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women

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Debbie Brague
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CONTENTS | April/May 2012

- 11 PROFILE**
A SHEER LOVE OF WEDDINGS
For Nancy Flottmeyer of Weddings by Nancy, every day is a special occasion.
- 14 CAREERS**
A TRUE ENTREPRENEUR
Debra Lash of the Wedding Tree shares her secrets of success.
- 17 DESIGNING WOMEN**
CAPTURING A CELEBRATION
Preserve your memories with the latest trends in event photography and filmmaking.
- 21 PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL**
A HOUSE OF RECOVERY AND HOPE
Peggy Ham celebrates a life turned around—and helps others do the same at Ruth House.
- 25 FAMILY**
CELEBRATING LIFE
Both family and medical staff are blessed by a child's birth.
- 27 HOME**
LIVING LARGE IN A SMALL HOUSE
A simple house is transformed into a home worthy of celebration.
- 31 HEALTHY LIVING**
LIVING WITH LUPUS
Debbie Brague celebrates life while living with a chronic illness.
- 35 NONPROFIT**
HAVING A BLAST
The La Crosse Skyrockers spark a spirit of adventure for its volunteers.
- 36 WOMEN IN THE REGION**
CRW COVER GIRLS REVISITED
They're still shining, and brighter than before.
- 39 FOOD**
A SMORGASBORD OF OPTIONS
When hosting a party, professional advice can help you prepare the buffet.
- 44 RETAIL THERAPY**
PLAYING DRESS-UP
From mother-of-the-bride to showers to cocktail hour, there's a new spin on party wear.
- 47 TRAVEL**
DESTINATION CELEBRATIONS
Take the stress out of celebratory events by taking a trip with your guests.

Pictured on cover:

Nancy Flottmeyer, owner, Weddings by Nancy
Photo by Megan McCluskey, Atypik Studio

Other photo credits: This page, Kelly Ottesen Photography;
page 6, Janet Mootz Photography; page 36 (left), Janet Mootz Photography;
page 36 (right), Theresa M. Smerud; page 37 (top) Janet Mootz Photography.

In every issue:

From the Editor **6** | In the Know **8** | Accomplishments **34**
Advertiser Index **50** | Community Calendar **50**



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When it comes to celebrations, we tend to think of the big ones—weddings, anniversaries, births, graduations—events that mark a milestone or a major accomplishment. But editing this issue of *Coulee Region Women* made me think about celebrations, and especially the celebrations of milestones, in a different way.

A birthday or an anniversary is a distinct date on a calendar. We circle it in red, anticipate it, make plans large or small. But some celebrations sneak up on you, and it's not until you pause on an ordinary day—perhaps during a conversation or a quiet moment—reflect on where you have been and where you are now, and realize that today, this very moment, is a celebration of what you have become.

This happened to me while reading the article on our cover woman, Nancy Flottmeyer, of *Weddings by Nancy*. In it, she tells of a time several years ago, before she

had an office of her own, when she would set up shop at Grounded Specialty Coffee in downtown La Crosse and meet with her clients for hours.

This detail made me stop because I was there too, literally, and I remember eavesdropping on her meetings while I worked on my laptop at a table nearby. In those pre-CRW days, I went to coffee shops to escape my quiet home office and get out among people. I'd sip my latte, edit my book projects, listen to the shop owner, Todd Ondell, spin stories, and occasionally flip through one of the copies of *Coulee Region Women* sitting about. "Who's the editor of this?" I would think. "I want her job."

Now, Nancy has her office and a blossoming business, Todd has passed the Grounded baton to Maria Norberg, a young woman entrepreneur, and I am immersed in the job I coveted. We've all come so far. It's a quiet moment worthy of celebration.

This issue of *Coulee Region Women* focuses on the accomplishments—big and small—of several women in our area. Some, like Nancy, are businesswomen who not only have built successful businesses, but also are in the business of celebration itself. Others are celebrating their lives and their health after long struggles with addiction or diagnoses of chronic illness. You'll learn what to serve at a celebration, what to wear to a celebration and where to go for a celebration. And as we continue to celebrate our own 10-year anniversary, we hope you'll look back over your own years and find something to celebrate, too—with or without fanfare.

Betty

coulee region women

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CELEBRATE MOTHER EARTH



Coulee Partners for Sustainability will be hosting an Earth Fair on Earth Day, Sunday, April 22, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Myrick Park and the EcoPark. Many activities are planned for young and old alike, including children's crafts, a farmers' market, EcoPark playscapes tours, green workshops, vendors, a live raptor demonstration and a concert by popular children's singer Hans Mayer. There will be door prizes given throughout the day, live music and food sold by the People's Food Co-op and the Root Note. A Recycling Fair will also be held nearby at Emerson

Elementary School from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For a full list of events and times, please visit www.cpslax.org/earthfair.

CELEBRATE OUR READERS

The call continues for story ideas from our readers to feature in our August/September 2012 "Readers' Issue." We are looking to you to nominate an area woman you admire, a woman-owned business you enjoy, a women-run organization making a local impact or any women's issue you feel is important to our community. Additionally, if you've ever wanted to try your hand at writing for *Coulee Region Women*, we'll consider complete stories as well—please email editor@crwmagazine.com for writing guidelines. Story ideas for this issue will be received until June 15, 2012, and may also be sent to editor@crwmagazine.com.



CELEBRATE FITNESS

Move your body and support good causes May 5-6 during the Festival Foods La Crosse Fitness Festival. The festival gives area residents and visitors from across the country an opportunity to enjoy active, aerobic outdoor events amid the breathtaking natural beauty of the Mississippi River Valley. The wide range of activities—from a full marathon to a 5K walk, youth events and cycling events—offers challenges to both experienced and novice athletes of all ages and fitness levels. The festival begins Saturday with the 5K Run and 5K Walk, Bike Tour and Grandad's Uphill Cycling Time Trial. Sunday events include the Marathon, Half Marathon and Cycling Criterium. Proceeds from the festival are donated to the St. Clare Health Mission, Youth Enrichment Association and Special Olympics of La Crosse. For more information, including registration, visit www.lacrossefitnessfestival.com, email pfisterp@cityoflacrosse.org or call 608-789-7533.



Kristy Walz

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THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND

Ready to laugh out loud? Then gather some friends and plan to attend the 9th annual *Coulee Region Women* Thank You for Being a Friend celebration on Saturday, April 14, 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Drugan's Castle Mound in Holmen. Professional development specialist Kristy Walz will speak on celebrating laughter and humor, and WKBT's Kristen Elicerio will serve as emcee. In addition to a luncheon, the event will feature entertainment, vendor booths and door prizes. Tickets are \$20 each or \$35 for two and are available from the area businesses listed in the ad on page 46. For more information, call the *Coulee Region Women* office at 608-783-5395.

CELEBRATE FUN

Every once in a while, we run a piece that readers find especially enjoyable, and they tell us about it in their feedback. In February/March 2012, our "Food Issue," it was our Retail Therapy piece "Feast Your Eyes," in which wares from merchants of downtown La Crosse were styled as dinner. Thanks to the open-mindedness of these merchants and the sublime skills of Kelly Ottesen Photography, we pulled it off. We are always eager to hear from our readers with comments, ideas and feedback. In this case, we are happy to have delighted you!



A WORD OF CORRECTION

While it's good to be on a first-name basis with folks who provide you with daily essentials, sometimes it backfires. For example, we're so familiar with "Theresa at Bean Juice" that we didn't catch the misspelling of her last name in "Bean Queens" in our February/March 2012 issue. Her correct name is Theresa Held, not Weld.



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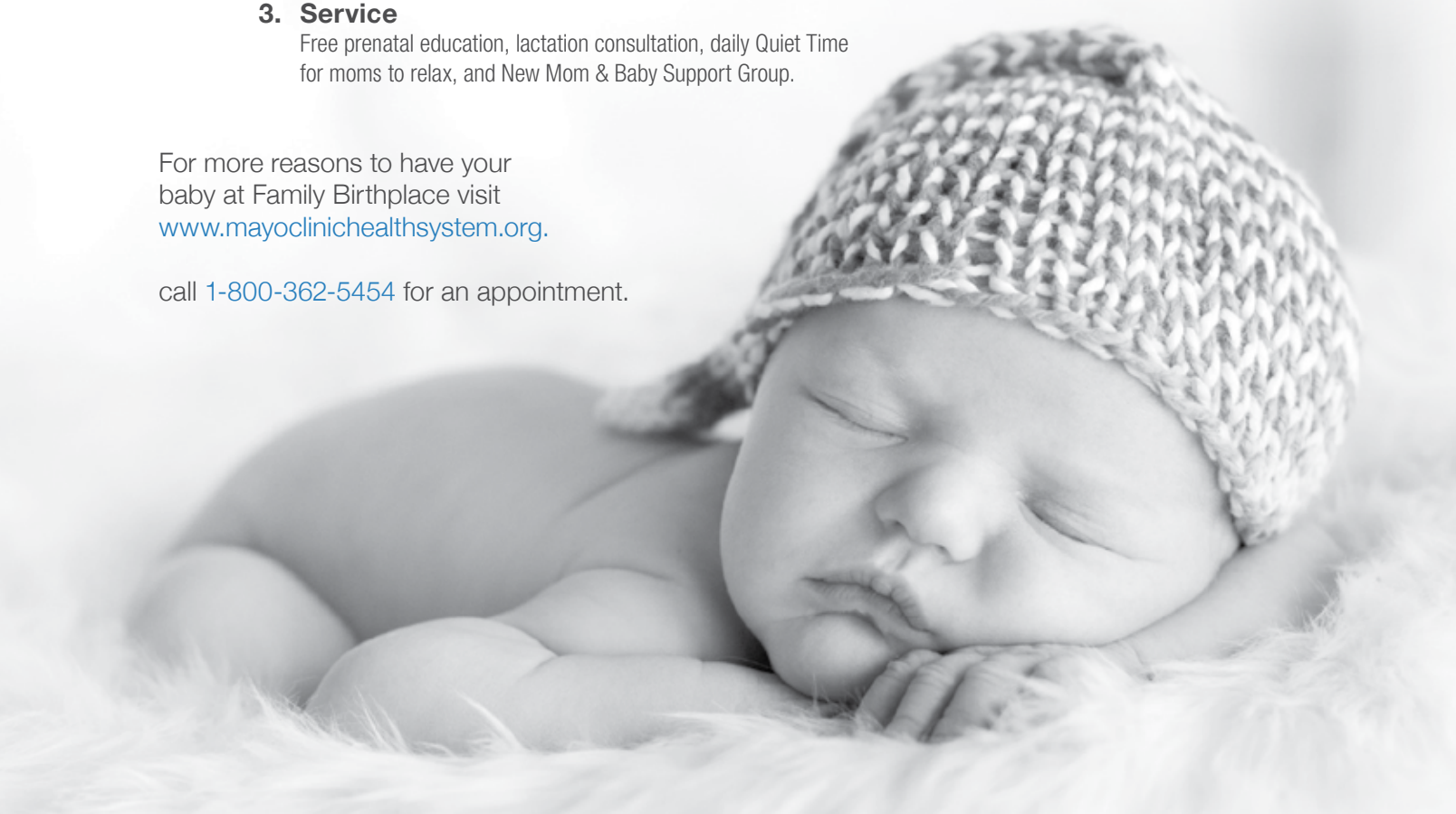
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A Sheer Love of Weddings

For Nancy Flottmeyer of Weddings by Nancy, every day is a special occasion.

BY KRISTY WALZ

Photo above by Megan McCluskey, Atypik Studio

Nancy Flottmeyer's days are full. She's a wife, mother, designer, business owner, publisher and creative director of two regional magazines and copublisher of another. In addition, she launched the first national publication for wedding planners last year.

"I don't do it all," she says. "I have a great team at home with my family and a great team in everything else that I do."

Though Flottmeyer is surrounded with support and immersed in work she loves, her days might sound chaotic to some. Yet when Flottmeyer talks about her life, it doesn't sound at all overwhelming. It sounds like a divine plan.

"I have been dreaming about weddings since I was in kindergarten," she says. "After high school, I got a job at a local bridal shop. I swear they hired me because of the look on my face in the interview when I said, 'I ... love ... weddings.'"

Flottmeyer's enduring passion for the wedding industry, her solid values and a keen business sense have been a successful combination. This year, Flottmeyer will celebrate 10 years in business as Weddings by Nancy. As the industry and the economy have changed over the last decade, Flottmeyer too has evolved and cemented her place in the world of weddings.

A marriage of talent and interest

While most high school girls were thumbing through the most recent issue of *Teen Magazine*, Flottmeyer admits, "I kept a copy of *Modern Bride* in my locker." An Aquinas High School graduate, Flottmeyer left La Crosse for UW-Stout to pursue a degree in Fashion Merchandising. "I moved around after college and eventually landed in the [Twin] Cities," she says. I went back to school for advertising design because I wanted to be a part of a wedding magazine."

In 1995, Flottmeyer came back to La Crosse to be closer to her fiancé, Bob. After they married, she worked as a designer for an advertising agency. Though she was engaged by her work, it wasn't her calling. Appropriately, the catalyst for career change came at a wedding.

"I was a friend's personal attendant, and three people asked me if I was the wedding planner," Flottmeyer recalls with a smile. "I came home from that wedding and started researching right away. I can remember thinking, 'It's time; I should do this. No one in town is doing this.' In 2002, there were people who told me that La Crosse wouldn't pay for wedding planning, but I really believed in the idea. I believed in my dream."

Heart and soul, on display

Belief, determination and a sheer love of weddings quickly catapulted Flottmeyer from dreamer to successful businesswoman.

"When I started Weddings by Nancy, I would hold client meetings at Grounded," a coffee house in downtown La Crosse. "One day I was there for five hours. I would set up in a corner of the coffee shop. It used to take me an hour just to pack up to get ready for those meetings."

Today, client meetings are held one block east at the Weddings by Nancy studio in the historic Doerflinger Building. Flottmeyer's

The past 10 years have been a balancing act for this entrepreneur. "Being a creative [person] running a business, I always have new ideas. I could use a little more left brain. I've been told I'd get more done if I'd just stop thinking," Flottmeyer says, smiling.

A role model in the industry

Flottmeyer has earned an admirable reputation that has allowed her business to grow, even in a turbulent economy. Her creativity rivals her character. Since Weddings by Nancy began, Flottmeyer has unveiled new products and ideas that have kept her

to live in a collaborative environment. We want to see each other succeed.

"I love to make our advertisers look good," she adds. "The minute an issue is printed, I'm already excited about doing the next one."

The Wedding Magazine is published annually and has three editions: Coulee Region (copublished with Coulee Region Communications), Rochester and Green Bay. Flottmeyer's success with the regional publications gave her footing to launch the first national publication for wedding planners, *Wedding Planner Magazine*.



Nancy Flottmeyer's wedding designs have ranged from funky, modern and fun (left) to crisp and classic (right). Always, a mix of color, texture and mood flavor the couple's big day. Photos above by Olive Juice Studios.

weddings and inspirations are artfully staged throughout the space. It's tangible piece of her heart and soul, on display.

"The office has given me sanity," she says. "It's given my family the separation we needed between work and home. When I'm here, I'm whatever I need to be that day. And when I'm home, I'm just me."

Flottmeyer refers to her home as her sanctuary. Her voice sweetens when she speaks of her three children and her husband. "Bob is a great husband. It takes a certain spouse to understand an entrepreneur. I married the right person."

Her family has taken an active role in her world. "Sometimes, instead of going home, the kids will come to the office after school. I tell them, 'No cell phones, no texting—I'm running a business here,'" she laughs.

relevant and created a sense of community in the wedding planning industry. She developed a line of custom invitations, offers rentals and does event planning for corporate accounts. Flottmeyer's desire to grow and learn and her in-depth knowledge of the wedding industry has positioned her to lead industry publications, as well.

Flottmeyer cofounded *The Wedding Magazine* with Diane Raaum of Coulee Region Communications because she saw an opportunity for her colleagues. "I love going to meetings and watching caterers or florists work with the brides. I just love the process. Coming from the industry, I knew what businesses were looking for [in a wedding publication]. I work with wonderfully talented business owners that I trust. We've become friends. We've chosen

"The Weddings by Nancy mission statement is 'To be a role model and inspiration in the wedding and event planning industry.' I think we've been successful because we're focused—we do this not for us, but for the brides, and to be a part of the La Crosse community and the larger wedding planning community."

Focused, respected and successful, Flottmeyer is still able to channel her inner little girl. "My mother gave me a Cinderella book from 1942. It's one of my favorite stories. Cinderella goes to three balls and gets married!" (crw)

Kristy Walz lives in Holmen and was delighted to catch a glimpse of her inner girly girl when interviewing Flottmeyer.

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A TRUE *Entrepreneur*

Debra Lash of the Wedding Tree shares her secrets of success.

BY KIM BRASEL
Photos by Kelly Ottesen Photography

Debra Lash bought a business when she was 26 because she was tired of making other people rich and wanted to forge her own way. Sixteen years later, the owner of the Wedding Tree in downtown La Crosse says a strong work ethic, faith in herself and following her instincts led her down a path she hopes other young entrepreneurs will follow.

What makes for a good entrepreneur? Believing in yourself and not being afraid, says Lash. “There are a lot of entrepreneurs who believe in themselves but are afraid to do anything about it,” she says. “I never had that fear of failure, and I still don’t.”

Not everyone had that same faith in her initially; two banks refused her a loan for her shop because she had never worked in retail. By the time she approached the third bank, she was more determined than ever.

“I just went in and said, ‘You have to give me the money for this. I want to own a business, I know I can do it and these are things I am going to do,’” she says. That banker told her she had the spirit of a true entrepreneur, and gave her a loan.

Do the best you can do

Determination and a strong work ethic were instilled in her by her parents, who taught her simple but valuable lessons: Do the best you can do, do better than the people around you and always be early for

everything. She credits those lessons with getting her to where she is today and helping her face circumstances that for many would be a wall, but for her were only hurdles.

“When I graduated from [high school], I was pregnant,” she says matter-of-factly. “I moved to La Crosse, was hired as a supervisor at Hardees and went to school full time at Western Wisconsin Technical Institute, majoring in marketing and retailing.”

She was promoted to assistant manager within six months of being hired. After graduating from WWTI, a regular customer at Hardees who worked with La Crosse Management Systems offered her a job. She didn’t get the position she interviewed for, but she made such a good impression they created a position for her as a dispatcher.

A measure of moxie

In five years, she went from working as a dispatcher to fixing hardware problems to selling products and installing equipment. But burnout started to set in, and at the ripe old age of 25, she realized she needed something different. She started looking for a business to buy and found the Wedding Tree.

“I just had this blind faith in myself, because I was doing so well with just a two-year degree. I thought, ‘How hard can it be to buy a business and make it better?’” she says with a laugh.

Lash had never been in a bridal shop for more than a dress before

she bought the Wedding Tree, which was started in 1976 by Lester and Carolyn Grimm and originally located where Deaf Ear now resides on Fourth Street.

She spent the first six months calling customers asking how she could improve the store. Most said the experience was great, but would have preferred it if they had tuxedos so they wouldn't have to go across the street to Desmonds Formal Wear.

Well, Lash's landlord was John Desmond, and when she told him her customers wanted her to do tuxedos, he said no. Her lease stated she could not do anything related to menswear, ever. "But I wanted to do it. Don't tell me I can't do something," she says.

Lash offered to pay him 10 percent more than his other dealers were to rent tuxedos from him, but he still said no. So she took out another loan, bought out her lease and moved to the Rehfuß Building on Main Street. Desmonds closed at 5 p.m.; she stayed open until 7 p.m.

"The scary part was that my rent increased significantly because the space was so much bigger," she says, but it never crossed her mind that it wouldn't work.

Built to last

Today, still housed in that late-Victorian building, Lash's wedding shop offers everything a bridal party could need, including a selection of couture gowns on the second floor, along with prom attire. Lash has indeed built a business with lasting power. She says luck has played a role in her success, but that's not all. Preparation met opportunity, and that's why she is where she is today. **(crw)**

Freelance writer Kim Brasel enjoys writing about local businesswomen and listening to their inspiring stories.





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CAPTURING A CELEBRATION

Preserve your memories with the latest trends in event photography and filmmaking.

BY MELISSA HANSON
Contributed photos

Anyone who has ever held their great-grandparents' tattered wedding photograph or heard the delightful sound of Grandpa's laughter in a movie of his last birthday can attest that these memories in tangible form are priceless relics to be guarded and treasured. Still and moving images allow us to relive pivotal moments that make us who we are and connect with our loved ones. There is no greater gift to future generations than to keep the legacy going with evidence of our own milestones.

Choosing a professional to create the images you will pass on, then, is no simple task. Whether your event is a wedding, bar mitzvah or your little one's first birthday, a few simple tips will help you to find a qualified professional to document your special occasion.

Choose the right professional

Jan-Arden and Cathy Petersen, co-owners of Artistic Video Productions, say one of the best ways to find an artist you can trust is to ask friends who have recently hired an event photographer or filmmaker for suggestions. As with any business, Jan-Arden says, "a good reputation, dependable work ethic and customer support narrow down the options."

Next, study their portfolio to see if the artist's style speaks to you and if you are moved by their work. Tiffany Brubaker, a professional wedding photographer, cautions that "you will never be happy with your own pictures if what you see in their portfolio is different from what you want." What you see is similar to what you'll get, so make sure it lives up to your expectations.



Moods, moments and details—these are some of the elements professional photographers and videographers capture at special occasions. Photo credits: Page 17, clockwise from top left: Atypik Studio, Tiffany Brubaker Photography, Atypik Studio, Atypik Studio. This page: Tiffany Brubaker Photography.

Finally, meet with the artist to see if you will work well together. Get a sense for whether or not you can trust them to create the images that will grace your walls and the movies that will be shared with loved ones. Megan McCluskey, portrait and wedding photographer at Atypik Studio, suggests, “If it doesn’t feel right, chances are having this person working closely with you on your special day isn’t going to feel right, either.”

This is also a good time to ask for the artist’s qualifications and verify that they are experienced and use professional equipment. The experts we consulted caution that a common mistake people make is hiring someone who has adequate equipment but lacks experience. There are no second chances in event photography, so make sure your professional has what it takes to get the job done right.

Note new trends

Event photography and filmmaking have evolved over the past few decades. Of course, technology has made it possible to create a cleaner, crisper image with a greater range of effects, but the content has also shifted to include more candid and casual images along with the standard poses and traditional lineups.

According to Brubaker, most couples are looking to reproduce images they see in magazines. That includes romantic images of the newlyweds in embrace, details from the event such as flowers and table settings and even action photos. “They [still] want posed pictures,” Brubaker reveals, “but they want their poses to be casual, fun and creative.”

It is crucial to have an idea of what type of images and poses are important to you for your event. A good start, according to McCluskey, is to scan magazines and websites for images that you like and take notes of what you like about event videos. Then create a file of inspiration and samples to review with your photographer/filmmaker to help them understand your priorities, tastes and interests.

Create a partnership with the artist

Once you have selected a professional and started to assemble your wish list, schedule time during the planning stages to meet again with your photographer and filmmaker. The goal, Petersen says, is for the artist to get to know you and your expectations. “Without that knowledge,” he adds, “the end result would have more of a generic feel rather than a custom feel made for the couple.”

McCluskey suggests you come prepared with your file of inspiration images and a list of poses that are important to you. Your photographer won’t know you want a photo of your college friends raising a glass to you and your new spouse unless you say so. Likewise, you might get caught up in the moment and forget to ask a cherished family friend to join the photo with your parents.

According to Brubaker and McCluskey, another mistake people make when planning an event is not scheduling enough time for photos. When meeting with your photographer, go over your wish list and your expectations and ask for a reasonable estimate for how much time should be set aside for capturing those images. Once you have established a schedule for the day, share it with your photographer.

Besides careful planning, all that’s left is to trust your professional. “Find a photographer you like that aligns with your style,” Brubaker suggests, “and let them do their job.” Ultimately you have to trust their experience and knowledge to create the images that will warm your heart, bring back cherished memories and serve as an heirloom for future generations. (crw)

Melissa Hanson admits to being a photo hoarder and amateur documentarian. Her most prized possessions are photos of her children and ancestors.



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A HOUSE OF RECOVERY AND HOPE

Peggy Ham celebrates a life turned around—and helps others do the same at Ruth House.

BY THERESA WASHBURN
Contributed photo

Peggy Ham's insurance dictated that she arrive legally drunk at the hospital to be admitted to the inpatient detox unit. She picked up her last box of wine, found a bench by the Mississippi River and finished most of it. "I just sat there, on that beautiful day, and drank and drank," she says. With the wine nearly finished, Ham drove herself to the emergency room. "I'm here for detox," she said. "What do I do?" That day ended a three-decade-long slide into the foggy, confused world of alcoholism and back into the world of sobriety, clarity and hope.

Ham can tell her story—the jaw-dropping story of a life in decline—with honesty and forgiveness. She can describe dark moments, like when she hid an eviction notice from her daughters; or when she coughed up blood, drank water to ease her stomach, and continued to sip wine hidden in a coffee cup; or when she lost feeling in her feet and hands but kept driving. "I just couldn't think clearly enough to realize that these things were really bad, very bad." Ham can tell her story well, and somehow, that ability allows her to listen deeply to the stories of other women, women who have lost everything to addiction.

Welcome to the Ruth House

Ham's journey of recovery took her from the detox unit and eventually to the Ruth House, a YWCA-run safe house for homeless women who are in recovery from alcohol and drug abuse. She came first as a resident, and now returns almost every day as the Ruth House Home Coordinator, a job she has held for almost a year. "It's a dream come true," Ham explains. "I never thought I would say that, but it is." After two-and-a-half years of sobriety, her previous life is a distant memory, the one where she owned a home worth \$180,000, had a great job in the insurance industry and a nice, fat 401(k). "I lost it all, I blew through it all, lost my job, my house, spent all my money, all because of alcohol." Ham smiles and shakes her head at this truth. Though the money and the house are gone, the job now brings deep satisfaction.

As Home Coordinator, Ham is the first person to interview the women who hope to get their lives back on track. She listens carefully to their stories with the aim toward finding a place of comfort and

growth—a room at the 100-year-old residence now known as the Ruth House. After they clear this one-on-one exchange, women are invited to return for a group interview. Ham, the current residents in the house, YWCA and community members attend the meeting, which Ham tries to keep relaxed by offering donuts, coffee and a comforting smile. “I was so nervous at my interview,” Ham says. “I know it can be intimidating.”

The Ruth House was established in 2005 when Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center donated the residential building. With funding from HUD, United Way and the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA), the Ruth House began admitting women in February 2006. “The admission guidelines are simple,” says Ruthann Schultz, YWCA Agency Programs Director. “Women must be homeless and in a program of recovery.” The home can house up to eight women at a time for a term of up to three months. During their stay at the Ruth House, women relearn basic skills, such as cooking and cleaning, and are retaught how to negotiate the complexities of finding transportation and interviewing for a job. “They need to learn how to live in the world again and not use,” explains Ham, “because when you are using, your mind never gets a sober moment of thought, and you forget how to act and live like a normal person.”

An open door to recovery

While Ham cannot be there all the time, she does her best to keep close watch on the behaviors of the women in the residence. She asks for civility and understanding and knows that the days of living in a sober community will deeply affect each woman’s future. The residents meet weekly as a group to discuss their progress and the attitudes in the house, as well as individually with



As Ruth House Home Coordinator, Peggy Ham models a life beyond addiction for women in recovery.

Ham. During individual meetings, Ham guides their process of reentry into daily life, accounting for individual needs for sobriety. One woman in the house is working to complete her GED, others work at the YWCA WeShine program cleaning businesses in the evening, others find jobs and search for low-income housing.

Statistically, the Ruth House is a success with 71 percent of the women staying sober while in the house—a rule enforced with earnest—and 68 percent of the residents finding safe, affordable housing when they leave. Emotionally, it is a gift from God, offering sacred ground for women who have nearly lost their lives to the debilitating disease of addiction. For Ham, it was a moment in the house that brought her out of depression. “My mother had just died,” she says, “and I [had arranged] her throw pillows all over my tiny room. I was so sad, I felt lost.” But the presence of the pillows in that Ruth House space

provided an inspiring and reassuring connection to her mother. One day, “I took a shower, and as I was drying my hair, a wave of hope flooded over me. Somehow—I don’t know exactly how—I knew in that moment that things would be okay.”

Because of Ham’s dedication, the commitment of the YWCA and the generous contributions of United Way, FSPA and private donors, the Ruth House will continue to be a place of hope for many other women. It will be an open door on the path of recovery and a chance for all the residents to learn to choose life over addiction. (crw)

Theresa Washburn is a writer and communications consultant. She spends her time trying to find just the right words for her stories and the stories of the people she works with. She lives in a quiet spot in Vernon County with her husband, daughter and a menagerie of animals.





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Both family and medical staff are blessed by a child's birth.

BY SHARI HEGLAND

Contributed photos



Dr. Micca Donohue feels honored every time she is a part of one of a family's greatest celebrations: the birth of a child.

But, she says, it isn't just that moment that is a celebration. "It's a whole nine months of celebrating that the day is coming," she says; it's the anticipating and preparing. "It's a big deal—being a parent is a lifelong job."

Dr. Donohue, a native of Milwaukee, has had a lot to celebrate. In just four-and-a-half years of practicing at Gundersen Lutheran's Avery R. Gundersen Center for Women in Onalaska, the board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist estimates she has delivered between 300 and 400 babies. There are even a few families for whom she has delivered three children in just those few years, developing a relationship with the entire family. Prior to joining Gundersen Lutheran, Dr. Donohue graduated medical school and completed her residency at the University of Iowa Medical School and University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics in Iowa City.

A very personal celebration

"It's a privilege to be there when life arrives and to see the family," she says, noting that all deliveries are unique, and families find many different ways to welcome their new additions.

"It can be as simple as the mom and dad holding their baby, and seeing the dad cry," she says, or an extended family gathering, with a great-grandmother present to witness the birth of the newest

family member. Some families incorporate special prayers or other traditions.

"Everybody celebrates in their own way," Dr. Donohue says.

Among the most poignant are the births of babies whose parents have struggled to conceive or women who experienced difficult pregnancies.

"There are some hard roads that some people take to have their family, people who have had a lot of losses and then finally have their baby. They are very memorable," she says. "In those births, I remember all of the specifics of what happened."

The most important thing

While about half of the more than 1,400 births each year at Gundersen Lutheran are attended by midwives, Dr. Donohue says her job as an obstetrician allows her to be a part of a wide variety of births, including emergency Caesarean sections and others requiring assistance. The most important thing, she says, is not the type of birth, but the new life coming into the world.

In 2011, the doctors and midwives at Gundersen Lutheran helped introduce families to 1,481 newborn causes for celebration, including 31 sets of twins and two sets of triplets. **(crw)**

Holmen freelance writer Shari Hegland celebrated the birth of her son six years ago in May, and continues to marvel each year at the changes parenthood brings.



Dr. Micca Donohue,
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LIVING LARGE IN A SMALL HOUSE

A simple house is transformed into a home worthy of celebration.

BY HEIDI GRIMINGER BLANKE

Photos by Janet Mootz Photography

A little house on Losey Boulevard has plenty to celebrate. It's gone from a nondescript mid-20th century ranch home into an oasis of relaxed elegance, thanks to owner Patrick Foley. What began as a warren of small rooms and an unfinished basement became a home of magnificent proportion, despite its lack of square footage. Foley knows quite a bit about celebration, as he owns Monet Flowers and Gifts, so he spends countless hours preparing arrangements for celebrations of all kinds.

Foley's artistic talent is evident from the moment one sets foot in the door—if you happen to use the front door. Since the house has no street parking, family and friends park in the alley behind it and enter through the back door. When the front doorbell rings, "it's usually somebody selling something," Foley jokes. Despite its busy street location, an aura of calm exudes from every room.

"I was looking for a little house and a little backyard," says Foley, who had been an apartment and condo dweller. He took his time locating the perfect house, ultimately seeing "a lot of potential" in his final choice. Foley's home is now a wonderful reflection of himself, filled with personal memorabilia, treasures from Monet's, an inviting deck, delightful landscaping and an entirely refinished basement catering to friends and family.

Celebrate change

Foley's home started changing the moment he bought it. He reports that he "hadn't owned the house for an hour" when his family helped him start renovating. Down came a shared wall between the kitchen and a bedroom, making way for a dining room. Out came the heavy draperies and the old carpets; an abundance of pine cabinets

and moldings were replaced or painted over. At the time, Foley went with a white color scheme; he painted the walls white and brought in white furniture and carpet “to clean it up.” Then came a new roof, siding and windows.

After that, Foley worked one room at a time, transforming the white rooms with warm colors and personal touches. For example, the kitchen is painted a deep red, including the ceiling; the wall colors in most of the rooms continue on to the ceiling, giving each room the feeling of being enveloped in color, without being stifled. Outside, Foley replaced nearly all the original landscaping, installed a meandering brick path and rebuilt and moved the garage.

Celebrate friends and family

The basement, once cement walls and floors, is now an oasis for family and friends. It contains a bedroom, a bathroom, a living area and a full kitchen. Foley likes to cook and entertain (he spent years in the food and beverage industry), and the basement is the perfect spot. While Foley toyed briefly with installing a basement bar, he decided instead to construct a fully equipped kitchen, doubling his cooking options. An eating counter takes the place of both bar and table and a family room, with a gas fireplace, extends from there. The bathroom’s black fixtures and bird’s-eye maple shelves and cabinets give the bathroom a spa-like feeling. In nicer weather, the party moves to the backyard deck, complete with a ceiling fan, where everyone can sit back with a drink and enjoy the view of the bluffs.

Celebrate memories

Stepping into Foley’s den, once a bedroom, is like getting to know Foley without saying a word. His mother’s fur coat is displayed on a dress form, and his father’s Navy chest serves as a coffee table. Though both parents are deceased, bits and pieces of their personalities add spark to the room. The den’s walls feature maps from Foley’s travels, and a couple of generations of family photos are placed on walls and shelves. While not everyone has Foley’s knack for object placement, everyone can add a personal layer to a room by “bringing in familiar things,” Foley says.



Above and previous page: Working one room at a time, and unafraid of “breaking rules,” Patrick Foley transformed a small house with “a lot of potential” into a home that’s a wonderful reflection of himself.

Below: Foley clearly enjoys his home—and wants his guests to do the same.



Celebrate creativity

Foley doesn’t mind breaking the rules when it comes to decorating, and he enjoys experimenting with new ideas, even if a color or design doesn’t turn out the expected way. “You can always change it back,” he advises, though acknowledging with a smile that some of the changes might be a little costly, especially if wiring or plumbing is involved.

Much of what looks complicated to do really isn’t, and nearly every room holds a surprise. In the kitchen, an eye-catching refrigerator resembles an old-fashioned icebox with its antique gold color and wood exterior. Foley started the process by painting the refrigerator to match the cabinets. Then, a series of small frames were made and attached to the front and sides so the unit looked paneled. The kitchen floor, supposedly a temporary fix seven years ago, contrasts the kitchen’s dark red walls with a bold black-and-white pattern of adhesive tiles.

In the living room, a built-in pine hutch was given a facelift with paint, false drawer fronts (the hutch isn’t deep enough for real drawers) and lighting so it looks like a made-to-order display unit. The stairs to the basement are encased with glass panels, rather than wood or metal rails, giving the illusion of more space. A bathroom’s pedestal sink features a single layer of river rock in the sink’s bowl, a simple addition that adds uniqueness to the room. Even the utility room steps up to the creativity plate with granite-look laminate counters, painted walls and hidden, but accessible, pipes and wires.

Just celebrate

Once you open the back gate to Foley’s house, you know you’re entering the realm of someone who enjoys his home and wants others to do the same. In the summer, fragrant blooms and vines surround the yard, inviting a lingering stroll through Foley’s magical gardens. Inside, Foley makes guests comfortable with a dash of pampering. It’s okay to leave your shoes on in the house, but at the same time, Foley is likely to serve you a snack on a fine china plate. So come on in. Just remember not to use the front door. **(crw)**

Heidi Griminger Blanke, Ph.D., is the executive director at WAFER Food Pantry and a freelance writer. She’s thinking of painting her ceilings and her refrigerator.

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18th	FREE select health screenings at Options Clinic
19th	4 th Annual Karaoke for a Cause at Howie's

www.optionsclinic.org for event details and hours



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Living WITH LUPUS

Debbie Brague celebrates life while living with a chronic illness.

BY FRAN RYBARIK
Contributed photos

The name Debbie Brague may sound familiar to you. She hosts midday programs on WLXR, Magic 105 radio station. She is also the operations manager for the La Crosse Radio Group.

Brague's schedule can be grueling—nine- to ten-hour days starting at 5 a.m. each weekday. On weekends, she often represents the La Crosse Radio Group at charitable events. She shows up with sound equipment, music and quick-witted commentary to help good causes, like Riverfest, the La Crosse Area Family YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs. Her colleagues call her “the Energizer Bunny.”

“I love my job,” Brague says. “I work with great people, I try to make our listeners’ days go better with music and I help out in the community at special events.”

The picture of health

Tall, thin, with dark hair and a dimple in her right cheek, Brague appears healthy and fit. She walks two flights of stairs to get to her work area, works out at the YMCA three or four times a week and hauls sound equipment to events, in addition to her duties at home.

But early in 2011, she noticed that her body hurt. “One day it would be my right knee, ankle and neck,” Brague relates. “The next morning, those areas would feel fine, but other joints and tendons would be painful. It got worse as each day wore on. If I sat down to watch TV at night, the pain would get so bad that I could hardly get up to go to bed. It just didn’t make sense.”

She kept a diary of her symptoms. When she took it to her primary health care provider, she was referred to a rheumatologist at Gunderson Lutheran Health System.

“The specialist, Dr. Carol Danning, took a thorough history, then ran a battery of tests and blood work,” Brague explains. “I learned that I might have some kind of immune disorder. I had the flu over Christmas, so she thought perhaps the virus was still hanging on. She prescribed steroids for the inflammation and pain, with the goal of resetting my immune system.”





Debbie Brague, WLXR



Dr. Carol Danning, Gundersen Lutheran

For More Information

The following organizations are good resources for information on systemic lupus erythematosus:

- The Lupus Foundation of America
www.lupus.org
- The Arthritis Foundation
www.arthritis.org
- Gundersen Lutheran
www.gundluth.org
Key in "lupus" in the site search box.
- Mayo Clinic
www.mayoclinic.com
Click on "Diseases," then on "L," and scroll down to lupus.

Brague's condition improved with steroids, but her blood work didn't. "I was shocked to learn the reset hadn't worked," Brague says. "And when I first heard the word *lupus*, I didn't know what it was. It sounded like something awful, like leprosy."

Learning about lupus

Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is an autoimmune disease, which means the body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. This leads to long-term inflammation affecting joints, kidneys, skin or the heart.

Lupus is far more common in women than men. "The first episode most often occurs in their childbearing years. There is no known cause, but a lot of theories posit genetics and hormones as components in the process," Dr. Danning says.

After months of pain and worry, Brague had a diagnosis and a treatment plan. Now she had to begin the transition from seeing herself as a healthy, active woman to one living with a chronic illness.

She felt tested mentally as well as physically. "At first, I worried, 'What will happen tomorrow?'" she says. "Not only to my body. I was concerned about my family—my husband, Paul, our daughters and granddaughters. Internet searches overwhelmed me. They talked a lot about skin rashes, which I didn't have. Finally I decided I had to go into this with open eyes and open arms."

Living with lupus

"Lupus is not a disease you hear about all the time," Dr. Danning says. "Patients have to deal with a lot of unknowns—the disease itself and the treatment. It often takes three to six months before someone can begin to have confidence that, yes, they have a chronic illness, but it can be controlled," she explains. "Outcomes have improved in recent years. And I am excited that Gundersen Lutheran has been involved in clinical research studies of treatment options for people with more severe symptoms."

"It can take a while to find the right treatment, but most patients are able to do almost everything they did before they were diagnosed," Dr. Danning concludes.

There is no cure for lupus. The goal of treatment is to control the symptoms.

Brague's regimen includes a combination of drugs and lifestyle changes. She takes Plaquenil, an antimalarial drug that also treats autoimmune diseases. "I've improved my eating habits, cut down on caffeine, made sure I get to the Y and am working on getting adequate sleep," she reports.

Brague is feeling better now, but still gets tired. She decided, in true Energizer Bunny fashion, to combat her fatigue with activity. "Lying around is not good for me physically, mentally or emotionally," she says. "I fight my midafternoon fatigue by working out at the Y or getting busy around the house."

Creating the silver lining

Through social networking, Brague found another person in our area living with lupus. "It's been wonderful exchanging emails with someone who has been where I am," she says. "He's been a real inspiration. We've decided that there needs to be more awareness about this mystery disease called lupus."

Within two weeks of connecting through Facebook, they began laying plans for a fundraiser, probably in 2013, to do just that.

"Special events are what I do," Brague says. "I know a lot of people who can help us make this a super event. This will be more personal, and I realize it might be a little uncomfortable. But it will be worth it if it helps others in our community dealing with lupus."

Last summer, Brague had trouble setting up equipment at events. But now, "I am celebrating the fact that I can set up my own stage and speakers again. I am planning to do a 5K run in May at the Festival Foods La Crosse Fitness Festival," Brague says. "And I look forward to spending time with my granddaughters this summer. These goals help me stay as strong and healthy as I can. And if the lupus does flare up, I will be in much better shape to deal with it. I am not letting this diagnosis get me down. It doesn't scare me anymore."

Some people look for a silver lining in tough transitions. Debbie Brague is creating hers. **(crw)**

Fran Rybarik writes from her home in La Crosse, where she will be listening for more information about Debbie Brague's special event.

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(Time Magazine)

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**Gundersen
Lutheran
Welcomes
New Pediatrician**

Gundersen Lutheran is pleased to welcome pediatrician Stephanie Niec, M.D., who is now caring for children at the Gundersen Lutheran-Onalaska Clinic. A native of Otisville, Mich., Dr. Niec looks forward to building relationships with patients and families in the Coulee Region. "I've been impressed with the positive working environment and what a great place this is to care for children," she says.

Dr. Niec completed her medical degree at Wayne State University in Detroit, followed by a pediatric residency at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Niec or for more information, call 608-775-8138 or visit gundluth.org/pediatrics.



**Mayo Clinic
Health System
Welcomes
Ob-Gyn**

Modupe Omole, M.D., has joined the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Mayo Clinic Health System.

Dr. Omole earned her medical degree from the University of Ibadan in Nigeria and completed her Obstetrics and Gynecology Residency at Crozer-Chester Medical Center in Upland, Penn.

She is a member of the American Medical Association and a junior fellow of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

To make an appointment with Dr. Omole, please call 608-392-9866.



**Attorney
Julie A. Kuhn
Joins Eglash
Law Office**

Julie A. Kuhn has joined the Law Office of Heidi M. Eglash, LLC, bringing a wealth of experience to support clients with estate planning, elder law, real estate and business law needs. She is licensed to practice law in Wisconsin and Minnesota and is a member of the La Crosse Area Young Lawyers Association and the La Crosse County Bar Association. Kuhn will be joining in a series of roundtable discussions on financial and estate planning topics that Eglash Law Office and Amy Stodola of Edward Jones will be presenting throughout 2012. For more information, call 608-782-6110.



River Trail Cycles Celebrates 5 Years

Owner Emily Vance says that, after growing each year since March 2007, River Trail Cycles is excited to kick off this cycling and running season with an even greater selection of accessories, clothing and new and used bicycles for any type of rider (they accept trade-ins). Located in Holmen Square, River Trail Cycles appreciates community support and offers a very full calendar of involvement. River Trail Cycles is the only bicycle shop in the area open seven days a week year-round. Drop off your bicycle for its spring tune-up today! Visit www.rivertrailcycles.com.



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HAVING A BLAST

The La Crosse Skyrockers spark a spirit of adventure for its volunteers.

BY MARTHA KEEFFE
Contributed photos

When it comes to celebrations, the La Crosse Skyrockers know how to grab your attention—with the bright lights, spectacular colors and impressive sounds of fireworks. But it's the gritty on-deck time and expertise of the men, and a few unique women, who really get the show off the ground.

"We do a lot of hard, physical work in temperature extremes, from -20 degrees on one New Year's Eve to 90-degree weather during the Fourth of July," says Sonya Mix, a volunteer with the La Crosse Skyrockers for more than 20 years. "And we work all day, sometimes starting at 9 a.m. and finishing at 2 a.m." But the camaraderie of the volunteers makes it worth it, she explains. "Everyone watches out for everyone else to ensure that we have a safe and fun shoot."

Not your typical hobby

Truth be told, many women avoid risk—and shooting of any kind—when pursuing a leisure activity. "There's nothing mainstream about doing pyrotechnics, least of all as a hobby for women," says Jean Latham, Mix's mother and a Skyrocker volunteer since 1988. "It's more likely to appeal to women who think outside the box, who do more adventurous activities."

Latham, who has always been curious about how things work, was introduced to the Skyrockers after she viewed a New Year's Eve setup on Grandad Bluff. She was so compelled by the science behind building



Jean Latham (left) and Sonya Mix are two of the pyrotechnicians behind the La Crosse Skyrockers.

and launching fireworks that she decided to join the club. "After seeing some of the preparation, it looked like something fun to do," she says. "I was fascinated to learn about such a neat subject and to eventually be able to help put on a show."

Creating a spark

Though Latham, followed by Mix, may be the first woman to participate in hands-on show setup on a long-term regular basis, women have been involved with the organization since its inception as the Grandad Sky Rockers in 1929. Historically, women supported their husbands' hobby by arranging various fund-raising efforts or by providing meals to the men during show prep. At some point, those women seeking to gain pyrotechnic experience became trained

in the safety and handling of fireworks, then integrated themselves into the ranks of show crew. As of now, there are three women actively involved with the Skyrockers.

"Members work where they best fit in," says Latham. The men are more likely to do the heavy lifting and shoveling, whereas Mix is adept at helping design the placement of shells for shows. And Latham, who prefers "matching" shells—the process of connecting an electric "match" to a shell to prepare it for firing electronically—is also the club's secretary. However, safety protocol remains a shared responsibility. "It's extremely important to have great respect for the explosive power of even small fireworks," Latham adds. "Skyrockers work together to handle fireworks and prepare them for firing in a proper manner; we back up each other and do multiple inspections throughout the process."

Showtime

This special fusion of teamwork, attention to detail and a strong desire to create dramatic displays always results in appreciative *oohs* and *aahs* from the crowd. But even though the applause certainly keeps the Skyrockers lighting up the skies, sometimes what motivates them is really quite simple. As Mix says, "I have always liked things that go 'BOOM!'" 

Martha Keeffe and her family love a good fireworks display and can view the show off Grandad Bluff from their house.

CRW COVER GIRLS REVISITED

They're still shining, and brighter than before.

BY HEIDI OVERSON
Contributed photos

Coulee Region Women strives to feature women who positively influence our community and motivate us all to reach a little bit higher. We've caught up with five women who have graced our covers in the past. It is our hope that they will inspire you again.



Lisa Warsinske



Sue Kolve



Lisa Warsinske—April/May 2005

Whether you know her as the self-proclaimed Goddess of Fun, character Gladys or a phone telemarketer tormenter, Lisa Warsinske still inspires laughter in our community. When she's not working on the Campus Renewal Project at Gundersen Lutheran's Foundation Office, she and her husband, Jim, co-own and perform in the Heart of La Crosse Comedy Group and Comedy Alley Improvisation Troupe. In February, Warsinske presented her comedy show "Living Out Loud" at the Pump House in La Crosse. Her performances sold out quickly, proof that Warsinske's comic relief is in high demand.

"Laughing is healthy," says Warsinske. "It's necessary for living, and it helps people bond. It's affordable health care, as it raises endorphins and lowers blood pressure."

In her "spare time," Warsinske creates SpunkyWare jewelry, does voice work for Sound Frame Studios and is a keynote humorist speaker. She's busy, but she lives to see others laugh.

"When I see an audience's eyes light up, I'm reminded that I've made the right choices in my life," Warsinske says. "When someone tells me that a certain joke or scene was funny, that's better than chocolate. When people tell me how I touched their lives, they have also touched mine."

Sue Kolve—December/January 2008

Sue Kolve, owner of the Salon Professional Academy in Onalaska, has been very busy helping even more students obtain their salon careers.

"In 2009, we went through the process to become accredited, which allows for Title IV eligibility so students can receive financial aid to attend the Salon Professional Academy. This in turn gives more people the opportunity to attend and achieve their goals," Kolve says.

"Because of the Salon Professional Academy, salon owners can hire graduates that have the training and experience to help the salon right away. Owners can spend less time and money for initial training and have a better success rate. This also makes the graduate more employable to earn higher wages, thus, contributing to their family and community." Kolve has also served the community by opening The Studio on Copeland Avenue in La Crosse in June 2011.

But the growth doesn't stop there. Kolve is expanding her headquarters and corporate offices by adding a 4,000-square-foot addition to the Salon Professional Academy, which will be completed this year.

Kolve's website states "Big Dreams Begin Here," which applies to her students and her salon. "When we started, we never imagined it would grow this large," she says. "Helping others achieve their dreams is the reason we do it all."

Amy Lauren—October/November 2008

It's hard to imagine that a pianist of Amy Lauren's caliber lives right here, in our community. Since she appeared in our October 2008 issue, Lauren has written and released two CDs: *Beautiful Quiet* and *August*. Her 2008 *Winter and Christmas* CD was nominated for Best Holiday Album at Zone Music Reporter's 2010 Music Awards and reached number 9 on the New Age music charts in December 2010.

August proved a smashing success. It was nominated for 2010 Album of the Year at Solopiano.com and spent five months in the top 20 and seven months in the top 50 of the New Age music charts in 2011. It was also ranked number 37 at Zone Music Reporter's Top 100 Airplay Chart for 2011, reaching number 11 in June of that year—a very big deal, since 2,300 New Age albums were submitted. "I love the *August* CD," says Lauren. "It is my favorite."

Lauren's music is also gaining attention globally. Jingo Records, based in Taipei, Taiwan, is releasing her albums in Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. "To know I'm touching people's lives on the other side of the world is a feeling I wouldn't trade for anything," says Lauren.

And she touches them deeply: "I've gotten emails from people telling me that their babies have been born into this world listening to my music, and emails from people telling me their relatives have left this world listening to my music. That's quite an honor." She hopes to release another CD later this year.

Darryle Clott—December/January 2009

Holocaust educator Darryle Clott has no intention of slowing down. She is a Teacher Fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., teaches History of the Holocaust at Viterbo University and leads Holocaust Educator Workshops. She has continued to bring Holocaust survivors and humanitarian speakers to our area.

"I am teaching about the Holocaust and bringing in survivors to make people aware of what happens when people do not accept other peoples' differences," says Clott. "The Holocaust could not have happened without the bystanders. We all can make a difference in our own world by the way we treat others."

In 2009, Clott was chosen to be a part of a League of Women Voters project, "The Road Less Traveled." In 2010, she was one of 10 American Holocaust educators chosen to travel to Poland to study Holocaust pedagogy and was the recipient of the YWCA's Tribute to Outstanding Women Trailblazer Award.

Perhaps the biggest recent honor for Clott was receiving the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in May 2011, one of 100 awarded annually. "In my heart," says Clott, "I accepted it on behalf of the many splendid Holocaust educators I am privileged to know and work with."

While Clott's awards are certainly merited, she remains humble and focused on what is true to her. "I am a teacher—the very best job on the face of the earth," she says. "I'm living my dreams and passions by sharing what drives me."

Debbie Hosch—June/July 2009

Debbie Hosch, with her husband, Paul, has taken The Big Event Company, their fun and entertainment company, to a bigger and better level. In 2011, they opened a 23,000-square-foot entertainment facility on French Island. Shenanigans is a fun-lover's dream come true, featuring not only their trademark inflatables, but 60 arcade games, a 3,300-square foot laser tag arena, private birthday party rooms, an indoor ropes course, bumper cars, mini-bowling and more. Hosch loves hosting sports team events, corporate team-building events and even bachelor/bachelorette parties. Shenanigans is a place for families, friends and coworkers to have fun and to bond.

Expanding her business was a huge leap of faith that has paid off well. "We filled a need in the community," says Hosch. "People thank us for offering a facility like this. They've wrapped their arms around what we're doing. We've devoted ourselves to being community-oriented."

"We'll be adding more attractions as time progresses," adds Hosch, who's itching to further develop the outside area.

Whether you're looking for a true birthday party experience or needing an excellent fundraising idea, Hosch has got you covered. "I strive to make your experience—and your life—fun, interactive and celebratory," she says. (crw)

Heidi Overson was, once again, encouraged and inspired by these wonderful women. She believes in sharing our gifts, passions and talents to bless others.



Amy Lauren



Darryle Clott



Debbie Hosch



Because the #1 killer of women is heart disease, Coulee Region Women magazine is committed to making women aware of the importance of heart health.

The Executive Leadership Team of the American Heart Association's La Crosse Go Red Luncheon has made it their mission as well to help fight heart disease in women. Please join us at the luncheon to learn how you can make your heart healthy and happy! We're rolling out the red carpet just for you!

Diane Raaum

Publisher/Coulee Region Women

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ANNE CASEY

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American Heart Association
My daughters, my husband & dark chocolate!



RENEE DAVIS

Go Red For Women Director
American Heart Association
Seeing my kids laugh, vacations, and cooking for family and friends.



TIFFANY OLSON

Public Service Director
News 8 WKBT-TV
Going for a walk in our beautiful Coulee Region.



BETSY HOLY

Store Manager
Macy's
Tennis and golf make my heart healthy from the exercise and happy from being around friends and loved ones



DIANE RAAUM

Publisher Coulee Region Women
Publishing! Cooking, skiing, biking, hiking and family and friends bring me happiness!



SARAH HAVENS

Director, Community & Preventive Care Services
Gundersen Lutheran
The joy of family and friends makes my heart happy!



ANGELA HAMMOND

RN, RCEP
Mayo Clinic Health System
Educating women and men on how to make their hearts healthy!



LYNNETTA KOPP

Executive Director
Coulee Region RSVP
My son and husband, serving the community and a good massage make my heart happy!



DEB BRAGUE

Operations Manager
La Crosse Radio Group
Serving my community and making people smile makes my heart Happy!! Can't do it enough.... but will try :)



PAUL P. ALBRECHT BSN, RN

Director of Cardiovascular Services Mayo Clinic Health System
Working with a group of wonderful women to promote cardiac health awareness.



JENNIFER KLOHEN

Sales Director
The Waterfront Restaurant & Tavern
A heart healthy diet makes my heart happy!

Team members not photographed:

Deb Carlson
La Crosse Radio Group

Jackie Adsit
Gundersen Lutheran

Jessica Watkins
Macy's

Traci Weber
Mary Kay/
Four Sisters Wine Bar & Tapas

A SMORGASBORD OF OPTIONS

When hosting a party, professional advice can help you prepare the buffet.

BY JULIE NELSON

Recipes analyzed by Gundersen Lutheran registered dietitians.



The napkins read 2012 and a banner proclaims “Congratulations!” Your 18-year-old looks more grown up than you ever imagined possible and, in the refrigerator, a vat of potato salad is bursting for more space. It’s graduation day, and you’re ready for a party.

When planning the menu for this or any milestone soiree—whether confirmation, family reunion, landmark anniversary or shower—you’ll likely gravitate to foods that, over the years, have become standards, and for good reason: They work. Gina Prange, the deli kitchen manager of the People’s Food Co-op, says she gets many requests for trays of sandwiches, wraps or croissants; fruit and veggie trays and salads. “People like finger foods at this type of event,” says Prange. “Many graduation parties are outdoors, so picnic foods work well.” If you’re looking for something hot, pulled pork is a common meat dish, and the Co-op’s Sloppy Josephines offer a popular vegetarian option.

Catering to every taste

If you’re pursuing something more unique, Mary Cody, the owner of Traditions and Maggie’s restaurants, says a good place to start is with your graduate. “What are some of your child’s favorite foods? Maybe she or he had a childhood favorite, something that will bring back a happy memory. These types of foods can be good conversation pieces, especially if you have a picture of the child eating those foods.” She says even mundane favorites can be dressed up for the occasion. A plate of Oreo cookies for example, could be dipped in chocolate.

If your student’s favorite is tacos and you know the grandparents couldn’t handle the spicy heat, just add one other dish that they could eat, advises Cody. As far as catering to other special dietary needs that guests may have, Cody says don’t worry about it. “People don’t come to graduation parties expecting a meal. If they don’t have a full plate at your house, there will be more food at the next party, or they will



be fine eating when they get home.” The same planning strategy goes for all your kid’s Facebook friends who may or may not show up.

Dare to be different

“Talk to the graduate,” Nell Hull of Nell’s City Grill advises. “All the kids are excited and talking to each other about their parties and what they are having. You can come up with a menu different from the others.”

One of Cody’s favorite catering jobs was for a graduation brunch. “It was held on a Sunday after church and was very well received. I made egg bake, French toast with toppings ranging from syrup to whipped cream, bacon, muffins, banana bread, ham and potatoes. Because it was different, it was a real hit.”

Another good theme can be a cookout, especially if you have a relative that likes to grill. Guests can gather around the grill while waiting for their (made-to order) food. Burgers, brats and hot dogs are sure bets for this event; kabobs—not always. Cody says if you’re serving something on a stick, be aware of how people will need to eat it. Can they eat it standing up or sitting down? Will they want to use two hands to slide five items onto their plate, or will they just eat two or three items directly from the stick? As for dessert, sheet cakes are still the most common, though Prange says she’s seeing more requests for cupcakes.

When it comes to types of foods, the caterers say less is more. Offer six to eight items and plan to refresh them often, rather than trying to keep 12 items fully stocked. Graduation parties don’t have to be expensive; you can provide a couple of main items and have the caterer supplement, or you could ask your relatives to contribute some family favorites.

Whatever you do, remember the important part of the day is to enjoy the time you have left with your children (and look forward to the day they move out and cook for themselves!) **(crw)**

Julie Nelson was all too happy for the graduation advice as her own daughter, Abby, will be inviting friends over after Logan High School’s 2012 commencement ceremonies.

SLOPPY JOSEPHINES

from People’s Food Co-op

Serves 12.

- 3 cups Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP), available from People’s Food Co-op
- 3 cups boiling water
- 2 onions, chopped
- 2 green peppers, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 T olive oil
- 1 48-oz. jar of barbeque sauce

Combine TVP and boiling water and set aside. Heat oil and sauté onions, garlic and green peppers until soft, about 5 to 7 minutes. Add TVP and remaining ingredients and cook over medium heat for 5 to 10 minutes until heated through. Serve on hamburger buns. Can be made up to 48 hours ahead of time.

340 calories, 3.5 grams fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 890mg sodium, 63g carbohydrate, 5g fiber, 5g sugar, 13 g protein.

PESTO POTATO SALAD

from Nell’s City Grill

Serves 8.

- 1 lb. small potatoes (purple, fingerlings, yukons; if large, cut into quarters)
- 1 lb. green beans, cut into thirds
- 6 garlic cloves, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 1 cup fresh basil leaves, cut into ribbons
- 1/3 cup pine nuts
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Boil potatoes until almost tender. Add green beans and boil for an additional 2 to 3 minutes so the beans are crisp tender. Drain water, put back into the hot pot, add remaining ingredients and stir. Serve warm or at room temperature. Top with fresh grated Parmesan cheese.

160 calories, 10 grams fat, 1g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 0mg sodium, 15g carbohydrate, 4g fiber, 2g sugar, 3g protein.



RASPBERRY PUNCH WITH ICE RING

from Traditions

Serves 24.

- 4 10-oz. packages frozen raspberries, thawed (do not drain)
- 1 6-oz. can frozen lemonade concentrate, thawed
- 1 2-liter bottle ginger ale

In 4-quart Dutch oven, cook raspberries over medium heat 10 minutes, stirring frequently; cool slightly. Push through strainer with large spoon to remove seeds. Refrigerate raspberry juice at least 2 hours.

In punch bowl or large pitcher, mix raspberry juice and lemonade concentrate. Stir in ginger ale. Serve immediately over ice.

Fill a ring mold with crushed ice. Arrange fruit of your choice—kiwifruit slices, oranges, lemons, raspberries—in the ice so fruits stick up above the top of the mold. Freeze 15 minutes; add raspberry juice to fill mold. Freeze overnight. To remove, run hot water over bottom of mold to loosen.

60 calories, 0 grams fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 5mg sodium, 15g carbohydrate, 1g fiber, 13g sugar, 0g protein.

CREAMY BASIL PESTO DIP

from Traditions

Serves 24.

- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cups basil pesto
- 5 T sliced green onions
- 4 T lemon juice

Stir together all ingredients. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours. Serve with your choice of vegetables.

90 calories, 8 grams fat, 2g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 10mg cholesterol, 135mg sodium, 4g carbohydrate, 0g fiber, 2g sugar, 1g protein.

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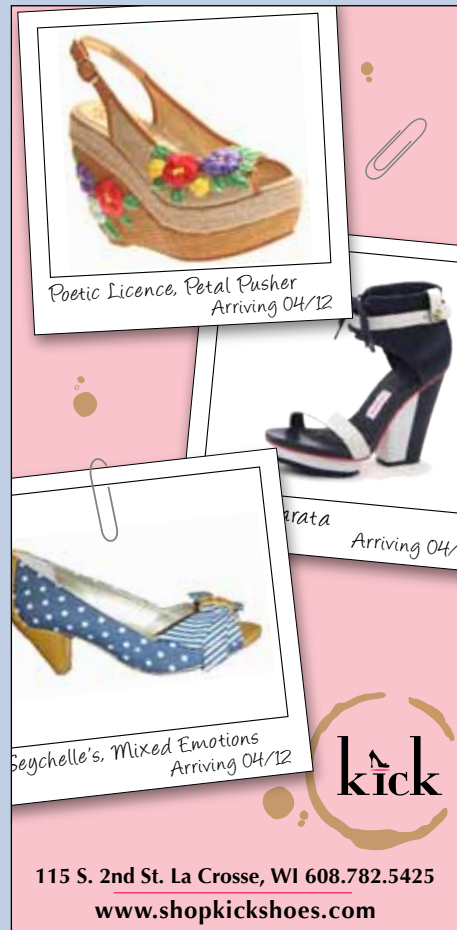
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Playing Dress-Up

From mother-of-the-bride to showers to cocktail hour, there's a new spin on party wear.

Photos by Kelly Ottesen Photography
Modeled by Kari Vogel, Valerie Martell and Courtney Kubly
Hair and makeup by The Ultimate Salon & Spa



Celebrate!



From afternoon shower to engagement soiree, this easygoing asymmetrical dress lets you accessorize to fit the occasion.

From **Dale's**, downtown La Crosse: BB Dakota dress, \$94; fashion necklace/earring set, \$32; fashion bracelet, \$26. From **kick**, downtown La Crosse: Sacha London "Athena" shoes, \$118.



Dazzling fabric, unforgettable details and a higher hemline make a dashing break from traditional mother-of-the-bride dresses.

From **The Wedding Tree**, downtown La Crosse: KM Collections dress, \$178; Tony Bowls earrings, \$26; pocketbook, \$34. From **kick**, downtown La Crosse: Bacio 61 "Grotto" shoes, \$160.



The cocktail dress isn't a dress anymore—an electric blue jacket, classic black cigarette pants and just enough bling to turn heads at evening events.

From **Herberger's**, Valley View Mall: Evan Picone jacket, \$139; Evan Picone shell, \$54; Laura Ashley pants, \$72; Nine West "Maximal" shoes, \$89; La Regale pocketbook, \$40; Erica Lyons earrings, \$25; Erica Lyons necklaces, \$50 each; fashion ring, \$25.

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Enjoy an afternoon dedicated to friendship and celebration of women. Kristy Walz a Professional Development Specialist will speak on celebrating laughter and humor. Kristen Elicerio from WKBT will be our emcee for the event. Tickets are \$20 each or \$35 for two and include the luncheon, entertainment, booths, and numerous door prizes! Ticket outlets include Travel Leaders, Owned and Operated by Goli's Avenues of Travel in La Crosse, Honig's Gift Shop and Howes Diamond Jewelers in downtown La Crosse, The Ultimate Salon & Spa in Onalaska and Drugan's Castle Mound in Holmen, or call the Coulee Region Women magazine office at 608-783-5395 for more information.

The event benefits the Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse, which exists to enrich the lives of women and girls so they can do the same for others.

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DESTINATION CELEBRATIONS

Take the stress out of celebratory events by taking a trip with your guests.

BY CHARISH BADZINSKI

Photos by Charish Badzinski

Whether you're planning on marking your anniversary with a family cruise, inviting the girls to Las Vegas to celebrate your "Forever 39" birthday or getting married barefoot on the beach in an intimate ceremony in Jamaica, destination celebrations are as popular as ever. And according to the experts at Travel Leaders, owned and operated by Goli's Avenues of Travel in La Crosse, embracing the trend can offer a number of benefits for everyone involved.

Why choose a destination?

While destination milestone birthdays and anniversaries have been consistently fashionable for many years, destination weddings have gained in popularity recently. The experts at Travel Leaders say the popularity of incorporating travel into celebrations can be attributed to a number of factors.

1. The wow factor. These days, brides are looking for a unique way to celebrate their nuptials, and not only do destination





For birthdays and anniversaries, destinations such as Alaska (previous page) and Las Vegas (above) are popular.

weddings offer something different, but the honeymoon can be built right in. The bride and groom can even register for their destination wedding and honeymoon, so guests can select a financial gift to give the happy couple to help allay the costs. More, group bookings can mean special perks for the bride and groom, such as free upgrades on their stay.

2. **Travel is travel.** “Families are so spread out these days across the country that people are going to be traveling home anyway,” explains Rachel Gilbertson, a travel sales agent with Travel Leaders who specializes in destination weddings and honeymoons. “So it may not be that much more to go to Mexico instead.”
3. **All ages are entertained.** Trips to Disney or group cruises are perfect examples of group trips that can appeal to everyone. Some families who take group trips will simply establish a group dinnertime, to ensure everyone connects at least once a day; otherwise everyone is free to seek out what they enjoy.
4. **Less stress.** When you plan a destination celebration, someone else takes care of the coordination and worry for you. If it’s a destination wedding, your travel agent works with the wedding coordinator on location, and often all meals, drinks and some activities are included—so guests can do their thing separately or as a group while the bride and groom simply enjoy being newlyweds.
5. **You can keep it intimate.** It’s common, particularly for second weddings, for couples to want something on the small side. Likewise, some first weddings are also held remotely, with a reception in the couple’s hometown at a later date.

Planning the journey

The travel professionals at Travel Leaders

have coordinated a wide variety of destination celebrations, from big groups to small, ranging from an anniversary cruise with the whole family, to treks to Europe to explore family roots, to vow renewals in Hawaii. When you’re ready to get started planning your destination celebration, no matter what the occasion or the size of the group, the options can be overwhelming. Jo Ann Buening, leisure groups and sales agent at Travel Leaders, says the first step is a fact-finding meeting with your travel agent. “Bring your questions, concerns and thoughts, and we’ll sit down and narrow it down.”

“Part of our job is to match a client and destination together,” Danette Jacob, a travel sales agent at Travel Leaders, explains. “People might think a certain destination is right for them, but sometimes advertisements are telling you what they think you want to hear. Chances are I have been to the destination or someone else in our office has, and we can tell you about it firsthand.”

Picking up the tab

Who pays the tab for the celebration depends upon who’s throwing the party and what the group is celebrating. Buening says, “If it’s renewal of vows, a family group, milestone birthday or anniversary, normally the parents or elders will pay everyone’s way.”

Jacob adds, “If someone is celebrating a birthday in Las Vegas or Cancun, they might say, ‘If you’d like to come, please call my travel agent, and this is what we’re going to do.’”

Meanwhile, Gilbertson says for weddings, it is tradition for the parents to pay for the bride and groom and perhaps some guests, while the majority of guests pay their own way.

No matter who’s paying the tab, though, destination celebrations often include added bonuses with group bookings. That can add up to discounts for attendees, and more, according to Buening, who says working

with someone who has connections to suppliers also makes a difference. “We can ask for extra amenities and special things for that group on top of what the supplier is offering generically.”

Up, up and away

The most popular destinations these days, according to the experts at Travel Leaders, vary according to the celebration type. For weddings, Mexico is popular, particularly the Riviera Maya. In addition, Jamaica and Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic are also common choices. For destination birthdays and anniversaries, Alaska, Las Vegas and Orlando are popular. And all travel agents have also seen an upsurge in destination celebration travel to Europe lately.

Whatever the destination, whatever the celebration, combining the two can be rewarding for all who attend, as it reunites family and friends. For some, it represents a return to the fading tradition of the family reunion. Buening says she recently booked a 50th anniversary trip to Alaska for a family of more than 20 people, including grandkids. “Their wish was to have all those grandkids and everyone get to know each other,” she says. Before that trip, some of them had never even met. Like many families, they knew that destination celebrations, and the opportunity to reconnect with people, can often be the best wedding, anniversary or birthday gift of all.

Charish Badzinski is looking forward to a destination celebration of her own this year; she’ll celebrate turning 40 with a trip to Ireland. She blogs about food and travel at <http://rollerbagoddess.blogspot.com/>.



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ADVERTISER INDEX

Altra Federal Credit Union.....	52
Ameriprise Financial/Hanson & Associates.....	23
American Heart Association.....	38
Atypik Studio.....	13
Bethany Lutheran Homes.....	24
Beyer Cabinets LTD.....	26
Bittersweet Boutique & Antiques.....	19
BrightStar Care.....	20
Coulee Carpet Center.....	30
Coulee Region Professional Women.....	24
D.M. Harris Law, L.L.C.....	33
Davig Financial Corp.....	20
Downtown Mainstreet Inc.....	42,43
Drugan's Castle Mound.....	41
Earth Fair.....	23
Fayze's.....	42
Feist Dental.....	2
Flooring Interiors.....	26
Forever Young Skincare Clinic.....	15
Freedom Fest.....	16
Gerrard-Hoeschler Realtors.....	29
Gundersen Lutheran.....	5, 33
Hidden Valley Designs.....	26
Honda Motorwerks.....	10
Janet Mootz Photography.....	29
Kelly Ottesen Photography.....	24
KICK.....	43
La Crescent Tile.....	29
La Crosse Community Theatre.....	43
La Crosse Radio Group.....	30
LARK.....	43
Law Office of Heidi M. Eglash.....	16
Macy's.....	34
Mayo Clinic Health System.....	9
Mayo Clinic Health System-The Canticle.....	24
Neighborhood Smiles.....	51
Options Clinic.....	30
Overhead Door of the 7 Rivers Region.....	26
Painted Porch.....	43
People's Food Co-op.....	42
Power House Marine.....	23
River Trail Cycles.....	20
Root Down Yoga Studio.....	19
Satori Arts Gallery.....	42
Sacred Ground Landscape Design.....	33
Schumacher Kish Funeral Homes Inc.....	33
Set Free 2 Enjoy.....	45
Silhouette Shoppe.....	30
Stamp 'n Hand.....	43
Take II LLC, Staging & Redesign.....	29
The Pilates Studio LLC.....	24
The Second Showing.....	24
The Waterfront Restaurant & Tavern.....	42
Touch of Class.....	13
Travel Leaders.....	51
Ultimate Insulation.....	29
Ultimate Salon & Spa.....	10
Valley View Mall.....	3
Viterbo University.....	33
Weddings by Nancy.....	13
Wisconsin Building Supply.....	20
WKBT Newschannel8.....	7
WXOW News 19.....	49
YWCA.....	16

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Gundersen Lutheran.....	34
Law Office of Heidi M. Eglash.....	34
Mayo Clinic Health System.....	34
River Trail Cycles.....	34

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

ONGOING EVENTS

American Association of University Women (AAUW)
2nd Sat. of each month (Sept.-May), 9:30 a.m.,
608-788-7439, www.aauw-wi.org.

Business Over Breakfast La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce, 4th Wed. every month, 7:30-8:45 a.m.
Preregister 608-784-4807, www.lacrossechamber.com.

Children's Museum of La Crosse weekly programming: Save-On-Sundays \$1.00 off admission every Sun., noon to 5 p.m.

Mt. LeKid Climbing Wall open every Sat. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sun. 12-4 p.m.

Wee Move for ages 1-4 with parent, every Fri., 10:30 a.m.

Little Learners for ages 1-4 with parent, every Thurs., 10:30 a.m.

Coulee Region Autism Society 3rd Wed. of each month, Chileda Habilitation Institute, 1825 Victory St., La Crosse. 6:30-8:30 p.m. Child care available, call 608-519-0883. lax-autismgroup@centurytel.net or autismfyi-lacrosse@yahoo.com.

Coulee Region Professional Women (CRPW) meets the 4th Tues. of each month, Nell's City Grill, 1111 3rd St. S., La Crosse, 5:30 p.m. Kathy Emmert, kemmert@centurytel.net.

La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce monthly breakfast meeting, 2nd Mon. of each month, 7 a.m., Radisson. Admission is \$5 and includes breakfast. www.lacrossechamber.com.

La Crosse Noon Wisconsin Women's Alliance meets the 2nd Thurs. of each month, noon. Heidi Blanke, hblanke@gmail.com.

MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) meets the 1st Monday of each month, Olivet Lutheran Church, 6:15 p.m. Holly Zeeb, wxyzeeb@centurytel.net, www.olivetlutheran.org/small-groups/mops.

Onalaska Rotary meets every Monday at 6 p.m., lower level of Blue Moon, Onalaska.

Valley View Kiddie Crew meets the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month, Valley View Mall Food Court, 10:30-11:30 a.m., www.myvalleyview.com.

WAFER Food Pantry, Mon.-Fri. 10 a.m.-12:45 p.m., Mon., Tues., Thurs. 4-8 p.m. 608-782-6003. www.waferlacrosse.org.

Women in Networking and Support (WINS) meets the 2nd Wed. of each month, Piggy's, noon-1 p.m. Shari Hopkins, 608-784-3904, shopkins@couleebank.net.

Women of Worth (WOW) meets the last Wed. of each month, Boot Hill Pub, noon. Debbie Lee, 608-784-2775, debbie.lee@westlandinsurance.com.

CALENDAR EVENTS

April 5-6, Easter EGG-Stravaganza, 5:30-7 p.m. Thurs., 9:30-11:30 a.m. Fri. Pre-registration and pre-payment required. www.funmuseum.org.

April 10, 25th annual Joint Luncheon, Partners of Gundersen Lutheran, Inc., and Franciscan Healthcare Auxiliary of the Mayo Clinic Health System, 11 a.m., Radisson Hotel Ballroom. Tickets are \$15 and available from MCHS/FH Volunteer Office or JavaVino, Village Shopping Center.

April 11, Coulee Region Volunteer Coordinators (CRVC) 18th annual Volunteer Recognition Breakfast, 8 a.m., Cargill Room at The Waterfront Restaurant, La Crosse. www.crvconline.org

April 13, Spring Fling, 5-9 p.m., downtown La Crosse.

April 14, Thank You for Being a Friend luncheon, *Coulee Region Women*, 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Drugan's Castle Mound, Holmen. 608-783-5395.

April 14, Spring Season of Art Show, La Crosse Society

of Arts and Crafts, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Holmen Square Mall. Fine art by local artists; free admission. For more information, call Connie at 608-526-2255.

April 14, MVM Roller Derby vs. Chippewa Valley, 6 p.m., Green Island Ice Arena, La Crosse.

April 14, Boy Scouts Showcase, Center Court, Valley View Mall. www.myvalleyview.com.

April 17, Pushcart Players *Peter & the Wolf*, 6:30 p.m., Page Theatre, Saint Mary's University, Winona. www.pagetheatre.org.

April 19, Viver Brasil, 7:30 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Main Theatre, Viterbo University.

April 20-21, 26-29, Hippolytos, 7:30 p.m. 20-21, 26-28, 2 p.m. 29, La Croix Black Box Theatre, Viterbo University.

April 20-22, 26-29, *Antigone*, 7:30 p.m. 20-21 and 26-28, 2 p.m. 22 and 29, Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse.

April 21, Dorothy Day Wizard of Oz fun, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Free with admission. www.funmuseum.org.

April 21, UW-L SOTA Project Funway Fashion Show, 1 p.m., Center Court, Valley View Mall. www.myvalleyview.com.

April 21, Celebration of Smiles fund-raiser for Operation Smile, Ridgetop Photography LLC, La Crosse. www.ridgetop-photography.com.

April 24, The StepCrew, 7:30 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Main Theatre, Viterbo University.

April 27, Wellness Expo 2012, 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m., OmniCenter, Onalaska. www.rsvplax.org.

April 27-28, *Le Corsaire*, 7:30 p.m. Fri., 3 p.m. Sat., Page Theatre, Saint Mary's University, Winona. www.pagetheatre.org.

April 27-29, Gingerbread Arts & Crafts Show, Valley View Mall. www.myvalleyview.com.

April 28, Steven Marking and Beth Ekern Lakman, 7:30 p.m., Pump House, La Crosse. www.thepumphouse.org.

April 28, Bubblemania, 3 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Main Theatre, Viterbo University.

May 4, Red and Green Wit and Wisdom Tour 2012, 7 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Main Theatre, Viterbo University.

May 4-5, Kinesis Dance Theatre Company, 7:30 p.m., Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse.

May 4-13, Free gift with purchase event, Valley View Mall. www.myvalleyview.com.

May 4-20, *Blood Brothers*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre. www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

May 5, Storyhill, 7:30 p.m., Pump House, La Crosse. www.thepumphouse.org.

May 5, MVM Roller Derby vs. Harbor City (Duluth), 6 p.m., Green Island Ice Arena, La Crosse.

May 12, Pet Expo, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Center Court, Valley View Mall. www.myvalleyview.com.

May 13-19, Options Clinic celebrates National Women's Health Week. Visit www.optionsclinic.org for a list of events.

May 17, Taste of the Coulee Region, 4:30-8:30 p.m., City Brewery Hospitality Center, www.facebook.com/tasteofthecouleeregion.

May 19, RSVP Who Will Be Smarter Than a 5th Grader? 10 a.m.-noon, Center Court, Valley View Mall. www.myvalleyview.com or www.rsvplax.org.

May 20, Riverside Family Fun Fair, Riverside Park. Games, activities, food and more. p.m., Green Island Ice Arena, La Crosse.

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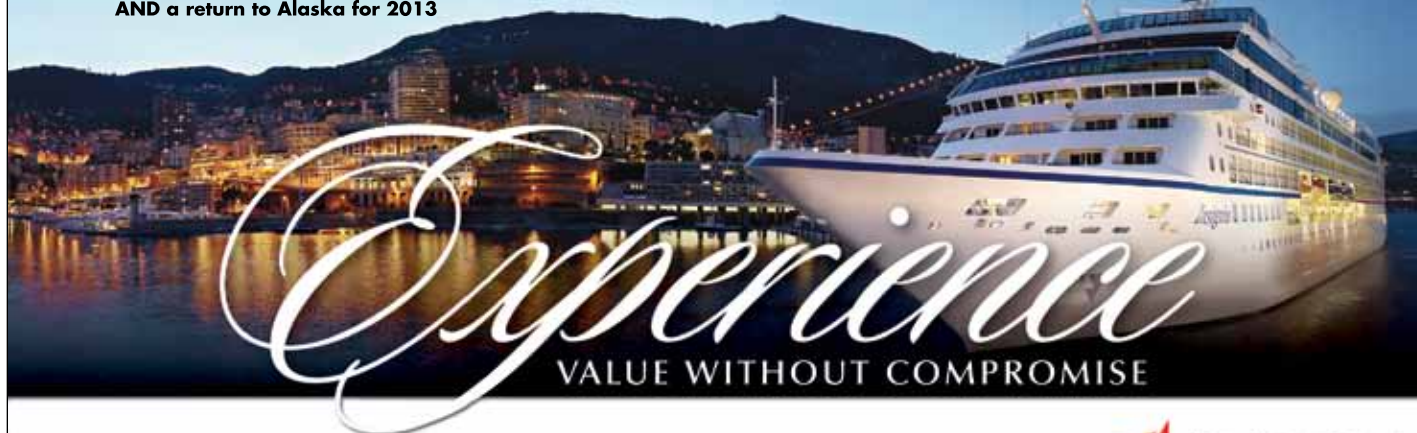
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