

## Adventures of a Green Dean in Green Pastures



*Dean Cliff F. Thompson*

In the photo are Sara and Mark Weier, who share chores in running the Weier-Nook Farm near Dodgeville. They were among the hundreds of Wisconsin citizens who helped educate UW-Madison faculty this past summer. I was among the lucky learners. A busload of us rolled around the state for five days, visiting people in their farms and factories, and listening to their experiences and dreams.

We were on the "Wisconsin Idea Seminar," made possible by a grant from the Evjue Foundation. New faculty from many departments, and a couple of only slightly used faculty like myself, had the opportunity to see first-hand how the walls of the University are as great as the state itself. Many universities with an international reputation have few ties with their local communities. Some, like the University of Wisconsin-Madison, are renowned both at home and abroad. But I know of no university with a history and commitment to equal this University's special dedication to serve the community which supports it.

One of our teachers was the venerable John Patrick Hunter of the Capital Times, who apologized to me one morning for referring to me as the "new dean" in his first press report on our progress, whereas he now realized I was completing my third year. I assured him that my colleagues and law alums regarded me as new, that Agriculture Dean Walsh had told me that I should expect to be introduced as a new dean for at least four years, and that, anyway, if he thought I was new, that was proof enough.

It is true that I had already traveled to many of the areas on our tour, and had begun to get a good sense of

law practice around the state. But I had only a remote understanding of the past fortunes and current lives of the people served by Wisconsin's legal profession. This seminar was intense, complete with assigned readings, and lectures at meals and on the bus to prepare us for our stops. We were on duty at least 12 hours a day. If that sounds onerous, I should add that we also managed to add a few hours every day for spirited relaxation, easy enough in the company of bright and engaging companions. Although we didn't believe the dark hints that there would be a final exam, I dutifully took notes, and I have enjoyed the freshness of the memories stirred by reading them.

I suppose everyone on the tour has favorite recollections. Mine, in addition to the Weier's dairy farm, include: high tech at Silicon Sensors; Truman Lowe of the Winnebago describing the nuances of green in the emerging summer foliage; the combination of old fashioned service and modern science at the Marshfield Clinic; the complicated integration of product use at Green Bay Packaging Co.; and the keenness of students at Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School, where theory and hands-on experience combine.

My own enthusiasm for the seminar certainly arises because we were given vivid experiences in subjects about which we had read. None of us thought we had become instantly wise in the ways of Wisconsin. But we emerged a little less green, and considerably more appreciative of the bonds between our University and the State.