

Book Review

Reliving town's '99 miracle

The Measure of Everything
by Ed Davis,
Plain View Press, 174 pages

By Scott Geisel

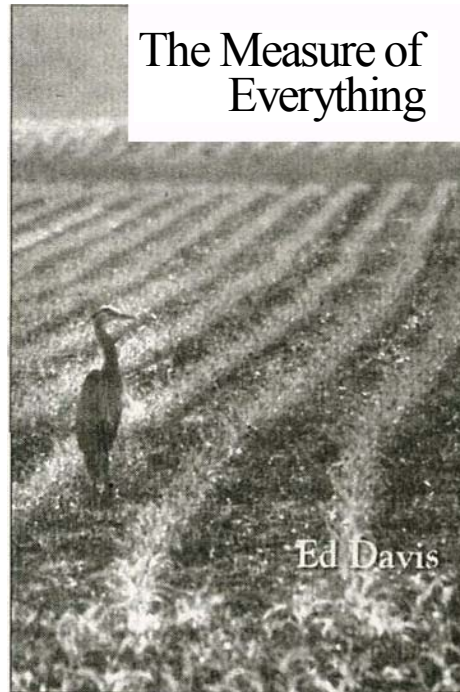
The Measure of Everything by Ed Davis is a book for Yellow Springers. But it's also a story for anyone who likes nature, farms, the feel of a small town, a love story or the struggle to find what's right in the world and how to stand up for it.

Created out of the events in the winter of 1999 leading up to the sale at auction of the nearly 1,000-acre Whitehall Farm at the northern edge of Yellow Springs, this story takes on the issues of small-town preservation, affordable housing, urban sprawl, and farmers' real struggles to survive and secure their futures in the age of big agribusiness and development.

But it's a work of fiction. Davis creates Billy Acorn, an unlikely and flawed hero who runs from his mistakes only to find himself confronted by the very things he's trying to escape. On his journey he stumbles upon the connections between the past, present and future that will ultimately drive him toward what he hasn't known he's been seeking.

Several compelling subplots emerge along the way — a mother searching for a home and future for her son, a teacher striving for redemption, and a once-prominent mentor struggling to reclaim his place. Holding it all together is the small-town feel that Davis writes so intimately about. Yellow Springers will recognize such familiar comforts as the local coffee shop, tavern, nature preserve, pond with wild geese, and, especially, the feel of "street talk" and local fundraising events. Even the book's cover speaks of the love of nature and things small town, a photo taken by Yellow Springs resident Patricia Perry of a heron on the farmland behind Kills Pond — the very ground this story draws its inspiration from.

A reminder of the events that Davis chronicles here and that remain a central debate for the characters in this story stands just beyond the western edge of town — the giant NO SPRAWL sign from the "Save the Farm" days.



Though some of the issues and circumstances have changed since the auction of the Whitehall Farm, that old struggle between the people and the land, between balancing a small town's needs for housing and a solid financial future with the desire and drive to preserve the natural world, are as real now as ever. And while this is a story about preservation and love of nature, Davis isn't afraid to take on more than one side of the issues, and he doesn't pull any punches when it comes to pointing the finger at those who don't have respect for the land and what it means to those who live on it, work it and love it.

Davis reminds us that what happened in this little town in 1999 was a miracle, an unprecedented coup pulled off with the help of "angels." And his story is one of hope for the future, a belief that this might not be the last miracle for Yellow Springs or other small towns like it.

The Measure of Everything is available locally at Epic Books and at www.davised.com.

• Scott Geisel teaches writing at Wright State and is co-editor of *MudRock: Stories & Tales*.