

coulee region

women

AREA HOME AND HOMEOWNERS MAGAZINE

Sara Lubinski
Paints a River

Kids on the Farm

Glorious Hmong Gardens

Eating Well Is Easy as Pie

Love to Spare:
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NATURE
Nurture

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Pictured on cover: Artist Sara Lubinski. Photos on cover and this page by Megan McCluskey, Atypik Studio. Photographed at Great Spirit Bluff, La Crescent.



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In the early morning, there's no place I'd rather be than my front porch. For a few minutes, with my coffee and my journal, I am alone. The only sounds around me are breezes through leaves and birdsong; a lazy cat might be curled up on the wicker chair beside me. The air is fresh and the light is new. There's nothing like being in nature.

Yet a few weeks ago, my family and I sat on this same porch one evening and witnessed a very different scene. A wild storm snapped sheets of rain across our quickly flooding street, and thunder and lightning crashed in unison, accompanied by the gleeful screams of our children. It was wild and thrilling, and before it was over, branches and even trees were down everywhere, and our power was out until

the following afternoon. There's nothing like being in nature.

When planning our Nature/Nurture issue, it's fitting that Mother Nature has been our constant companion. We've held photo shoots literally between rainstorms, obsessively checking storm paths on our smartphones and dashing props to safety when the drops started to fall. We've conducted business despite aforementioned power outages and managed models' hair through high humidity and mischievous winds. There was even an afternoon while I was editing when a cool, brisk breeze snapped my curtain, and I began to think of fall.

The women featured in this issue, too, enjoy a close relationship with nature, and the wildness and the wonders she brings. These wonders are captured with passion and paint by artist Sara Lubinski; they are harnessed and channeled by farmers like Ana Skemp, Pam Hartwell, Der Vang, Lai Her and Shao Her. Nature and nurture blur boundaries, lovingly, by women like chef and food advocate Monique Hooker; Deb McKenney, who uplifts people's spirits with her therapy dog; and foster parents throughout the region, who bring stability and love to children they take in as their own.

We'd like to thank you, too—our readers, and advertisers who have appreciated and nurtured *Coulee Region Women* to this, our 75th issue. Thanks to you, your ideas, your feedback and your support, we continue to provide stories and information that, we hope, nurture you right back. You could say it's in our very "nature" to do so, and we thank you for giving us this privilege.

Ultimately, it is to you that we dedicate our latest issue—as well as to our prevailing Coulee Region woman, Mother Nature.

Betty

coulee region women

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Step out and support breast cancer research and awareness September 6 at the ninth annual Steppin' Out in Pink. Walk with family, friends or on your own to honor breast cancer survivors and remember loved ones. This event is a noncompetitive 4.5-mile walk for all ages and abilities.

Proceeds help fund breast cancer research initiatives at Gundersen Medical Foundation, give assistance to breast cancer patients in need, offer subsidized mammograms for the uninsured and support the services of the Center for Cancer & Blood Disorders and Norma J. Vinger Center for Breast Care. This walk starts at 9 a.m. on the Gundersen-La Crosse Campus walking trail. Pink ribbon trophies will be awarded to the top three community teams, top three Gundersen teams, top three corporate teams and top three individual fundraisers. The registration deadline is 5 p.m. August 25. Register in advance to get a free 2014 T-shirt! For more information and to register online, visit steppinoutinpink.org.

FIND THE HELP YOU NEED

Great Rivers 2-1-1 service provides free, confidential advice and community information 24-7, 365 days a year, serving more than 21 counties in the Coulee Region, including parts of Minnesota and Iowa. It links people to services from support groups, to parenting help, to hospice care and everything in between. If you are looking to take the next step on an issue but are not sure where to go, call this wonderful service and a helpful representative will refer you to one of the 4,200 community or human service programs in their database to help with your specific needs. Simply dial 2-1-1 or 800-362-8255, or visit their website at greatrivers211.org.

HAVE YOUR PIE



The YWCA Celebrity Pie Auction will be held August 20 at the Freight House in downtown La Crosse. Coulee Region Women's own Betty Christiansen and Diane Raaum will be among the 20 local celebrities putting their baking talents to work to help raise some "dough" for YWCA programming. Each pie is "sweetened" with an incentive and goes to the highest bidder. To get both a pie and a prize, stop by and bid for your favorites. The event begins with a 5-6:30 p.m. social, and the live auction starts at 6:30 p.m. For more information about this event, visit ywcalax.org.



GROW YOUR BRAIN FALL FARM FESTIVAL

Spend September 13 from 3-7 p.m. at the Fall Farm Festival at Deep Roots Community Farm, W4406 County Road YY, La Crosse. Proceeds go to Grow Your Brain, dedicated to connecting children to healthy food and nature. A delicious meal featuring fresh, organic fruits and vegetables and pulled pork sandwiches will be included with your ticket. Enjoy live music, a silent auction, rock art with Sunshine Alley and kids' yoga by Root Down Yoga. Monique Jamet Hooker, a chef, teacher and author trained in Europe with a passion for food and travel, will be giving her outstanding lecture, "Know your Food, Know your Farmer, Promoting the Path from Farm to Table," as part of her initiative to inspire farm to school programs and promote organically produced local foods. For more information and to purchase your tickets, visit growyourbrainlax.org.

MARATHONS AND MURDER



The Local Lupus Alliance is hosting their third annual 6-Hour Run/Walk on the cross-country trails at Goose Island Park on September 20. Come enjoy a day of family fun while supporting a great cause in the process. Packet pickup is 8:30 a.m., with a 10 a.m. start. Can't run or walk for 6 hours? No worries; the event provides a great shelter and an amazing aid station with all the calories and hydration needed to enjoy a few laps of the trail. If you are hoping to try your first half-marathon, full marathon or Ultra, here is your chance. For more

information, contact locallupusalliance@gmail.com or locallupus.org.

Then, enjoy La Crosse's very own whodunit when the Local Lupus Alliance hosts another exciting event: their second annual Murder Mystery, held October 18 at the Weber Center for Performing Arts. Enjoy food catered by The Waterfront Restaurant while helping choose the murderer in this mystery, featuring an original script written by local actor/director/writer Jonathan Lamb. All proceeds will stay local and help raise awareness for lupus. For more information and to purchase tickets, contact locallupusalliance@gmail.com or locallupus.org.



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Capturing a River

Sara Lubinski expresses her passion for painting and nature in a celebration of the Coulee Region.

BY HEIDI GRIMINGER BLANKE
Photos by Megan McCluskey, Atypik Studio

Many landscape artists paint what they see, but Sara Lubinski absorbs what she sees, then transfers it to canvas. She captures nature via pencil, ink and paint, creating a record of the natural environment she treasures.

Even Lubinski's home reflects a love of nature. A gravel driveway leads to a lofted log cabin nestled into the woods, a peaceful spot Lubinski shares with her husband, Ken, two large, friendly dogs and a cat. The light-filled space contains Lubinski's studio, a small area just off the living room where constant birdsong provides background music. Here, Lubinski reviews her sketchbooks, translating her ideas with a paintbrush.

The eye of a scientist, the heart of a painter

While Lubinski has always loved nature and art, she didn't fully combine her passions until 2012, when she purposefully set out to paint habitats of the Driftless Area in a collection called River Sojourn. Growing up in Lincoln, Nebraska, "roaming everywhere," Lubinski inherited an interest in nature from her father and a passion for art from her mother. In college, Lubinski began as an art major, but then switched to science, earning a master's degree in botany.

"I wound up getting a job with the federal government and working as a botanist," Lubinski says. "I worked on the Mississippi to begin with, doing aquatic plant research. The river changed my life in so many ways; not only was it exciting to work on one of the greatest river systems in the world, but I learned its value to waterfowl, humans and other species, and to the economic and cultural landscapes." From there, Lubinski worked in national parks, increasing her knowledge of plant geography and ecology. Always, though, she was struck by the beauty of her surroundings.

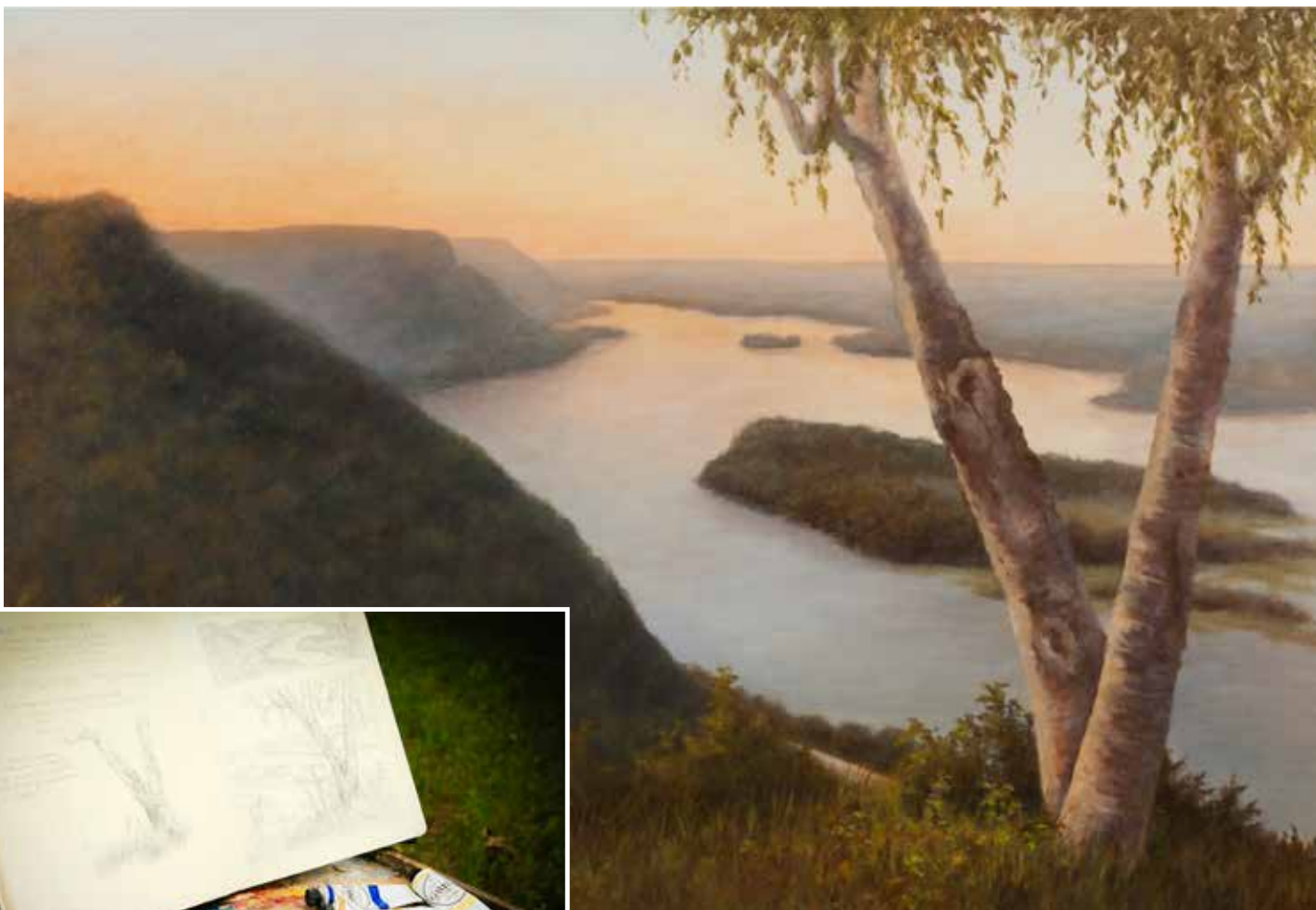
"I did a lot of traveling; it was like going to school again, I was learning so much. But it was during those trips that I started thinking about my long-lost dream of wanting to be a landscape painter; that was really a scary dream because it was the biggest thing I wanted to do, and I didn't know if I could do it. I kept putting it off." Lubinski finally left full-time work in 2004 and started painting. "It wasn't until 2012, however, when I realized that by combining landscape painting with my knowledge of habitats and plants, I could create a group of paintings for the purpose of sharing the beauty of the Coulee Region—our trout streams and rivers, the bluff prairies, the deep forests."

Preserving a landscape

Thus began Lubinski's River Sojourn series of paintings, completed in early 2014. "It seemed important to connect my art and my interests with who I am, what I know, what I value. Instead of just going out and painting a pretty picture, I wanted to have a deeper meaning to my work and to bring a focus to something that I think is important."

Her paintings bear testimony to an enduring landscape. "My focus is actually on having a display that includes the variety of habitats we have here. All the paintings come from conserved landscapes, whether they are federal or county or city or state land, and also the private landowners who have preserved their land through local land trusts. I wanted to bring attention to the work the land trusts are doing with individual landowners. Even though those lands are not always available to the public, they are important to have established for our clean air and water and our environment."

Lubinski works in a style of sketching and painting dating back to



Lubinski's painting "Quiet Majesty" is part of her River Sojourn collection. Great Spirit Bluff, the location featured in the painting and in this story, has been owned by the Howe family for several generations. It is protected by a private conservation easement with the Minnesota Land Trust.

the early 19th century, one similar to that of the Hudson River School, in which artists observe their surroundings, sketching different aspects of it before applying the first dab of paint.

"I think that helped me slow down and made me more aware of what was in front of me, and it also gave me the opportunity to combine elements of a drawing into a composition back in the studio," she says. "I could pick and choose what I thought was essential to me. I love that. I actually go out and sit and do nothing except observe for quite a while, and I find that I become aware of new things."

Lubinski's sketchbooks are illustrated journals. Written details based on her botanical knowledge accompany each sketch. She may record the time of day and air temperature, names of plants in the sketch and information about them. Lubinski says the notes are "really meaningful to me because they make me understand the environment." Her sketches needn't be incredibly detailed, she says, as the page full of notes jogs her memory and helps her view different composition ideas.

Life and land in perspective

The River Sojourn exhibit opened in April 2014 at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum in Winona, with 39 of its 50 artworks displayed, and the remainder at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota. "Each place that the exhibit goes, I want to include paintings that are

close to home and that people recognize and can really relate to." By featuring a familiar environment, Lubinski hopes viewers will be able to make an emotional connection, as well as a visual one. Concurrently, she is starting a new project whose works will center on the Mississippi River.

Lubinski is humbled by the magnitude of her natural surroundings. "We're just another generation moving through this enduring landscape; people have lived here for thousands of years, and it's sustained them. You go up on some of these overlooks and know that so many people have stood there before you and looked at the same scene and looked at the same stars. It helps put life in perspective and puts land in perspective."

Lubinski's delayed career is bringing a new meaning to her life, allowing her to step back and examine what brings her joy. Her paintings are her contribution to society, a way to help people think beyond their own lifespan by seeing their land celebrated through art.

"There's so much here," she says of the magical landscapes she captures. In doing so, she helps us see our very special surroundings with fresh eyes. 

Heidi Griminger Blanke, Ph.D., is a freelance writer with Orah Communications. She sat outside, or at least near an open window, to write most of this article.



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STEPPING UP FOR KIDS

Foster parents provide love and stability for children and families.

BY SHARI HEGLAND
Contributed photos



The Berge family, (from left) daughters Kayla and Haley, Cathy and Jim, have expanded to take in two young girls as foster children.

With nearly grown children and a previous career teaching special education, Cathy Berge of Onalaska wasn't ready to give up on giving back to children. Her solution: become a foster parent.

Now, Berge and her husband, Jim, are fostering their second set of siblings since joining the ranks of La Crosse County's foster parents in 2011. "It was my idea, and my husband agreed," she says. "He knew it was important to me to fill that void."

That desire to be around children also factored into Allison Collins's decision to be licensed as a foster parent along with her husband, Bryan. Collins has worked in child care since high school, including working at a day care center and spending 10 years as a nanny for one family.

"I've wanted to do this for a long time, but Bryan wasn't sure he could do it emotionally," she says. It has been challenging, she acknowledges, but also rewarding watching the brother and sister they have cared for the last six months grow and change. They are 21 months and 8 months old, respectively.

"This is, to me, absolutely perfect," Collins says. "This is the age range I love." It has, however, meant big lifestyle changes for the Onalaska couple. "Our life is completely different," she says.

The child at the center

Diane Hietpas, who is single with no children of her own, also had to make big adjustments to her life when she became licensed in



Bryan and Allison Collins are one set of many Coulee Region foster parents. They have recently opened their home to two young siblings, 8 months and 21 months old.

order to serve as a foster parent to a young man. She first helped him through her job in a local school system when he was 12.

"There was an unusual gravitation, in that he would come to me when things went wrong," she says. When he was unable to continue living at his parents' home, Hietpas was an obvious choice and essentially the only option. "He literally came home with me that night."

While Hietpas is the foster parent, a team of people provides support and assistance for the young man in her care. Mentors take him BMX biking, teachers and social workers provide input and support, and his father is still a part of his life.

"I knew I needed a relationship with his dad," Hietpas says. "I consider us co-parents." She consults his father on a number of decisions and keeps him up to date on what is happening in his son's life.

"It is a system of support, supportive of all parties, with the child at the center," Hietpas says.

Keeping relationships intact

That relationship is key to achieving the ultimate resolution for as many children in foster care as possible: reunification with their families in a way that is healthy for everyone. Approximately 80 percent of children placed out of their home will eventually be reunified with their families.

Berge, who is currently caring for two young girls, tries to involve their families in activities families normally do together.

"It's inviting them to trick-or-treating, or kindergarten carnival," she says. It can mean continuing a previous family tradition of visiting Santa Claus at the La Crosse Children's Museum, she adds.

"It is important that foster families are willing to be flexible, open and nonjudgmental," says Cheryl Howe, unit supervisor at La Crosse County Human Services. "It can be very challenging, but the rewards are great when you see the mother or father and child celebrating."

A system of support

In all of this, caseworkers with La Crosse County Human Services are always available to answer questions and provide support. "I can call, and I know they are going to call me back the same day," Berge says.

The county provides each foster family with two days of respite care each month. "The respite care is very helpful, because you do need that," Berge says. Social workers visit the families at least once a month, also. Families receive a stipend to cover the expenses for each child, including child care expenses if the foster parents work. Social workers point out, however, that it is not meant to be an income for the family.

Couples or individuals interested in becoming foster parents should start by attending a two-hour orientation meeting held monthly by the La Crosse County Human Services Department, which is followed up by two more preplacement sessions.

"It is during these that a family or individual interested in proceeding would get an application," Howe says. The application process includes background checks, references, physicals, proof of pet vaccinations and home studies.

"It involves many home visits to ensure that they are in a good place to foster, that they have income to meet their needs currently," Howe says.

Before taking a placement, families complete a 30-hour foundation course, including learning about how children respond to trauma. Additional training is completed each year.

Many kinds of care

Foster homes may provide either emergency care or continuing care. Emergency care homes are on call for two weeks at a time. They are willing to take a phone call in the middle of the night, Howe says, for a placement that may be an hour or continue for up to 60 days.

"There are also longer-term homes that want to make a difference in the life of a child and are willing to take them for as long as needed," Howe says. While the typical placement length is six to 12 months, some may last for a year or much longer.

Given the potential length of a placement, foster families have input on what ages or genders of children they are most comfortable with, and they can turn down a proposed placement.

Currently, La Crosse County has about 70 foster homes available to take in children. But with an average of 10 children entering care each month, and only eight leaving care, there is always a need for more foster homes, says Howe. "Though we have homes with openings, it doesn't mean we will have a good match. We need a large pool."

While foster parenting, like any type of parenting, has challenges, they are outweighed by the rewards, say these parents.

"The bottom line is that these are great kids who are in circumstances beyond their control," Hietpas says. "One family, one person, can make a difference."

Families and individuals interested in becoming foster parents should call Rhonda Rude, La Crosse County Human Services, at 608-789-4834 to register for an orientation meeting. www.crw.com

Shari Hegland is a freelance writer and editor who lives and works in Holmen.



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Farm camps connect kids to the land and nature.

BY MARTHA KEEFFE

Contributed photos



Kids learn about raising animals, growing food, exploring nature and discovering their own capabilities at farm-centered summer camps like Summer on the Farm, Farm/Art Summer Camp and Rainbow Ridge Farm. Getting dirty and having fun are encouraged.

As a kid, I'd occasionally find a hunk of headcheese in the refrigerator. It belonged to my mom, and though I failed to see the appeal of this gelatinous, old-world meat concoction, she enjoyed it. When my grandmother would visit, they'd share stories of how it was made. This, along with butchering chickens and geese, was a skill she learned during summers spent on her immigrant family's farm. Suffice it to say, I grew up knowing where our bacon came from.

Pam Hartwell, who along with artist Stephanie Sharp offers farm camps at her property called Mom's Farm, agrees. "It's important to have that connection to food and nature, especially as we become more urbanized," she says. "Most kids have an idea of where their food comes from, but they don't share the same appreciation for it as their parents and grandparents. I think that's why there's an interest in farm camps, to recreate that awareness in their children."

In response, farm stays are gaining popularity among camp-goers nationwide. According to 2014 statistics from The American Camp Association, 23 percent of camp programming revolves around farming, ranching and gardening. So if you're in the market for a farm adventure, you need not look far to get the dirt on farming—this is Wisconsin, after all!

Farm/Art Summer Camp at Mom's Farm

"I grew up on this farm and wanted to recreate what I had when I was young," explains Hartwell, who returned to the Dresbach, Minnesota, area after working as a master gardener and sustainability educator in California for 20 years. "I decided to keep the farm going while adding an educational component to it."

She and Sharp hatched the idea to combine what they love—



Farming, kids and art combine harmoniously at local farm camps.

For more information:
Farm/Art Camp at Mom's Farm
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Summer on the Farm!
deeprootscommunityfarm.com
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Rainbow Ridge Farm
rainbowridgefarmcamp.com
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farming, art and nature—and share it with children through summer camps. “It was a natural fit,” explains Sharp. “Nature provides the inspiration to express yourself artistically, and farming gives you a greater appreciation for the world around you.”

During the weeklong camps, kids use found objects like pinecones, sticks and rocks to create art projects, and they learn uses and hazards (think poison ivy!) of indigenous plants. Camp leaders teach the proper execution of farm chores, which include weeding and watering the gardens, milking goats and collecting eggs. “I’ve met adults who have never held a chicken before,” says Hartwell. “So if I can give a kid the opportunity to work closely with an animal, that exposure can be magical.”

In addition, kids are given ample free time to explore the farm and surround themselves with peace and quiet. On the first day, each camper finds his or her own spot to journal or think. “They love it,” adds Sharp. “I think they enjoy the simplicity of it.”

Summer on the Farm!

“At first I was skeptical, but I’ve found that if you introduce kids to the process of gardening, they are more willing to try new foods,” says Ana Skemp, who with her husband, Andy, owns Deep Roots Community Farm just 20 minutes outside of La Crosse. “That’s the spirit of adventurousness I hope to encourage when kids come to our farm for camp.”

As an avid gardener and former teacher at Three Rivers Waldorf School, Skemp has always had a strong desire to share her knowledge of horticulture and biology. “There’s a disconnect between healthy eating and its source,” she explains, noting that kids are often surprised to realize that vegetables straight from the garden can taste so good. “I’ve witnessed campers who were initially hesitant to try something new, pull a vegetable from the garden, eat it and say, ‘I like that!’ I want them to bring that excitement home to their families.”

To expand a child’s taste exposure, Skemp schedules her camps in late summer through fall, when the time is ripe for harvesting. “Plums and cherries from our orchard are abundant, and the kids eat up the grapes, currants and raspberries,” she says. “Years ago, accessibility to these foods would have been more prevalent, but now it’s up to organic farms to fill that void. I want kids to

experience these lovely gifts of nature.”

These gifts of nature extend to the farm’s pastoral surroundings and the animals that inhabit it. Chickens, geese, dogs and cattle call this farm home, but it’s the horses that often steal the show. “They are so gentle and easy that the kids love to feed, water and groom them. I think the interaction between them plants the seeds of respect for other creatures.”

Rainbow Ridge Farm Camp

The first thing you notice when you visit Rainbow Ridge Farm are the goats. They’re in the barns, roaming the hillside or demonstrating incredible feats of balance as they climb the branches on the “monkey tree.”

“Goats are incredible creatures,” says Donna Murphy, who organizes family-friendly events on the farm she owns with Cindy Hoehne. “They’re also quite entertaining. They love to dance and, if you let them, they’ll climb right up on you.”

It’s that enthusiasm for country living that Murphy hopes to inspire in the children who attend her camps. “I think in general people have lost touch with the spontaneity that comes with nature, and that’s why our camps are hands-on,” explains Murphy, who has a degree in recreation administration. “Kids are with the animals, combing and milking them. They get to feed corn to the chickens and turkeys. If I have a project going on, I encourage them to help.”

Past projects have included helping 4-H participants ready their goats for a fair, using rocks to dam up the creek to create a swimming hole and building a bridge. Should a camper fall—or jump—in, that’s OK. “Our safety rules are practical,” stresses Murphy, “but we want kids to explore, eat food from our garden and get dirty.”

“The majority of these kids have never been on a farm,” says Murphy, adding that they are very inquisitive about farm life. “They’ll ask if we have alligators or if animals like music. I love it when they find out our llama, Hercules, loves gospel.” 

Martha Keffe lives and writes in La Crosse. She appreciates those who garden and make their fresh produce available for sale, and she helps her daughter care for her goat and numerous other farm animals on a friend’s farm.

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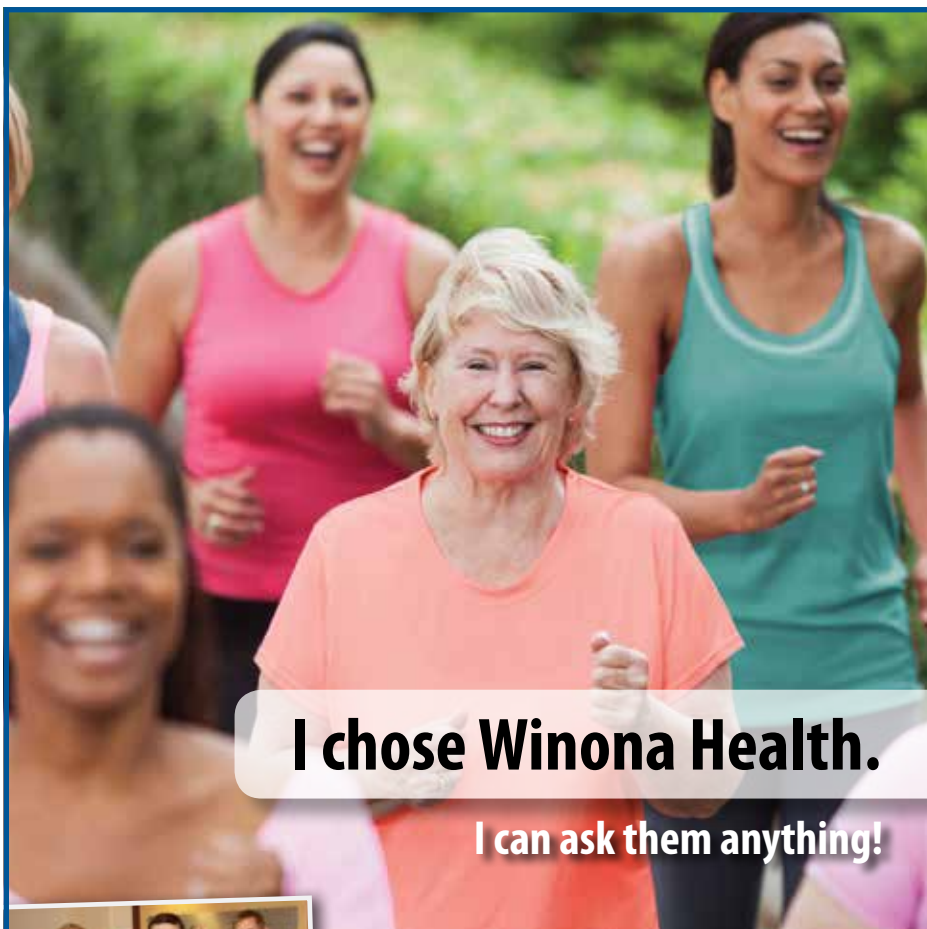
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COMFORT CARE

Hospice care focuses on living, not dying.

BY KIM SEIDEL
Contributed photos

When one hears the word *hospice*, unpleasant images of death may come to mind. Yet for those who have experienced hospice, it can bring happy memories of their loved ones during their final days.

"Hospice care makes it possible to focus on living, not dying," says Waneeta Everson, clinical manager, hospice/palliative, Gundersen Health System. "It's about changing goals from aggressive care to comfort care for patients."

Framing care through the hospice approach includes asking patients what they value and still want to accomplish. "It's typically an event, such as a wedding or a birth, they want to be there for," says Dr. Jackie Yaeger, Gundersen Hospice Medical Director. "We plan how to help patients attend that special event, including conserving their energy and not going to clinic appointments."

Rest for the weary

Hospice is rooted in the ancient practice of giving shelter and rest, or "hospitality," to sick or weary travelers. Today hospice is more than a place. Gundersen Health System Hospice covers a 50-mile radius in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Patients are at home, in an assisted-living or long-term care facility or in the hospital.

Hospice offers support and care for patients with a physician-certified life expectancy of six months or less. Hospice patients are no longer undergoing treatments to cure their illness. Gundersen Hospice serves all ages, including pediatric patients.

The hospice approach provides respite and relief for patients and their caregivers. Education is an important piece of hospice care. Primary caregivers receive bereavement support for 13 months following a loved one's death.

"Why didn't we consider hospice sooner?" is a common question hospice workers hear. "We do our very best to work with all patients in hospice," says Dr. Yaeger. "Yet hospice can be the most valuable for helping patients and their families when they come sooner rather



Waneeta Everson, RN, clinical manager, Gundersen Health System



Jackie Yaeger, MD, Gundersen Hospice Medical Director

than later, when a patient is in crisis, has uncontrolled symptoms or is near death."

Into the next stage of life

Gundersen's average daily hospice census is 50 to 55 patients. Annually, about 425 patients are admitted into hospice. Yaeger and Everson would like more hospice patients admitted earlier. Hospice enables patients to have what most want at the end of life—comfort and dignity.

With early hospice intervention, many symptoms, such as pain, can be controlled so patients don't require hospitalization. Hospice focuses on providing patients physical, emotional and spiritual comfort. "I tell our nurses that we're doing the birth process into the next stage of life," Everson says.

Quality of life is possible through an interdisciplinary team approach that includes doctors, nurses, chaplains, home health aides, social workers, a music therapist, bereavement coordinators and trained volunteers.

Another advantage is assistance is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Team members make regular and urgent visits to patients. A professional also can answer questions or give advice by phone.

Many myths about hospice care prevent people from taking the hospice route sooner rather than later, if at all. One misconception is end-of-life care is expensive. In fact, Medicare covers most of hospice, as do most insurance plans, HMOs and managed-care plans.

With hospice care, there's time for healing among loved ones and the chance to say, "I love you" and "good-bye." 

Kim Seidel is a writer based in Onalaska who most enjoys writing about family and health issues.



SHERI IN THE MORNING

Sheri Lynch of *Bob & Sheri* seeks adventure—in La Crosse.

BY DIANE RAAUM AND BETTY CHRISTIANSEN

Contributed photos



Top left: Magic 105's Deb Brague hosted Sheri Lynch for a morning broadcast (right) during the La Crosse stop of the RV Crazy tour.
Bottom left: Lynch's RV stops in Riverside Park.

If you're a fan of the local radio station Magic 105, chances are you already feel like you know Sheri Lynch very, very well. A handful of local fans of the Charlotte, North Carolina-based *Bob & Sheri* show—including *Coulee Region Women* staff—got the chance to know her a bit better when she swung through La Crosse, with her husband and nine children in tow, on her cross-country RV Crazy tour.

If you like Lynch on the air, you'd love her in person. She's just as warm and funny as she comes across over radio waves, and even when broadcasting, she talks with her hands, wildly.

OK, we have to ask: How can you have all these people in an RV and not kill each other?

The kids are really good travelers! We have high expectations of them—not that they'll behave, but that they'll have a sense of adventure. That's the whole point of being alive—to have a little adventure every day. For example, we're going to get our picture taken with that big fish in Onalaska today. We're very excited about that.

Do you bring that sense of adventure to your *Bob & Sheri* material?

Basically, we live our lives, then we put it on the radio. I'm really excited about the little things in life. If you add up the "big things" in life—seeing the Eiffel Tower, things like that—you come up with 10 or 12 over the course of your life. You'll miss a lot if you're not looking for the little things.

One of the big things I've learned is that, in America, we have it all wrong. We worship celebrities, when the really interesting people are the ones you meet in the grocery stores and gas stations. People say that our values are wrong—they're not, but we're celebrating the wrong things.

The most humbling, most rewarding things I've learned when meeting listeners from all over the country is that we're all the same—we're all connected, having the same experiences, all caught up in this wonderful chaos.

How did the *Bob & Sheri* show begin?

About 20 years ago, when I was right out of college, I was asked to help with a radio station's marketing campaign. Afterward, they took me out to lunch and offered me a job—they offered me a show. I was a TV writer and producer. I'd never been a performer and was actually shy. I figured I'd do it a year and get fired.

Do you and co-host Bob get along in everyday life? If you have differences, how do you work them out?

We really are best friends, but we're totally different people, which might be why we get along so well. He's focused on the past and the future, and I'm all about the moment. We manage differences by me telling him what to do. (crw)

The tag line of Bob & Sheri is "Real people, real laughs," and Diane Raam and Betty Christiansen enjoyed both in this interview.

FROM COTTAGE TO HOME

The 2013 Parade of Homes winner blends family memories with modern comfort.

BY ASHLEY REYNOLDS

Photos by Bruce Defries Photography



The original fireplace, built of stone Carole's father picked by hand, and Ron's much-desired garage are two of the hallmarks of the Jones's Lake Onalaska cottage remodel.

Welcoming is the first word that comes to mind when visiting Carole and Ron Jones's home. A cottage converted into a forever home, this 2013 Parade of Homes winner is at the intersection of old-fashioned lake house and modern relaxation. As members of the family who has owned this cottage for three generations, Carole and Ron were able to perfectly transform it into something they and their family could continue to be proud of.

Then and now

Just by walking into this beautiful home right on Lake Onalaska, you can feel the importance it holds to the Joneses. The charming, bright interior and the touches of lake house décor radiate a sense of nostalgia and comfort with a touch of modernism, qualities that make this home so special.

Carole eagerly shows old pictures of the original cottage to demonstrate how much has changed between then and now. The original building, which was on the property when the family first bought it, was a modest space with no running water and an outhouse; nonetheless, it had been a peaceful getaway for their family over the years. She then shares photos of the transformation her parents made

on their 25th wedding anniversary in 1968, when they made a few more renovations, the biggest one being the impressive fireplace that serves as the heart of the home to this day.

"As people are gone, you look at things and go, 'Well, that was important to them, so it is important to us,'" Carole says, reminiscing about their decision to renovate the old cottage rather than tearing it down and starting over. "My father hand-picked the stones that went into that fireplace, and I just couldn't see that go. I knew that we just couldn't tear it down."

The history and memories surrounding their home show why certain pieces of it hold so much significance. "We wanted to stay within the footprint of the original building," explains Ron. Carole adds, "We wanted to leave that cottage feel so that when family visited, they still felt that this was the family cottage, while also being our forever home." The original ceiling and the fireplace were on the list of things they did not want to change, but another thing they absolutely did not want to alter was the old shuffleboard court at the back of the house. "It is one of the few features of the original cottage left, and I didn't want it touched," explains Carole. "I wanted that to stay exactly the same." Tradition is important to them as a family.



Modern additions, like a large and user-friendly kitchen (top left) and a comfortable sunroom with vast lake views (bottom left) cohabit easily with original features, such as the hand-built stone fireplace that has always been the heart of the home.

Some necessary changes

There is no hiding the history and memories this home holds among all its original design, but many new features give it the modern twist necessary to fit Carole and Ron's lifestyle. Of course, some updates to an older home like this one are necessary, but Carole and Ron had a couple of other must-haves on their list when they began working with contractor Tony Szak. One item was more windows: Carole wanted to bring more light in and make it easier to see the lake. "You can never have too-big windows or too much light," explains Carole, who decided to put big windows or sliding doors in every room, both upstairs and down. "I also wanted to make sure that every room in the house had windows facing the lake. After all, people come here to be by the lake and see the lake," she continues, making it evident that their family's opinion and comfort were a big factor in their decision-making process. Even though their kids are grown and have moved on to their own adventures, making them feel a part of

this huge renovation to their beloved family cottage was essential.

As part of the 700-square-foot addition to the house, the couple added a charming sunroom with a spectacular view of the lake, which Carole claims is her favorite room in the house. "I just love this sunroom because it always feels like you are outside. I can sit out here and watch the snow in the wintertime and feel perfectly comfortable," says Carole.

Ron had simpler desires. "I was disappointed that we didn't have room for a three-car garage, but a two-car garage is better than no garage! I'd have to say that is one of my favorite parts of the renovation," he explains as Carole laughs.

Getting through the renovation

Getting their dream house put together was neither a quick nor an easy task. As with any renovation, all of the beautiful features and charming details came with hard decisions and stressful situations. "This was a wonderful project, but I wouldn't want to do it again," says Carole. "There were so many

decisions and so many times I changed my mind. I just have to say it is a great gift to have a husband who trusts your decisions and lets you do what you want instead of constantly fighting you on little things."

"Or who doesn't care," Ron jokes. "I have a garage!"

Making decisions wasn't the only difficult part; dealing with multiple subcontractors could be challenging, too. But the couple made the best of every situation. "The real way to achieve success when working with subcontractors is cookies," Ron says as Carole laughs. "My wife made so many wonderful cookies, and there is power in that!"

"Overall, I can't think of anything I'd change. Tony was able to modernize this for us, and it still feels like a lake house. I'm very happy with it," says Carole. All of their hard work was worthwhile. It truly is a gorgeous, history-rich home fit for some wonderful people. 

Ashley Reynolds is a journalism student at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and an intern for Coulee Region Women.

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CANINE COMPASSION

Debi McKenney and her dog touch lives through the Ambassadors of Love pet therapy program.

BY LEAH CALL
Contributed photos



Debi McKenney (in blue) and Rollie charm and warm the hearts of residents of Hearten House I.

When Debi McKenney and her husband, Dennis, take their 3-year-old boxer, Rollie, for a walk, it's not uncommon for people to recognize him. That's because Rollie is a pet therapy dog, part of the Ambassadors of Love pet therapy program at the Coulee Region Humane Society.

The McKenneys and Rollie make weekly Monday evening visits to Bethany Lutheran Homes' Hearten House I memory care facility in La Crosse and biweekly visits to the La Crosse County Juvenile Detention Center, in addition to numerous appearances at community events throughout the year.

A pet therapy team

McKenney's involvement in the pet therapy program began as a desire to pay it forward after Dennis suffered a heart attack and stroke, which required an extended hospital stay in 2005. "Those were tough times, but the highlight of my day was when the therapy dog would come in to visit us," recalls McKenney. "That was my first exposure to therapy dogs."

Two years later, McKenney enrolled her boxer puppy, Maggie, in classes at the humane society. McKenney and her husband, who is disabled from the stroke, took Maggie through the necessary training

to ultimately pass the Good Citizenship Test and receive an official certification as a pet therapy dog in 2010.

"Being a pet therapy team was something my husband and I and Maggie could do together," says McKenney.

Maggie was a natural as a therapy dog, very people-oriented and friendly. Unfortunately, she died from cancer one year later, a loss that is still difficult for McKenney to discuss without a few tears.

"We decided at that point that we needed another dog—and we needed it right away," says McKenney.

That dog was Rollie, who, like Maggie, took classes and became a pet therapy dog.

A mission of love

Therapy dogs in the Ambassadors of Love program must be at least 1 year old. They must be spayed or neutered and calm around other dogs. Humans in the program must be 18 or older and willing to volunteer their time to help others.

The dogs brighten the days of those they visit, providing unconditional love, acceptance, comfort and safety. McKenney sees a visit from Rollie as a source of comfort and laughter for the residents of Hearten House I. "Rollie likes to give kisses, and that gets lots of

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giggles," she says. "The other day, (a resident with Alzheimer's disease) was having a tough day. She was crying and confused, but when she heard Rollie, she came down from her room, and he brought a smile to her face."

Residents at the facility look forward to Rollie's visits, says McKenney. "They remember Rollie's name even if they don't remember ours."

Youth at the detention center also enjoy visits from Rollie. "The kids like to see Rollie do his tricks, and sometimes they will get on the floor and cuddle with him or wrestle with him," notes McKenney.

Rollie, too, enjoys his job as a therapy dog. "He knows when it is Monday or Thursday," says McKenney. "He is whining at the door and ready to go." **(crw)**

Westby-based writer Leah Call shares her office with her dogs, Charlie and Tug.

Ambassadors of Love

The Ambassadors of Love pet therapy program at the Coulee Region Humane Society was started in 1985 by Carol Phillips and her yellow lab, Fred. Today, about 70 teams touch more than 60,000 people annually in the Coulee Region.

Therapy teams visit area hospitals, nursing homes, schools, libraries and nearly 250 community events annually.

Those interested in certifying their dog as a pet therapy dog and becoming part of a team should contact the Coulee Region Humane Society at 608-781-4014.

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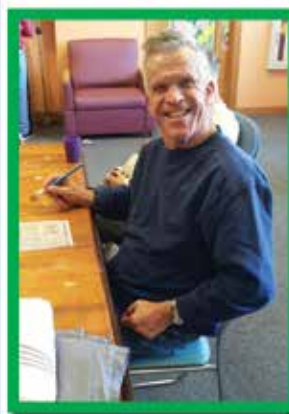
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A NATURAL REFUGE

The Visitor Center on Brice Prairie offers much for wildlife lovers.

BY JESSIE FOSS
Contributed photos



Left and center: Kids get hands-on education about native wildlife at the Visitor Center on Brice Prairie (photos by Jerry Weigel). Right: Young birders explore the prairie (photo by Owen Johnson).

Located just outside of Onalaska, the Visitor Center on Brice Prairie is home to countless varieties of wildlife, wildflowers and other natural prairie grasses. The area is also home to the actual visitor center, a nearly 2-year-old Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certified building.

The property is situated on the La Crosse District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, the most visited refuge in the United States. It spans 261 miles from Wabasha, Minnesota, to Rock Island, Illinois, and about 3.7 million people visit the area each year. Between 800,000 and 900,000 visitors make their way through the La Crosse District each year.

Many of those people don't even realize they're spending time in the refuge, nor do they visit the visitor center, says Paula Ogden-Muse, Visitor Services Manager of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, La Crosse District. But those who do stop in are in for a special treat. The visitor center features animal exhibits, a river walk and interactive displays. Many of these exhibits are meant to be hands-on, not hands-off, says Ogden-Muse.

"The center was really designed with kids in mind," she says. "We wanted this to be a place where families would want to come and teachers would want to bring their students."

Exploring the prairie

One way students get involved at the refuge is through the Classroom on the Prairie program. The refuge has teamed up with Sand Lake Elementary School to offer a program to three third-grade classrooms. Students spend time at the refuge learning about the

prairie by engaging in activities like gathering and planting seeds and dissecting owl pellets.

While the students spend as much time outside as possible, they can also learn in the beautiful new building.

Adults also have plenty of activities to choose from at the refuge. More than 2 miles of trails—some graveled and some paved—wind throughout the refuge. Gravel paths are open to both feet and paws. Birding is a popular activity, and Ogden-Muse says photographers are also starting to discover the beauty at the refuge.

Honoring the environment

Something that makes the building so special is its Silver LEED certification. LEED is a certification program that recognizes best-in-class building strategies and practices. Some of the ways Visitor Center on Brice Prairie has earned this certification is by using water from the roof to flush the building's toilets, solar panels to heat its water, photovoltaic cells to provide about 30 percent of the necessary energy and geothermal energy to heat and cool the building.

The Visitor Center on Brice Prairie's address is N5727 County Road Z, Onalaska. More information about the refuge can be found at www.fws.gov/refuge/upper_mississippi_river or by contacting 608-779-2399. 

Jessie Foss is a freelance writer who lives in La Crosse. She really enjoyed her time visiting the Visitor Center on Brice Prairie and would recommend that anyone check it out.

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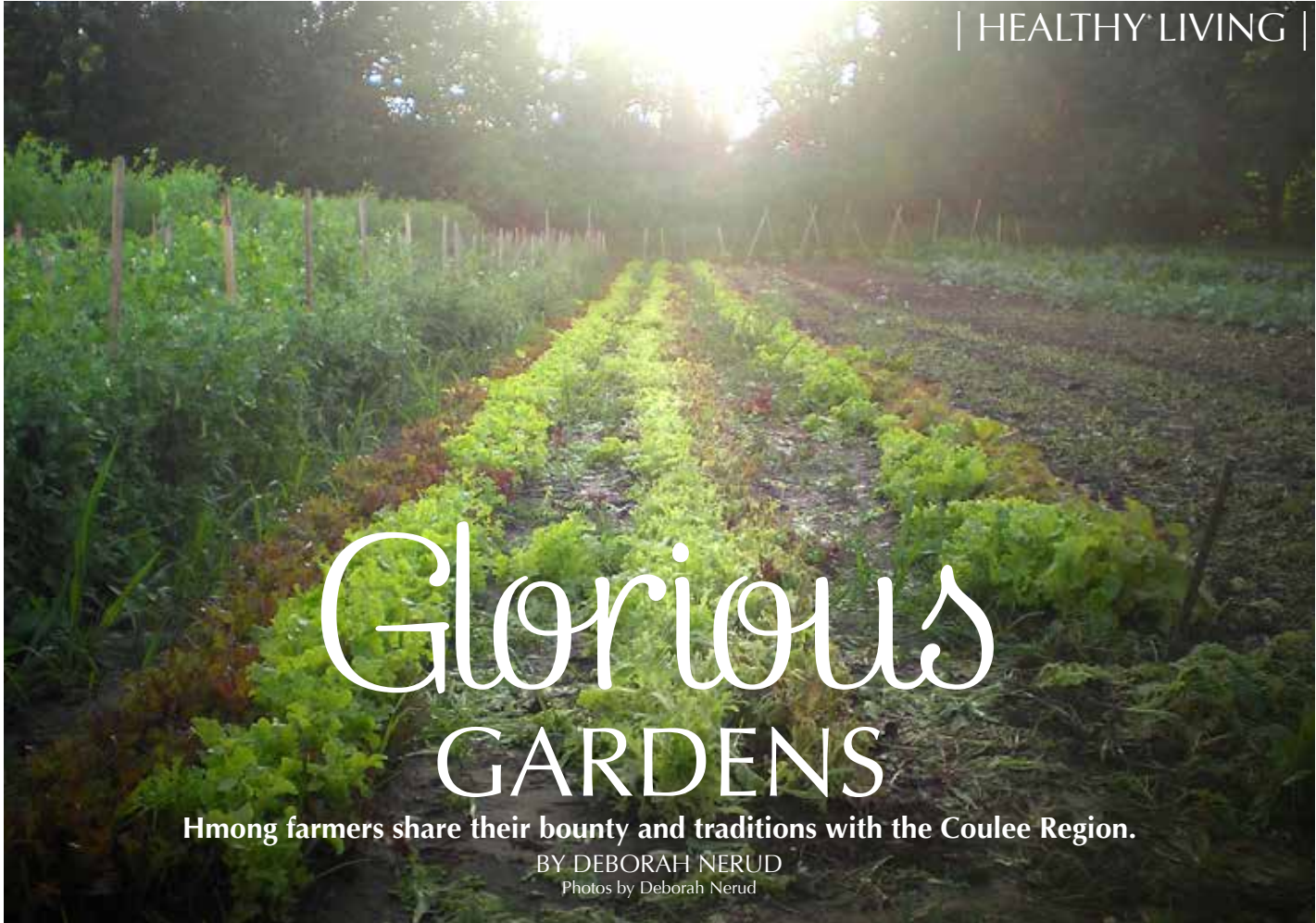
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Glorious GARDENS

Hmong farmers share their bounty and traditions with the Coulee Region.

BY DEBORAH NERUD
Photos by Deborah Nerud

For most green thumbs in the Midwest, having a vegetable garden—be it straw bale, square foot, container, terrace or urban—is a satisfying way to enjoy a perfect tomato, a healthy bunch of kale and a steady supply of rhubarb. Given this, it's easy to take our soil and space for granted; whether we're growing on our patios or in our backyards, gardening in the city tends to be more of a hobby than a means to basic sustenance. But for Hmong farmers in our community, small-scale farming is far more profound.

According to Xiong Xiong, co-executive director for the Hmoob Cultural and Community Agency (HCCA), for Hmong families who garden and support themselves by selling their produce at local and regional farmers' markets, growing food embraces the basic tenets of self-sustainability, food sovereignty and deep-seeded environmentalism. "With limited access to jobs, frequently due to a language barrier, most Hmong families that choose to garden to support their families are small-scale," Xiong says, "but their work involves the whole family, and it's really intense." She adds that farming is the main source of income for these families—even though they often barely break even. Although the farms may be small-scale, the work is arduous and done by hand with little to no machinery; oftentimes, little more than a mechanized tiller is employed.

Carrying out a tradition, by hand

For Der Vang, this is a way of life that allows her the independence and ability to do what she knows she's good at. A farmer for five years

on land just outside of Holmen, she grew up in Laos learning how to farm from her parents. Everything here, just as it was in Laos, is done by hand—the planting, harvesting, washing and trimming—and no pesticides are used. Translated through her son, Toua Yang, Vang adds that "we plant in quantity so that the majority will be OK." For Yang, 18, farming is a chore. "It's just something you're expected to do," he says. "The whole family helps because there's always so much work." Vang and her family sell their produce at multiple farmers' markets and stands four days out of the week, traveling as far as Princeton, Minnesota, where sales, which average \$400 to \$500 per day, according to Yang, are twice as high as they are in the Coulee Region. Vang adds, "Anyone can do farming, but what we do, by hand, is something different."

The immense amount of time that goes into such labors is the main reason Cathy Lee, office assistant at the HCCA, and the first in her family to be raised in America, chooses gardening as a hobby, rather than as a way of life. She used to farm and baby-sit, helping to raise the children and the animals on her family farm, but decided to go to school and find different work, adopting a lifestyle more American than the one her parents were raised with. She adds that there is a definite cultural and age difference that comes into play among the younger generations, as they choose whether or not to continue a farming tradition. "I don't think (my) generation will work as hard as the elder generation, who are very geared toward taking care of large families," Lee says. "I think they are more



Der Vang and her son, Toua Yang, sell their produce at several area farmers' markets.



Lai Her and Shao Her tend crops in their vast garden.

Farmers' markets where Der Vang sells:

Wednesday mornings, Saturdays and Sundays at Northside Shopko
 Wednesdays at Holmen Festival Foods, 3-7 p.m.
 Thursdays at HCCA, 1815 Ward Ave., 7 a.m.-4 p.m.

Farmers' markets where Lai Her and Shao Her sell:

Wednesday mornings at Northside Shopko
 Wednesdays at Holmen Festival Foods, 3-7 p.m.
 Saturday at Riverside Park, 7 a.m.-12 p.m.
 Sunday at Onalaska Festival Foods, 8 a.m.-1 p.m.

likely to decide to choose to just take care of themselves."

This generational shift, between youth and elders, between farming for sustenance and acclimating to a culture of ready-made and store-bought, has been the primary topic of discussion at the HCAA Youth/Elders Garden project. By spending time with elders in the gardens, Hmong youth can foster a better understanding of their elders and why gardening is considered a way of life for so many. Whether they choose to pursue a career in nursing or in agriculture, the goal of the Youth/Elders Garden is to advance education about a way of life that remains important and vital to the Hmong community.

Engaging a new generation

Lai Her and Shao Her, both veteran gardeners, are aware of the value of having the younger generation in the fields. Growing more than 30 varieties of produce and flowers on their Holmen farm, Shao Her contends that more help in the field would be great, but "younger kids are of the new style—they don't like it out here. Too many bugs and too hot."

Shao Her, who retired from Aramark in 2013, continues working in the garden because she enjoys it, but she definitely concedes that it is a lot of work. "It's nice when (the kids) come and help." To help encourage this, HCCA elder and youth advocates work to promote continued and open communication between the generations.

Mai Xiong, the interim Family Strengthening Advocate for HCCA, observes that "to be (in America) and to think of farming as a hobby or a luxury is a common theme." She hopes to see Hmong youth continue an interest in their elders' choices to farm, to preserve family tradition and to incorporate a strong sense of self-sustainability. For Der Vang and her seven children, who all help in the garden, farming is not just a business; it's a way of life. 

Deborah Nerud is a seven-year urban gardener with a penchant for Seed Savers' Scarlet Nantes carrots and Amish Paste tomatoes. She finds that pulling weeds and playing in the dirt is good for the soul and encourages her two children to do the same.

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Helping People Affected by Mental Illness

Patti Jo Severson, MS, RD, health educator, Gundersen Health System Behavioral Health, was recently recognized for her advocacy for people and families affected by mental illness.

Severson's work was highlighted as Gundersen Inpatient Behavioral Health received special recognition from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

Severson has served on the La Crosse County and Wisconsin NAMI boards of directors, is an organizing member of the Family to Family support group, created the NAMI Parents and Teachers as Allies program and is an original member and president of the Mental Health Coalition of the Greater La Crosse Area.



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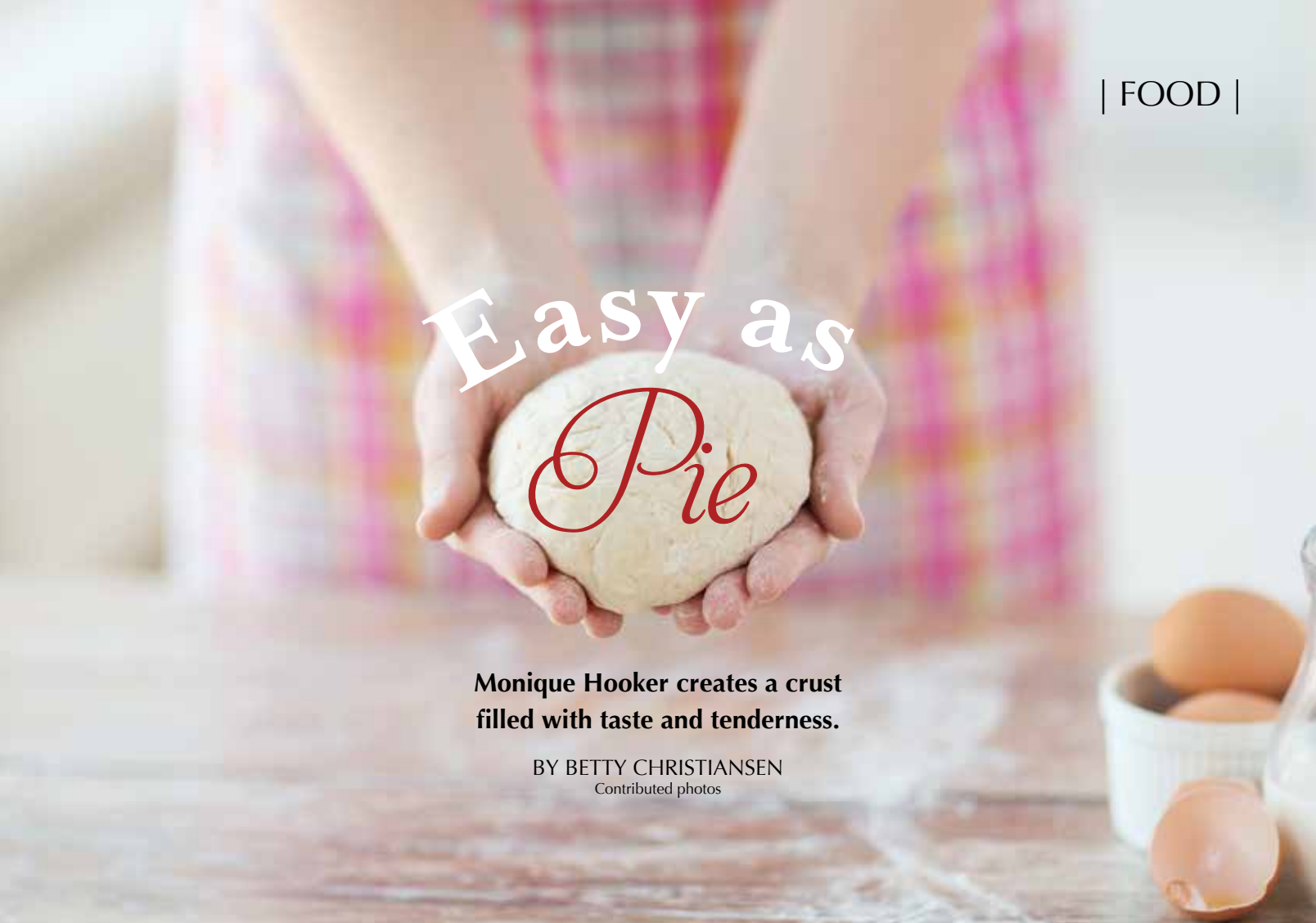
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Easy as Pie

**Monique Hooker creates a crust
filled with taste and tenderness.**

BY BETTY CHRISTIANSEN
Contributed photos

Close your eyes, and think of pie. What comes to mind? It might be your grandmother and the incredible apple pie she made from an old family recipe. Or memories of Thanksgiving, maybe Christmas. Or the delight of snuggling up to your mother's side, sprinkling pie dough scraps with cinnamon and sugar for a quick treat while dessert is baking.

That's Monique Hooker's point: Pie evokes memories—of warmth, of tenderness, of love.

And that's the key reason she created her own frozen piecrust, sold in many stores in the Coulee Region and beyond. Everyone loves pie—but who has the time, or the talent, to mix up a piecrust from scratch, roll it out by hand and painstakingly lift or lattice that fussy top crust? A whole generation, she fears, is growing up without that basic comfort food: homemade pie, fresh out of the oven.

Pie and beyond

A local “celebrity chef” and a passionate advocate of whole, locally grown, good food, Hooker created this crust—and her company, Got2HavPie, which she runs with business partner Jessica Rizzolo—to give busy people a healthy, organic alternative to commercially made frozen piecrusts. “People have to have choices,” Hooker insists, “and healthier choices.”

The crusts come in four different varieties: Simple Pie Crusts,

Puff Pastry Squares, Puff Pastry Rounds and Sweet Short Pie Crusts. Each one boasts just a handful of simple, locally produced, organic ingredients: flour, Organic Valley butter, vinegar, a pinch of salt. Only one, the Sweet Short crust, contains sugar.

The Simple and Sweet Short crusts are perfect for pies, but Hooker urges her customers to be creative, and to look at pie in a new way. The puff pastries, for example, make a flaky, delicious alternative to pizza crust, as demonstrated in the Mediterranean-Style Pizza featured here. “Just turn your oven on to 425°, open your refrigerator and see what's in there,” advises Hooker. “Learn to be curious. Get in trouble! Make mistakes!” In terms of cooking for ourselves, especially when getting kids involved in the delight of meal-making, “this is what we have to get back to. Cooking is an art; this piecrust is just a tool for becoming creative.” Add a salad to this creative endeavor, and even the busiest mom or dad can put a healthy, seasonal, complete meal on the table, with some family fun thrown in for good measure.

Everyone gets a piece

Best of all, you can have your pie and feel good about it, too. Got2HavPie offers a wholesome alternative for the consumer, but the benefits go far beyond that. The locally produced, organic ingredients not only support local farmers, but also promote healthier land. The production, too, is local, taking place at the Kickapoo Culinary



Monique Hooker (left) and Jessica Rizzolo bring piecrust and inspiration to the Coulee Region through their company, Got2HavPie.

Center in Gays Mills, with much of the work done by adults with varying abilities employed through the Vernon Area Rehabilitation Center (VARC) and Riverfront. Some work is also done by local high school students that Hooker mentors. The crusts are shaped with Amish-made cutters she designed herself. Each crust is hand-cut and hand-folded.

This is Hooker's way of giving back to the community, something that's in her very nature. "A major goal was making a product that would serve the area," Hooker says of her crusts. "We're bringing a sense of cooperation to the kitchen, our employees, our producers and our distributors.

"As a woman," she continues, "I understand comfort, health and the tenderness that is cultivated around the table." It's this tenderness that permeates every bite of her pie.

STRAWBERRY-RHUBARB CROUSTADE

Serves 8.

- 5 cups strawberry-rhubarb compote (see pie recipe on page 39, or substitute 5 cups of other fruit)
- ½ cups honey
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 12-inch Got2HavPie Sweet Short Pie Crust
- ¼ cup cold butter
- 1 egg plus 1 T water (for egg wash)
- ½ cup sugar (for sprinkling on top)

Remove piecrust from freezer and place in refrigerator overnight, then bring to temperature just before using.

Preheat oven to 400°F. (If substituting other fruits, like peaches or plums, slice them first). Place the fruit in a bowl and sprinkle with honey and vanilla extract. Toss gently, then set aside.

Place the dough on a baking sheet. Arrange the fruit on top, leaving 2 inches all around free of fruit. Fold the dough up on the sides and pinch to make a decorative edging. Brush with egg wash and sprinkle with ½ cup of sugar.

Place in oven and bake for 45 minutes. Transfer to serving platter. Let cool lightly before serving.





STRAWBERRY-RHUBARB PIE

Serves 8.

- 2 12-inch Got2HavPie Simple Pie Crust rounds
- 4 cups fresh chopped rhubarb
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 cups fresh strawberries, halved
- 1 vanilla bean, split, or 1 T vanilla extract
- 2 T honey (optional)
- 2 T unsalted butter
- 2 T cold water
- 1 egg plus 1 T water (for egg wash)
- 2 T sugar (for sprinkling on top)

Remove piecrust from freezer and place in refrigerator overnight, then bring to temperature just before using.

Preheat oven to 375°F. Place the fruits, sugar and split vanilla bean or vanilla extract in a large pan; cook until rhubarb is somewhat soft and just starting to fall apart. Place the mixture over a strainer and drain the juice (reserve for use as pancake syrup or serve over ice cream).

Line a pie pan with one round of piecrust. Fill with the drained fruit and drizzle with honey (optional). Dot with pieces of butter, then cover with the remaining piecrust round. Cut an X in the center to allow steam to escape. Brush lightly with egg wash and decorate with piecrust trimmings, if desired, or brush with egg wash and sprinkle with reserved sugar.

Set on a sheet pan and place in oven. Bake for 45 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from the oven and set on a rack to cool.

MEDITERRANEAN-STYLE PIZZA

Serves 6.

- 1 12-inch Got2HavPie Puff Pastry Round or Puff Pastry Square

- 1 T olive oil

Toppings:

- ¼ cup olive oil
- ½ lb. fresh spinach (about 3 cups)
- ¼ lb. fresh shredded kale (about 2 cups)
- 1 cup fontina or provolone cheese, shredded
- 1 cup black olives, sliced
- 2 cups seeded and diced or sliced tomatoes
- ½ cup chopped basil
- 2 T pesto or other herbs
- ½ cup each of grated Parmesan, ricotta and goat cheese

Remove puff pastry from freezer and place in refrigerator overnight, then bring to temperature just before using.

Preheat oven to 425°F. Coat a sheet pan with 1 T olive oil

Mix ¼ cup of olive oil with pesto or other herbs, then spread on top of the puff pastry. Add all the toppings*, in no special order, and finish with chopped basil and cheeses. Place in oven for 20 minutes.

*Use your creativity! Variations in toppings are endless, but avoid using a liquid sauce, like tomato sauce, right against the dough, which will cause the crust to become soggy.

Betty Christiansen loves to make pie, but her husband is better at crust. She is editor of Coulee Region Women.



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Photos by Jordana Snyder Photography

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Modeled by Melissa Klein.

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GLAMPING

High-style camping is all about family, says Sharon Tobin.

BY JULIE NELSON
Contributed photos

Ah, camping. Pitching a tent, rolling out your sleeping bag and lying down at night surrounded by fresh air. Not your idea of heaven? You're not alone. A number of Coulee Region women are embracing the idea of "glamping"—or camping in style.

When Sharon Tobin and her husband, Tim, go camping, it's in a 40-foot motorhome, fully equipped with air conditioning, heat, a flush toilet, a bathroom you can actually turn around in, a shower stall larger than many found in Europe, a queen-size bed and a full-size refrigerator. The kitchen boasts ample counter space, and the living room, when the slides are fully extended, offers 11½ feet of spacious comfort. The cockpit is more like a command center, with multiple functions, including the vehicle's stereo system, available at the touch of a button. The passenger seat is a full recliner with a foot rest.

With two TV sets and a satellite dish, the Tobins never need to leave their camper. So what's the point in camping? "I'm like a turtle," says Sharon. "I like to have my home on my back. I can sleep in my own bed every night, and I don't have to drag my clothes in and out of a hotel."

Glamping family-style

But the real point of camping, as far as Sharon is concerned, is family. When the Tobins were first married, Sharon's parents purchased a campground in Wisconsin Dells, and Sharon, Tim and their two sons spent every weekend at Stand Rock campground. They played outdoors in the water when it was warm and gathered around the camper's indoor table with a deck of cards when it rained.

Fast forward to 2011. Sharon and Tim celebrated their 45th anniversary that year and wanted to do something special to celebrate the milestone. The first idea, taking the entire family on a cruise, was discarded as being too temporary. Instead, they settled on something that would allow Sharon and Tim to spend more time with their grandchildren and allow their sons to enjoy quality time with their own families and friends: They bought a motorhome.

After a year and a half of searching the Internet, Sharon found just



One of the very best features of Sharon Tobin's 40-foot motorhome is an ample kitchen with a full-size refrigerator. You can't squeeze that into a tent.

what she wanted from a seller in Florida. She and Tim hopped a plane and spent two weeks driving their new toy home to La Crosse. Now fully stocked with quality cookware, thanks to son Troy, whose hobby is gourmet cooking, and top-notch technology, thanks to son Tracy, who works at 3RT Networks, the camper is the hub of family trips and family plans. This fall it will be tailgating at Packer and Badger games and will travel to Texas in time for NASCAR. Sharon and Tim won't be on any of those trips; it will be their sons, their wives, their kids and their friends. And that's the point. Even though they won't all be together, the entire family will have stories of the camper they will share and laugh about for years to come.

"It's all about sharing," says Sharon. "That's when it's fun." **(crw)**

Julie Nelson is still sleeps in a tent when she goes camping, but has to admit the "glamper" looks mighty comfortable. Julie is the public relations director at The Salvation Army.



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& even better day!*

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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., 608-519-0548, aauwlacrosse@hotmail.com, 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, 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 1-7 with adult, every Fri., 10:30 a.m.

Little Learners for ages 1-7 with adult, every Thurs., 10:30 a.m.

Coulee Region Professional Women (CRPW) 4th Tues. of each month, Pogreba Restaurant, 5:30 p.m. Courtney Kubly, 608-516-6916, kubly22@yahoo.com.

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

La Crosse Toastmasters Club 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, 7 p.m., Gundersen Health System Urgent Care Bldg., Basement, 1830 S. Ave., La Crosse.

League of Women Voters 2nd Tues. of each month, noon, Radisson Hotel, Nancy Hill, 608-782-1753 nfhill@centurytel.net.

NAMI Family Support Group 2nd Mon. of each month, 6:30 p.m., South Side Neighborhood Center, 1300 S. 6th St., La Crosse.

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.

Onalaska Toastmasters Club 1st and 3rd Mon. of each month, noon-1 p.m., Globe University, Onalaska.

Valley View Kiddie Crew 1st and 3rd Tues. of each month, Valley View Mall Food Court, 10:30-11:30 a.m., myvalleyview.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 in Networking and Support (WINS) 2nd Wed. of each month, Hayze's, noon-1 p.m., Shari Hopkins, 608-784-3904, shopkins@couleebank.net.

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

Women's Alliance of La Crosse (WAL) 2nd Thurs. of each month, noon, The Waterfront Restaurant, Patti Bartsch, 608-799-8326, nu@naturallyunbridled.com.

CALENDAR EVENTS

Aug. 4-6, Kids Cuisine Day Camp, 8:30-11:30 a.m., ages 4-7, Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

Aug. 8-10, Irishfest, Southside Oktoberfest Grounds, La Crosse.

Aug. 9, Ride for Sight, 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m., La Crosse River State Trail Parking Lot, County Hwy B., La Crosse.

Aug. 9, Senior Expo presented by Coulee Region RSVP, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Aug. 9, 7th Annual Three Rivers Rodeo Log Rolling Tournament, 10 a.m., Great River Landing, Onalaska.

Aug. 11-14, Spanish Day Camp, 8:30-11:30 a.m., ages 4-7, Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

Aug. 15, Friday Foodies Day Camp, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., ages 7-12, Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

Aug. 15, Night Out at the Museum, 5:30-8 p.m., Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

Aug. 15-17, Kornfest, Village Park, Holmen.

Aug. 18-22, Dogs, Dinos and Bugs Day Camp, 8:30-11:30 a.m., ages 4-7, Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

Aug. 20, Red Cross Blood Drive, 12-4:30 p.m., Valley View Mall, Center Court, myvalleyview.com.

Aug. 20, Vernon County Volunteer Coordinators Real Colors Interactive Seminar, Vernon Memorial Hospital Conference Rooms, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Aug. 20, YWCA Pie Auction, 5 p.m., Freight House, La Crosse, ywcax.org.

Aug. 22-24, Great River Folk Festival, Riverside Park, La Crosse.

Aug. 23, Back to School Block Party, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Aug. 23, "30 Seconds in Winona" Film Festival, 7:30 p.m., Lake Park, Winona.

Aug. 29, SHEL Concert, 7:30-9:30 p.m., Pump House, La Crosse, thepumphouse.org.

Aug. 29-Sept. 31, *Sesame Street Live: Let's Dance!* multiple showings, La Crosse Center.

Aug. 29-Sept. 1, La Crosse Area Labor Day Weekend Bicycle Festival, Cameron Park, downtown La Crosse, bicycledlacrosse.com.

Sept. 2, The Moody Blues, 7:30 p.m., La Crosse Center.

Sept. 4-6, 11-13, 18-20, Heart of La Crosse Comedy Sketch, 7:30-9:30 p.m., Pump House, La Crosse, thepumphouse.org.

Sept. 5-7, 10-14, 17-21, *Mary Poppins*, 7:30 p.m. Fri. and Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Sept. 5-7, Elvis Explosion, Fri. 7 p.m., Sat. 2:30 p.m., and 7 p.m., finals Sun. 1 p.m., La Crosse Center.

Sept. 6, Steppin' Out in Pink, 9 a.m., Gundersen-La Crosse Campus Walking Trail, La Crosse, steppinoutinpink.org.

Sept. 6-7, Made in Wisconsin Show, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Sept. 10, Cool Struttin': A Night of Jazz with Dave Marck, 7:30-9 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Main Theatre, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Sept. 12-14, Gingerbread Arts and Crafts Show, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Sept. 13, Kaleidoscope Tour Color Run, 8:00 a.m., Riverside Park, La Crosse.

Sept. 13, Grow Your Brain Fall Farm Festival, 3-7 p.m., Deep Roots Community Farm, W4406 County Road YY, La Crosse, growyourbrainla.org.

Sept. 14, Chad Erickson Memorial DuRunRun, ages 2-12, 8 a.m.-12 p.m., Riverside Park, La Crosse.

Sept. 18-21, Applefest, La Crescent.

Sept. 20, Local Lupus Alliance 6-Hour Run/Walk, 10 a.m., Goose Island Park, La Crosse, loallupus.org.

Sept. 20-28, Fall Auto Show, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Sept. 21, The Magic of Bill Blagg Live, 7:30 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Sept. 25-28, Oktoberfest, La Crosse.

Sept. 26, Night Out at the Museum, 5:30-8 p.m., Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

Sept. 26-Oct. 5, *A Wrinkle in Time*, 7:30 p.m. Fri. and Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Sept. 27, Maple Leaf Parade, 10 a.m., La Crosse.

Sept. 27, 2014 Walk to End Alzheimer's, 10 a.m., Jaycee Shelter, Lake Park Complex, Winona, 507-289-3950 or deddy@alz.org.

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



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