

coulee region

women

AREA HOMEOWNERS MAGAZINE

COMMUNITY

Jennifer Livingston:
A Hometown Heroine

Behind the Scenes:
The New La Crosse
Community Theatre

The Generous Home
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Steppin' Out with
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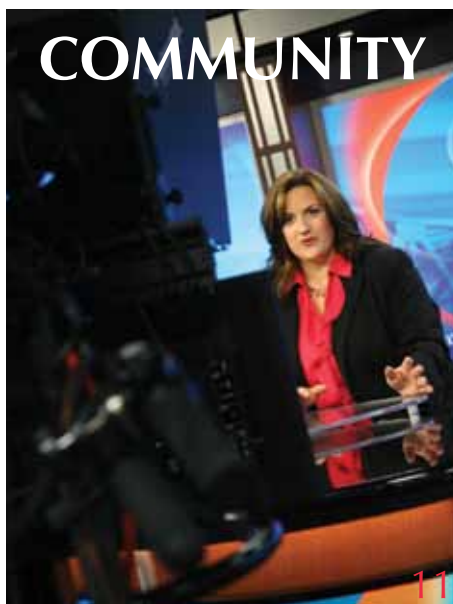
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AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE

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| FROM THE EDITOR |

Not long before I sat down to write this letter, I was asked to prepare an item for a "Thanksgiving feast" for my son's kindergarten class. I chose cranberries, for rather selfish reasons. Cooking cranberries was always my job for our family Thanksgivings growing up, and I loved heating the sugar and water, hearing the first cranberries pop and watching the hard berries split and dissolve into a brilliant, glossy sauce. Plus, I could make it the night before. Never mind that no one I know actually enjoys *eating* cranberry sauce—let alone small children.

It became something of a community effort from the start. I found a new recipe that my kids could help to make and that they might actually eat. I explained that the cranberries and apples were grown close to us in Wisconsin—the oranges, not so much. The kids took turns dumping the fruit into the food processor and—thrilling!—turning it on. They were my taste testers, and they approved.

My son was so looking forward to having me come to his class, and I was looking forward to meeting some of the other parents. Like me, they brought their assigned dishes on their lunch hours—dressed in business clothes, scrubs or jeans—to eat with their children, all as excited as mine. I already knew a few of them; most I did not, but it didn't matter. Everyone pitched in to set tables, pour juice, serve wiggling children

warm homemade food and, then, to simply sit and enjoy a meal in the company of their children. I was impressed by the teacher's organization of this ambitious task, charmed by the sweet little community that embraced my son and moved by the quiet delight of the parents, gathered for a stolen hour behind a kindergarten class's door.

This time of year, it's hard to miss the importance of community. From schools to churches to families to special events like the YWCA Tribute to Outstanding Women, we are made aware of the richness and impact that others make in our lives. Side by side, we are cooking food, planning events, raising funds, lifting people up and making things happen in a way that the Coulee Region could not do without.

We've devoted this issue to the women who, behind the scenes or in front of a camera, are taking action on behalf of the community they love. This community of women includes Jennifer Livingston (we scooped *Glamour*), Sheila Garrity of the La Crosse Community Foundation, Western Technical College's Amy Delagrave, people-mover Bev Scott, Norma Vinger (yes, *that* Norma Vinger) and the benevolent Brenengens of Brenengen Auto Group. Some of these names you know well; others you may not, but it doesn't matter. Side by side, they are—we all are—demonstrating what community is all about.

Betty



Our own community—the Coulee Region Women staff—celebrated winning a Gold award for Editor's Letter to the Readers at the MMPA Excellence Award ceremony in November.

coulee region women

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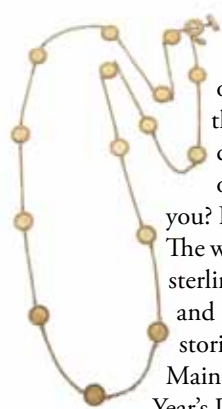
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MODERN HEIRLOOM



Do you have a cherished heirloom, something special handed down from one generation to another? Perhaps it is a piece of jewelry that holds sentimental value or a Christmas decoration that evokes a special memory. For the second year, Touch of Class in downtown La Crosse wants to hear the story behind that special piece of jewelry or adornment that is an heirloom or will be. Who gave it to you? How did you receive it? How will you pass it on to the next generation? The writer of the winning story will receive an Anna Beck 18k gold plate and sterling silver multidisc necklace. Entries should be no more than 500 words and must be received no later than December 20, 2012. Submit heirloom stories to info@touchofclasslacrosse.com or mail to Touch of Class at 312 Main Street, La Crosse, WI 54601. The winner will be announced on New Year's Day in Touch of Class's newsletter and on its Facebook page.



PARTY TIME!

La Crosse Mardi Gras is a family-oriented celebration uniting the families of La Crosse and surrounding communities in fun, food and fellowship for a good cause. Since 1991, Mardi Gras has helped provide tuition assistance for the families of Aquinas Catholic Schools, as well as assistance to Coulee Region children through scholarships to the Gateway Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America, the Riverland Council of the Girl Scouts, the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Greater La Crosse Area and the La Crosse Family YMCA. Join the fun at the Mardi Gras Ball, January 19, and Carnivale, January 27. Carnivale offers an array of food for any palate—Cajun chili, root beer floats, jambalaya, brats and kraut, crepes, hot dogs and more. Entertainment throughout the day includes area show choirs, karate demonstrations, juggling, clowns and the Coulee Region's Got Talent competition. If food and entertainment aren't enough, try your hand at one of the many Carnivale games. Find more information at www.lacrossemardigras.com.

CMN HOSPITALS HERO



Born 13½ weeks early, weighing just 2 lb. 12 oz., Lindsay Schmidt of Onalaska spent the first 77 days of her life in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Gundersen Lutheran. "Those were the longest 77 days of our lives," recalls her mother, Marcy Lund.

Fortunately Lindsay's family, Children's Miracle Network (CMN) Hospitals was there from the beginning. "They've done so much for our family. They financed equipment used to help her breathe and stay alive. They also helped with meals and accommodations, so we could stay at the hospital, close to Lindsay," says Marcy. Ten years later, Lindsay is excited to be a CMN Hospitals hero, and she wants to pay it forward and raise money to help other preterm babies. Remember CMN

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Contact 608-775-4424 or visit www.gundluth.org/cmnhospitals.



A HOLIDAY CLASSIC

The La Crosse Dance Centre

presents its 23rd annual Nutcracker Ballet on Friday, December 7, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, December 8, at 2 p.m. at Viterbo University's Fine Arts Center. An enduring holiday tradition, this full-length performance of the Nutcracker Ballet showcases more than 75 area dancers, from school age through adult. Tickets are \$13-\$17 and are available from Viterbo University. Call the box office at 608-796-3100, email boxoffice@viterbo.edu or visit www.viterbo.edu/tickets.

CELEBRATE WINTER

Instead of sitting inside complaining about the snow and cold, get outside and enjoy the activities that can only happen in winter. A great place to take advantage of all that winter has to offer is the Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR) Winter Festival, which takes place on Saturday, January 12, 2013. This wonderful family event highlights fun winter activities including skating, sledding, skiing, archery, a snow sculpture slide, ice cave hikes, horse-drawn bobsled rides, dog sledding and much more. Festival attendees can warm up at the annual chili and bread contest hosted by the La Farge Lions Club and participate in the Kickapoo Quick Auction, which will sell goods and services produced in the Kickapoo Valley to raise funds for the KVR Educational Programs. Most daytime activities are held at the KVR Visitor Center on State Hwy 131, 1.5 miles north of La Farge. Activities are subject to change due to weather conditions. For a complete list of activities, visit <http://kvr.state.wi.us/winterfest>.



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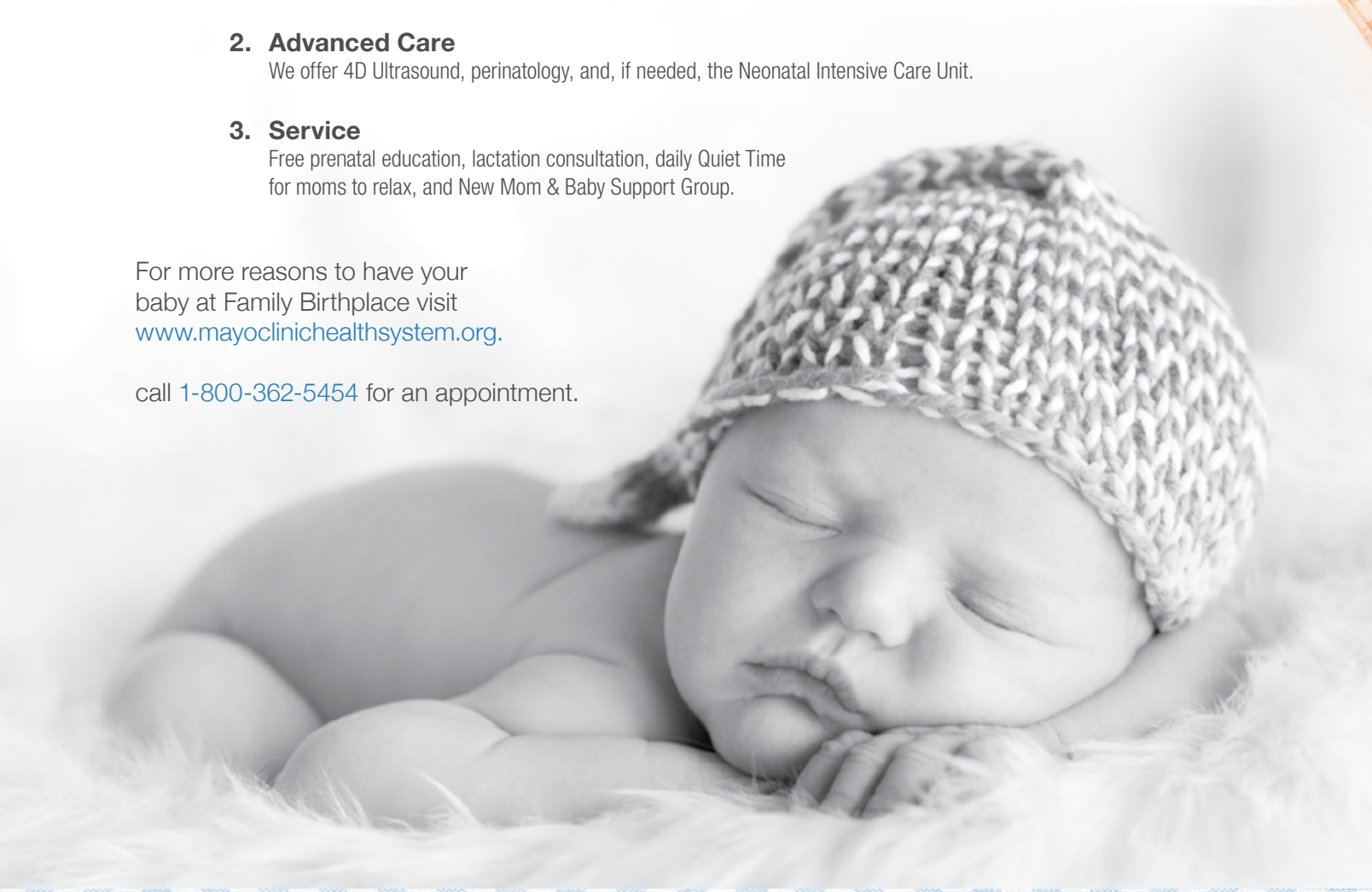
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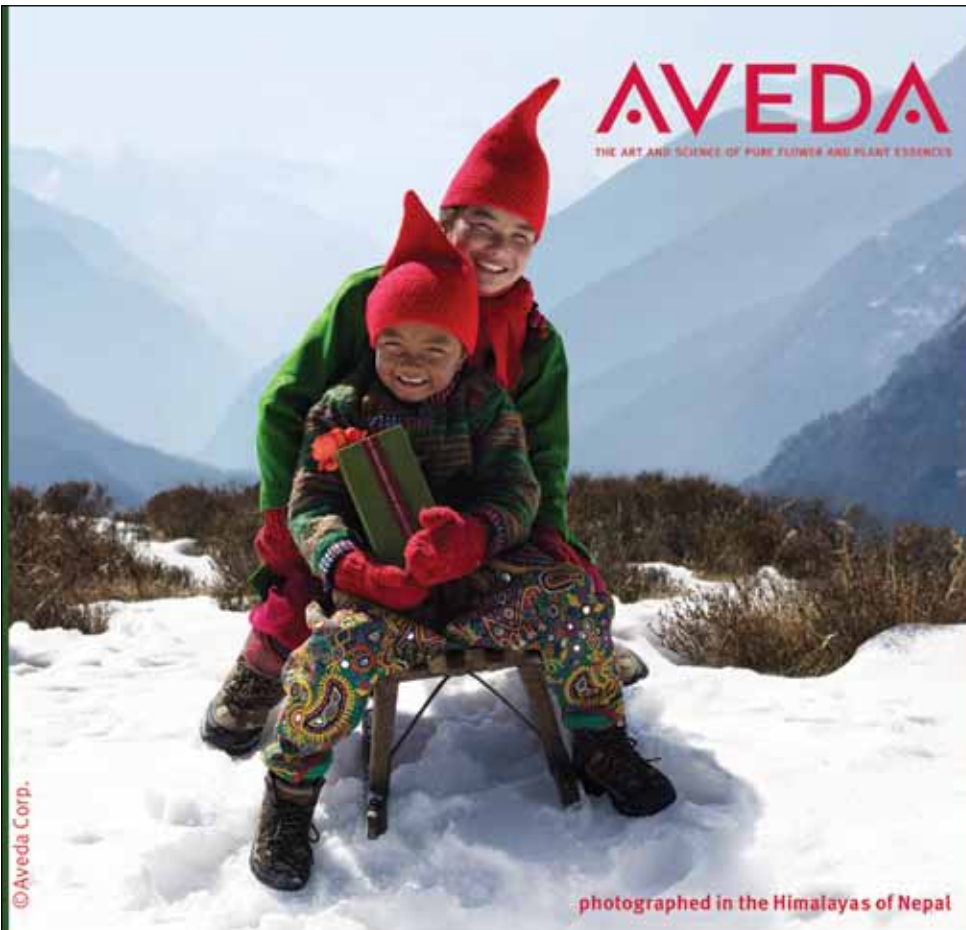
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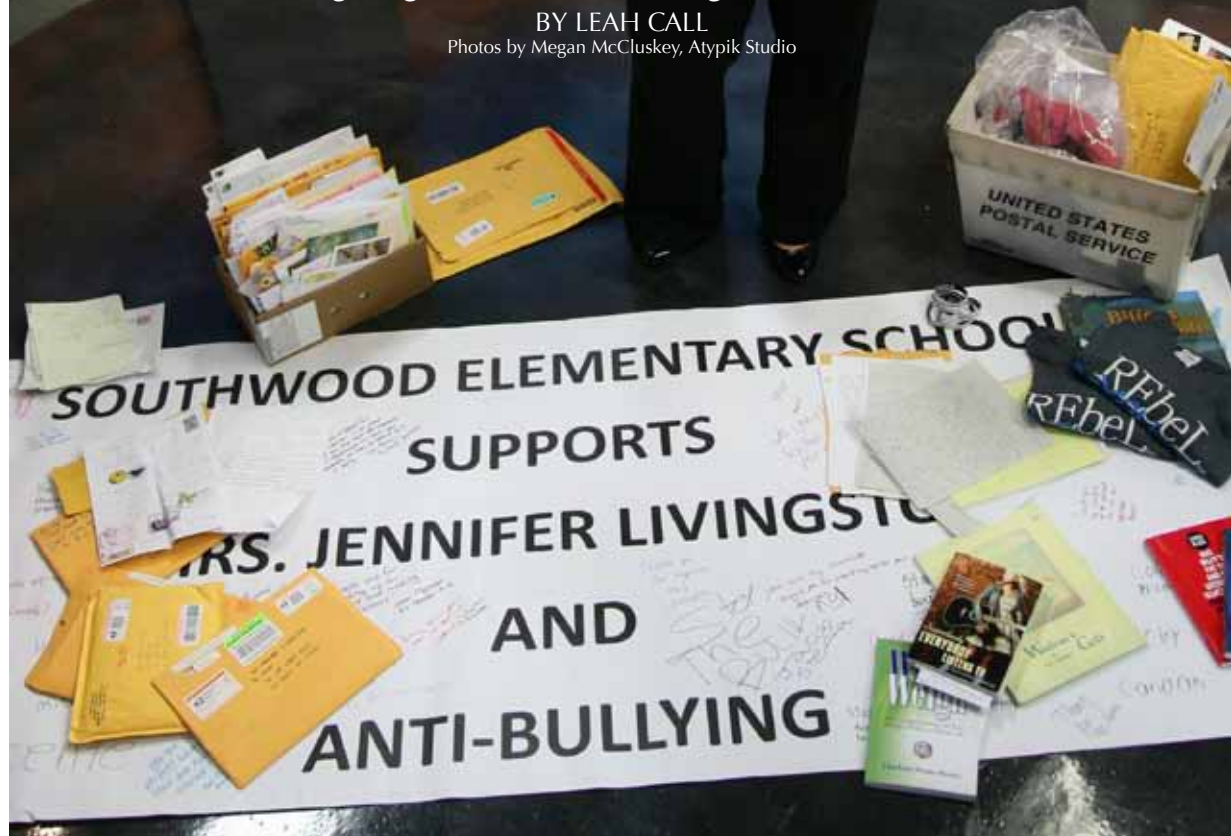
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STEPPING UP, SPEAKING OUT

Hometown heroine Jennifer Livingston
goes global with her message of kindness.

BY LEAH CALL

Photos by Megan McCluskey, Atypik Studio



Random hugs from strangers are not uncommon for beloved WKBT News 8 morning anchor Jennifer Livingston, a positive weekday presence for television news viewers throughout the Coulee Region. But lately, Livingston receives more heartfelt embraces than usual. That's because in October, designated national anti-bullying month, she had the courage to respond to an email that attacked her weight.

"I was surprised indeed to witness that your physical condition hasn't improved for many years," the email stated. "Surely you don't consider yourself a suitable example for this community's young people, girls in particular. Obesity is one of the worst choices a person can make ... I leave you this note hoping that you'll reconsider your personal responsibility as a local public personality to present and promote a healthy lifestyle."



Livingston responded with eloquence and honesty in a televised response, and her story went viral. Within days, it was covered in nearly every major newspaper and talk show throughout the nation. To date, she has made appearances on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Katie*, *Good Morning America* and the *Today Show*. She has been photographed for *Glamour* magazine. She has become an inspiration to people around the globe.

"It's just so unbelievable to think that what started as this local conversation so quickly spread around the nation and around the world," says Livingston.

Within hours of her on-air response, the YouTube video of it surpassed a million views, and interview requests from national media flooded in. Livingston's email inbox ballooned, eventually crashing the station's email system. "At one point, I looked down at my inbox, and it said 4,500!" recalls Livingston. "The majority—not all of them—were really positive, uplifting, really heartfelt stories. People were clearly moved by this, and they were sharing their stories. That's what was so emotional for me, that this clearly struck a chord with people."

The outpouring of support continues on Facebook, on Twitter, in email and in letters, from parents whose children are being bullied, from others who lost children to suicide because of bullying and from adults still dealing with the emotional effects of being bullied as a child.

It is NOW time

The video of Livingston's response to her critic has been shown in classrooms throughout the region and the world. She hopes the conversation continues in schools and in the community. "Part of the reason I was brave enough to do this is because I knew I had the

support of people that were saying wonderful things about me. I felt like I had arms wrapped around me. But children aren't always so lucky. Sometimes the bully is the loudest voice they hear. And that—to children—is a very scary thing to stand up to."

Livingston doesn't consider herself an expert in bullying behaviors. "I don't think I can say exactly what schools should be doing, but I think as a community as a whole, we need to voice the positive behaviors and encourage that, instead of letting people who say negative things get away with it."

One letter, which Livingston posted on her Facebook page, is particularly encouraging. A 13-year-old boy from Indiana wrote:

Dear Mrs. Livingston,

recently i was called the school bully but after i heard your story and your message i realized it is NOW time to grow up. So i went to all the kids that i affected and apologized. i would like to apologize to u for the person who sent you that email because just from that vido that we watched in school for anti bullying week u seem like a nice and respectable person even though i don't rely know you.

"Those are the emails that make me go *woo-hoo!*" says Livingston. "Those are the kids I hope this is resonating with; they see that their words can hurt, that they really need to learn to be kinder."

"A suitable example"

Bullying is learned behavior. "It is passed down from people like the man who wrote me that email," said Livingston in her on-air



"I really thought of my 10-year-old and what message I want her to hear from this experience. I want to be the person I want her to be. I wanted to tackle the issue in a way that I would hope she would."

—Jennifer Livingston

response. "If you are at home and you are talking about the fat news lady, guess what? Your children are probably going to go to school and call someone fat. We need to teach our kids to be kind, not critical. And we need to do that by example."

Livingston's parents were the example she emulated as a child growing up in Marion, Iowa, near Cedar Rapids, with three brothers, one of them actor Ron Livingston, best known for his role in the movie *Office Space*. Her father, an aerospace engineer, and mother, a Lutheran pastor, still live in Marion today. The values they instilled in Livingston are evident in the way she handles herself on air and off.

As people initially jumped to Livingston's defense, her mother's concern for others surfaced. "My mom called, saying, 'You really need to tell people to be kind in their critique of this man. They are missing the point, if they now bully this bully,'" recalls Livingston.

"She has always had that mind-set that people need to be kind. My mother has been a great example of a really amazing, kind and generous woman—absolutely someone I strive to be like."

In Livingston's own home, her daughters, ages 10, 3 and 1, now learn from her example. While her two youngest children are too young to understand what is happening, Livingston says, "My 10-year-old has been so proud, which warms my heart."

In preparing her response, Livingston kept that daughter in mind. "I really thought of my 10-year-old and what message I want her to hear from this experience. I want to be the person I want her to be. I wanted to tackle the issue in a way that I would hope she would."

Community conversations

As the requests for interviews, talk-show appearances and public-

speaking engagements pour in, Livingston strives to find balance between her job, her family and her new role as an anti-bullying advocate.

"I wanted this to become a discussion and a conversation in our community. I'm excited to continue that conversation here," she says. "I hope what comes out of this is that people in lots of different communities become inspired to speak out about it in their community. I hope parents talk to their children about it, and that schools continue to focus on this issue, because it is not going to get any better unless we tackle it. And we have got to make it better for our kids today."

Livingston embraces the La Crosse area as tightly as it embraces her. She came to work at WKBT 15 years ago and has done the morning show for 12 years. "When I came here, it was never a thought that I would be here as long as I have been. But I fell in love with this community. People here are so nice and friendly. This area is so beautiful, and then I met the love of my life here."

That love is WKBT evening news anchor Mike Thompson, formerly with News 19. "We met out on a story in 1999. He was covering the story for his station, and I was covering the story for my station. One thing led to another, and a couple years later we were married."

Though we have to share Livingston with the world for a while, she remains our hometown heroine, speaking out for the good of the community she loves. "People here have good hearts," she says, as proud of this community as it is of her. *(crw)*

Westby-based writer Leah Call is grateful for Livingston's message of kindness, which started a conversation in her own home. Livingston is an inspiration to Call and her four children to stand up for themselves and others ... and to be nice!

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AN EDUCATED WORKFORCE

WTC's Amy Delagrave offers area adults a helping hand with their GEDs—and their lives.

BY JESSIE FOSS
Contributed photos



Their motivations and backgrounds are typically different, but they come to Amy Delagrave (pictured above) searching for something missing in their lives. Part of Delagrave's job as an Adult Basic Education Counselor at Western Technical College is to help students earn their High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED) or certificate of General Educational Development (GED).

Eleven percent of Wisconsin residents aged 25 and older do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent, according to United States Census data. Each year, about 10,000 of these adults decide to pursue a HSED or GED, and that's where Delagrave steps in.

Those looking to gain their HSED, Delagrave says, usually have a goal in mind. For some, the HSED opens a door to employment, while others have the ultimate goal of earning a college degree.

In order to earn a HSED, people must be at least 18½ years old or their ninth-grade class must have graduated from high school. There are age exceptions to the alternative high school HSED program.

Dropping back in

Currently, students in Wisconsin are required to stay in school until they turn 18. However, that wasn't always the case, and Delagrave says she sees plenty of people who left school when they were young and went to work in the area's factories. Many worked their way up the ranks, but when industries changed and factories closed, workers were left without a job and little education. Delagrave also sees people who left school for a variety of other reasons, from family issues to unplanned pregnancies.

"They come back when they feel the time is right," Delagrave says.

Western Technical College does not operate as a walk-in testing center, but its adult basic education instructors help prepare people for the test by offering reading, math and English labs. The amount of time it takes people to prepare for the HSED exam, Delagrave says, depends on their skill and commitment levels.

"I will be there"

No matter their skill level, students who come to Western are guaranteed to receive Delagrave's unwavering support.

"I will be there," she says. "I will support and guide them the best I can."

Much of that support comes in the form of working on transitions. Delagrave says she and her co-workers do a lot of teaming with other people on campus and in the community to help students reach their ultimate goals. For some, those goals are to earn a post-secondary degree or other certification. Delagrave has seen people go on to attend Western, UW-La Crosse and Viterbo University.

Delagrave says this is more than a job for her; it's a passion. "I feel very blessed to have this job," she says. "I really value this college and its commitment to being a student success center."

More information on Western Technical College's HSED/GED program can be found at www.westernnc.edu/goal/highschool. 

Jessie Foss is a freelance writer who lives in Onalaska. She feels very blessed for every educational opportunity she has had.



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LEADING FROM THE HEART

Viterbo's Servant Leadership program makes La Crosse a better place.

BY JULIE NELSON
Contributed photos

Sue Sieger is one of the country's leading experts on the Affordable Care Act, the health care reform many refer to as Obamacare. She meets with senators and congress members to discuss the ramifications of this program, and she speaks to groups across the country on the ins and outs of the legislation. Despite this high-profile position, Sieger says the most rewarding aspect of her job happens far from the national spotlight, when she is back in Onalaska, mentoring a co-worker at Benefits Design Group, Inc. But it wasn't always this way.

Sieger admits to being the classic Type A personality who is hardworking, always busy and always doing more. A perfectionist, she used to be driven to get every detail right and was easily frustrated when a co-worker wasn't working just as hard. Her life changed when her boss told her she had no "people skills." Surprised and angered at the accusation, Sieger thought a good way to prove

her boss wrong would be to enroll in a master's course in servant leadership.

Working for the greater good

Servant leadership is a concept articulated by Robert K. Greenleaf, in which individuals see themselves primarily as citizens of the world, contributing to the well-being of people and community. Then, by consciously working for the greater good first, they become leaders themselves.

La Crosse's Viterbo University is the only place in the country that offers a master's program on servant leadership. When Sieger plunged into the coursework, which calls for self-reflection, her life started to change. "I began to realize that I had become a 'human doing,' not a human being, and that I needed to do work on myself before I could truly help others."

The pivotal point came when Sieger, uncharacteristically, agreed to join her mother on a retreat where the main component was silence. Sieger's 80-hour workweeks and constant activity came to an abrupt halt. During the leisurely sunrises, walks in the woods and sessions with a spiritual director, Sieger saw her previous schedule in a different light, and her entire attitude shifted.





Sue Sieger is a leading expert on the Affordable Care act and a servant leader.



Servant leader Barb Kruse is a spiritual director at the Franciscan Spirituality Center.

Now her co-workers—and her boss—know her as someone who listens to others and supports them in their efforts, not as someone who berates those around her for every small failure. Her new attitude has changed the atmosphere of the entire office. Sieger has become a leader by being a servant first.

Change yourself, change your community

The director of Viterbo's program, Tom Thibodeau, says this is what servant leadership is all about: changing a community and a culture by changing one person at a time. Currently, 150 graduates of Viterbo's master's program in servant leadership are out in the world, and La Crosse is one place that is better for it. Well-known community leaders such as Festival Foods' Mark and Dave Skogen,

the Dahl family of Dahl Automotive and the Kwik Trip Corporation have embraced this philosophy, creating workplaces where each employee is treated first as a human being with value and potential, and second as an asset that can make the company more money.

Thibodeau says servant leaders come in all stripes. They are recent college grads, and they are people in their 50s and 60s who are looking to find more meaning in the second part of their lives. They are heads of companies, and they are people low on the totem pole. They are people of all faith backgrounds and people of no faith background. "Everybody has influence," he says. "The key is in understanding when to take a leadership role and when to be a committed follower."

Other graduates include Sheila Garrity (see page 21) and Barb Kruse, a spiritual director at the Franciscan Spirituality Center. Kruse comes from the Catholic faith and says a desire to discern where God is in the midst of our lives is part of what compelled her to take part in the servant leadership program. Through the course, she's come to appreciate and seek out the humanness in everyone she meets. "Everyone wants to be accepted and honored where they are. Deep listening is important to me. When another person knows they've been heard, they're more open to hearing you."

People who live as servant leaders don't give their actions a second thought. They do what they do because it is the "right" thing to do—for themselves, for their community, sometimes for God and for another person.

Kruse says being compassionate is a first step in being an instrument of peace. "Wouldn't it be great in this world if we all did that and tried to live the best way we can, every day?" **(crw)**

As the Development Director for The Salvation Army, Julie Nelson is fortunate to see servant leadership in action every day.

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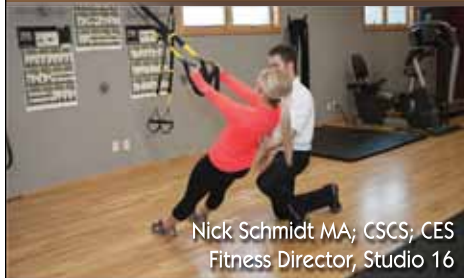
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HELPING *Community Service* TO HAPPEN



For Sheila Garrity, filling community needs is more than a job; it's a life.

BY THERESA WASHBURN

Contributed photo



On Second Street in downtown La Crosse, in the brick building above the Lighting Design by Wettstein's showroom, a small group of dedicated employees answer phones, pore over applications and review agency projects, all in an effort to unite community needs with financial resources. At the helm is Sheila Garrity, acting executive director of the La Crosse Community Foundation for the last 20 years. Garrity's drive to support the myriad projects, grants and donors that make up the foundation has helped it grow to an organization with almost \$30 million in assets and significant supporting foundations.

Foundational work

The La Crosse Community Foundation administers nearly 140 funds, distributing grants and scholarships to agencies and organizations that work to offer arts programs, community services, conservation projects, educational opportunities, family services, preservation works and youth services. In addition, the foundation distributes money through nearly 20 scholarships and scholarship funds. The work of the foundation began in 1930, and since then, the foundation has apportioned almost \$20 million in grants and scholarships. Nearly everyone in La Crosse County has been touched by the efforts of this energetic organization and those who give generously to it.

Foundational guidance

Garrity's commitment to serving the La Crosse community is like the earth's commitment to keep rotating: constant and without rest. Garrity's passion registers in her voice as she talks about her job. "At the

foundation, there is a constant flow of people in need and people who want to help out," she says. "I consider it an honor to listen to people's dreams of their own philanthropy, and this work of administering memorials makes it a kind of holy place."

Garrity points to an article in the foundation's recent annual report. "Like this," she says of the Chad Erickson Memorial Park Fund. "This was so important to the family to honor their son." The article outlines the evolution of the fund established in memory of Chad, who died at age 15. In it, Barb, Chad's mother, describes the healing she and her family have experienced as they engage in the fund's administration. Garrity understands the connection between the people who want to give and the people who need the gift. She lives it and administers it with grace.

Foundational life

Coaxing personal information out of Garrity is far more difficult than gathering the armloads of details she offers about her work and the La Crosse Community Foundation. Garrity's list of community service involvements could be read like an auctioneer's chant: La Crosse County Board, La Crosse Police and Fire Commission, State Bar Association Office of Lawyer Regulation Committee, Affiliate to the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Franciscan Spirituality Center Board, League of Women Voters and a chorus of advisory committees and memberships.

But Garrity's life is more than meetings and associations; she is a mother of three adult children and, most recently, a grandmother. Her face breaks into a smile when asked her about her family. "Oh, you have to see my grandbaby," she says. As she presents a picture of baby Rosie, a new type of enthusiasm shows through.

Certainly little Rosemary has no idea of the inner strength possessed by her dynamic grandmother. Garrity, who often finds herself listening to the heartbreaking stories of families who suffer loss, suffered her own when her husband, Jim Gokey, died of brain cancer in 1998. Anchored in deep faith, Garrity carried on, grounded in her Catholic roots and surrounded by her family and friends. Grief did not stop her commitment to the community, but it may have intensified it. When asked how she got through some of those hard times, she says, "I tell people to surround yourself with love, whether it is family, activities, nature or community and ... hang on." She adds, "It is also important to be rooted in some faith experience and connection with the divine."

It's fitting that out of this loss rose a new opportunity to give. As a memorial to Garrity's husband, a new foundation fund was established in 1998 called Jim's Grocery Bag, which provides annual grant support to the La Crosse School District so it can purchase groceries to stock school food pantries.

Sheila Garrity's devotion to service, coupled with the La Crosse Community Foundation's ambitious mission to "improve the quality of life for all residents who live in La Crosse County forever" creates a powerful and potent force in our area. The combined efforts of the staff, the board and the hundreds of families who have given abundantly to this public charity have far-reaching implications for more people than can be counted. **(crw)**

Theresa Washburn is a writer, workshop presenter and communications consultant. She lives in the Coulee Region with her family and a menagerie of animals.

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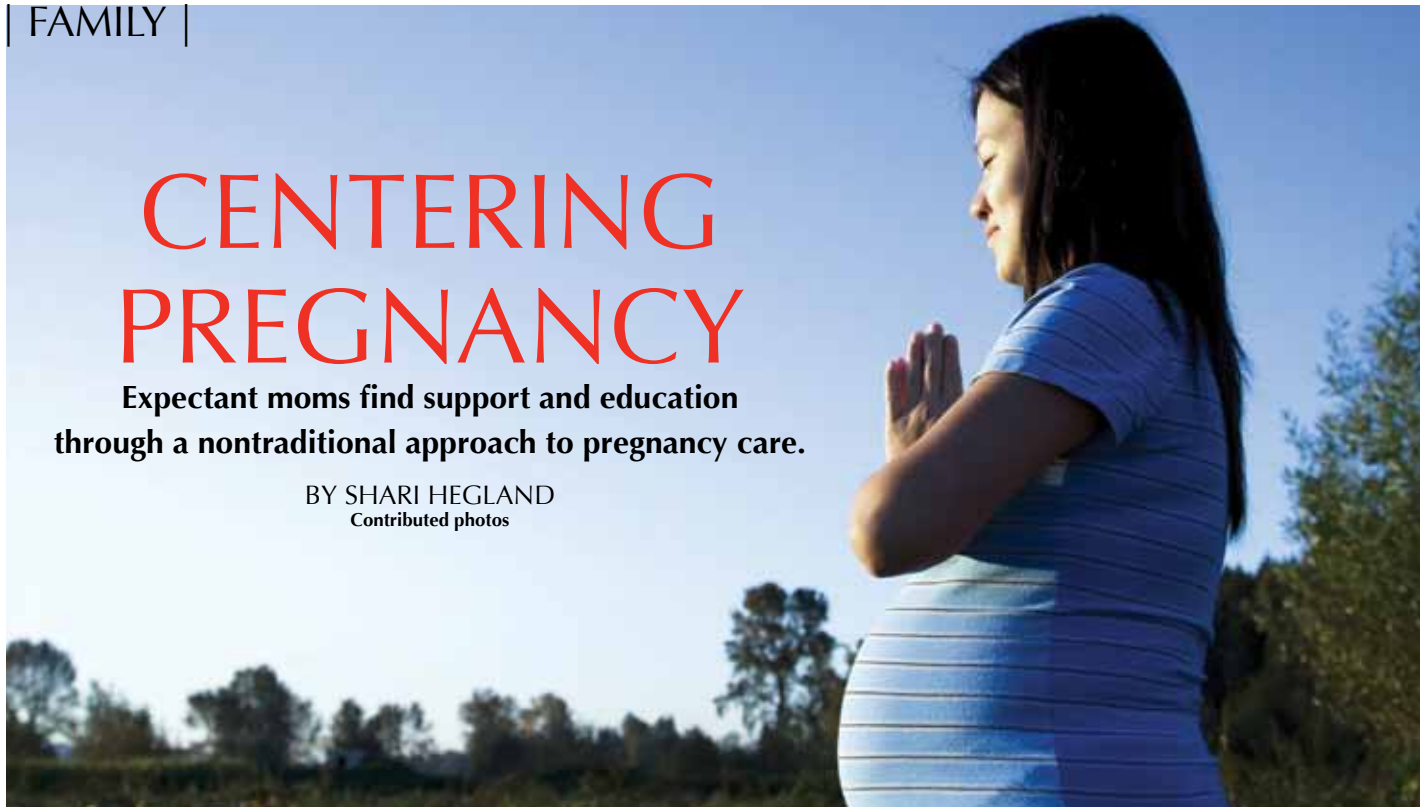
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CENTERING PREGNANCY

Expectant moms find support and education through a nontraditional approach to pregnancy care.

BY SHARI HEGLAND
Contributed photos



Selena Dahlby and Chynna Rose-Clark are each expecting their first child. Both are having boys, and their due dates are just days apart.

They share their experiences with other women and their partners, learning from each other along the way, through Centering Pregnancy, a program offered by Mayo Clinic Health System in Onalaska. The program replaces traditional clinic appointments with biweekly group meetings, coupled with one-on-one time with certified nurse-midwives and registered nurses, in a relaxed environment.

"It's nice to know other women are going through the same experience," says Dahlby, a Holmen resident who is joined at the meetings by her husband, Chiz. "It's a neat environment having the option of my husband coming, too, so he can share more in the experience."

Rose-Clark feels she gains more information from the 90-minute sessions than she would through a traditional 15-minute pregnancy checkup in a clinic setting. "I'm kind of an introverted, shy person, so it's nice to have everyone else asking questions," she says.

Dahlby agrees. "Being able to have eight minds or ten minds asking questions" is a benefit. As a first-time mother, Dahlby doesn't always know what questions to ask. And while she reads a lot to find information she needs, the discussion format of the Centering Pregnancy group is a better learning fit for her husband.

More than a checkup

Kandi Holt, RN, and certified nurse-midwife Theresa Hagen facilitate the Centering Pregnancy group that Dahlby and Rose-Clark attend. The duo is one of three RN-midwife teams who lead groups of five to eight women, and their partners, with due dates in a six-week span.

Rose-Clark appreciates knowing from the beginning the schedule for each of her appointments. The groups meet biweekly for 90 minutes, which includes time for each expectant mom to meet with the

midwife to listen to the baby's heartbeat and measure the baby's growth.

The first half hour also includes self-care, where each woman has her own assessment, including checking blood pressure and urine testing. "Everything that takes place at a traditional appointment is done here," Holt says.

The big difference is in the remaining time, which is dedicated to education. Discussion may focus on nutrition, changes in the body during pregnancy, the birthing process, relaxation techniques and infant care. During the nine sessions, participants also hear from a lactation consultant and a massage therapist, topics for which there is little time to discuss during traditional pregnancy checkups.

Forming friendships

According to Holt, Centering Pregnancy has been offered at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., for five years. The local program celebrated its first year in September and has graduated about 45 patients so far.

In addition to providing information, the program fosters friendships. "By the time patients are to that ninth session, they really have formed a bond with each other," says Holt. An additional "reunion" session brings them back together after their babies are born. Some families continue to meet on their own to share experiences and support. *(crw)*

Freelance writer Shari Hegland would have loved this option when expecting her son, although she enjoyed the mom and baby group also offered by Mayo Clinic Health System.



Kandi Holt, RN



Theresa Hagen, CNM

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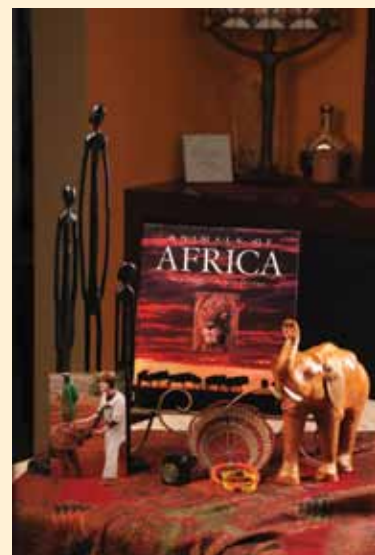
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A GENEROUS HOME

The owners of Brenengen Auto Group offer a glimpse inside their home and life of purpose.

BY MELISSA HANSON
Photos by Bruce Defries Photography

*Clockwise from top left:
In the great room, various wood tones and expansive windows offer warmth and light.*

African-themed details reveal one of Cheryl Brenengen's favorite causes: an elephant orphanage in Kenya.

As indicated by the family mailbox, Don Brenengen has a passion for cars.

The "big brown box" that houses the oven and other small appliances in the kitchen also serves to block the view into the kitchen from the main entrance.

If you've seen a car bumper in the past 21 years, you are probably familiar with the Brenengen name. Cheryl and Don Brenengen are the driving force behind Brenengen Auto Group, Bodies by Brenengen and Fire House Car Wash, but they've also made a name for themselves as one of the Coulee Region's philanthropic families.

Home with a view

"Welcome. Come on in," Cheryl Brenengen greets me at the door before I knock or even set foot on the stamped-concrete stoop. She offers a warm smile and a gentle handshake before gesturing for me to enter their lakeside home.

Soft music and a warm glow coming from the great room beckon me enter. As we pass the



Whimsical design choices such as a tile mosaic inspired by The Wizard of Oz are subtle indicators of the homeowners' playful personalities.

semiformal dining room with Asian-influenced furnishings, I catch my first glimpse of what is arguably the home's best feature: the view.

Sitting in the Brenengens' great room, one can expect to be distracted by Lake Onalaska and the Mississippi River just outside an expansive wall of windows and the unobstructed panoramic view of the Minnesota bluffs beyond.

"I've got the river in my blood," Brenengen professes with a glimmer in her eye. She proudly explains that her father and grandfather made modest livings working on the river.

She and her husband, Don, a native of La Crosse's Northside, inherited their love of the water. Whether grilling on the riverside patio, relaxing on the pontoon or playing water sports with the kids and grandkids, the Brenengens make a conscious decision to appreciate the beauty of the view that greets them each morning.

The details are in the design

The home, not unlike its owners, is a mix of grandeur and modesty wrapped up in one neat package. "We came from simple roots,"

Brenengen says, romanticizing about her own humble beginnings as a young girl on the far southern tip of French Island.

"We were dollar-challenged," she notes with a playful tone, "but it was a good life." Those early life experiences made a mark on the Brenengens, who purchased their car dealership in 1991 and have since expanded to six. They are modest about their successes, and Cheryl is quick to credit the business, which she says is more of a passion than a job, for giving them visibility to do work in the community.

Under careful inspection, hints of the couple's personalities and charitable interests can be seen around the home. You won't see any plaques or awards (although they've earned a few), so you must look closely.

Take, for example, one of Brenengen's favorite features in the home: a whimsical tile mosaic in the master bathroom. The detail starts as a wide ribbon of neutral-toned tile that narrows as it meanders across the floor, spiraling to a fine point in the open shower.

"It's my own yellow brick road," Brenengen says, referring to her favorite childhood movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. She supposes this playful side of her personality is what compels them to help children through the Boys & Girls Club of West Salem. From leading fundraising efforts to mowing the grass and painting walls, the Brenengens have been willing to get their hands dirty for what they refer to as their pet project.

Brenengen, who hasn't had any formal design training, says she designed the house by clipping photos from magazines and working closely with two building contractors-cum-friends to bring those inspirations to life.

"I like to be different," she says. So she didn't just create carbon copies of those magazine images. For example, Brenengen chose to paint a bold splash of red on the kitchen ceiling. Slightly unorthodox design choices such as these made her contractors scratch their heads. "But it all worked out in the end," Brenengen says.

At home in the Coulee Region

"[The Coulee Region] really is the most beautiful place there is," says Brenengen. But she is quick to note the people who call the Coulee Region home are as endearing a quality as the landscape. She wouldn't trade a small community where people care for one another for the big city. "We have it made here," she adds. "We really do."

For Brenengen and her husband, giving back is a natural response to their appreciation for the community where they grew up. Although the couple works long hours in their businesses, they make time to give of themselves. They hope to help build a much-needed permanent building for the West Salem Boys & Girls Club in the near future, and they encourage the community to step up to help with this goal.

The Brenengens are proud of the fact that their family and employees share a desire to help others by participating in servant leadership programs and other personally chosen causes.

Brenengen admits she is inspired by the example other community-minded families in the Coulee Region have set, and she hopes to inspire others in the same way. "I would like everyone to feel obligated," she proclaims. "I feel everyone should contribute something."

Melissa Hanson writes about purposeful living and adventures of the soul on her website www.GalleriaMelissa.com.



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HEY, TAXI!

Bev Scott provides a lift for those in the region who need some extra help.

BY EMILY FAETH
Contributed photo

"I love anything with wheels!" exclaims Bev Scott, owner of CTS Taxi, Access Medical Transit (AMT) and a slew of other related operations. Since the 1980s, Scott has been in the business of getting people where they need to go—in many more ways than just one.

Most of us are familiar with the services taxi companies provide—especially those of us who don't own vehicles of our own and sometimes need help getting around. Less familiar is a business like AMT, the other primary division of Scott's enterprise. "Probably 99 percent of [AMT's] clients are wheelchair bound, but it's nonemergency medical [transportation]," says Scott. "We take people to doctor's visits, to day care, to home visits, to holidays to see their families. You name it, that's what we do."

Not your typical taxi service

Unlike a traditional taxi service, AMT is also set up to ease the financial burden of transportation on its clients. "We're set up to accept Medicaid, LogistiCare, cash; some insurance also covers the costs." Also unlike traditional taxi services, AMT is equipped to cater to the specific needs of its clients, who range from infants to elderly adults. "All of our vehicles are hydraulic wheelchair lift equipped, and the vehicles are all inspected by the DOT on a yearly basis," says Scott. And Scott's concern for the safety of her clients extends beyond the vehicles in her fleet: "All of our drivers have CPR and First Aid training, passenger assistance training, defensive driving [training], so they're quite versed."

Serving multiple communities

Since beginning her business in 1987, Scott has expanded significantly, reaching beyond the immediate La Crosse area. In addition to the 10 drivers currently serving La Crosse are 12 to 14 drivers serving in Monroe County. "We also have another division that sells personal mobility products—anything from wheelchairs, scooters, to stair climbers, elevators ... even though you're in a wheelchair, you should be able to go where you want, when you want." Sharing the storefront with Access Mobility Products is yet another division, Unique Edge Customizing, which services and customizes vehicles of all types and which employs her son Jake. Another son



A lover of vehicles and people, Bev Scott uses one to serve the other with Access Medical Transit.

works in accounting and also attends UW-La Crosse. All of this is in addition to various other divisions in outlying areas such as Platteville and River Falls.

More than a job

Over the years, Scott says, she and her drivers have built strong relationships with many of their clients, and along with those relationships come many happy memories for the veteran driver. "I haven't driven since probably '87, '89, but I used to take a young man to Riverfront. In order to get him onto the vehicle, I had to give him a piece of banana—then, to get him back off, I had to do the same. He was such a sweetie," says Scott with a chuckle. "And there are lots of stories like that. You just fall in love with [the clients]."

Scott's care and respect extends to all of her clients, as well as her staff. "I have wonderful staff," she says. "Their hearts are into their jobs. They treat their clients like they would their mom or grandma. My drivers and my staff—they're a part of my family. And I want my clients to feel that, too." (crw)

While freelance writer Emily Faeth is an avid bicyclist in the warmer months, she's no stranger to the inside of cabs come winter.



FOR THE *Well-Being of Women*

The Brilliant Bodywork owner explains why she and her staff support the YWCA.

BY LINDSAY BONNAR

Contributed photos

Stephanie Andresen-Stevens was introduced to the YWCA of the Coulee Region two years ago, when a friend and YWCA board member invited her business to be a part of Taste of the Coulee Region, a YWCA fundraiser. Since then, she and her staff at Brilliant Bodywork in Onalaska have taken part in other YWCA fundraisers—such as the Celebrity Pie Auction—and monitor the YWCA website for volunteer opportunities.

According to its mission statement, the YWCA is “dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.” The YWCA of the Coulee Region “empowers women to reach for their full potential and creates an inclusive community based on equality, respect and dignity,” as expressed in its vision statement.

Andresen-Stevens and the staff at her family-run business have a firm belief in what the YWCA does—helping underprivileged women gain life skills and become empowered, specifically women who may be in bad or even life-threatening situations. They have taken the belief not only to heart but also into action.

“Potentially, you are saving a life by helping to raise those funds,” says Andresen-Stevens, “so every dollar that you can bring in, every ounce of awareness you can bring to somebody” matters. “Educating people about the YWCA is just raising [that organization] up and allowing them to reach more clients that really need them.”

The YWCA’s mission strikes a personal note with Andresen-Stevens as well. “I have a family history of a grandmother who was raped and murdered, and that obviously sticks with you; you take it to heart. You never want to see that happen to another woman.”

Empowering women, inside and out

Andresen-Stevens has taken the principles of empowerment and building people up and applied them to how she runs Brilliant Bodywork. The list of services the business offers ranges from massage to skin care to weight loss and weight management. She and her staff also make it a point to spend time getting to know their clients. They find that discussing things like nutrition and supplementation with their clients is a big part of looking at the whole person.

“These are things that often we don’t think about, but definitely what fuels your body comes out on your face and your skin,” Andresen-Stevens says.

She and her staff work to take care of the person as a whole, from the inside out—whether helping a client with skin or muscle ailments or sending a card to support and celebrate a one-year sobriety date.

“We take the time with our clients, which I think is kind of unique. When you go into the average spa, you are just seen as a client on the schedule. With us, it’s so much more than that,” Andresen-Stevens says. “Whether it’s in relaxation, or skin care, or just spiritually, we want to see these people grow and succeed.”



Stephanie Andresen-Stevens, owner of Brilliant Bodywork

Lindsay Bonnar is also passionate about the well-being of others. She finds a lot of happiness in helping people find their own path to health and wellness. Stephanie Andresen-Stevens was the winner of the Coulee Region Women pie at the 2012 YWCA Celebrity Pie Auction in August.



Altra Offers Women and Investing Seminar

If you are a woman interested in learning how to become a successful lifelong investor, join us for a no-cost, no-obligation Women and Investing Seminar on Tuesday, February 5, at 6 p.m. at Altra Federal Credit Union, 1700 Oak Forest Drive, Onalaska.

This seminar will teach you to be a careful, competent, disciplined long-term investor to attain financial security. You can take control of your own future through investing. Discuss investment principles and opportunities such as asset allocation, investor behavior, mutual funds and annuities.

For more information, or to reserve your place, call Kimberly Eigenberger at 608-787-4599.

Altra Federal Credit Union Receives Desjardins Award for Youth Financial Education

Altra Federal Credit Union has been awarded the Desjardins Award for Youth Financial Education by the Wisconsin Credit Union League. "We are strongly committed to the financial literacy of our youth," states Lori Horstman, Altra's Learning & Development Manager.

The Credit Union National Association's Center for Personal Finance created the Desjardins program to recognize leadership among credit unions promoting financial literacy for all ages. Through youth events, school presentations, social media and websites, Altra has taught financial life skills to 2,239 students in La Crosse, Onalaska and Holmen.

Headquartered in Onalaska, Altra is a nationwide full-service cooperative financial institution with more than 70,000 members.



Gundersen Lutheran Health Educator Appointed to Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee

Governor Scott Walker appointed Gundersen Lutheran nutrition and health educator Patti Jo Severson, MS, RD, to Wisconsin's new Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee (CJCC).

She is one of 18 council members who will assist the governor in directing, collaborating and coordinating the services of state and local governmental agencies and nongovernmental entities in the criminal justice system to increase efficiency, effectiveness and public safety.

With a background in social services and behavioral health, Severson represents mental health organizations on the CJCC. "We all benefit from using proven strategies that address criminal justice issues, particularly in the areas of mental illness and substance abuse," she explains.



Mayo Clinic Health System's Center for Women's Health Welcomes Internal Medicine Physician

The Center for Women's Health at Mayo Clinic Health System—Franciscan Healthcare is pleased to welcome Caroline Wilker, M.D.

Dr. Wilker earned her medical degree from the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. She completed her Internal Medicine Residency at the Washington University/Barnes Jewish Hospital in Saint Louis, Mo.

Dr. Wilker is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine. She has special interest in pulmonary and cardiac-related medical problems.

Prior to joining Mayo Clinic Health System, Dr. Wilker practiced hospital medicine at Meriter Hospital in Madison.

For more information or to make an appointment, call 608-392-9891.

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A WOMAN *with a* GIVING HEART

Norma Gillette Vinger is recognized for her dedication to helping others.

BY KIM SEIDEL

Contributed photos



Left: Norma Gillette Vinger received the 2012 Founder's Award for Community Leadership from Gundersen Lutheran Medical Foundation. Right: From left, Mark V. Connelly, M.D., Donald Vinger, Norma Gillette Vinger and A. Erik Gundersen, M.D.

Although her gifts have brought the community enormous success and have saved countless lives, Norma Gillette Vinger would rather listen than talk and give rather than receive.

In October this year, Vinger was on the receiving end when she and her husband, Don, received the 2012 Founder's Award for Community Leadership. While she appreciated the honor to her family from Gundersen Lutheran Medical Foundation, for Vinger the night was more about connecting with guests and friends than receiving an award.

The power of giving

Vinger and her family embody the "transformational power of giving," says Phil Schumacher, the foundation's executive director, who presented the award along with Robyn Tanke, the foundation's

chief development officer. "This happens when someone decides, 'We can make a difference by sharing our time, our talent or our treasure. We can change the world with a giving heart,'" Schumacher says.

Vinger is a woman with such a giving heart. When people take note of her name, they often ask her if she's the "Norma" of the Norma J. Vinger Center for Breast Care at Gundersen. Yes, she tells them with her genuine bright smile, she's *that* Norma. Then, she'll listen to their stories and offer words of encouragement. She receives many words of gratitude, but again, she would rather give her support to others.

Story of survival

Vinger's encouraging words mean something to someone with breast cancer. She's a survivor. When she was diagnosed in 1997, she

felt “so scared,” and sought support from other friends who also were fighting breast cancer or had won the battle.

Today, she’s a 15-year survivor, and at age 73, she’s a picture of wonderful health. Vinger and her husband celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary this summer with their family, including two sons and two grandchildren. The active couple enjoys visits to their Arizona home. Vinger also likes bowling and shopping with friends.

Family tradition

Transformational giving experiences, like Vinger’s, often are limited to a single cause and person or couple, Schumacher says. That’s not the case for the family of Norman L. Gillette Sr., Vinger’s father and founder of Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company of La Crosse. The family’s philanthropic spirit has remained alive for three generations.

Growing up in the family business, Vinger still serves on its board today. She was featured in early November as keynote speaker on the company’s past, present and future for the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce’s Business Expo.

A gift of life

It seems Vinger was born with a giving heart. When her younger sibling, Norm Jr., needed a kidney transplant in 1968, Vinger was a young wife and mother of two small children. Yet she chose to give one of her kidneys to save his life. “I didn’t want him to die,” she says, recalling that her aunt and uncle stayed with her kids while she spent a week recovering in the hospital.

At that time, “the transplant between humans was only 10 years old,” Schumacher says. “This transplant was one of the first kidney transplants at Mayo Clinic. What an amazing gift.”

Her brother lived for 33 more years. Schumacher recalls his last visit with Norm. “He told me that his battle with cancer had advanced, and he would likely die in the coming months. Through his tears, Norm said, ‘I’ve never really thanked Norma.’”

This led to Norm’s financial gift to the Norma J. Vinger Center for Breast Care, which opened in 2003. Since then, the center has grown into a regional household name and a national center of excellence.

Steppin’ out together

Fortunately for the community, this story of giving doesn’t end. Responding again to a need in 2004, the Vinger family, along with Norm’s three children, established the Norman L. Gillette Jr. Breast Cancer Research Fellowship with the Gundersen Lutheran Medical Foundation. Gundersen’s commitment back to the family was to create an annual event, Steppin’ Out in Pink, to help achieve the full funding of \$2 million by 2012.

Seven years later, the foundation has far exceeded the \$2 million goal, thanks not only to the family’s enthusiasm and participation each year, but also to the generous support of the family business as the event title sponsor since day one, Tanke says.

This September, the sea of Steppin’ Out in Pink participants in pink T-shirts represented a record-breaking 5,500 walkers, including 300 breast cancer survivors. They also represent the sentiment Vinger embodies so well: It’s better to give than to receive. *(crw)*

Kim Seidel is a local writer and editor who enjoys meeting inspirational people like Norma Vinger as part of her work.



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A DISH TO PASS

This holiday season, bring a serving of good health to the table.

BY CHARISH BADZINSKI

Recipes, photos and analysis provided by the La Crosse County Health Department–Nutrition Division.



For every party invitation this time of year, it seems, comes the challenge of bringing a dish to share. Most of us have our fail-safe fallback plan—an item we make so often, we're embarrassed to bring it again. But never fear; in this season of celebrations, you don't have to bring the old standards. Instead, Jennifer Miller, a registered dietitian with the La Crosse County Health Department, says we can create a dish to share that is memorable, inventive and yes, even healthy. And if you are expecting to be deprived in order to watch your waistline this holiday, guess again. Even though the holidays are notorious for the annual gift of unwanted pounds, when you bring something nutritious to the table, you can be sure at least one dish fits sensibly into your eating plan.

Cook smart

To that end, Miller offers several recipes that highlight the seasonal flavors we crave this time of year: oven-roasted sweet potatoes, butternut squash, ripe apples with cranberries and a fruit dip reminiscent of pumpkin pie. "It's not about restricting everything; it's about moderation. You want your family and friends to come back, so you really want it to taste good, too." To draw out rich flavors while taming fats and sugars, Miller makes sensible substitutions and calls upon techniques such as oven roasting, which caramelizes the natural sugars in foods like sweet potatoes. When done properly, no one will notice you've skipped the marshmallows.

CURRIED BUTTERNUT SQUASH AND PEAR SOUP

Serves 8.

- 1 2-lb. butternut squash
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 T olive oil
- 1 tsp. dried ginger powder
- 1 T curry powder
- 4 cups reduced-sodium vegetable broth
- 2 firm ripe pears, cored and cubed
- ½ cup half-and-half

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil. Cut squash in half lengthwise; remove seeds. Place squash cut side down on baking sheet. Place pears, onions and garlic on baking sheet with squash and drizzle with olive oil. Roast about 45 minutes or until soft. Scoop out squash. In a large pot, combine all ingredients; bring to a boil. Pour soup into blender; puree in batches until smooth.

130 calories, 3.5g fat, 3g protein, 24g carbohydrate, 4g fiber, 45mg sodium. This recipe is a Foot Steps to Health recipe providing a ½ cup serving of fruit/vegetables and is 500 Club approved.

AUTUMN BREAKFAST BAKE

Serves 12.

- 9 cups sliced unpeeled apples (can substitute 1½ cups blueberries for 1½ cups apples)
- 2 cups cranberries
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 T whole-wheat flour
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1½ cups oatmeal
- ¾ cup whole-wheat flour
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 2 T warm water

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, combine apples, cranberries, sugar, 2 T flour and cinnamon; toss to coat. Spread fruit mixture in a 9x13-inch pan. In a separate bowl, combine oatmeal, ¾ cup whole-wheat flour, brown sugar, butter and water; mix well. Spoon oatmeal mixture on top of the fruit. Bake for 50 minutes or until topping is brown and fruit is soft.

290 calories, 9g fat, 4g protein, 52g carbohydrate, 6g fiber, 70mg sodium. This recipe is a Foot Steps to Health recipe providing a ½ cup serving of fruit/vegetables and is 500 Club approved.

SWEET POTATOES

Serves 6.

- 2 large sweet potatoes, baked and peeled
- 2 T butter
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground allspice
- ¼ cup raisins
- 1 Granny Smith apple, peeled and diced
- ⅛ cup fat-free milk

Mash sweet potatoes. Melt butter over low heat in small saucepan; mix in sugar, cinnamon, allspice and raisins. Add apples, cover and let simmer for 5 minutes or until apples are tender. Mix apple mixture into sweet potatoes; stir in milk. Mix well until potatoes reach desired consistency.

180 calories, 4g fat, 1g protein, 37g carbohydrate, 3g fiber, 60mg sodium. This recipe is a Foot Steps to Health Recipe providing a serving of fruit or vegetable and is 500 Club Approved.

PUMPKIN PUDDING WHIP

Serves 6.

- 1 3.12-oz. box instant vanilla pudding mix*
- 1½ cups skim milk
- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- 1 tsp. pumpkin pie spice
- 2 cups fat-free whipped topping

In a mixing bowl, beat pudding mix and milk until well blended and thickened. Blend in pumpkin and pie spice. Fold in whipped topping. Spoon into dessert dishes or hollowed-out miniature pumpkins and chill until serving. Serve with apple slices.

*Sugar-free instant vanilla pudding mix can be substituted to lower sugar content.

140 calories, 0g fat, 3g protein, 26g carbohydrate, 1g fiber, 160mg sodium. This recipe is a Foot Steps to Health Recipe providing a serving of fruit or vegetable and is 500 Club Approved.





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Eat smart

Miller also offers several practical tips for navigating gatherings this season and ensuring that you don't feel deprived. First, lighten up old standards by using lighter versions of yogurt, sour cream and cream cheese, and use half whole grains in recipes that call for less nutritious grains. Also, consider making small additions of fruits and veggies that won't throw off your recipes, but will give your plate some added nutrition. And remember that bringing a dish not only lets you introduce healthier options to the people you care about, but it also ensures a guilt-free option for you. "Make a dish that you know you're going to enjoy, but is also going to fit into your calorie count during the day," explains Miller. Each recipe comes with a sensible calorie count, some hits of nutrition to keep you going during the busy party season and servings of healthy fruits or vegetables: just what your body is craving. "It's about maintaining your weight during the holidays, but you don't want to deprive yourself," says Miller.

Finally, Miller advises to keep yourself out of temptation's way. Don't stand near the food table for the duration of the party. Instead, hold your conversations away from the buffet or kitchen to eliminate mindless munching. That way, you get a little goodness at the party, but never too much of a good thing.

The Health Department features monthly recipes and other valuable information at <http://www.getactivelacrosse.org/lacrosse/get-eating-healthy/foot-steps-to-health/>. **(crw)**



Jennifer Miller, La Crosse County Health Department

Charish Badzinski is the token salad maker in her family. She enjoys introducing her family to vegetables and fruits they've never tasted before.

Food Safety Tips

From the La Crosse County Health Department.

- **Practice proper sanitation.** Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, and encourage guests to wash their hands, too. Wash all produce, prepare food on clean surfaces and avoid cross-contamination.
- **Thaw food safely.** Never thaw foods under hot water or at room temperature, as it encourages bacterial growth. Instead, thaw in the refrigerator, in a cold-water bath or in the microwave, according to manufacturer's instructions.
- **Monitor food temperatures.** All poultry, casseroles and reheated leftovers should be cooked to 165°F. Ground meat and egg dishes should be cooked to 160°F. Fresh beef, pork, veal and lamb (not ground) should be cooked to 145°F. Keep hot foods hot by using chafing dishes, slow cookers or warming trays; keep cold foods cold by nesting them in bowls of ice. Leave no cold foods out longer than two hours.
- **Treat leftovers with care.** Refrigerate or freeze in shallow containers within two hours of cooking. Use refrigerated leftovers within a couple of days, and reheat to 165°F.

For more information on safe food-handling practices, and a 24/7 hotline, go to the United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education?index.asp.

TAKING CENTER STAGE

The La Crosse Community Theatre stars in a revival performance.

BY HEIDI GRIMINGER BLANKE

Photo by Theresa M. Smerud



Pirates of Penzance

Nothing says “community” like an organization whose very name bears the term. The La Crosse Community Theatre (LCT), a Coulee Region mainstay for nearly 50 years, produces seven shows annually, all with a paid staff of six people. “For every one person on stage,” says executive director David Kilpatrick, “there’s somewhere in the neighborhood of three to five people offstage supporting them.” From costume preparation to set building to ticket sales, volunteers help make LCT a shining star in the area arts scene.

Without the community, LCT would be just another theater.

ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE.

—William Shakespeare

Suzanne Young is a veteran of many performances. She began her community theater career in 1967, when rehearsals were held in church basements. Young enjoys all aspects of a show and, as a volunteer, she forms bonds with people she would not cross paths with otherwise. Like an extended family, shows are made of many smaller groups with distinct responsibilities that come together at the end as if for a giant reunion, and then go their separate ways after the show closes. “But I have a feeling, that with the social networking and everything, it’s a lot easier for people to stay in touch if they choose,” says Young.

Anne Drechtrah, who has been involved as a volunteer at the director level for many years, agrees, sharing that the theater “offers a chance for people to know the camaraderie” that goes on in it. She has “generations of friends” she is still close to, and she even keeps in contact with friends from other countries who were once in a show.

Sally Cremer was LCT’s first president in 1963, when the Coulee Region was “just starved for live entertainment.” She credits the organization’s long-term success to a solid mix of art and business. At the start of her term, Cremer insisted LCT have a board of directors and a business manager. She is sure this attention to the business end is one of the reasons it has stayed together.

For many associated with LCT, either as staff, volunteer or patron, the new Performing Arts Center, located at the corners of Front and King Streets and formed by a partnership between LCT and Viterbo University, is considered one of monumental importance. LCT Board of Directors vice president Kenna Christians anticipates the state-of-the-art facility will do far more than offer an evening of entertainment. “It’s an economic draw,” she relates. “People come in from out of town; they may spend the night in a hotel and certainly go out to eat.” In addition, she states, the venture shows that “the arts are alive and going well in La Crosse and, I think, for some people, that’s a real benefit, especially if you’re moving from bigger cities.”

I BELIEVE THAT IN A GREAT CITY, OR EVEN IN A SMALL CITY OR A VILLAGE, A GREAT THEATER IS THE OUTWARD AND VISIBLE SIGN OF AN INWARD AND PROBABLE CULTURE.

—Laurence Olivier

Kilpatrick points out that all funds for the Performing Arts Center were raised privately and locally, in a display of community support for which western Wisconsin is known.

For volunteers more intimately involved with the theater, the new facility is a chance to interact with all aspects of a production, as



Architects envisioned creating a jewel of downtown when planning the Performing Arts Center, inside (left) and out (right). This center will serve as the permanent home of the La Crosse Community Theatre in January 2013.

everything will be under one roof. Set designers, costume constructors and actors, for example, will be able to work concurrently, drawing all those involved with a show into a tighter community.

I REGARD THE THEATRE AS THE GREATEST OF ALL ART FORMS, THE MOST IMMEDIATE WAY IN WHICH A HUMAN BEING CAN SHARE WITH ANOTHER THE SENSE OF WHAT IT IS TO BE A HUMAN BEING.

—Oscar Wilde

One of the highlights of the new theater will be the opportunity to meet and chat with friends before the show and during intermission. In the theater's current digs, patrons stand shoulder to shoulder during these times, crammed into a tiny reception and concessions space. Christians is excited because the space will offer "opportunities for people to mingle, to talk to each other; it's going to be more of a social experience." Kilpatrick is especially thrilled to see this part of the building come to life, as his Ph.D. dissertation centered on the lobby and pre-show experience. "People can come in and mill about and socialize, unlike our current theater, where everything is blocked," he says.

While much of the building's accessibility is mandated by law, additional attempts were made to be as inclusive as possible. For example, nearly everything associated with a production—from dressing rooms, to the director's box, to the stage and backstage areas—are on one continuous level. Loop technology will allow those with hearing aids to listen to the performance as if with their own personal loudspeaker.

The community is involved at every aspect of a show, and Kilpatrick offers numerous ways for people to become involved on- or offstage. Some volunteers help out with administrative details for an hour or two. Others build sets, or help with lighting and costumes. Still other volunteers assist with database input or marketing. One of the more popular ways to become involved is to usher at a performance, then see the show for free. This opportunity is open to individuals as well as groups.

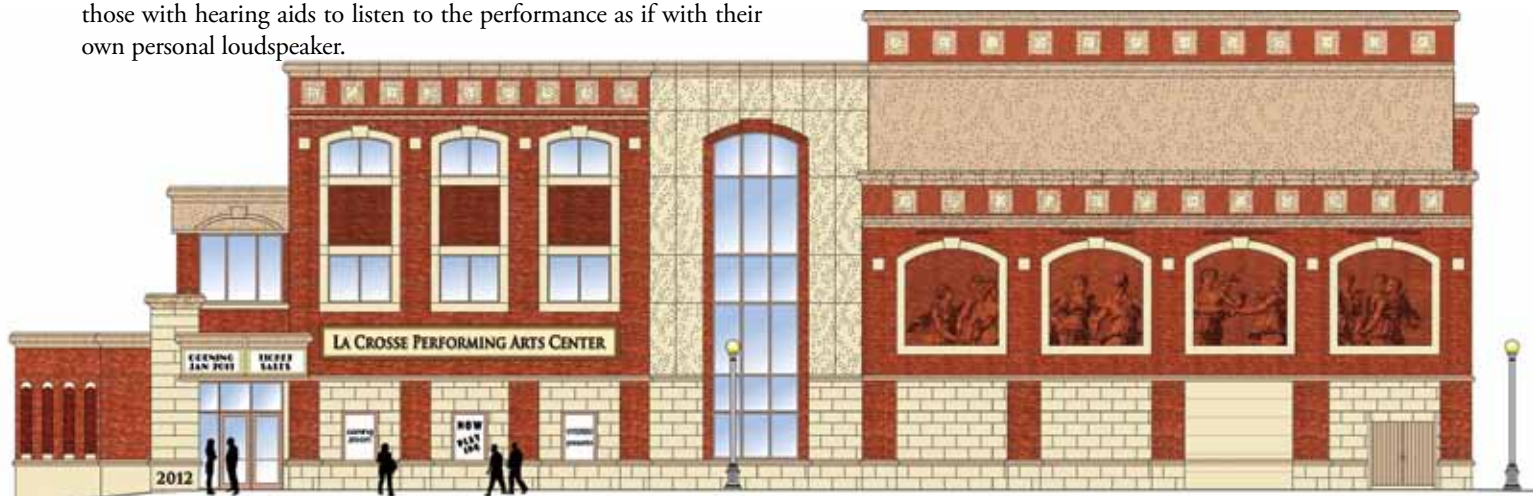
EXIT, STAGE RIGHT.

—Snagglepuss

Young considers LCT "an integral part of the community" and is excited about "the vibrant life and experiences for people" the new location will bring. Best of all, though, she says with a slight laugh, will be the ability for actors to exit from both sides of the stage. "We're really looking forward to having stage right wing space, because now when you head off of stage right, it is just a wall."

Without a doubt, the La Crosse Community Theatre will continue to live up to its name. Whether you are a theater patron, involved in a performance or simply strolling by the Performing Arts Center, LCT offers a sense of community to the entire Coulee Region.

Heidi Griminger Blanke is a freelance writer who is looking forward to attending theater performances in the new facility (and having room to move in the lobby).





THE *Power* OF THE *Purse*

From clutches to carryalls, the Coulee Region
is aplomb with perfect purses.

Photos by Megan McCluskey, Atypik Studio

"Every woman should have a purse of her own."
—Susan B. Anthony

1. Clockwise from top left: Franco Sarto jet black bag, \$148; The Sak "Iris" demi clutch, \$89; Tignanello pebble leather organizer shopper in tomato, \$169; Nine West "Magic Mirror" gold clutch, \$49, all from **Herberger's**, Valley View Mall.

2. Michael Kors neoprene tote in turquoise, \$128; iPad case in lime, \$48; wristlet in purple \$38, all from **Macy's**, Valley View Mall.

3. Deepa Burnani black clutch, \$250, **Touch of Class**, downtown La Crosse.

4. Rebecca Minkoff "Mini Mac" in freesia, \$195; "Mac Daddy" in teal, \$350, **Touch of Class**, downtown La Crosse.

5. Dooney & Bourke python domed bucket satchel, \$468, **Macy's**, Valley View Mall.

6. Melie Bianco "Darlene," \$110, **kick**, downtown La Crosse.

7. Dooney & Bourke nylon giraffe-print large tulip shopper, \$168, **Macy's**, Valley View Mall.

8. Amara Felice hand-pieced leather clutches, \$58 each, **LARK**, downtown La Crosse.

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Rotary Lights November 23 – December 31

Join in one of La Crosse's most beloved traditions—the Rotary Lights display. November 23 to December 31. Stroll or drive through the display as you wish, but don't forget your contribution of a nonperishable food item, which will help stock area food shelves.

This year, visit Santa in his new house, built in part by Rotary Lights and the La Crosse Area Builders Association (LABA). The building project was led by LABA board member Jon Olson and volunteer Jim Wing.



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COMMUNITY: BE A PART OF IT!

In 2013, enjoy 41 ways to make the most of all the Coulee Region has to offer.

1. Shop at a farmers' market.
2. Order off the 500 menu.
3. Join the People's Food Co-op.
4. Hike through Hixon Forest.
5. Sign your family up for a 5K run/walk for the charity of your choice—there are so many to choose from!
6. Bike the local trails.
7. Shop locally owned businesses.
8. Attend the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra.
9. Attend a La Crosse Community Theatre play.
10. Audition for a La Crosse Community Theatre play.
11. Bring your concerns to your elected representatives. To find them, go to www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/CoDirctry/7FedStateReps.pdf.
12. Take in a free flick at the La Crosse Public Library movie night.
13. Feed the ducks at Riverside Park.
14. Drive through Rotary Lights in Riverside Park (and bring nonperishable food items for local food shelves).
15. Visit Lights Over North La Crosse, the holiday light display at Copeland Park.
16. Sign up your family to deliver Meals on Wheels.
17. Sign up for music lessons at Leithold Music, SSE Music or Reed Music Studios.
18. Then, join the La Crosse Concert Band.
19. If you're not up for #17 or #18, at least enjoy a free performance of the La Crosse Concert Band at Riverside Park in the warm months.
20. Visit a resident at a local retirement home.
21. Enjoy the quiet beauty of the International Gardens.
22. Get your hands dirty as an International Garden volunteer.
23. Absorb amazing local art at the Pump House in La Crosse.
24. Absorb amazing local and international art at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum in Winona.
25. Take a sunny afternoon and drive up Wisconsin Hwy. 35. Then, drive back down Minnesota Hwy. 61. All seasons are equally delightful.
26. Donate time and muscle power to Habitat for Humanity.
27. Shop the Habitat ReStore.
28. Clean out your closet/attic/basement/garage. Then, donate appropriate goods to the Salvation Army, Goodwill or the Habitat ReStore.
29. Find a local cause you believe in. Then, support it as you are able.
30. Find a new favorite locally owned restaurant.
31. Join a service organization or networking group (browse "Ongoing Events" in this issue's Community Calendar, or download the 2013 *Coulee Region Women Business & Resource Directory* at www.crwmagazine.com).
32. Visit the dinosaurs at the Children's Museum of La Crosse.
33. Take in an arts or sporting event at UW-La Crosse or Viterbo University.
34. Volunteer at your child's school.
35. Write your child's teacher a note of appreciation.
36. Become a CASA for Kids advocate through the YWCA.
37. Bring a neighbor you don't know well a home-baked treat.
38. Join your neighborhood association.
39. Smile and say hello to the next person you meet on the sidewalk.
40. Take in the view at the newly remodeled pavilion at Grandad Bluff.
41. Then, look to Grandad Bluff for the famous Skyrocket fireworks display this New Year's Eve.



FORECAST TEAM

Daybreak • Live at Five • 6pm Report • 10pm Report



YOUR HOMETOWN TEAM

Maddy Sky • Dan Breeden • Alex Kirchner



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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

ONGOING EVENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Coulee Region Professional Women (CRPW) meets the 4th Tues. of each month, Nell's City Grill, 1111 3rd St. S., La Crosse, 5:30 p.m. Debbye SwardFihn, debbye@couleecoffee.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. www.lacrossechamber.com.

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

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

Onalaska Hilltopper Rotary meets every Wed. noon-1 p.m., La Crosse Country Club, 300 Marcou Road, Onalaska.

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

Onalaska Toastmasters Club meets the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month, noon-1 p.m., Globe University, 2651 Midwest Drive, Onalaska.

Valley View Kiddie Crew meets the 1st and 3rd Tues. of each month, Valley View Mall Food Court, 10:30-11:30 a.m., with fun and education experiences for children and parents. www.myvalleyview.com.

Viroqua Toastmasters Club meets 2nd and 4th Thurs. of the month, 7-8:30 p.m., Vernon Memorial Hospital, Taylor Conf. Rm., Lower Level, 507 S. Main, Viroqua.

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

Women in Networking and Support (WINS) meets the 2nd Wed. of each month, 4 Sisters, noon-1 p.m. Shari Hopkins, 608-784-3904, shopkins@couleebank.net.

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

Women's Alliance of La Crosse (WAL) meets the 2nd Thurs. of each month, noon at Waterfront Restaurant. Kendra Brown, kendra@dmharrislaw.com.

Women's Alliance of La Crosse (WAL) presents the 2013 WILD (Women in Leadership Development) workshops on Jan. 28, Feb. 25 and March 25, 2013. Contact Moriah Cody at 608-783-2639 or moriah.a.cody@ampf.com.

CALENDAR EVENTS

Dec. 1-31, Rotary Lights, 5-10 p.m. daily, Riverside Park, downtown La Crosse. www.rotarylights.org.

Dec. 6-9, *These Shining Lives*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Toland Theater, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse.

Dec. 7-8, La Crosse Dance Centre's 23rd Annual *Nutcracker Ballet*, 7:30 p.m. Fri., 2 p.m. Sat., Viterbo Fine Arts Center, 608-796-3100, <http://www.viterbo.edu/tickets>.

Dec. 6-8, 14-15, *The Wager*, Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Dec. 7-16, *A Christmas Story*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Dec. 8, Crucifixion Parish's 5th Christmas Gift and Craft Showcase, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., 420 S. 2nd St., La Crescent, 507-895-4402.

Dec. 8, Meet Pet Therapy Dogs, 10-11 a.m., La Crosse Children's Museum, www.funmuseum.org.

Dec. 8, Norskedalen Gift Shop Open House, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., N455 O Ophus Rd, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

Dec. 10, Pet Photos with Santa, Valley View Mall, 10% of photo sales benefit Coulee Region Humane Society, www.myvalleyview.com.

Dec. 13, UW-L Cabaret, Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Dec. 14, Boy Scout Overnight, 5:30 p.m. Fri.-9:30 a.m. Sat., Children's Museum of La Crosse, www.funmuseum.org.

Dec. 15, Women's Christmas Tea, 2-4 p.m., Bethany Church, 3936 Cty Rd B, La Crosse.

Dec. 17, Pet Photos with Santa, Valley View Mall, 10% of photo sales benefit Coulee Region Humane Society, www.myvalleyview.com.

Dec. 19-20, String Ties, Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Dec. 20, Vanessa Trouble, 7:30 p.m., Minnesota Marine Art Museum, Winona.

Dec. 22, Meet Pet Therapy Dogs, 10-11 a.m., La Crosse Children's Museum, www.funmuseum.org.

Dec. 31, Skyrocket's New Year's Eve Fireworks, Granddads Bluff, La Crosse.

Jan. 11-12, Johnsmith, Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Jan. 12, Winter Festival, Kickapoo Valley Reserve, starts at 8:00 a.m., WI Hwy 131, 1.5 miles north of La Farge, www.kvr.state.wi.us/winterfest.

Jan. 16-17, Greater Midwest Farm Show, La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

Jan. 17, Capitol Steps, 7:30 p.m., Main Theater, Viterbo University.

Jan. 18, Transit Authority, 7:30 p.m., Heider Center, West Salem.

Jan. 19, Mardi Gras Ball, 5:30 p.m., Stoney Creek Inn, Onalaska, www.lacrossemaidgras.com.

Jan. 19-26, Winter Rec-Fest, La Crosse.

Jan. 20, Z93 Wedding World, La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

Jan. 23-27, Frozen River Film Festival, Winona State University, frff.org.

Jan. 25-Feb. 3, *Macbeth*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Jan. 26, The Great Tri-State Rail Sale, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., La Crosse Center, 608-781-9383.

Jan. 27, Mardi Gras Carnivale, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossemaidgras.com.

Jan. 31, *The Accidental Hero*, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., Page Theatre, St. Mary's University, Winona, www.pagetheatre.org.

Feb. 1-2, Snowflake Ski Jump Tournament, Westby, www.snowflakeskiclub.com.

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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