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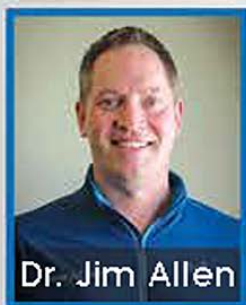
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Pictured on the cover: Lisa Klein, community engagement coordinator at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Photo by Jordana Snyder Photography.

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Those who know me well have often heard about my annual “me-treats”—a trip alone somewhere with few people and fewer obligations to others. It is in many ways, the antithesis of the theme of this issue: Together.

But even inveterate introverts like me can find value in shared experiences, shared efforts and the support of others. I had the opportunity this winter to join in a group guided snowshoeing adventure on Minnesota’s North Shore—something I honestly would not have tackled alone. Having a group that offered expertise, encouragement and strength in numbers, along with laughter, stories and shared photos to remember the trip by, made the experience unforgettable. Together, we were able to go places many of us would never attempt to traverse without the support of others, including climbing frozen waterfalls and gingerly making our way across ice bridges above rushing rivers. I needed the support of a group to take on this kind of challenge.

You’ll find this issue full of examples of how we are often stronger when we work together, whether that means strengthening our community by linking entities such as the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with businesses and organizations to amplify the talents and contributions of students or

fostering a culture of teamwork in a business environment that attracts high achievers who may naturally be inclined toward individual goals and pathways.

In Galesville, the women business owners and managers who ring the historic square—ranging from financial advisors to convenience store managers, bakers and boutique owners—work to foster a philosophy that what benefits one, benefits them all, especially as they work to make the small city a growing shopping destination. Despite their wide range of ages, experiences, marketing philosophies and business models, they understand the power of cooperation.

And as we read in this issue’s Healthy Living story, trying to go the “lone wolf” route could become crushingly lonely when supporting a loved one through the stages of Alzheimer’s disease. Sharon Zimmer openly shares her challenges and where she finds support in keeping her and her husband, Chuck, together and continuing to make memories. She leans on her friends, his friends and community resources to forge relationships that help them move forward.

“Together” isn’t always easy—the women in our stories honestly acknowledge that. Groups come with unique personalities and needs. Even when the objective is lighthearted adventure travel with like-minded “sisters in life,” communication and flexibility are essential.

At *Coulee Region Women*, we often share the stories of individuals—women who do extraordinary things, women whose ordinary lives echo the experiences of us all, women who inspire. But while those stories, taken one by one, may seem to be only about individuals, we believe that *Coulee Region Women* as a whole—each single publication, each year of issues, all 21 years of bimonthly magazines (really, 21 years!)—is a collective of the entire Coulee Region. And when all of us are brought together, we are so much more than a simple collection of individual stories.

We are a region that has strength, works together, rises above the challenges, overcomes hardships, provides the necessities plus, and lives with grace. I’m simply blessed to be able to share in these stories and in all that our combined talents, values and effort bring to this area. No one woman can do alone what we can do together.

Shari

coulee region women

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NEW HORIZONS HOSTS ADVOCACY TRAINING

New Horizons will host a four-part Advocacy Training via Zoom 6-9 p.m. April 25, April 26, May 2 and May 3. This training is held three times a year for those interested in growing their ability to advocate for people facing adversity, specifically abuse, in our community. People of all professions, education, and backgrounds are encouraged to attend.

The training is designed to help volunteers, interns and community members understand what the organization does, what each advocate's role is within the organization, and what each of their programs entail. Topics are presented by experienced New Horizons staff. Attendees will be introduced to topics such as active listening, advocacy, crisis intervention, diversity, trauma-informed care, legal issues, and so much more.

Please contact New Horizons volunteer coordinator, Doreen, for more information at 608-791-2610 ext. 1301 or volunteer@nhagainstabuse.org. To register visit www.nhagainstabuse.org/events/2022-spring-advocacy-training/.



SPRING THAW IN GALESVILLE

Old Main Historical and Community Center, 20869 College Avenue in Galesville, is the place to shake off the winter blues Saturday, April 23, at the Spring Thaw Celebration, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

This celebration of warmer weather and all things earth related will include vendors, speakers and demonstrations, including a hydroponics demonstration by McHugh Farms. Others represented at the event include Lucky Frank Farms Beekeeping, Driftless Natives, FernGrove houseplants, Frazer Farms CBD, Eckers Apple Orchard, Elmaro Vineyard, Wiscorps, HonaGoods, GoodGranola, Create Happy and West Prairie Collective.

You'll find vendors with herbals and tinctures, hand-crafted repurposed goods, unique art, crystals, and plenty of food, including pulled pork, egg rolls, cookies and cakes.

Follow the Old Main Facebook page for updates and more vendor information.



EARTH FAIR RETURNS TO MYRICK PARK

La Crosse's Earth Day celebration is back, with activities happening in Myrick Park and around the community April 23-24.

The Earth Fair, hosted by the Sustainability Institute, will be held 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 24 in Myrick Park. This free event includes:

- Green Goose Chase Mission Based Scavenger Hunt running April 18-24 with exclusive mini-missions at the Earth Fair
- WisCorps Critter Mobiles
- Mississippi Valley Conservancy Trail Trek Challenge Kick-off and Marsh Walk
- Driftless Area BioBlitz 2022 and Insect Presentation by UW-La Crosse entomology professor Barrett Klein
- Live raptor presentation

Plus live music, green vendors, farmer and artisan market, hands-on activities, presentations, prizes, food and more.

Additional special events are:

- Friends of the Marsh: Marsh Day Clean Up—9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, April 23, at Myrick Park
- Solar on La Crosse Schools Bike Tour—noon to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 23, at Hamilton/SOTA I School
- Recycling Fair—10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, April 24, at Emerson Elementary Parking Lot—drive-through only.

Find more details on the Sustainability Institute website at www.sustaininstitute.com/earthfairlacrosse.



ARTSPIRE FESTIVAL FEATURES MUSIC, ART

La Crosse's free community art festival, hosted by The Pump House, will bring music, street art, vendors and more to downtown La Crosse Friday, June 11, and Saturday, June 12.

Friday night begins with live music at 8 p.m. by Minnesota-based Cloud Cult, an eight-member multi-media performing group known for incorporating live painting in their concerts.

Saturday will include the juried art fair on King Street just outside of The Pump House from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., plus musical performances by B2wins. B2wins is the duo of twin brothers Walter and Wagner Caldas from Brazil who bring their music on violins and more with a mission of making the world smile through music.

Additional Saturday performances by local groups will include the Enduring Families Project, Hmong Dancers of La Crosse, I&E Dance Company, La Crosse Community Theatre, La Crosse Dance Center and the YMCA Dance Program.



SPRING FLING!

Ready to leave winter in the rearview? Gather your friends and join the Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse at its 2022 Spring Fling held Saturday, April 9, 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., at Fox Hollow Banquet Hall. Mix, mingle, dine and shop for the benefit of women and girls while enjoying live music by Dan Sebranek and Mary Cortessi, a Makers Market with unique vendors, a raffle with premium prizes and a signature Women's Fund cocktail. Tickets are \$40 for one or \$320 for a table of eight and includes lunch. You'll also meet the 2022 Roberta Zurn Outstanding Woman in Leadership Award recipient. To register, go to <https://womensfundlacrosse.org/events/spring-fling-2/>.



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Taking "together" to the next level

Lisa Klein returns to her UW-La Crosse roots to bring the Coulee Region community closer.

BY JESSICA ZEN

PHOTO BY JORDANA SNYDER PHOTOGRAPHY



After spending more than 20 years as a television news anchor and reporter with WKBT-TV News 8 in La Crosse, Lisa Klein knew it was time to take on a new challenge, but she wanted to continue giving back to her community. When the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse was looking for a community engagement coordinator, Klein felt this was the right move for her. The university's newly created position allowed her to help bring the community and UW-La Crosse closer than ever before.

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Klein has been part of the Coulee Region since her days as an undergrad at UW-La Crosse, and she doesn't plan on leaving any time soon. "This community is my home," she says. "The Coulee Region is filled with generous people who truly want to see their neighbors succeed. So many people in our community lead with their hearts. I love living and working among those people." It also doesn't hurt that this area is blessed with wonderful K-12 education systems, continuing education opportunities, vast recreation options and beautiful geography.

"I have always been drawn to public service. It's what led me to a career in journalism," says Klein. "That career taught me how to make connections and find answers—skills I now use to connect the community and the university to help provide meaning to a student's learning while also having a small role in a community project's success. It's fulfilling to be able to give back in this way."

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

As a UW-La Crosse alumnus, Klein knew she would be in good hands and have a solid foundation for filling the new community

engagement coordinator position. In just a few years, Klein has helped the university connect with the community in a multitude of ways.

One of the largest campus-to-community projects has been working with the Afghan evacuees at Fort McCoy. "Right away the community rallied their support. So many local organizations were asking how they could help," says Klein. UW-La Crosse staff, faculty and students wanted to be a part of that conversation, too. They took action when student-athletes, faculty and staff teamed up to offer six indoor all-sport camps to help keep the Afghan kids active in January.

Other incredible collaborations included working with Western Technical College to fill some English as a Second Language (ESL) needs. Hundreds of student workbooks, CDs and DVDs were sent to classrooms on the base. A large number of these supplies came from a donation from National Geographic Learning secured by a UW-La Crosse faculty member. Western was even able to use a grant to hire educators to teach ESL classes at Fort McCoy. There was also a successful school supply drive hosted by the United Way, Western Technical College, Viterbo University, the School District of La Crosse and UW-La Crosse that collected almost \$8,000 in supplies in just two weeks. Community education was a focus of UW-La Crosse's collaborative work as well. The three higher education institutions hosted three panel discussions to teach citizens how to understand and support our new Afghan neighbors.

"The Afghan evacuee support effort is such a great example of togetherness and what we can accomplish when we work in conjunction with one another," says Klein. It shows how the community is connecting to provide services to those who are really in need. "UW-L couldn't have done some of these projects alone. They absolutely were a collaborative effort."



Lisa Klein's duties as community engagement coordinator have included facilitating drives that collected books, school supplies, food and more for the Afghan refugees at Ft. McCoy and other causes. Photos courtesy of Michael Lieurance, University Communications, UW-La Crosse.



BETTER TOGETHER

In September 2021, UW-La Crosse launched its Community Engaged Learning (CEL) program to connect classrooms to the community. This program acknowledges classes that engage with a community partner for a minimum of 15 hours to share applicable career skills. Community partners can be businesses, nonprofit organizations or civic organizations that would like to partner with faculty and students to conduct research or work on a project. It's a mutually beneficial partnership that provides students hands-on, meaningful learning experiences while meeting a community need. "Our community has a lot to offer," says Klein. "Connecting students with businesses and organizations off campus might help them see the potential for a future career locally."

A great way for community organizations to partner with classrooms, including those in the CEL program, is through the UW-La Crosse Community Idea Exchange webpage. There an organization can request to partner with a faculty expert and their classroom to address a community need—producing surveys, conducting research, creating marketing materials, etc. The idea exchange is designed to help the campus identify organizations looking to collaborate. "Tell us what your community needs are! That's what is really exciting for me," says Klein, who looks forward to watching the number of collaborative project ideas grow to provide experiential learning for students and support for community organizations.=

PART OF THE COMMUNITY

"How do we do community engagement?" asked Klein when she started her new position. There wasn't a systematic way of capturing all the work being done. "The university was already doing so much wonderful work in the community," says Klein. That's where she stepped in. "I was excited to start telling the campus' story." Now, community groups that want to engage with the university can visit its community engagement webpages to connect. The webpages make it

a lot easier for people to find the resources they're looking for, explains Klein. Community members can request guest speakers, learn how to attend events on campus, find volunteers, post internships, locate parking, engage with classroom learning and so much more. "We want to be part of the community, not our own community," she says. "And we also want the community to feel welcome."

HOW TO CONNECT

Are you a community member who is ready to work together with UW-La Crosse? Klein is happy to take your call or answer emails. "A lot of the work I do is about helping to connect community needs with students. I'm also available as a one-stop-shop point of contact for anyone needing help navigating the university," she says. **CRW**

Jessica Zen is a freelance writer in La Crosse who enjoys working together with the community by volunteering at a local therapeutic riding stable.

Klein can be reached at her office at 608-785-8153, or by email at lklein@uwlax.edu. If you want to explore what UW-L has to offer the community online, be sure to browse the following resources:

- Community webpage: <https://www.uwlax.edu/community/>
- Partner with UWL in the classroom: https://www.uwlax.edu/community/community_partners/
- UWL Community Idea Exchange: <https://www.uwlax.edu/community/uwl-community-idea-exchange-submission/>
- For businesses: <https://www.uwlax.edu/community/businesses/>
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WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE

Leaders at Trust Point Inc. share the importance of teamwork to their company culture.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

At Trust Point Inc., a wealth management firm headquartered in La Crosse, no man is an island. No woman is, either.

“Everything I do is part of a team. I can’t do it on my own, or I wouldn’t have this role,” says Regina Siegel, vice president of organizational development.

Yet, Siegel didn’t always value teamwork as much as she does today. “If you would have asked me in middle school, high school, if I was a team player? I would have said no because I was the one who was a little type A.”

Those with type A personalities tend to be driven, hardworking and goal-oriented. The downside? It can mean tending toward perfectionism, sometimes with an “if you want it done right, do it yourself” mentality. “I preferred to do things on my own,” Siegel reflects. “But how foolish of me because now I know—and it only took a few times—I learned quickly that things are always better when done together.”

IT STARTS ON DAY ONE

Now, Siegel is a champion for teamwork, helping create a culture of collaboration that permeates the organization.

Culture is what attracted Allyson Krause to the company. “I had interviewed at a few different companies, and the instant



Regina Siegel, vice president of organizational development

I sat down and talked with the committee that interviewed me (at Trust Point), it was a completely different feeling,” she says. “The questions, the engagement level, the positive discussion about the culture from every employee that I talked to was a huge difference. I decided it was a winner, and I was right!” Krause now serves as the managing director of the retirement plan services division, working with business owners in the community on managing their 401K plans and providing financial education for their employees.

Erica Rytlahti has been with Trust Point for 11 years and currently serves as the managing director of wealth management in La Crosse. She spends her time giving direction to and mentoring staff members, working directly with clients, and guiding long-range planning and process improvements. “We have a robust training program here with new staff members,” she notes, “and we talk about teamwork from day one.”

Siegel agrees. “I was told by our CEO my first week, ‘If you don’t offer any suggestions or challenge any pieces, or share, you don’t belong in this company because we need you—we need *every* person—to help us grow from day one.’ And I feel like we really live that.”

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

You can't have effective teamwork without good communication. When the pandemic arrived, it made communication even more challenging—and vital. "What we learned in our department," Krause shares, "was, there's so much informal communication that happens on any given day when you're in the office, and you have to be extremely intentional about re-creating that. Those are really the conversations—the remarks as you're walking by, the laughter you hear in the hallway—that help to build that team cohesiveness."

Rytalahti notes, "I think there's a tendency when you're working remotely to maybe keep it all (about) work, and it doesn't have to be." She emphasizes the importance of checking in on employees' personal lives: asking about their kids, a trip to visit parents and even about their mental health.

Krause seconds that. "I definitely saw our managers make a big effort to just check in for no other reason than to connect." She describes Trust Point's CEO, Kent Handel, making phone calls to employees to see how they were doing. "Of course, it kind of scared everyone at first, because we weren't used to getting calls from him!"

HOW CAN I HELP?

Siegel recalls how, as a new hire, she was so impressed by the level of support from colleagues. Coworkers would regularly pop into her office to ask how she was, whether she needed anything and to offer their help.



Erica Rytalahti, managing director of wealth management



Allyson Krause, managing director of retirement plan services

Rytalahti echoes that sentiment: "I have no doubt, if I went to Regina for something, or if I went to Allyson for something, they would be right on it. They would drop what they're doing or make time for me as soon as possible. So, I trust them completely."

Krause also discusses the importance of being supportive. "As a leader, I definitely emphasize more what people are doing *well*. I lead based on strengths and helping people to identify and do things according to their strengths, as opposed to magnifying weaknesses. I think that's a huge part of why everyone feels so supported, because you can spend a lot of energy trying to overcome your weaknesses, but you're not likely to have as much of an impact as if you're focusing on your strengths."

"We all have the same goal at the end of the day, right?" Rytalahti asks. "We all want to service our clients, and we want to take care of our people, so it makes it really easy to collaborate. We may get there by different paths, but we all have the same goal. We're always willing to help." **CRW**

Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a writer in La Crosse. Her earliest lessons on teamwork were learned on the soccer field.



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SHOWING UP FOR HER COMMUNITY

The Charmant Hotel's Stacy Erickson
extends her professional focus
to connect city and community.

BY ANASTASIA PENCHI
PHOTO BY KARLEE MIKKELSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Stacy Erickson, director of sales and marketing at The Charmant Hotel

Stacy Erickson never intended to stay in the Coulee Region. She moved here in 2016 and planned to return home to central Minnesota as soon as her husband, Mark, finished his residency at Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center. But she became intrigued by an open director of sales position at The Charmant Hotel. She fell in love with the upscale boutique hotel and appreciated its family-focused owners. She was hired and began to immerse herself in area businesses and community organizations.

"The (Charmant) sells itself, so that makes the job rather easy," Erickson says. "I just wanted to be a part of it (all)."

INTO THE COMMUNITY

Soon Erickson was providing her expertise to Downtown Mainstreet, Inc. and its Jingle Bell Brunch. She got involved in other community events like the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra Valentine Ball, Gundersen Medical Foundation's Steppin' Out in Pink and the Gateway Golf Outing for Scouting.

Tia Sneath, special events program coordinator at Gundersen Medical Foundation, said when the foundation decided to create a committee to better promote Steppin' Out in Pink—an event known for supporting breast cancer research and patient support programs—there was no question she wanted Erickson involved.

"Stacy has been influential in the way we fundraise, market and continue to grow this event," Sneath says. "I've had the pleasure to be on different committees and projects with Stacy, and I am always in awe of her ability to show up for her community."

MAKING LA CROSSE HOME

Since coming to La Crosse, Erickson has been promoted to director of sales and marketing at The Charmant as well as at the owners' other properties. Her husband, Mark, is now an oral surgeon at Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, and they have an 18-month-old daughter, Zoey.

And Erickson continues to connect businesses to community events. In January, The Charmant hosted Head Shot Happy Hour, where a local photographer provided each attendant with two professional head shots while the rest of the group mingled with peers over cocktails.

"It's my goal to create community-driven events," Erickson says.

Next on tap is an experience where attendants will travel to sites to eat a bite of a special dish that a restaurant creates or drink a craft cocktail that is unique to that enterprise. Erickson said existing relationships with places like La Crosse Distilling Co. make collaboration even easier.

"It only benefits all of us to have working relationships with other establishments in the area," she adds. "We should be extremely proud of what we have in this market."

In addition to connecting and promoting these businesses and community events, Erickson is making friends along the way.

"I think that is one of the most special parts of Stacy—her ability to be an incredible servant leader," Sneath says. "I am lucky to have Stacy as a friend, confidant and role model, and I look forward to seeing all of the good she does for the world." **CRW**

Anastasia Penchi is a believer in both collaboration and craft cocktails. She can be reached at callmeloislane@hotmail.com.



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The heart never forgets

Sharon Zimmer navigates her husband's Alzheimer's diagnosis with love and local support.

BY LEAH CALL | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Chuck and Sharon Zimmer of Onalaska continue to make memories, even as Chuck moves through the stages of Alzheimer's disease. Sharon relies on support from friends, family and community organizations to help them continue to "live each day."



When Chuck Zimmer took early retirement in 2017, his primary plans included golfing, traveling with friends and spending quality time with family. Those plans were derailed with a diagnosis of early onset Alzheimer's disease. Plans also changed for his wife, Sharon Zimmer, who suddenly found herself in the position of caregiver.

"For me as a caregiver, the challenge I find is I'm one person, but taking care of two. I do everything now," says Zimmer, forced to take on responsibilities she once shared with her partner.

She also had a crash course in financial and legal matters along with learning as much as she could about the disease that stole the couple's vision for their future. But Zimmer has a healthy attitude about this disease without a cure. "When people think of Alzheimer's, they remember the final stages, but there are actually seven different stages of Alzheimer's," explains Zimmer. "You can live a good life for years if you stay engaged, exercise and eat a healthy diet."

Since the diagnosis, Zimmer has made it her mission to keep Chuck engaged socially and physically. He continues to enjoy his beloved game of golf, and the couple has traveled extensively throughout the United States, though sidelined in 2020 by Covid-19. "We do something every day outside the house—even when I was working

full time," notes Zimmer, who left her job in late 2021. "The main thing is we are living each day."

THE POWER OF SUPPORT

While Zimmer has aptly taken on the challenge of navigating her husband's diagnosis, she appreciates the support she's found in the community. "There are so many resources in the community. If you think your loved one is struggling, don't wait for the storm to happen. It's better to be proactive than reactive," she says.

One of the first resources Zimmer found was a support group at a local church for both caregivers and those living with dementia. Still emotionally processing the reality of his diagnosis, Chuck opted not to go, but Zimmer did. And she was glad she did.

"I learned that I wasn't the only one in La Crosse County who was under 65 with a spouse with dementia," recalls Zimmer.

The Zimmers found additional support through the La Crosse Parks and Recreation Department's program Club Connectivity, which meets monthly for the purpose of keeping those diagnosed with dementia active both socially and within the community. It also offers fellowship for caregivers living through the same challenges. Past activities have included an outing to Elmaro Vineyard, lunch at



Huck Finn's on the Water and a group visit to La Crosse Distilling Company.

Another local resource is SPARK!, a program that meets monthly at Clearwater Farm in Onalaska. This free program is led by trained staff and volunteers. Activities typically last 60 to 90 minutes and include topics such as cooking, crafts, music and storytelling.

Causeway Caregivers, whose Oasis Respite program gives caregivers a needed break, offers adult day care on Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. "But Thursday is Chuck's golf day," says Zimmer of the reason they haven't regularly used this resource. "I'm trying to

keep him in the world as much as possible, living in the moment. The guys are watching him, and they are having a good time."

Support from friends and family, including the couple's two adult children, is valued as much as the connections they have through local support groups. "I'm grateful for everything that we do together and for any help we get, whether it is from a friend or neighbor, or just someone asking, 'How is Chuck?'" says Zimmer. "That means a lot to me. I really do look for the joy in life."

CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

In order to care for others, we need to take care of ourselves. For Zimmer, that self-care routine includes early mornings at the YMCA and a weekly bingo night with a girlfriend. "I now know when to take time for myself," notes Zimmer, adding that sometimes that means just going to another room to read a book or getting out of the house, both alone and with Chuck.

"Stay engaged and keep loving your spouse," she advises. "I want to be the caregiver out of love and not out of obligation."

You can hear the love she has for her husband as she talks about the good days, the moments when she sees the man she married. "Though his personality has changed, he is still in there. I can still get him to laugh.

"He knows he has this," she adds. "He knows his speech is depleting. But for a person with Alzheimer's, the heart never forgets." **CRW**

Writer Leah Call has huge respect for Sharon's attitude and her ability to find joy in each day.



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LOCAL FOOD, LOCAL LOVE

The owners of Free Range Exchange leverage talents and friendship to create a delicious community in Hokah.

BY SUSAN SCHUYLER | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



From left, Ben and Ava Horn and Cambria Kolstad-Devaney and her husband, Dan Devaney, are the owners of Free Range Exchange in Hokah, Minnesota.



There is a heartfelt story about everything at the Free Range Exchange coffee shop in Hokah, Minnesota, and its owners Cambria Kolstad-DeVane and Ben Horn politely take turns layering details as they eagerly tell each one.

However, the fresh, delicious fare served at Free Range Exchange speaks for itself. There is a full coffee and espresso service, a vast assortment of baked goods—all made from scratch by Kolstad-DeVane—and grab-and-go items, which include breakfast sandwiches, lunch sandwiches, wraps and salads—all made from locally sourced seasonal produce, eggs and meats.

FARM TO SOUL

All of the tales Kolstad-DeVane and Horn weave share the common thread of “local love,” which is Horn’s mantra for the Free Range Exchange’s collaborative business model that connects the wholesome, locally sourced food they prepare to the remarkable community they conjured to help them make it.

Illustrations of the shop’s supportive network

are epic: A friend who helped with drywall during renovation came in for coffee one busy day and was instantly hired as a full-time cook; one chicken supplier is a customer’s sister; the printer is someone Horn met through a former employer; a coworker contributes her chicken’s eggs.

For Horn, the term “farm-to-table” is too vague to describe their model. “We specialize in hyper-local—the ‘who you know,’” he says. A large, wall-mounted chalkboard titled “Farm to Table—Table to Soul” lists dozens of the Free Range Exchange’s vendors, most of whom are within a 60-mile radius of Hokah. Horn’s own 1.5-acre farm in La Crescent, Happy Horn’s Market and Orchard, is the main source of the staple vegetables for the menu in season.

ALL IN A DAY’S WORK

In addition to market gardening, Horn manages Free Range Exchange’s vendor relationships, inventory and front-of-house relationships. “I can talk all day and say hi to everybody, and that’s something we promote,” he says.

Kolstad-DeVaney starts her 10-hour day between 3 and 4 a.m. with bakery prep. She makes all of the shop's baked goods from scratch every day: muffins, scones, cakes, breads, English muffins, croissants, focaccia, quiche, cheesecake—you name it!

"I started with pretzels," Kolstad-DeVaney says as she points to fresh pretzels stacked on the front counter. In high school, she loved Auntie Anne's soft pretzels from Mall of America. So she made her own using sourdough starter. "I ended up making way too many to eat myself, so I decided to start selling at local farmers markets," Kolstad-DeVaney says. She has been selling her wares at farmers markets ever since.

The pretzels were a gateway bake for making sourdough cinnamon rolls, and eventually she mastered all quick breads and anything with yeast and sourdough.

ENDURING FRIENDSHIP

The Free Range Exchange has been open since November 2019, but the saga begins a couple decades earlier, when Kolstad-DeVaney and Horn met as students at Vermillion Community College in Ely, Minnesota. Their friendship endured distance, as Kolstad-DeVaney and her husband, Dan DeVaney, stayed in Ely, and Horn and his wife, Ava, settled in Horn's hometown of La Crescent.

Their families met for annual vacations until Dan DeVaney took a job that brought him to La Crescent. Horn, who is a vendor and president of the La Crescent Farmers Market, invited Kolstad-DeVaney to share a table to sell her baked goods at the La Crescent market.

They passed the time at the market discussing their shared longing to be their own bosses. Meanwhile, Horn and Kolstad-DeVaney learned that the owner of the shuttered Sidewalk Cafe in Hokah was looking for a new tenant. In 2018, they negotiated to purchase the property instead, and as new owners they began a 19-month renovation of the brick-and-mortar home for their dreams.

A BUMP IN THE ROAD AND HAPPY ENDING

Covid was an unexpected plot twist. The Free Range Exchange finally opened in November 2019, just four months before lockdown. "There's no way to put that in the business plan," says Kolstad-DeVaney. But she says they took it in stride and made the best of it. In fact, they've consistently doubled their projected sales using mostly word of mouth as their primary marketing strategy. "We're constantly growing, with new faces coming in every day," Kolstad-DeVaney says.

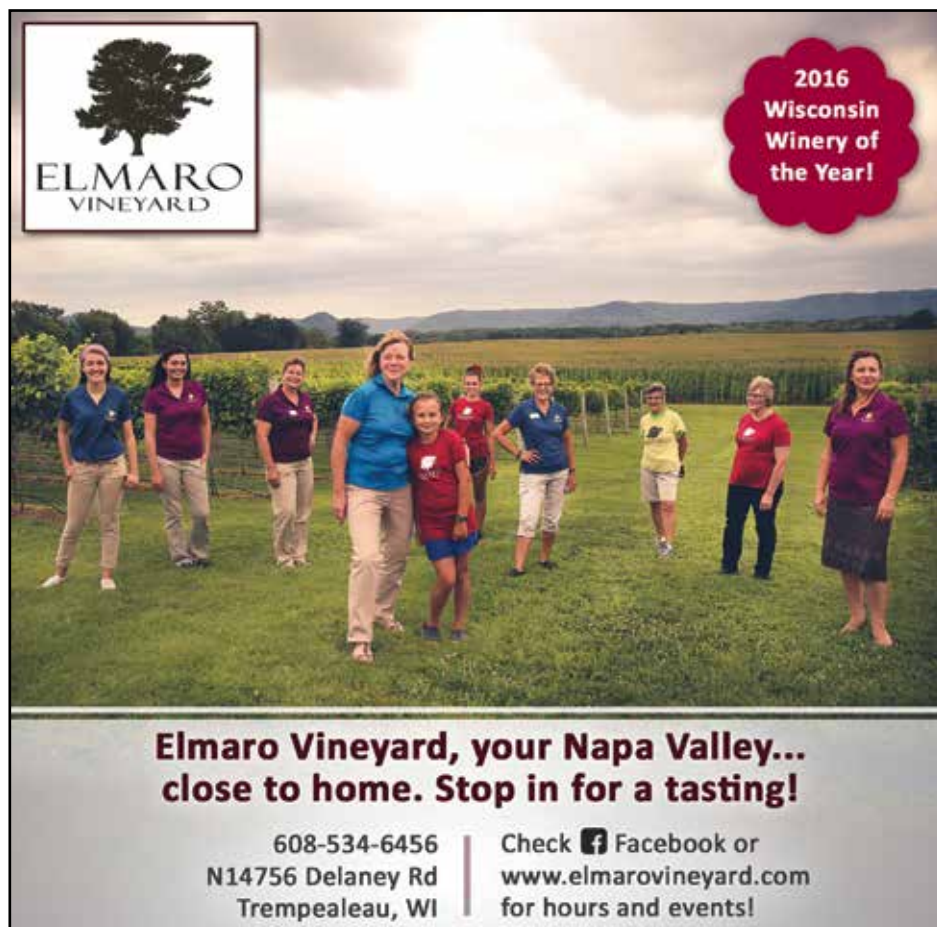
Like all great stories, there's a happy ending. Sometime in the next year, the Free Range Exchange is expanding to downtown La Crosse in the northeast corner of the Gunderson Health System's Dental Specialties building on Third Street North. To prepare, Horn and Kolstad-DeVaney are learning to delegate and train others to repeat their collaborative achievement in the new venue. **CRW**

Susan C. Schuyler is a freelance writer and editor. She also is retired, which gives her plenty of time to drive to Hokah from La Crosse to enjoy the delicious bounty at Free Range Exchange.

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Maple Balsamic Vinaigrette

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- 1 head garlic, top bit of papery skin cut off
- 1 tsp. balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- ½ cup balsamic vinegar
- ½ cup olive oil
- ½ cup maple syrup
- 2 T water
- 2 T brown sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- ⅛ tsp. pepper

Place the cut head of garlic in the center of a small piece of aluminum foil, drizzle with vinegar and oil, wrap and place in a 400°F oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until fragrant and caramelized. Let cool.

Squeeze garlic cloves out of skins and mash with a fork. Place garlic in a blender with the rest of the ingredients and emulsify together.



Potato Soup

- 6 strips bacon, cut into bits
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic
- 6 medium-large potatoes, peeled and cut into large chunks
- 3 cups milk
- salt and pepper
- bacon bits, scallions, and shredded cheese as garnish

In a large stockpot, cook bacon bits and reserve 1 T rendered fat in the pan. Add onion, celery and garlic. Sauté until fragrant, then add potatoes and enough water to cover. Bring to a boil and partially cover. Lower heat and simmer until potatoes are cooked through, about 20 minutes. Add milk, salt and pepper to taste, and blend with a stick blender until smooth. Alternatively, blend soup in batches using a blender, but the stick blender really makes quick work of any pureed soup. Garnish with reserved bacon, scallions and shredded cheese.



Basic Morning Muffins

These can easily be doubled and are adaptable with any fruit, nut or chocolate combination. This is the base for most muffins at the Free Range Exchange, using local ingredients whenever possible.

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup buttermilk
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup fruit (frozen works perfectly fine)
- 2 T turbinado sugar
- 2 T granulated sugar (mix sugars together and reserve for topping)

In a medium mixing bowl, combine oil, buttermilk, extract, ¾ cup sugar and eggs. Whisk together until sugar is incorporated. Add flour, baking powder and salt. Using a rubber spatula, lightly toss fruit into dry ingredients, then mix together. Batter will be lumpy. Scoop into a lined muffin pan, top with reserved sugar mix. Bake in a 350°F oven for 20 to 25 minutes. Makes a dozen regular-sized muffins.





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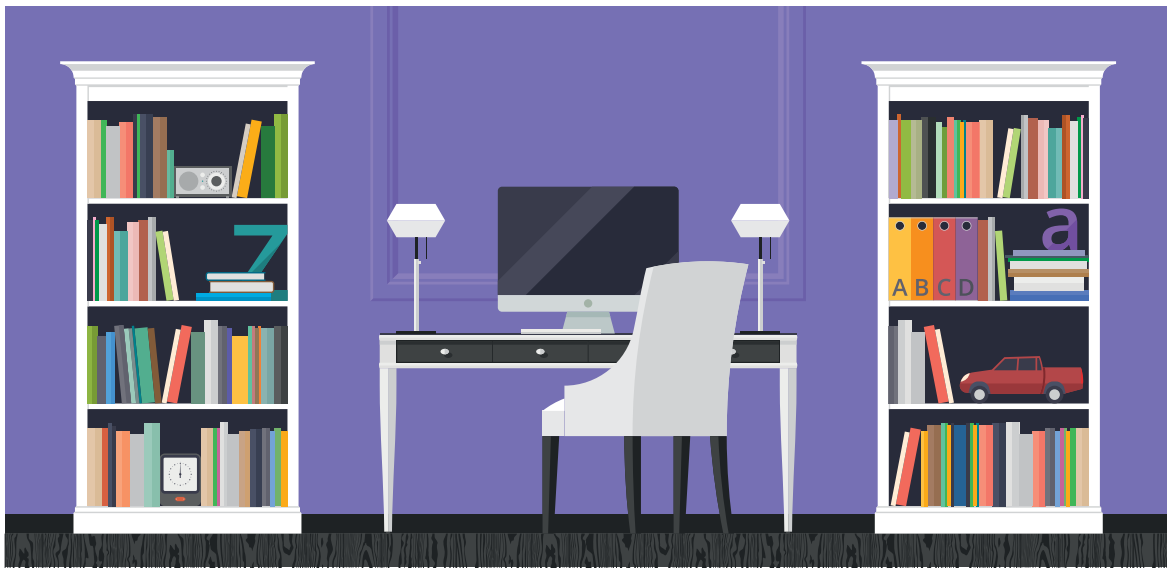





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GET IT TOGETHER

Tackle spring cleaning with 10 expert tips.

BY HEIDI OVERSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Glorious spring is finally here! Cast off the cold, dark days of winter and set the stage for a fresh, clean season, starting in your home. We asked three local professional organizers for their best decluttering tips. Bring on light, airy and open spaces!



Lisa Filips

GET STARTED

Lisa Filips, former owner of NEST Home LLC and a former teacher, still loves educating people, especially when it comes to cleaning their homes.

“Decluttering rooms takes the emotional weight of a mess off us,” Filips says. “But we all know that the first step is the hardest. Many people just don’t know where to start, so they don’t start at all or fail to finish what they began.”

1. Start small

Never start in your garage or basement; instead, tackle a smaller space you spend the most time in.

“Attack a space and gut the room out completely,” Filips advises. “Get it empty and then power clean. Sit back when you’re done and ask yourself, ‘What do I want this to look like?’ When you see all of the things that came out, you will see what is necessary to keep. Get rid of the rest, put what you want to keep back into place and look at the difference.”

2. Get creative with storage

“You can buy suspended storage racks for the garage. Try under-the-bed containers and sealable containers that are airtight and moisture proof,” Filips suggests. “Number each box, make a list of its contents, snap a picture of the list and place the list in the box before you tuck it away. That’s how you will always know what is where.”

3. Emotionally detach from possessions

Emotional attachments can stop people from getting rid of what they don’t really need. “When I had clients who were emotionally



A good reorganization can transform a room and dispel the distress of a mess.

attached to their belongings, I held up the items and asked them if they really liked them or not. When they were undecided, we placed the items in a ‘marinate’ pile. On my next visit, we revisited the pile, and they were ready to get rid of more,” Filips says.

If you truly can’t part with an heirloom, enjoy it. If you have a quilt, for example, Filips suggests displaying it on a ladder. “If you have acquired a lot of heirloom dishes, box the different sets and rotate them with the seasons or holidays. Don’t save the good dishes for a special occasion—make every day special and use them!

“If you’re looking for places to donate your cast-off items, try any of your favorite charities,” says Filips. “I have also used freecycle.org and the Buy Nothing Facebook group. Sue Graf at WINN runs a haul-away service and takes donations as well.”



Sonja Meehan

DECLUTTER

Sonja Meehan with Simply Thriving Organization (simplythrivingorganization.com) in La Crosse often tells her clients that no amount of organizing can fix the amount of space that's needed for the things they have. Decluttering is a must.

"Americans have a lot of stuff," Meehan says. "It's just our way of life. Sometimes I have to be that cold, hard voice of reason that helps them decide to get rid of things. One of the things I ask people is, if a certain item suddenly disappears, would you replace it? If they say no, we get rid of it. I also like to tell my clients to focus on what they're keeping versus what they're getting rid of. That always helps."

4. Get rid of things you never use

Start with a drawer, whether it be a junk drawer or a sock drawer. Set a timer for 10 minutes. "Get rid of what you never use. Arrange the drawer nicely, then move on to another part of that room or another drawer."

5. Accommodate your habit

If you drop your keys, purse, wallet, sunglasses, etc. on the counter every day, it can become an everyday irritation. Create a home for those things with a bin or basket close to the counter. Make the most-used things accessible.

6. Take inventory of your things first

"For example, take all of your towels out of the linen closet, lay them on a table or bed and then decide what you can part with," says Meehan. "Same with clothes. You might find you have 10 of one type of shirt when you only need to keep two or three."

"I always approach things from a sustainability angle," says Meehan. "Decluttering will definitely bring you joy, but take time to consider what your impact is on the planet."



Claudia Adiazola

IMAGINE CLEAN

Claudia Adiazola with Simply Sorted Homes (simplysortedhomes.com) in Onalaska loves offering creativity to her clients, who often can't see past their clutter.

"I like to tell people, imagine your space after we are done," says Adiazola. "Look at your new, clean space, and imagine the whole house looking like that."

7. Donate and recycle

"This country has so many sales!" says Adiazola. "People like to shop. One can't keep collecting; they have to donate. Box your old things, and put them in the front seat of your car. It will be visible to you and remind you to donate. Plastic supermarket bags can collect at an alarming rate. Put them in your car and bring them to the stores that have recycling bins in the entryway."

8. Write down your intentions

Sometimes the best way to follow through on decluttering and cleaning intentions is to write them down. Set goals and write them on colorful Post-it Notes, placing them on the car dashboard, near your front door or other places where you can't miss them. "This



Getting rid of unused items and organizing even small spaces, such as a drawer or closet, is a great starting point for a spring declutter and cleaning.

is a great way to remind you to drop off your donations, as well," Adiazola says.

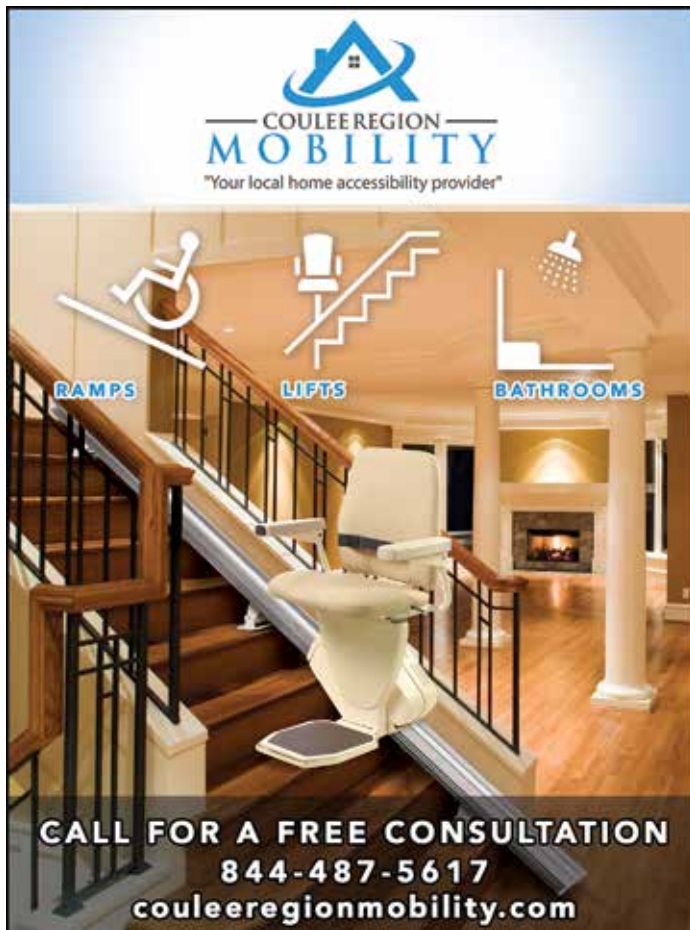
9. Digitize books, notes and photos

"If you have too many books, papers and photos lying around, consider going digital," says Adiazola. "You can find your books on Kindle or another e-reader. Using Amazon Audible is another great option. I like to put notes on my iPad versus writing them down and having scraps of paper everywhere." Photos can be sent to a professional digitizing service.

10. You have to declutter in order to truly clean

Once you declutter and learn to let things go, your spring cleaning will be a breeze. "You will feel lighter and happier," says Adiazola. "Emotionally, if you don't have space and finally decide to get rid of the things that don't serve a purpose, you will find joy in knowing someone else will make good use of it. It's a good feeling." **CRW**

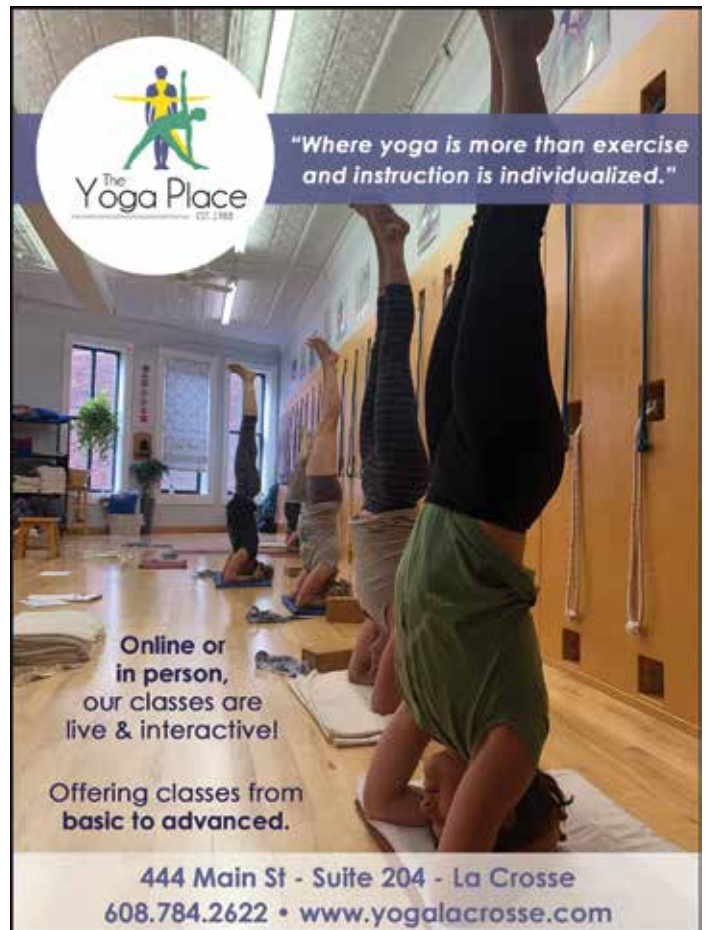
Heidi Overson felt like she made three good friends while interviewing for this article. They each gave her great ideas for decluttering her own house.



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Small City, Big Happenings

A diverse group of women-led businesses keeps downtown Galesville humming.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Front row (from left): Kelly Gardner, Create Happy; Perian Heffner, Couvera Insurance; Traci Stoner, Treasure Chest; Anna Ledebuhr, Coulee Boutique; Sue Kundy, Edward Jones; Tara Herbst-Kopp, Rebel Glass; and Danielle Todd, Flex Appeal Fitness. Back row: Clarissa Andersen, Jungle Juice; Kari Schulz, The Main Fox; Rachel Spitzmacher Perez, Lylli & Ivi Bakery; Mary Knappen, Phoneco; Amy Hembd, Garden of Eatin'; Harmony Bork, Renaissance Breads and Pastries; Angela Kelly, Gales Lanes; Nan Horton, Common Market; Joyce Johnson, Common Market; and Susan Olson, Mike's Bar & Grill.

Stroll around the square in downtown Galesville, and you are sure to notice a few things.

First, every space around the square, anchored by the historic bandshell and park in the center, is occupied.

Second, the range of businesses on the square and surrounding blocks offers nearly everything someone who lives downtown could need: groceries, dining, clothing, gas, pharmacy services, health care for people and pets, fitness, jewelry, hair care, financial and legal services, gifts and even entertainment with a bowling alley.

Finally, if you look more closely, you will find a common denominator among those businesses: Nearly every one is owned or managed by a woman.

DOWNTOWN REBIRTH

While a few of the businesses in downtown Galesville are rooted decades-deep, like Joyce Johnson's Common Market, which is beginning its 36th year, many are part of a recent revival that is making the district a growing destination, offering handcrafted jewelry, stained glass, boutique clothing and even a smoothie bar. The owners of those



Joyce Johnson, Common Market

businesses credit another Galesville business veteran and mentor, Traci Stoner, and her husband as a driving force behind the area's revival in recent years.

Stoner's Treasure Chest Gifts has been an anchor on the southern corner of the square for 18 years.

"We put a lot of time and money into this downtown," Stoner says. In recent years, she and her husband have purchased and repaired multiple buildings, turning broken windows and deteriorating interiors into spaces that now contain several of the district's newest entrepreneurs. "We have some really good people (as tenants)—four hardworking women over there," Stoner says.

Tenant Kelly Gardner, owner of Create Happy and current president of the Downtown Galesville Business Alliance, praises the Stoners, saying, "They are the key components in the story of downtown Galesville."

WORK ETHIC

Stoner isn't the only Galesville business owner to credit the success of the businesses in the downtown area to the effort and will of their female proprietors.

"We're all here because we know how to work," Johnson says, as she tallies a total in her head for a dedicated customer of her self-proclaimed "old-fashioned co-op." At the Common Market, hand-selected produce

sits alongside organic and specialty offerings, and Johnson fields phone calls from regulars wanting to know if their special order has come in and what bread options will be delivered that day from Renaissance Bakery down the street.

That sentiment was echoed also by Brenda Sannes, owner of Studio6 Beauty and Barber, who served as the first president of the Downtown Galesville Business Alliance, founded in 2019 to bring events and more people to the business district.

"The work ethic of the women that own these businesses downtown is incredible," she says.

SPIRIT OF COOPERATION

The second factor these business leaders credit with helping the entire downtown succeed is their sense of community, cooperation and sharing the load. Despite a wide range of ages, business concepts and experiences, Sannes says the group has meshed well in their efforts to further promote Galesville.

"We look at what everyone has to offer," she says, relying on the long-term experience of some and the internet marketing savvy of others, to help the community as a whole.

Gardner agrees. "It's a good balance of personalities. We all differ in our business models and how we go about reaching our customers."

Sannes says the idea of cooperation extends to how the Downtown Galesville Business Alliance works with other entities, including as a member of the Galesville Chamber of Commerce, with the philosophy that anytime a promotion effort brings more people into town, it helps all businesses.

"The thing we do really well together," Sannes says, "is realize if it is good for my business, it is good for everybody's business."

Gardner agrees. "Business brings business," she says.

IT'S THE PEOPLE

While the formal organization exists to plan events such as monthly Downtown Walkabouts with music in the square, market vendors, extended business hours and holiday events, the women with businesses downtown say it is the individuals who make up the organization that make all the difference.

"Everybody does a great job of sharing what else there is to do in Galesville," says Anna Ledebuhr, owner of Coulee Boutique. "It's very collaborative."

Several business owners noted how if a customer is in one store, they frequently point out others in the area that the customer may want to visit—Sannes sends her salon clients to Gardner's shop to find the cute earrings she's wearing; Gardner suggests picking up a pastry at Lylli & Ivi or grabbing groceries at Common Market. Johnson lets her market customers know about the gifts available at Treasure Chest, and so on. "It's about people

and referrals—we have our own little network," Sannes says.

But it is also about the customers, especially those who have developed longtime relationships. "The customers keep me going," Johnson says, as she greets the next person through her door by name.

SMALL CITY, BIG HAPPENINGS

Even though the fact that Galesville's downtown revival is being led by a nearly all-woman force is coincidental (they insist they would welcome a little

male perspective as well), there is no doubt that what is happening is positive for the community.

"It's a small city with a lot of big things happening all the time," Sannes points out.

Or from Johnson's perspective of watching the changes for 36 years: "I say it's kind of magical, our community here." **CRW**

Shari Hegland is marking her calendar for this summer's Downtown Walkabouts to meet more of Galesville's creative, hardworking women—there are just too many to squeeze into a two-page story.



Brenda Sannes, Studio6 Beauty & Barber



Kelly Gardner, Create Happy



Anna Ledebuhr, Coulee Boutique



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ACCOMPLISHMENTS



LEONARD NAMED PARTNER IN HAWKINS ASH CPAS

Brittany Leonard, CPA, is now a partner at Hawkins Ash CPAs. She was most recently a Senior Audit Manager in the firm's La Crosse office. In her new role as partner, she will continue to provide audit services to tax credit projects, education agencies, nonprofit organizations and commercial enterprises.

Leonard holds the Advanced Single Audit Certificate from the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and is a Certified Public Accountant. Her background prior to joining Hawkins Ash CPAs includes tax return preparation and small business accounting. She serves as the chairperson for the firm's nonprofit services group.



RIVER TRAIL CYCLES CELEBRATES 15 YEARS

River Trail Cycles, located in Onalaska just off the Great River State Trail, is celebrating 15 years in business. That's 15 years of providing bikes, repairs and trail passes to a Coulee Region community that loves exploring the area on two wheels. Anniversary celebrations include an extended Spring Sale, held April 15-30—15 days celebrating 15 years.

Owner Emily Vance opened River Trail Cycles in 2007, first operating out of Holmen Square, then building a new storefront on Highway 35 in 2014. Visit River Trail Cycles at 106 Mason Street in Onalaska, at www.rivertrailcycles.com or call 608-519-5757.



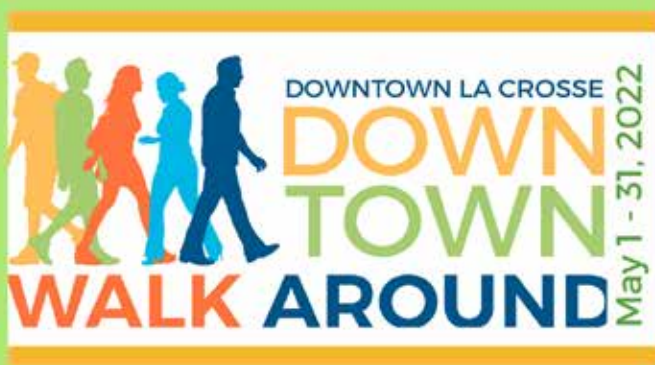
PAGLIARO TO LEAD FSC

Jean Pagliaro of Onalaska was recently named executive director of the Franciscan Spirituality Center, having served as program and retreat coordinator since 2017.

She is also president of the Upper Midwest Association for Retreat and Spirituality Centers. Previously, Pagliaro was an affiliate chaplain at Gunderson Health System in La Crosse, the volunteer coordinator at Coulee Region RVSP and pastor of Halfway Creek Lutheran Church in Holmen. She has extensive training in crisis response, community-based organizing and effective communication, as well as significant fundraising and grant-writing experience. The Franciscan Spirituality Center is a sponsored ministry of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and welcomes people of all faith backgrounds and traditions.

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WHOLE-CHILD LEARNING

The Kickapoo Valley Forest School opens education to the great outdoors.

BY JAN WELLIK | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



No matter what the weather, the students at Kickapoo Valley Forest School spend their days outdoors—for fun, for learning and even for snacks and lunch.

Enjoying time outdoors is important to many families in the Driftless Region. Taking the classroom outdoors adds a new level of academic, social and emotional skill building to education, as proven at the Kickapoo Valley Forest School (KVFS), a free public school currently offered for grades 4K and kindergarten through La Farge School District at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

“It offers our child a well-rounded education in the best setting possible,” explains KVFS nurse and parent Emily Oium. “I think there is a misconception that forest school is just playing outside all day, but we see our child learning and growing academically.”

FROM ABC TO ECOLOGY

KVFS integrates full-time nature immersion with child-led practices, explains Jonel Kiesau, one of the school’s founders. “They learn how to be good land stewards,” she says.

At a forest school, students learn letters, phonics, math and more, but also a connection to the environment through hands-on, experiential learning that incorporates academic topics.

“When my oldest child was younger, I read about forest schools in other countries and always dreamed it would be an option for our children, so we were thrilled to learn of the opportunity in our area,” Oium says.

Her 6-year-old, Cash, “enjoys the freedom of movement,” she explains—but she sees him gaining more. “We are seeing a huge leap in our child’s vocabulary and understanding of connections to the natural world,” Oium says. “I believe the skills he is gaining at KVFS will build a wonderful foundation for lifelong learning.” But, she adds, “If you asked him, he would say that he loves building things and getting dirty!”

Similarly, KVFS parent Amanda Caldwell sends her 5-year-old son, Finley, to the forest school because, she says, “I want him to feel a closeness with the natural world.”

Caldwell appreciates how he burns off energy climbing, running

and exploring, which, she says, “is more in line with the natural learning style of children versus sitting at a desk.” She commutes a half hour each way to take her son to KVFS because he “loves getting hands-on with the environment.”

BUILDING A SCHOOL WITHOUT A BUILDING

Kiesau, planning and leadership coordinator for KVFS, is also the education director at Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR), leading environmental education there for almost 20 years.

In recent years, KVR piloted a weekly 4K program on-site and offered seasonal programming for homeschoolers. “Families were looking to do something innovative with their education and find alternatives to their children being on devices,” Kiesau says.

With about 9,000 acres of public wilderness in the KVR, it is the ultimate children’s play space with a variety of habitats, including wetlands, prairie and oak savannah forests.

Kiesau worked with Megan Gustefson, superintendent at La Farge School District, to write a Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) grant. In 2020, they were awarded \$700,000 to run a forest school as part of the school district.

Kiesau acknowledges KVFS teachers Julia Buckingham and Ximena Puig, who created the curriculum specific to KVR place-based forest schooling to meet certain benchmarks. KVFS currently serves 30 students in blended-age classes of 4K and kindergarten. The grant will allow them to add first grade next year and second grade by the following year.

KVFS has a vision to “grow children who are future land stewards ... into adults that are going to contribute to our world in positive ways,” says Kiesau. **CRW**

Writer Jan Wellik is the founder/director of Eco Expressions, a nature and art program for youth in the La Crosse area: www.EcoExpressions.org.

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EVERYONE HAS A STORY TO TELL

The Driftless Writing Center brings together experienced and aspiring authors.

BY JOAN KENT | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Writing is a lonely activity. And it can be intimidating. The Viroqua-based Driftless Writing Center (DWC), founded in 2010, helps people who have stories to tell but are stymied because they're afraid their writing isn't good enough or they're what DWC board treasurer Lisa Henner, a former middle school language arts teacher, calls "a recovering C English student." Through several programs, including the made-for-Zoom-era Connect & Write virtual writing lab, DWC offers writers of all levels the opportunity to connect with other writers and establish a dedicated time slot in which to write.

"Absolutely we believe in striving for excellence and revising until something is done," Henner says. "But to start, it's like modeling clay; you have to get your hands in before you can do anything."

"It's hard to get our inner critic to shut up," says Maureen Adams, who's attended DWC programs for two years. "If you start censoring yourself, you're dead in the water, so the emphasis is on getting ideas out, not being a critic immediately on your own work—to write without judging so you're not filtering yourself but letting it flow."

JUST KEEP WRITING

DWC is a nonprofit organization that connects writers, readers and audiences through workshops, discussions and public performances. It celebrates the unique culture of the Driftless region and seeks to



The Driftless Writing Center is run by an all-volunteer board who teach classes, arrange workshops and facilitate virtual writing sessions. Top row: Jennifer Morales, Lisa Henner. Middle row: Mark MacAllister, Erin Malone, Carly Frerichs. Bottom row: Shauna Anderson, Betty Christiansen.

enhance the creative expression of the people who live here.

It does that, in part, by offering workshops geared to writers of all levels: Absolute beginners can find a voice in Words on the Page, while writers with a draft of a novel can hone their project in a Manuscript Critique workshop. Opportunities in between include Draft & Craft



Joy Harjo, U.S. Poet Laureate

sessions led by DWC educators and writing workshops on everything from poetry to publishing to parenthood taught by expert writers from across the nation via Zoom.

Jane Schmidt, author of four published books and a weekly column in the *Crawford County Independent*, started attending DWC writing workshops because she wanted to learn to write better. "I was worried about the details," she recalls. "They told me, 'Just

keep writing your stories.' It was good advice. If I'd gotten tripped up by commas, I might have stopped."

Some people who take part are experienced writers; others haven't started. They've included a 10-year-old homeschool student, high school students, working parents and people in their 80s. "Our focus is on community and inclusivity," Henner says. "Everyone is welcome."

"It's really heartwarming to see the kids come," says former funeral home director John Sime, whose works include two magical realism novels based on former Viroqua characters and a book titled *UFOs in the Kickapoo*.

The camaraderie is what attracted him to DWC, he says. "It's a venue for me to read my stuff and hear other people read. It's just nice to have other people like me to talk with."

THE DRIFTLESS AND BEYOND

While many area writers appreciate DWC for the workshops it offers, the group has spearheaded other projects that not only connect people locally through stories, but also open the area up to a world of

writers beyond the Driftless. After devastating floods swept southwest Wisconsin in 2018, DWC generated *Stories from the Flood*, an oral history community service program that recorded stories of people affected by the flooding, and published a booklet featuring quotes from several transcribed accounts. In 2019, DWC produced the print anthology *Contours: A Literary Landscape*, a collection of original poems, short stories, essays and art by local contributors, each showcasing a unique angle on life in the Driftless region.

DWC also brings nationally known writers to the area for readings and workshops, both in-person and virtual, including author Jane Hamilton and U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, who appeared at UW-La Crosse in October for a free public performance of her poetry and music.

ALL WRITERS WELCOME

Since Covid, DWC has found a niche in the virtual world, gathering people from throughout the Midwest plus Canada, North Carolina, New York and Oregon to write together and share in its offerings. "It's added a layer to what we are doing by bringing in a variety of viewpoints and perspectives," Henner says.

The center helps people develop a writing practice, Adams says, comparing writing to learning to play a musical instrument or becoming a good athlete. And, it provides writers support and encouragement as they pursue publication, even in the face of rejections. "It's like fishing," Adams says. "You don't catch a big trophy on your first try. This makes you feel like you're not doing this lonely job alone, to know that others have persevered." For more information, see www.driftlesswritingcenter.org. **CRW**

Joan Kent is a retired newspaper reporter who seldom experienced writers' block because daily deadlines didn't allow for it.

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Better Together

Play with patterns for a fresh take on spring fashion.

BY ELISE WEINBENDER | PHOTOS BY FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHY

From trendy tie-dye to fresh floral, geo and more, fill your spring wardrobe with fun patterns from local shops.

Pairing Classics

Combine tie dye with a unique asymmetrical top from **Urban Shoetique**.

Add flirty flare jeans, chunky heels, and a cross body bag to complete the on-the-go spring look.

Modeled by Elise Weinbender.

Yana K Brighton tie-dye sweater, \$128; Bed Stu Aiken crossbody bag, \$220; Liverpool Tucker high-rise straight jeans, \$98; Mission heels, \$140



It's All in the Details

Dive into details by combining an embroidered blouse and headband with patterned velvet leggings from **Touch of Class**. Incorporate a pop of color with a handbag and add the perfect pair of sandals for an effortless spring look.

Modeled by Abrielle Van Dyck.

Johnny Was Althea velvet legging, Johnny Was Sonya popover blouse, Johnny Was Geana scarf (p. 4 photo), Hobo Stroll convertible crossbody bag, Powder Retro Meadow padded headband, Keva Startburst leather earrings, Mephisto Helen sandals

Dare to Be Bold

Don't shy away from bold colors and patterns this spring. This hot pink top from **Mainstream Boutique** paired with diamond-patterned pants creates a fun and eye-catching look.

Modeled by Rhonda Clements.

Clara Sunwoo drop-shoulder top, \$76; Clara Sunwoo geo diamond pants, \$84; snakeskin bracelet, \$36; earrings, \$24





Deb Bassett, right, works closely with Alesha Schandelman, executive director of The Center: 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection, to bring people together for support and community.



Deb Bassett, left, visits with her wife, Jo, in the library at The Center, where they first met.

WELCOMING OTHERS INTO THE FOLD

Deb Bassett shares understanding and support through The Center: 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection.

BY TALLITHA REESE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

A relative newcomer to La Crosse—having moved here in 2016 after calling Flint, Michigan, home for 63 years—Deb Bassett quickly discovered community and an opportunity to share her experience and advocacy as a member, volunteer and now administrative assistant at The Center: 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection.

“The first time I visited (The Center) and found out about their welcoming and affirming atmosphere and philosophy, I knew that I wanted to volunteer,” says Bassett. “As The Center grew, I grew more and more attached and dedicated to their all-encompassing passion for welcoming others to the fold and being a resource to our marginalized community.”

SHARING A SENSE OF BELONGING

Since coming out in the early '70s, Bassett has been actively involved in the LGBTQ+ community, but after retiring from her career as a high school biology teacher and moving to the La Crosse area to be closer to family, she felt isolated from the community she had developed in Michigan.

However, when she discovered The Center, a local organization that works to develop and expand understanding of human sexuality, gender identity and the need for equal treatment, she knew she was home.

“I fell in love with The Center and have spent an enormous amount of time here, doing a little bit of everything,” says Bassett. “I began volunteering, and shortly after, I developed a volunteer coordinator position to try to keep a good volunteer team available.”

Bassett also served on the board of directors for The Center for a year, before stepping down to take the position of administrative assistant to the executive director.

“What we bring to the LGBTQ+ community is hope, safety and belonging,” Bassett says. “We have been told many times that we have

literally saved lives by reaching out, being there, encouraging and surrounding those who felt the brutality of not being accepted.”

Executive director Alesha Schandelman also focuses The Center’s work on education and outreach in the community. “It’s a lot easier to hate an idea or an abstract thing until you get to know people,” she says. Getting to know individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, along with other marginalized populations, is key to preventing “othering,” she says.

“Othering”—viewing people who are different as less or separate—is the opposite of the word that is at the center of the organization’s purpose and logo: Together.

IMPORTANT CONNECTIONS

For Bassett, The Center provides social interaction, extended family and a meaningful place to offer her time and caring.

“I am always a warm and welcoming face to all who enter, and will always make you feel comfortable, cared about and welcome,” says Bassett. “Once someone walks in, to me they are family. It takes courage to walk in here; the love and caring will bring you back!”

The Center provides a wide range of support groups for all ages, library and computer space, resources and social interaction, along with referrals to LGBTQ+ friendly doctors, lawyers, accountants, hair salons and other services.

“I hope that my involvement in The Center, developing programs and offering support to our guests—whether one time or daily over the five years I have been here—has been as much a blessing to others as The Center has been to me,” Bassett says. **CRW**

Tallitha Reese is a freelance writer and content manager based in Cashton. She owns Words By Reese and you can find out more about her and her work at www.wordsbyreese.com.



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PARTNERS IN ADVENTURE

Coulee Region women find traveling to be more fun with active “sisters in life.”

BY MARTHA KEEFFE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



From parasailing to cycling, these “sisters in life” have more fun when they travel together. Pictured at right: Patty Wright, Courtney Cameron, Susy Foster and Roxy Lassig.

It's often said that people are social creatures. In fact, as far back as the 16th century, the English poet John Donne recognized the importance of social connection when he famously stated, “No man is an island.” And whether or not you agree, the need people have for social interaction couldn't be more apparent than through our addiction to social media. We crave human interaction so much that according to a January 2022 article in *Business of Apps*, Zoom “was one of the fastest growing apps of the pandemic, with meeting participants increasing by 2,900 percent.”

But for some people like Courtney Cameron, who is willing to try any activity from mountain biking to snorkeling (and everything in between), nothing beats personal interaction—especially when it's within the company of women who have a shared sense of adventure.

A BIT OF EXCITEMENT AND A CHALLENGE

When not working as the assistant store manager at Coulee Region RV Center in West Salem, Cameron is either contemplating her next adventure or is somewhere, doing something. A lifelong outdoor enthusiast, Cameron has “found that all these activities involve a bit of excitement and a challenge,” whether that be in far-off venues like the Galapagos Islands or closer to home in the Midwest.

“I swam with sea lions that played cat and mouse with me. They

were like dogs,” says Cameron, who described how these persistent sea mammals continued to pull her into their game even though she decided it was time to go. And while she was on a 50-mile road bike with friends in Door County, Cameron took a break from pedaling to join a group of 20-somethings in a spontaneous leap off a cliff into the lake. “I always say (these activities) make me feel alive,” says Cameron, explaining that it's the companionship of others that enhances her experiences.

Cameron enjoys shared experiences so much that she has connected (sight unseen) with women on Facebook and sport-specific travel groups. It's this adventurous spirit that recently took Cameron to Mexico, where she met with other solo women travelers to surf, rock climb, snorkel, paddleboard, hike and kayak. “I like people, and it is a joy in life to find people I enjoy being around,” she says.

THE MORE THE MERRIER

A native of Missouri, Cameron sought out other active-minded people when she moved to the Coulee Region. Though she made some connections with people at college and at work, it was through the Grand Bluff Training group in La Crosse—whose mission is to prepare runners of all capabilities to run races of all distances—that Cameron met her core group of compadres: Susy Foster, Roxy



These Coulee Region women have more fun tackling travel adventures together. Left: Patty Wright, Courtney Cameron, Roxy Lassig and Susy Foster. Right: Courtney Cameron, Susy Foster, Dawn Burg, Roxy Lassig and Patty Wright.

Lassig and Patty Wright. Though these women come from diverse backgrounds, and their ages span a 25-year difference, their desire to be active is the glue that binds them together.

"I was never an athlete previously," emphasizes Foster, who, after losing weight, became interested in running and biking. "I was blessed to find friends with the same interests through our running training group. I wanted to do the Key West Half Marathon last year and asked my running friends if anyone wanted to join me, and the rest is history."

Since then, this group has run, biked, hiked and traveled together, creating lifelong memories along the way. And though some of their experiences have resulted in a lack of sleep, the consumption of lots of junk food and living out of a camper, their ability to laugh their way through these challenges has bonded them in a way that is reserved for those who just inexplicably "click."

"These women have become great friends who make me laugh continuously," says Lassig of how the group inspires her. "They are full of infectious, endless energy and positivity. They push me to keep moving, keep laughing and keep exploring all that life has to offer. I'm happiest when I'm outdoors with friends and nature."

"It's delightful to travel with people who share the same interest," says Wright, who appreciates that someone in the group is always ready for a run or bike. And as the senior member of the group, she loves the energy and enthusiasm of her traveling companions. "The most memorable events almost always include Courtney," says Wright as she reflects on Cameron's impromptu jump into the lake and the time they ignored a Do Not Enter sign to go exploring. "You have to learn to go with the flow."

GOING WITH THE FLOW

It is this type of support and understanding—combined with an open-minded attitude—that has worked to mitigate conflict within the group.

"Communication is key for not getting on each others' nerves. And being flexible," says Foster, when asked what it takes to successfully navigate the ups and downs of traveling together. In addition, being able to discuss and come to a consensus about the location, activities and schedule for the group's next excursion helps maintain harmony among these friends.

And since there are no expectations that the group be in sync at all times, the pressure to participate in a planned activity is alleviated. "With the group I travel with, we don't require the whole group to do everything together, but for the most part we do," says Cameron, noting that the women she travels with are fairly laid-back, funny and kind. "I am pretty independent, and when traveling with my friends, if they want to do something and I want to do something else, we all agree that is fine."

As for future group adventures, Cameron remains open to almost anything. "It just depends on someone finding something they want to do ... and we go from there," she says.

Of course, whatever they choose to do next will most certainly involve being active with the friends who, according to Cameron, have become her sisters in life. "These types of activities create a bond between people, and I have definitely deepened several relationships because of the activities we share." **CRW**

Martha Keefe writes in La Crosse but lives her life outside biking, hiking, running ...

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Community Calendar

ONGOING EVENTS

American Association of University Women (AAUW) 2nd Sat. of each month (Sept.-May), 9:30 a.m., aauwlacrosse@hotmail.com, aauw-wi.org.

Cameron Park Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m. Fri., 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat., May through November.

Coulee Region Professional Women (CRPW) 4th Tues. of each month, www.crpwomen.org.

Coulee Region Toastmasters Club 1st and 3rd Mon. of each month, noon-1 p.m., Goodwill, La Crosse.

La Crosse Area Genealogical Society 4th Tuesday of each month (Sept.-May), 6-7:30 p.m., La Crosse Public Library, lacrosseags@gmail.com.

La Crosse Area Quilters 4th Tuesday of each month, 6:30 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel-Conference Center, Onalaska, www.lacrossequiltguild.com.

La Crosse Christian Women's Connection 2nd Tues. of each month, 12-1:45 p.m., Cedar Creek Golf Club, Onalaska.

La Crosse Rotary every Thurs. noon-1 p.m., Cargill Room, Waterfront Restaurant, www.rotarycluboflacrosse.org.

La Crosse Toastmasters Club 2nd and 4th Tues. of each month, 7 p.m., La Crosse County Administrative Building, 212 6th St. N., Room 100, La Crosse, 411.toastmastersclubs.org.

NAMI Support Groups Please refer to namilacrossecounty.org/support for information on the many programs offered.

Onalaska Area Business Association 2nd Tues. of each month, noon-1 p.m., La Crosse Country Club, oaba.info.

Onalaska Hilltopper Rotary every Wed. noon-1 p.m., La Crosse Country Club, Onalaska.

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

Valley View Rotary, every Wed., 7:30-8:30 a.m., La Crosse Famous Dave's, www.valleyviewrotary.com.

Viroqua Toastmasters Club 2nd and 4th Thurs. of each month, 7-8:30 p.m., Vernon Memorial Hospital, Taylor Conf. Rm., Lower Level, Viroqua.

Women Empowering Women (WEW), last Wed. of each month, Schmidy's, noon-1 p.m., Shari Hopkins, 608-784-3904, shopkins@couleebank.net.

Women's Alliance of La Crosse (WAL) 2nd Thurs. of each month, noon, The Waterfront Restaurant, Visit www.womensalliancelacrosse.com for more information.

Please contact each group to confirm meeting status and location.

If your organization would like to be included in our Community Calendar, please contact us at editor@crwmagazine.com or call 608-783-5395.

CALENDAR EVENTS

APRIL

Apr 1-2, Kimberly Lee: Writing Parenthood, Zoom reading and open mic 7 p.m. Fri., Zoom workshop 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Sat., Driftless Writing Center, www.driftlesswritingcenter.org.

Apr. 1-3, Telling Stories: A Strong Heart, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Apr. 1-10, *The Elephant Speaks Jazz*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.



Apr. 1-17, *The Vagina Monologues*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Apr. 2, Dan Sebranek & Friends present: The Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young Show, 7 p.m., Westby Area

Performing Arts Center, 608-634-0232, wapac.ludus.com.

Apr. 6, Recycled Percussion, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Apr. 8-9, Freeing Jesus: A Retreat with Diana Butler Bass, reception/book signing 6-8 p.m. Fri., workshop 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Apr. 8, Just My Imagination with Dave Marck and Tim Harrison, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Apr. 9, Women's Fund Spring Fling, 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Fox Hollow Banquet Hall, W3847 County Rd. OA, La Crosse, register at <https://womensfundlacrosse.org/events/spring-fling-2/>.

Apr. 9, Art in Nature workshop, 1-4 p.m., Great River Bluffs State Park, Winona, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

Apr. 9, Tribute to Frank Sinatra, 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

Apr. 9, Springtime Pops: The Best of the British Movie Scores, 7:30 p.m., La Crosse Symphony Orchestra, www.lacrossesymphony.org.

Apr. 9, Harmonious Wail, 7:30 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Apr. 9, Plant Propagation workshop, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., location TBD, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.



Apr. 11, *Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo*, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Apr. 13, Strong Women, Strong Coffee Zoom webinar featuring Dr. Jill O'Brien, 8-9 a.m., WWBIC, www.wwbic.com.

Apr. 13, Women with Purpose featuring Diane Nedland, "Married to an Alcoholic," 11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., La Crosse Country Club, cr.wwpwi.org.

Apr. 15-30, Spring Bike Sale, River Trail Cycles, 106 Mason St., Onalaska, www.rivertrailcycles.com.

Apr. 16, *Rosie Revere, Engineer & Friends*, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Apr. 22, Spring Fever open house, 4-8 p.m., downtown La Crosse, www.lacrossedowntown.com.

Apr. 22-May 1, *She Loves Me*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun, Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse, www.uwlax.edu/theatre-arts.

Apr. 23, Downtown Clean-up Day, downtown La Crosse, www.lacrossedowntown.com.

Apr. 23, Spring Thaw Celebration, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Old Main Historical and Community Center, 20869 College Ave., Galesville, find Old Main on Facebook.

Apr. 23, Beaded Trees Grief Retreat, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Apr. 23, Carve In 6 at the Bekkum with featured carver April Bird, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., free admission, Bekkum Memorial Library Community Room, 206 Main St. Westby, contact John Sutton, 608-634-4396, Lbarnfarms@gmail.com.

Apr. 23, Winona Outdoor Collaborative Monthly Meet Up: Annual Campaign Kick-off Party & Earth Day Cleanup, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m., meet at Peter's Biergarten, Winona, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

Apr. 23, Platinum Edition: Celebration 2022, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.



Apr. 23, *Prairie Smoke*, 7:30 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Apr. 23, Between the Bluffs Beer, Wine & Cheese Festival, 12-6 p.m., Oktoberfest Grounds, La Crosse, www.explorelacrosse.com/betweenthebluffs.

Apr. 24, Earth Fair, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Myrick Park, La Crosse, www.sustaininstitute.com/earthfairlacrosse.

Apr. 24, Recycling Fair, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Emerson Elementary parking lot, La Crosse, www.sustaininstitute.com/earthfairlacrosse.

Apr. 25-26, May 2-3, New Horizons Advocacy Training via Zoom, 6-9 p.m., 608-791-2610, volunteer@nhagainstabuse.org, www.nhagainstabuse.org/events/2022-springadvocacy-training/.

Apr. 29-May 15, *Next to Normal*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Apr. 29-May 4, Winona Outdoor Collaborative retreat: Moab Desert Escape & Exploration, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

MAY

May 1-31, Downtown Walk Around, downtown La Crosse, www.lacrossedowntown.com.

May 6, Rodney Carrington: Let Me In!, 7 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

May 7, Festival Foods La Crosse Marathon, 6 a.m., Sparta Area Chamber of Commerce; Half Marathon, 7 a.m., La Crosse Speedway Race Track; 5k, 8 a.m., Riverside Park; register at www.lacrossemarathon.com.

May 7, Celebrate La Crosse, Celebrate America, 7:30 p.m., La Crosse Symphony Orchestra, www.lacrossesymphony.org.

May 10, Franciscan Day of Solitude, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

May 11-15, Winona Outdoor Collaborative retreat: Beginner Backpacking on the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

May 12, Women with Purpose featuring Missy Vanlanuyt and Leah Burns, "Discover Hidden Gems Close to Home," 11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., La Crosse Country Club, cr.wwpwi.org.

May 13-14, Driftless Outdoors Show, 4-7 p.m. Fri., 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat., OmniCenter, Onalaska, <https://driftless.explorelacrosse.com>.

May 21, Walk MS La Crosse, 10 a.m., La Crosse Center, <https://mssociety.donordrive.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=donorDrive.event&eventID=760>.

May 21, 17th Annual Mayfair Art Fair, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., West Salem Lions Shelter, www.heidercenter.org.

May 21, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Women's Gathering, Sparrow's Nest, 17304 Havenwood Rd., Sparta, 661-400-2318, acresofhope@yahoo.com.

May 22, Riverdance, 7 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

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