at a large round table that still remains in her home today. One day, while writing a letter, she was overcome with a strange feeling, an uneasiness she could not

“

They were guided

by something deeper:

a recognition of shared humanity.

”

explain, only that something was off, that perhaps something was wrong.

She paused, left the table, and went to the stairwell, as if she might somehow find Alvin there in the house. Of course, he was not.

Returning to the room, she marked an “X” on the calendar. She told no one.

She simply went about her day. One week later, she received word that her husband was Missing in Action.

One year later, Alvin was declared dead, along with the pilot and the other members of his Airmen unit. Only then did the meaning of that marked day fully reveal itself.

What followed was almost too difficult to comprehend. My mother later learned that Alvin’s body had been badly mangled and burned in the crash.

A portion of his remains, though charred by fire and explosion, was still found strapped to his seat within the aircraft.

The same was true for the pilot, Mr. Keys. Other members of the crew were discovered scattered across the farmland.

When she recounted this story years later, she spoke with quiet certainty: the day Alvin died was the very day she had felt that foreboding, the same day she marked with an “X.”

In the immediate aftermath of the crash, it was not military officials who first responded, but local townspeople.

Despite the horror before them, and the violence that had reached their village, they acted swiftly and with extraordinary humanity.

Men from the area, among them Mr. Emilien Cautru and Mr. Vautier worked to gather the remains of the fallen.

Using wheelbarrows, they carefully collected what they could, determined to treat the dead with dignity. They dug trenches in the farmland to provide temporary burial and constructed makeshift memorials to honor the airmen.

They feared that without such efforts, the bodies would be left to the elements, or worse, to animals.

Their actions were not required of them. They were not compelled by duty.

They were guided by something deeper: a recognition of shared humanity, even in the midst of war.

Only later did American officials arrive to examine the site, exhume the remains, and recover personal effects.

Those items were eventually returned to the United States. The “X” on the calendar was never



A seatbelt, shattered metal, and fragments of glass recovered from the crash of Alvin's aircraft: artifacts of loss preserved against the enduring fabric of memory and country.

Among them was Alvin's stopwatch.

Badly damaged. Charred.

My mother found it difficult to even hold.

To her, it was not simply an object. It was a final, tangible connection to his last moments, perhaps something he had held in his hand as he counted down the seconds before the crew released their bomb load.

Years later, additional remains were identified: a tooth, and a partial leg bone.

The bone now rests in Big Rock, where Alvin grew up, and where his family remained.

meant to be symbolic.

And yet, it became exactly that:

a quiet mark of knowing,
a moment suspended in time,
and the beginning of a loss that would
echo for the rest of her life.

~Sue Grommes (reported by Associate Editor Diane Kondratowicz and edited by the Editor-in-Chief, Baudelaire Ulysse)



Perigny, France, 2004 – Patricia (Samuelson) Wenzel, seated second from left, joins family members, military representatives, and community leaders during a commemorative dinner marking the 60th anniversary of the WWII plane crash and the dedication of a memorial honoring the fallen airmen.



GRANNY'S

WOVEN QUILT SERIES

SATURDAYS AT THE AURORA MARKET



“

SMELLS LIKE KETTLE CORN,

AND KETTLE WISDOM SETTLE IN.

”

WRITER: GRANNY

PH: STAFF

04

Oh, Saturdays. There was no sleeping in when the Aurora Market came alive. Before the sun even peeked over the river, your grandpa and I would pack a picnic basket and our woven bags, then head downtown to find our spot among the bustle of neighbors and vendors.

Back then, the market stretched along the heart of Aurora’s downtown, a mosaic of color, sound, and smell. The scent of fresh bread pulled you in one direction, while the sweet tang of kettle corn spun you around

in another. You’d hear babies crying, fiddles playing, and old men arguing good-naturedly about whose tomatoes had more “heft.”

We always made a beeline for the jam lady. Lord, she made a cherry preserve so tart and sweet it could make you weep. Right next to her, a family from Oswego sold eggs in every shade from soft blue to speckled brown. Each dozen came with a quick story about the hens, the kids, or the time a fox got clever. I’d smile, nod, and tuck the carton in our basket like treasure.



Of course, it wasn't all food. Tables displayed handmade soaps, crocheted potholders, and the finest embroidered linens stitched by women whose fingers had never once been idle. I still have a lavender runner that reads "Bless this house," and you better believe it still blesses ours.

The market wasn't just where we shopped; it was where we gathered. Where young couples walked hand in hand and seniors pulled up folding chairs to catch up. You didn't just buy apples; you bought the season, the conversation, the memory.

Even now, I can still hear the low hum of morning gossip, the shuffle of baskets, the laughter rising with the heat. And I remember what your great-grandma used to say, handing me a still-warm scone from a linen-wrapped napkin:

"This market feeds more than the stomach, darling; it feeds the soul."

~Granny



Recreation of Aurora riverfront market scene: Young Granny seated briefly with her grandmother sharing a warm scone wrapped in linen.



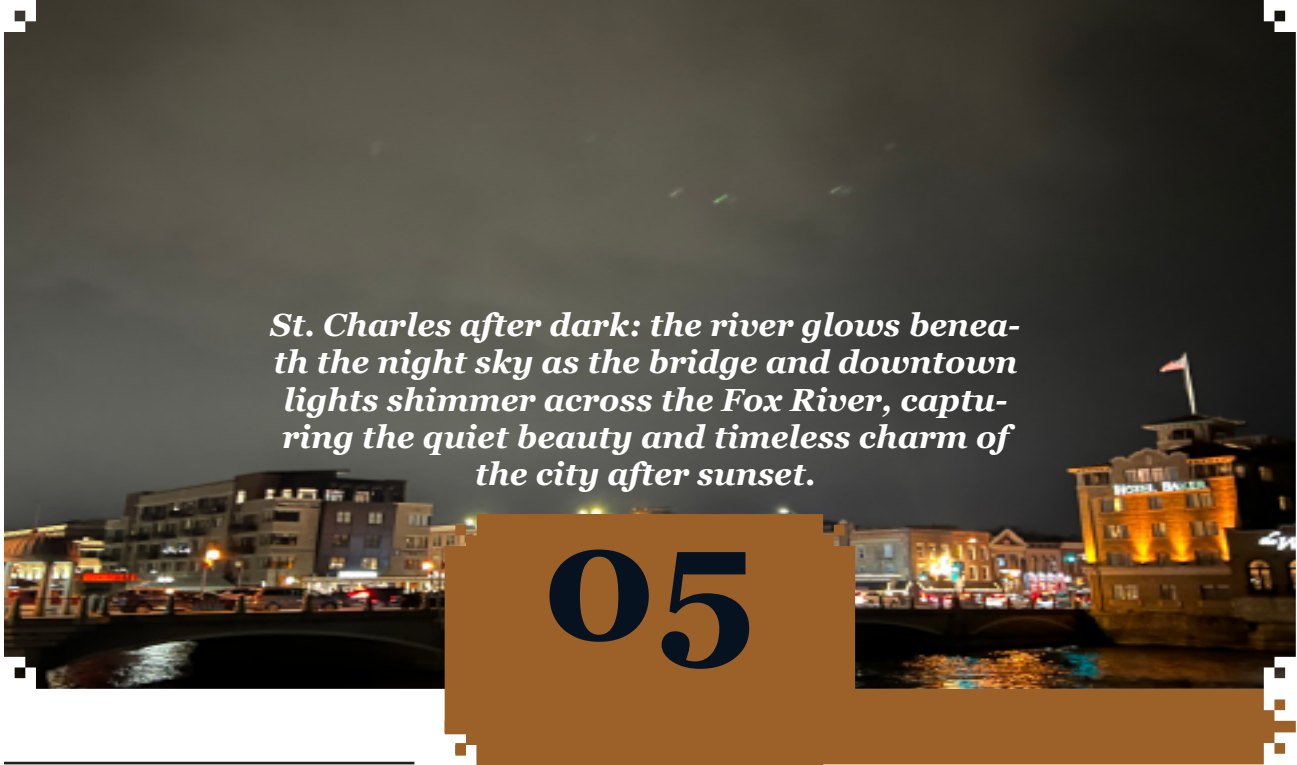
Granny and Grandpa walking side-by-side carrying baskets.

Stay tuned for the next story from Granny's Women Quilt Series. It's coming up in the July Issue.



David at Work

David K. celebrates 19 years at Jewel-Osco, an achievement marked not only by time, but by pride, perseverance, and community.



St. Charles after dark: the river glows beneath the night sky as the bridge and downtown lights shimmer across the Fox River, capturing the quiet beauty and timeless charm of the city after sunset.

05

WRITER: Fox Valley Review

PH: Staff

FOX VALLEY MOMENTS

A High Five at Jewel

I made a quick stop at Jewel-Osco to grab a few ingredients for a meal I was planning for my daughters. It was meant to be a simple errand, nothing more than in and out.

But as I checked out and began walking toward the door, something small and meaningful, happened.

David approached me.

Without hesitation, he raised his hand for a high five. I met him there, returning the gesture just as natura-

“I am proud of myself and grateful for the opportunity and support that Jewel has given me.”



“Jewel’s opportunity enables David to belong, function,

care, and contribute individually and as part of a team.”

lly. It was simple, spontaneous, and genuine.

Then he pointed to a pin on his name tag.

Nineteen years.

David has been working at Jewel for 19 years.

I congratulated him. “That’s an awesome achievement,” I said.

He smiled and replied, “Thank you. I am proud of myself and grateful for the opportunity and support that Jewel has given me.”

And he should be.

Nineteen years is not just longevity; it’s commitment, growth, and contribution. It’s showing up, day after day, and being part of something larger than oneself.



“David is not separate from the community.”

Spaces where neurodivergent individuals can contribute, grow, and be recognized, not for their differences, but for their presence and their value.

Sometimes, that recognition comes in the form of a milestone pin. Sometimes, it comes in the form of a high five.

Either way, it matters.

Moments like this remind us that opportunity matters.

Jewel is among a small number of companies that make a conscious effort to provide meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities, creating pathways not just to work, but to dignity, independence, and belonging. David is not separate from the community.

He is part of it.

And perhaps that’s the point. Jewel’s opportunity enables David to belong, function, care, and contribute individually and as part of a team.

Mary, who previously managed David at Jewel, described him as one of the kindest people she had ever worked with, the kind of person whose smile could light up an entire room. She recalled how David consistently treated customers and coworkers with

warmth, positivity, and genuine care, leaving lasting impressions through small acts of kindness that many people still remember today.

Beneath David’s cheerful personality is a quiet determination and remarkable strength. Mary shared that at one point David balanced shifts at both Jewel and Olive Garden, embodying an extraordinary work ethic. Outside of work, he also competes in deadlifting, lifting as much as 385 pounds, a powerful contrast to the gentle spirit many in the community know him for.

A couple weeks ago, when Mary returned to visit the store, David immediately approached her, stopped what he was doing, and sang “Happy Birthday” to her in the middle of the aisle, a moment she says she will never forget.

As a society, we carry a responsibility, not to create separate spaces, but to ensure that our shared spaces are truly inclusive.

ON THE EDGE

WRITER: Jeff Weisman

PH: Staff

CIRQUE ITALIA

Part I: The Magic Before the Fall



"The women are so strong."

“I still remember it to this day.”



06

There was a time when the circus felt like magic.

As a kid, my parents took me to see the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus at the old Rosemont Horizon in Chicago when I was six or so, and ever since then, I’ve loved the circus.

So, when I learned that Cirque Italia was coming to West Dundee for a few weeks in March when my daughter was nine, I knew I had to take her. “Are you sure I’m going to like it?” my daughter asked, sitting on the couch reading a book.

“I did,” I answered, smiling at her from the dining room table. “I still remember it to this day. Even right now, I can picture the clowns walking around on stilts and the trapeze artists swinging through the air.”

“Alright.”

I bought decent tickets in the main section of the performance ring and waited for the day to arrive, hyping it up every chance I got.

“I can’t wait for the circus,” I would say. “You’re going to love it.”

“I’m excited, dad.”

“I still remember it to this day.”

Finally, the Saturday afternoon of the

performance arrived.

We drove out to the tent temporarily installed in the parking lot outside Spring Hill Mall, and we parked near the main entrance, and stepped inside the big top.

Performers greeted us as we entered. Clowns wandered through the aisles, bending balloons, juggling, improvising laughter.

“These seats are nice,” I said, sitting down beside her. “We’re even closer than I thought.”

“They are, dad.”

“And we’ll get treats at intermission.”

The music thumped.

Lights shimmered across the water-lined stage.

The ring, elevated, circular, was surrounded by a shimmering pool, reflecting every beam of light like a living mirror.

Then suddenly, the music stopped.

The lights dimmed. And the ringmaster appeared. He began telling a story of a magical time when the world was filled with water.

And then, a woman descended from above. Suspended from a ring.

Spinning.

Twisting.

Defying gravity itself.



From blooming gardens and bustling plant sales to patriotic tributes, community gatherings, and joyful moments at Fox Valley Review's May Release Party, these images capture the people, places, and shared experiences that continue to bring the Fox Valley community together.



*“There were ropes. Wheels. Swings
suspended twenty feet in the air.”*

Water cascaded around her in a perfect circle.

“You like it?” I whispered.
“Yeah,” she said, transfixed. “How does she do that?”
“I don’t know.”
“The women are so strong.”

What followed was a sequence of performances that blurred the line between strength and grace. A man lifted a woman overhead with one hand. She balanced. Spun. Held a one-handed handstand in midair.

Water jets erupted in rhythmic bursts. The crowd leaned forward, collectively holding its breath. There were ropes. Wheels. Swings suspended twenty feet in the air. Bodies in motion. Perfect timing. Impossible control. A clown told a story about a city made of water. And then, intermission.

We sat with popcorn.
“You like it, huh?” I asked.
“I do,” she said. “The women are so strong.”
“They sure are.”

The lights dimmed again. The music faded. The ringmaster returned. He began speaking once more about that same magical time when the world was filled with water.

Part II continues in the next Issue.

WRITER: Cynthia Adamson-Kotlicky

PH: Cynthia

***Finding
Your
Fellow
Flowers***

Alone Together in the Fox Valley Series



Trees were my first babysitter. My mom says that as a baby, if placed under the arching canopy of my oak and maple friends, I would watch the leaves wave at me through dappled sunlight and be at peace. That never changed for me; when my heart is heavy and my mind racing, the steady dependability and healing energy of nature is a consistent comfort.

I think we can learn a lot about our society and ourselves by observing how we treat plants.

My grandpa used to say weeds are just flowers growing in the wrong place. I'll take that a step further and say weeds are just flowers that we bully. Like plants, in life some people are planted where they belong in a bed of like-minded companions where they get nurtured and fertilized so they can bloom into their full potential.

Others may struggle their whole lives to find a place to grow where people don't spray them with poison or try to uproot them, where the sun energizes without scorching, where the water drenches without flooding, where their presence makes people smile.

As I shared in the March issue, I lost my son, Tristan, under tragic circumstances. As someone on the autistic spectrum, he experienced social dynamics differently than most; I don't think he ever really found his fellow flowers, and he was often treated like a weed. This dynamic made him incredibly kind and empathetic toward the weeds of the world and Mother Nature herself. He was a vegan who cared deeply about animals and the environment. He often volunteered in the Brookfield area, where we used to live, with environmental efforts along the Des Plaines River.



“Weeds are just flowers that we bully... No one feels like a weed when they’re volunteering.”

Tristan wanted people, plants, and animals to live in the harmony his life was missing.

While perusing a local greenhouse for new friends to plant at my house this year, I was heartened by the spontaneous conversations that sprang up with fellow plant enthusiasts. Maybe by exploring groups in the Fox Valley dedicated to preserving and restoring our natural world, I could find fellowship.

There is no shortage of gardening groups in the Fox Valley, including the Batavia Plain Dirt Gardeners, the Fox Valley Garden Club, Pottawatomie Garden Club, and the Geneva Garden Club.

A national organization with a local chapter is Wild Ones, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to “promote native landscapes through education, advocacy, and collaborative action.”



Their website says, "We're an inclusive community. Diverse voices and backgrounds make us stronger. That's why we welcome everyone to join us." So I joined them for their annual native plant sale.

Native plants are ones that are indigenous to a particular region and ecosystem. Because they evolved locally, they often require less care and maintenance than other plants one might find at a big box store. They also benefit the environment because regional pollinators and other beneficial plants and animals formed symbiotic relationships with them over millennia. Similarly, I think that is what people are trying to find for their own lives: a place to root where it's easy and comfortable and filled with friends.

Image 1 : A quiet moment of pollination and bloom in the Fox Valley.

Image 2: Shoppers mingle at plant sale.

Image 3: Cynthia radiates joy and community spirit at a local plant sale.



Whatever the cause, that shared passion to do something positive for the environment, the community, or your fellow human beings creates an entry point for understanding and conversation. At a native plant sale, "What's your favorite shade plant?" is the equivalent of "So, what's your sign?" I observed and engaged in many conversations about the tribulations and triumphs of gardens.

We continually arranged the plants in the trays to make them look their best and cleaned loose soil from displays to entice shoppers. It reminded me of pet adoption events where the dogs are groomed perfectly and given a bandana in the hopes that a family will see how great they are. Everyone wanted these plants to find homes, which would in turn allow insects to find homes and pollinators to find food. I'm happy to say almost all the plants are going to their forever homes.

It struck me as particularly beautiful that people have shared experiences apart from one another, like there is a collective unconscious that the natural world activates in us. For us phytophiles, plants are like our chlorophyll-heavy cousins that we want to care for and consider family, and that shared feeling makes camaraderie easy.

I think this would be true for any similar endeavor; all volunteers rally toward a hope for the world through a shared vision. Volunteering makes true isolation and loneliness almost impossible. No one feels like a weed when they're volunteering, so it's something I will keep trying.

Maybe I'll see you there.

Where Sound Is Rebuilt

Inside Penguin Guitar in South Elgin

What began as necessity became craft and what became craft is now a growing presence in the Fox Valley music community. It didn't start as a business. It started as a problem.

In the early 2000s, Ed Snoble was playing regularly, week after week, live performances, instruments in constant use. And like many musicians, he found himself making frequent trips to a local guitar technician.

It added up. Cost. Time. Dependence. So he did what many craftsmen eventually do; he began figuring it out himself.

"Out of necessity, I started doing my own work and then I fell in love with it." What began as basic repairs slowly became something more.

WRITER: Fox Valley Review

PH: Penguin Guitar Co.

Adjustment turned into curiosity.

Curiosity turned into study.

And study turned into craft.

The deeper Ed went into the technical side of guitars, the way they were built, how wood responded to tension, how sound was shaped by structure, the more the work transformed from

obligation into passion.

Friends began to notice. Then they began to ask.

At first, it was informal, maintaining instruments for people in his immediate circle. But over time, something familiar and powerful took hold: Word of mouth. A friend tells a friend.

A player recommends a name.

A reputation builds quietly, steadily.



*Ed and student standing at
Penguin Guitar*

For nearly 15 years, that's how the work grew.
Not through advertising.
Not through scale.
But through trust.
"Guitars for players, by players."
Somewhere between 2015 and 2020, the work evolved again. Ed began building instruments from scratch. Not just repairing sound, but creating it. Electric guitars. Acoustic ukuleles. Instruments shaped not only by technical precision, but by lived experience as a musician.
Then, in 2025, something shifted: The work became official. Penguin Guitar Co. was formed, opening its services to the public and establishing a dedicated presence in South Elgin. Most guitars that pass through Penguin Guitar Co. don't need reinvention. They need care.



*Ed leaning over guitar at
Penguin Guitar*



Stringed instruments, especially those made of wood, exist under constant tension. Seasonal shifts across the Chicago metropolitan area affect the way that wood flexes, breathes, and responds. Necks shift. Action changes. Tone evolves.
The impact of Penguin Guitar extends beyond the shop. Ed has served as a board member of the Elgin Youth Symphony Orchestras, supporting young musicians across the region since 2019. Some of the earliest guitars built under the Penguin name were donated to the organization, auctioned off to support its future. "This work isn't just about instruments; it's about the people who play them."
In a region rich with talent but often underserved in specialized craft services, Penguin Guitar Co. fills a gap, quietly but effectively.

Molding Broken Pieces

WRITER: Beau

PH: Staff

I feel fragile;
I feel broken into zillions of pieces,
but I am not crushed or scattered.



As time goes by,
as I grieve,
as currere is lived,
my tears wash away
the residue of pain and aches.

My pieces, like magnets,
gather around the center.
My pieces,
like clay,
are being molded.

My pieces, like sheets,
are being folded,
inwardly and outwardly.



My pieces,
like iron,
are being forged, sharpened, and burnished.

My pieces, like a vision,
are being crafted.

My pieces, like a creation, are being endowed
with progressive,
powerful, passionate, and creative energies
to become one, a magnum opus.

I am becoming whole.



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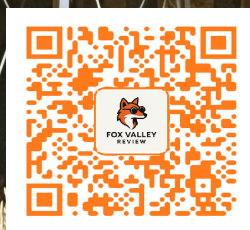


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