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A piece of the West

Ranch guests get taste of past

By Barbara Bedford
Freeman Correspondent

"There's a feeling I get when I look to the West, and my spirit is crying for leaving ... And she's buying the stairway to heaven."
— Led Zeppelin

EAGLE — Well, in this case she is a he.

Al Gagliano, owner of Kettle Moraine Ranch (KMR), has moved his childhood dreams from the city streets of Milwaukee to the winding roads of the Kettle Moraine.

The scenic 36-acre ranch is tucked away in the 14,000 acres of the Kettle Moraine. It has been termed as the Midwest's most unique ranch. Gagliano offers his customers trail rides, pony rides, hay rides and covered wagon rides. But that's not all. He's got his own little piece of the West. He's built an authentic western town, complete with a general store, chapel, saloon, jail, schoolhouse and farm.

"I grew up in the city," said Gagliano. "And I always said I was going to build a ranch someday. A great one."

KMR is entering its 24th year, and like the early pioneers nurtured their own people and towns, Gagliano makes sure his customers feel right at home. "It's a living fantasy," he said. "I've always had a special love for horses and the West."

Gagliano came from a very large family and his life as a child was not an easy one. He

work extensively with the blind, the disabled, special recreational groups, church groups and school and daycare groups. "We also work a lot with Girl Scout troops," he said.

The town's ambitions seem to be growing, too. "We are trying to expand," said Gagliano. "One of our next ventures is to create a family place to come to. I feel it's going to happen."

KMR has been making quite a name for itself. Its reputation has spread to such places as Chicago, Minneapolis and Detroit. "We haven't done any advertising there," Gagliano said. "It just happened by word of mouth."

The facilities enable the ranch to provide camping, picnics, cookouts, barn dances, auctions and family reunions.

The town's chapel, which Gagliano built for his mother, can be used for weddings of up to 60 people. The little red schoolhouse can also be used for functions for up to 30 people.

Gagliano, his wife Cindy and their three children live in the Kettle Moraine in a log cabin he built. He still travels to the city every weekday to work his "regular" job. However, when his working day is done, this modern pioneer moves west back to his own town, his own little piece of heaven.

"Someday though, I'm going to be able to be out here full time," he said. "Hopefully, I will be in the next two years."

