

Inside scoop: Connellys announce retirement

By Karrie Carlson, Daily Journal Media, Aug. 16, 2025

The word is out — Pat and Jean Connelly are retiring and Dairyland is up for sale. Does that mean the end of a Fergus Falls legacy? Not exactly. The end of an era? Yes.

In May 2025, Pat had a health scare that could have been life threatening. Jean said, “We had to reassess our goals to allow us to adapt to life challenges to allow us to remain steadfast and adapt to a different season of our lives that still gives us the ability to age gracefully and continue to be active members within the community.”

They knew at that time the 2025 season would be their last in the iconic red A-frame building that holds seven decades of memories. “At this time, we are hopeful the word will travel in a positive manner and reach the parties that will help continue the legacy that Bert Skogmo started in 1955,” Pat expressed.

Dairyland has been up for sale before. The Connellys said it was listed in 2016 under the firm stance that a buyer would have to utilize bank financing independently.

“We have learned over the last 10 years that most buyers are hoping that we offer to assist with purchasing through a contract for deed or other options,” Pat said. He continued, “The store was taken off the market, but we knew from that point that we were open to the prospect of selling Dairyland without the assistance of commercial real estate brokers.”

How does a business like Dairyland turn over ownership and keep the momentum earned through years of hard work? Pat and Jean’s hope is that the next owners will be mindful of Dairyland’s customer favorites, yet have the courage to bring new ideas and atmosphere to the community, ensuring continued growth of the business — but also that they will recognize Dairyland’s 70 years of heartfelt memories in Fergus Falls.

As Pat and Jean reflect on their time as owners, the memories are countless and each hold a place in their hearts. Jean said, “We have shared in laughter and tears. We have experienced hardships as well as milestones. Being part of Dairyland and this community has allowed us to experience love, joy, kindness and peace.”

Ultimately, the fate of Dairyland is unknown at this time, but there are words of wisdom to pass down to the next owners from Bert Skogmo, who offered this advice in 1955: “Keep it friendly. Keep it simple. Keep it fun.”

Another friendly piece of advice was shared by Pat’s brother, Chuck Connelly who reminded people: “Be humble, be thankful.”

Pat shared, “Kay Wilkes Johnson and Bert Skogmo redesigned Dairyland in 1962 by daring to be bold and daring to be different. Jean’s passion to love others echoes this with authenticity. Working together, side-by-side as we go about doing business, we hope people will realize that our true goal is to demonstrate our passion to dare to make a difference.”

Throughout the 2025 season, Dairyland has been having Throwback Thursdays to honor the 70 years it has been woven into the fabric of the community. And although summer hours will come to an end on Aug. 29, there is not a set last day. Pat said, “Saturday evening, Aug. 30 and Sunday lunch, Aug. 31, will feature our time-tested and customer-favorited Henny Penny Chicken. We will pause on

Monday, Sept.1 to honor Labor Day. As part of the throwback theme, we will extend the 2025 Dairyland season into the fall with throwback hours over the lunch hour from 11-2 on the weekdays."

Endings are never easy, and change can be hard. Pat and Jean hope to fill the time left in their Dairyland era to share memories, tell stories and pay tribute to the friends and families they have come to love.

Jean added, "Our hearts are overflowing as we look to transition ownership to continue the Dairyland legacy."