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STRENGTH

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Pictured on the cover: Dr. Nkechinyere Ijioma, Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse. Photo by Teresa Hase, Mayo Clinic Health System.

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What does strength mean to you? Depending on the situation, the connotation can range from the simple physical strength of being able to lift something heavy to a metaphorical ability to withstand hardship and challenge.

Even something as simple as my routine morning runs can require multiple types of strength. Of course, there is the muscle strength required to move my legs forward, lifting my feet over the snow and ice this time of year. And it takes a strong heart to keep the blood pumping to bring oxygen to those muscles.

If you're looking for physical strength, our Healthy Living and Home stories in this issue will help you find the right workout and create a space to stick with your fitness routine in your own home.

Strength can also be a synonym for endurance—the ability to keep going for an extended time, mile after mile (or day after day through challenging circumstances). We sometimes invoke strength when we see stoicism and resolve in someone who refuses to give up. I've watched friends “dig deep” during 24-hour endurance events to find a second wind and complete one more lap, and another, when they thought their legs could go no further.

We see strength in those people and places that endure through time, including the buildings that are the foundation and cornerstones of our communities, such as the

Historic Fortney Hotel in Viroqua, Leithold Music in downtown La Crosse and the renewed life shining from B's Place in West Salem.

Strength can be spiritual—the kind of internal resilience that turns us toward a deeper meaning when life gets tough. It can be emotional, overcoming grief to continue toward finding peace.

It can take the shape of courage to face the unknown or take on a challenge. Our cover woman, Dr. Nkechinyere Ijioma, had the strength and courage to follow a dream that she knew from the beginning wouldn't be easy. Even her inspiration, the doctor who spoke at Dr. Ijioma's all-girl school in Nigeria, had emphasized the difficulty of the schooling and exams involved, but she was not to be deterred. Her path led her across the Atlantic Ocean and through multiple states before bringing her to Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse, where she cares for the source of so much of our strength: our hearts.

Today, she shares her passion—another manifestation of strength—by mentoring both high school students and physicians in training.

Whether it is the strength to keep your spirits high when facing drastic changes in how a business or organization operates, as demonstrated by Elizabeth Poh, sales and marketing director at the La Crosse Center, or the courage to jump into the retail business world yet again like Nancy Neil, chances are you are surrounded by individuals who live out strength in a wide variety of ways.

Where do you see strength in those around you? In yourself?

We don't always see ourselves as strong, especially when we falter. My running isn't what it once was, as my Facebook memories remind me regularly, so it can be hard to see strength in that daily routine.

But even though my miles are fewer and slower than in the past, perhaps the greatest strength I've developed in 15 years of lacing up my shoes day after day in the wee hours of the morning is the fortitude it takes to pry myself out from under a warm, heavy, welcoming down comforter, open the door to the -15° wind chill and snowy streets, and take that first step into the frosty air. That, my friends, may be my greatest strength.

Shari

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CELEBRATE GALENTINE'S DAY

A Galentine's Day Brunch, presented by Pischke Motors, is a celebration of love and friendship benefiting New Horizons Shelter and Outreach Centers. The brunch will be held 9-11:30 a.m. Saturday, February 12, at the Court Above Main, 420 Main St., La Crosse.

The party begins with a coffee bar and donut bar donated by Linda's Bakery. While guests will sip their coffee and complimentary mimosa, they can get ready for the upcoming holiday with last-minute Valentine's Day gifts and getaways in a silent auction and raffle.

Over brunch from Serves You Right catering, guests will laugh and learn with a presentation from New Horizons staff and humorist Lisa David Olson.

New Horizons is excited to see community supporters in person again at this event. "Our community has shown us increased generosity throughout the pandemic, and we are so excited for this opportunity to show our supporters how thankful we are for their continued contributions and build up support for our future," says Sierra Lyon, Development Coordinator. Precautions will be taken to protect everyone's health and safety.

Tickets are \$50 each or \$500 for a table for 10 people. Tables can be marked with business logos or a group's name. Tickets are available online at bit.ly/nhgalentinesdaybrunch or by phone at 608-791-2610 ext. 1305.



THE STORIES OF STRONG HEARTS

La Crosse Dance Centre and The Pump House in La Crosse will bring a performance to the stage in early April combining dance, spoken word, song and movement in a celebration of our resiliency and strong heart.

Telling Stories: A Strong Heart will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 1, and Saturday, April 2, and again at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 3, in the Pump House's recently renovated theater. Director for the performance is Anne Drecktrah.

Tickets are available on the Pump House website at <https://www.thepumphouse.org/product/telling-stories-a-strong-heart/> or by calling 608-785-1434. Prices are \$30 for general admission, \$25 for Pump House members or \$15 for students and military (ID required).

Covid safety precautions at the Pump House can be found on the venue's website at <https://www.thepumphouse.org/our-response-to-covid-19/>.



Ilene Kernozeck,
Mrs. Oktoberfest
2021

MRS. OKTOBERFEST 2022 NOMINATIONS OPEN!

The snow may still be falling, but Oktoberfest is right around the corner. You can be an important part of the 2022 Oktoberfest celebration by nominating a deserving Coulee Region woman for the honor of Mrs. Oktoberfest 2022.

The nominee should be a woman who is:

- actively involved in the La Crosse community
- married or previously married
- at least 50 years old
- living within 20 miles of La Crosse
- able to devote her time to numerous Oktoberfest activities throughout the upcoming year
- a La Crosse and Oktoberfest enthusiast
- aware that you are nominating her to be Mrs. Oktoberfest

The deadline for nominations is Friday, April 1, at 5:00 p.m. All nominations must be made online through the form link at <https://www.oktoberfestusa.com/mrsonom/>. If you have questions about the nominating process, please contact mary.mickelson821@gmail.com.



ART DASH: READY, SET, GOGH!

Artists and art lovers alike can support the Franciscan Spirituality Center in a light-hearted event featuring seriously great artwork by local artists. The fifth annual Art Dash will be Thursday, March 24, at the Cargill Room at The Waterfront Restaurant and Tavern.

Donations of artwork will be accepted through March 1 by contacting Stacey Kalas at skalas@fspa.org; see criteria at <https://www.fscenter.org/content/art-dash>.

The event itself begins with a 5:30 p.m. cocktail hour and preview of artwork, followed by the 6:30 p.m. "Dash."

How it works: A \$100 ticket buys a spot in the Dash. After a preview of the art, names will be drawn randomly, three at a time. As your name is called, you'll dash to the piece you want. If someone claims your top pick before you do, you'll need to make a different choice. Depending on when your name is called and what pieces are available at that point, you may get your top pick or you may need to select a second or third choice. Everyone who buys a \$100 ticket is guaranteed a piece of art.

Spectator tickets are also available for those not interested in receiving art for \$50. The event will also include a wine pull and caricatures by Tommy Orrico. Tickets may be purchased online at <https://www.fscenter.org/content/art-dash>.

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Left-Right: Sheryl Gora-Bollom, MS, LCSW;
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Dr. Nkechinyere Ijioma is the senior associate consultant (physician) in the Department of Cardiology and Assistant Professor of Medicine at Mayo College of Medicine.

STRONG LEADER, STRONG HEART

Dr. Nkechinyere Ijioma brings passion for health and helping to the Coulee Region.

BY JANIS JOLLY | PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAYO CLINIC HEALTH SYSTEM

It's a long journey from being a medical student in Nigeria to becoming a cardiologist at Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse, and Dr. Nkechinyere (Nkechi/pronounced as Ketch-ee) Ijioma has made the trip with a heart full of courage and a positive attitude.

She says her passion for medicine was triggered in high school. "I attended an all-girls boarding secondary school in Nigeria," says Dr. Ijioma. "The school typically organized an annual career day and invited professionals from a range of different careers—lawyers, chartered accountants, etc.—to speak to the students about their careers. I still remember the sense of awe and wonder that filled me, a teenager, to see and hear a female medical doctor talk about her medical school journey and her career as a medical doctor, wife and mother," she remembers. "She radiated joy and fulfillment, and despite her depiction of the numerous exams required to become a doctor, I knew at that moment that I wanted to be like her: I was going to be a medical doctor."

FOLLOWING HER DREAMS

Dr. Ijioma earned her medical degree in Nigeria, then completed her U.S. medical licensing exams in Iowa City. "My post-graduate medical education (residency and fellowship training) began in 2007

at the University of Iowa in Iowa City and has taken me to The Ohio State University in Columbus and Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. I jokingly remark that I went from being a Hawkeye to a Buckeye!" she says.

Cardiology became her choice as she worked through rotations in internal medicine residency. "I wanted to be a doctor who takes care of people's hearts because the heart affects everything else," she explains. "The heart is a small organ, with an average weight of about 300 grams. However, without a beating heart, there is no life. In addition, there are arteries and veins whose functions affect other bodily function. My fascination with disorders of the heart—coronary artery disease and heart failure—made me pursue cardiology fellowship training."

HEART OF HER PRACTICE

What's at the "heart" of her practice here in La Crosse and the Coulee Region? Her love of working with patients to arrive at a solution to their problems. "Patients want to know that their medical needs will be met. I have learned that people respond to kindness, empathy and a sense that the healthcare provider is genuinely interested in meeting their medical needs," Dr. Ijioma says.

Heather Kujak-Coons, operations manager at Mayo Clinic Health

System's cardiology department in La Crosse, describes the doctor as "extremely positive. That's one of the first things people notice about her." She notices the good things staff people do and acknowledges them. It's important for staff that others know and appreciate what they do. Her feedback to them is genuine, from the heart. She is also collaborative in that she knows whom to reach out to in cardiology or other specialties, Kujak-Coons explains.

As a certified nurse practitioner at Mayo Clinic Health System, Emma Banwart collaborates with Dr. Ijioma in the hospital and shares some patients at the clinic. She, too, appreciates the cardiologist's positivity. "She is easy to talk to, and puts the needs of the patient first," Banwart says. Banwart says the pandemic has increased the workload of the cardiology department because it worsens heart problems such as atrial fibrillation and sleep apnea. The increased workload stretches the department resources and to lighten the load a little, Dr. Ijioma and others have provided lunch for the whole department on very busy days.

CARING FOR COMMUNITY AND CARDIOLOGY

Despite coming from a different place and culture, Dr. Ijioma, a Nigerian-Canadian dual citizen, says she has felt welcome in the Midwest. "One of the first things that



WOMEN & HEART HEALTH

Heart disease presents differently in women than in men and is the leading cause of death for women in America. Prevention of cardiovascular disease includes healthy food choices, regular exercise, managing emotional stress, maintaining a healthy weight and avoiding unhealthy habits such as smoking cigarettes and substance abuse.

Typical symptoms of heart disease are chest pain, pressure or discomfort. Women can also experience associated symptoms of shortness of breath, neck or jaw pain, unusual fatigue, lightheadedness/nausea or vomiting. If you develop chest pain with any of these symptoms, call 911 immediately.

An excellent video dramatization of a woman having a heart attack along with thorough information about heart health is at:

<https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/can-stress-lead-to-a-heart-attack>

struck me when I first arrived at Iowa City was the friendliness of the people. When I moved to La Crosse, my next-door neighbors immediately reached out to me and made me know that they are looking out for me," she says. "We are really blessed in the Midwest with a sense of community."

She sees mentorship as vital to her profession. Dr. Ijioma wants to be an example to youth and encourage others, especially young women and people of color, to go into the sciences. "Each one of us can serve as a role model for others. Several Mayo Clinic (Rochester) consultants and I are collaborating with Mayo Clinic medical school leadership and the Health Career Collaborative (HCC) program to inspire Rochester STEM high school students in medicine. Approximately 25 Rochester STEM high school students are participating in this mentorship program. I consider this an opportunity to pay forward the mentorship that I have received in my career journey," Dr. Ijioma says.

She describes herself as a "volunteer enthusiast" for the American College of Cardiology (ACC). The ACC mission to "transform cardiovascular care and improve

heart health" is a goal close to Dr. Ijioma's heart. She has served on committees that provide training and education for practitioners. She also serves on one of the American Heart Association committees for fellows-in-training and early career physicians.

Participation in groups that align with her values provides another outlet for her energy. In Iowa she was involved with the 2005 and 2006 Iowa City Relay for Life (American Cancer Society) and 2006 Light the Night (Leukemia and Lymphoma Society). She even traveled to Slidell, Louisiana, with her church group to help gut houses after Hurricane Katrina. Here in La Crosse, she participates in community projects with the La Crosse Rotary-After Hours (RAH) club.

Dr. Ijioma believes that all workers have an important role to play, and by being kind to each other we all can make the world a better place. "If we all work to the best of our talents it makes the world better," she says. "The point of life is to make each other better." **CRW**

Janis Jolly is a freelance writer living in La Crosse.



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BUILDING ON STRENGTHS

La Crescent's Sarah Danielson focuses on hard work, positivity and community involvement.

BY JULIE NELSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Sarah Danielson's community involvement and volunteerism have long been part of her life, from serving as a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor and teaching Junior Achievement classes to helping decorate the La Crescent Fire Truck for Santa's tour around town.

When you're a commercial banker, it's fun to help people with dreams of starting their own business figure out the financial piece, but for Sarah Danielson of Merchant's Bank in La Crescent, the real joy comes in helping people identify their strengths. She says too often we, as a society, spend our time looking at weaknesses.

MAXIMIZING STRENGTHS

"When you set your focus on your strengths, you can maximize what you do well and then find others to complement you in areas where you are not as strong," says Danielson. She gives the example of employee complaints about dishes a co-worker always leaves in the breakroom, without appreciating that the same person shovels every time it snows without being asked.



Sarah Danielson

Danielson also references her sister, who owns a lab and is a great chemist but struggles with bookkeeping. One of her sister's first objectives was to get her business to a point where she could hire someone else to manage the finances. She and her new employee each focus on their

strengths, and the business is more successful as a result.

"Everyone has their own unique skills," Danielson says. "Whether in banking, at home or in my community partnerships, I try to hone in on each person's strength and focus on that. I think if everyone did that, we'd be a much more cohesive society."

ALWAYS INVOLVED

In terms of keeping the community strong, Danielson firmly believes everyone can play a part. "The community is what you make

it to be," she says. "I take to heart the saying that service is the rent we pay for living on this earth."

Danielson quickly admits she is usually overinvolved with community projects, but she also recognizes her joy in helping people is one of her strengths. Danielson is currently the president of the La Crescent Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, on the board for Junior Achievement of Wisconsin and part of the Lancer Creative Cooperative at La Crescent High School. She's also an alum of Big Brothers Big Sisters and still gets together regularly with her "little," who is now a 33-year-old with a Ph.D.

And there's more. Danielson teaches five or six Junior Achievement classes each year, is president *and* treasurer of the local soccer league, plays clarinet in the community band and is a mom to a 12-year-old and to 19-year-old triplets. Whew!

HARD WORK AND HUMOR

Danielson says part of her work ethic comes from her parents, who owned a farm outside of La Crescent and struggled to make ends meet. When Danielson moved out at age 18, she had to pay for her own apartment, her own food and her own schooling. Knowing she didn't have a safety net to fall back on forced her to pay attention to money and allowed her to become more resilient.

Through it all, Danielson says one of her most important strengths is a sense of humor. "I'm a highly organized person, but when plans start falling apart—as they often do when you are raising triplets—you just have to laugh," she says with a big smile. **CRW**

As the Community School Coordinator for Northside Elementary School, Julie Nelson applauds every effort to build strong communities.



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QUIZ: FIND YOUR NEXT WORKOUT

Answer 10 questions to pick the perfect exercise routine for 2022.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

If the questions you've been asking yourself lately have been along the lines of "powdered or sprinkles?" and "Netflix or Hulu?" give the following questions a go instead. They're designed to help you find a new workout to try—your body and mind will thank you!

	Not really A	Somewhat B	Yes, definitely C
1 Do you enjoy setting tough goals for yourself?	A	B	C
2 Do you want to continue to have the ability to cut your own toenails and tie your own shoes when you're older?	A	B	C
3 Does the thought of lying quietly with your eyes closed at the end of an exercise session, while soothing music plays, appeal to you?	A	B	C
4 When you head to the gym, do you make a beeline for the cardio equipment like the elliptical, treadmill or stationary bike?	A	B	C
5 Have you noticed that hefting those bags of groceries—or the kids/grandkids—has gotten ... rather more difficult?	A	B	C
6 Are you interested in the mind/body connection?	A	B	C
7 Do you sometimes worry about the state of your bones?	A	B	C
8 Do you love yoga pants, but sometimes wonder what it would be like to wear them in an actual yoga class?	A	B	C
9 Do you ever look at pictures of Michelle Obama in a sleeveless dress and think "I wish I had her arms!"?	A	B	C
10 Have the past two years left you feeling more stressed and anxious?	A	B	C



Fitness Lying Down



The Yoga Place

ANSWER KEY:

- | | | | |
|-----|--------|-------|--------|
| 1. | A = 3 | B = 5 | C = 10 |
| 2. | A = 10 | B = 5 | C = 3 |
| 3. | A = 10 | B = 5 | C = 3 |
| 4. | A = 3 | B = 5 | C = 10 |
| 5. | A = 3 | B = 5 | C = 10 |
| 6. | A = 10 | B = 5 | C = 3 |
| 7. | A = 3 | B = 5 | C = 10 |
| 8. | A = 10 | B = 5 | C = 3 |
| 9. | A = 3 | B = 5 | C = 10 |
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YOUR RESULTS

IF YOU SCORED 0-40, TRY YOGA.

What it is:

Yoga is a practice that blends physical poses (asanas) with concentration (dharana) and breathwork (pranayama). There are different types of yoga practices. At The Yoga Place in La Crosse, instructors teach Iyengar Yoga, a method of practice that follows the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar, characterized by its emphasis on alignment.

Benefits:

"Yoga not only helps you build strength, it helps you build balance, stability and flexibility," says Pam Starcher, owner and instructor at The Yoga Place.

Yoga is also great for building strength of mind. "I like to think of yoga as meditation in action," Starcher says. "When you're in the midst of chaos, or a very stressful situation, you can use that practice of meditation in action to help you through that."

What's more, anybody can do yoga. As Starcher notes, "*Yoga Journal* may present that lithe, female, in-great-shape yogi, but you don't have to be that at all! Yoga can be for any body, at any age."

Equipment:

Starcher recommends wearing comfortable clothing that you can move in.

A yoga mat will help you be stable on the floor. Other props might include a blanket, strap and a block.

"In Iyengar Yoga, we use props to help people adapt and adjust so that they can achieve that alignment and good form, which helps avoid injury," she notes.

Where to try it:

Visit The Yoga Place in downtown La Crosse. They offer a variety of class types, including those for beginners or more advanced practitioners; classes are also available online.

IF YOU SCORED 30-80, TRY PILATES.

What it is:

Pilates is a series of exercises designed by Joseph Pilates in the early 1900s. The work concentrates on the core muscles and learning how to incorporate them into every movement for proper alignment and support of the body. "Pilates focuses on strengthening your intrinsic muscles. These are the muscles you use for balance and coordination. All of us can use these benefits, but especially as we age, these are the first muscles we lose if we are not mindfully working on them," says Heather Froh, co-owner of The Pilates Studio in Onalaska.

Benefits:

Pilates can offer increased strength, muscle tone, flexibility, coordination, posture and body awareness. According to Froh, "Because Pilates is a mind/body way of conditioning, not only do you have the benefits of strengthening muscles, but you also learn what are the weakest and strongest parts of your body. With this knowledge, moving forward in your Pilates practice and in life, you can learn how to balance out your musculature for better efficiency and to keep you injury-free."

Equipment:

Pilates is often performed on special equipment like the reformer, the cadillac, the combination chair and the ladder barrel, or on mats. And while these might sound like medieval instruments of torture, they serve a valuable purpose: They can help provide varying levels of resistance and can help steady and align the body.

Where to try it:

Individual, duo and group classes are available at The Pilates Studio in Onalaska.

IF YOU SCORED 70-100, TRY STRENGTH TRAINING.

What it is:

Strength training—or weight training—uses the principle of progressive overload. For example, picking up a heavy object places a lot of demand on the muscles, which causes those muscles to break down. This, in turn, sparks a stimulus in the body to rebuild and repair those muscles, thereby growing more muscle.

Benefits:

According to Megan Berner, registered dietitian and certified personal trainer at Fitness Lying Down, "For women, it can be especially beneficial to strength-train to help promote bone health. For anybody starting to age, it can also help from a balance perspective—it can help ward off falls or injury because of a fall."

Strength training can also accentuate and give our body definition. That being said, "There's a big misconception that we're going to be big and muscle-y if we strength-train," Berner says. "But just adding a strength-training routine into your activity is not going to turn you into a hulk overnight! It takes a lot of intention to do that."

Finally, "It can help you feel more confident in your body," Berner says. "Clients get that sense of accomplishment, that 'I did this hard thing!'"

Equipment:

You can strength-train using just your body weight—think of pushups, planks or squats. Or you can use free weights like dumbbells or kettlebells; other equipment could include machine weights like a chest press machine or leg extension machine.

"The approach we have at Fitness Lying Down," Berner says, "is more about training your whole body as one solid unit." Instead of focusing on individual muscles, the trainers at Fitness Lying Down focus on movement strength, or "real world" strength, using a technique called dynamic variable resistance training, or DVRT.

Where to try it:

Give Fitness Lying Down a try for functional training in small group or semi-private sessions.

Please note: This is an unscientific, just-for-fun quiz. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to fitness, and all three options offer wide-ranging benefits. And remember: It's OK to treat yourself to that doughnut or spend time watching your favorite show. Just try to find time for exercise, too. It's all about balance! **CRW**

Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a La Crosse-based writer and marketer who enjoys both doughnuts and exercise.



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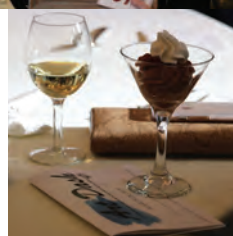
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Downtown Fashionista Returns

Nancy Neil opens Outrageous Boutique 30 years after her La Crosse debut.

BY LEAH CALL | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Nancy Neil has returned to downtown La Crosse and opened Outrageous Boutique 30 years after her initial entry into the retail business. The Pearl Street business offers clothing and accessories from unique American-made lines and designers.

It takes a strong person to endure the ups and downs of starting and running a new business. Nancy Neil has done it five times! This owner of the newest clothing shop in downtown La Crosse came out of retirement to launch Outrageous Boutique, her latest venture, situated next to The Pearl Ice Cream Parlor on historic Pearl Street West.

"I moved up to La Crosse in March of 2021, hoping to retire forever, but I didn't enjoy retirement. I just didn't see enough people," says Neil, who is no stranger to the retail fashion world.

Neil operated her first store, Wild & Woolly, 30 years ago in downtown La Crosse. Over the last three decades, she moved around the country, opening a store wherever she landed: Lake Geneva, Wisconsin; Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts; and Galveston, Texas. She's come full circle with her latest store, which bears the same name as her Galveston and Martha's Vineyard stores.

"One of my friends had a big sailboat named *Outrageous*," recalls Neil of the name's origin. "It's very preppy on Martha's Vineyard, and my clothes are not, so I had to have a name that people would recognize as being different."

When Neil closed her Galveston store, also called Outrageous Boutique, she planned to close the door on her retail career, moving back to La Crosse, where her son resides with his family.

But the retail itch flared again soon after the move. "I was walking around downtown, and I didn't see many women's stores," recalls Neil. "Then I noticed this building and I liked the location of it. And all of a sudden, I decided I could open a store again."

Like the clothing inside, the interior of Outrageous Boutique is distinct. "I kept the name not knowing what people would think of

it here, so I also made the store kind of fun. I bought a bunch of different overhead light fixtures from the (Habitat for Humanity) ReStore that make the store exciting and fun to further the name."

AN EYE FOR STYLE

It's not unusual for Neil to stop a stranger and ask for a peek at a clothing label. She's always on the lookout for quality, unique fashions that she personally curates for her boutique.

"I look for small lines that aren't in department stores, and I look for American made, which is hard to find but still available," she says. "I'm not looking for the button-down shirt or regular sweatshirt or any of the things you can get in department stores or online. The same goes with my jewelry and accessories. I have hand-embroidered belts, handmade jewelry and a lot of fun things."

Outrageous Boutique is currently open Wednesday through Sunday. For now, Neil runs the store herself, though she expects to hire some additional help. She also anticipates extended summer hours to accommodate increased customer traffic.

Neil hopes to continue getting the word out about the unique shopping experience she is creating. Meanwhile, she's right where she wants to be. "I like the customers and I like the reps. It becomes a very small world, and it is exciting, because they are interested in the same things I am—making people look nice and ordering clothes that are fun for them to wear." **CRW**

Westby-based writer Leah Call is excited to check out the spring and summer fashions at Outrageous Boutique.



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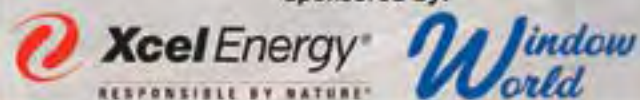
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Welcome

Sara Buchner

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Hello, and welcome to the Home Show!

The La Crosse Area Builders Association is pleased to announce that the La Crosse Area Builders Association Home Show is here for 2022. Be sure to join us March 25 through March 27 at the Omni Center in Onalaska—there's a lot going on that you won't want to miss!

The LABA Home Show is an opportunity to focus on your biggest investment, your home! Attending the Home Show is a great idea whether you are looking to build a new home, remodel a room, fix your roof or just see what is available for your home. There are three different fun days to visit the show.

Come join us on Friday for Date Night! Bring your significant other and enjoy a glass of wine or beer while exploring options and talking to experienced vendors about your current or future home projects or plans.

Can't make it Friday? Join us Saturday for Community Day and help us honor local nonprofit agencies who provide housing programs to those in need. Plus enjoy a glass of wine or beer while you visit the different vendors on this day as well.

Bring the kids on Sunday to enjoy Family Day, where we will have activities to pick up for kids, ice cream, Touch-a-Truck and more!

Vernon Vineyards and Hillsboro Brewing Company will be on-site Friday and Saturday, and you can participate in the Stone Distribution Scavenger Hunt all three days for a chance to win a prize package valued at \$200 each day.

This is the only Home Show in the La Crosse area and a great opportunity to meet local builders and vendors in person and learn how they can help you get your home projects completed.

Sara Buchner

Home Show Committee Chair

with us—that means that no matter what you're wanting to see, it's at this year's show! Are you wanting to see the latest trends? They're here. Or maybe you're looking for ideas to start a new project. I have no doubt that you will be inspired as you walk from booth to booth. As you join us at this year's show, I encourage you to visit each booth and meet some of the area's top builders. Then, check out some of their suppliers to select items such as lighting fixtures, plumbing finishes, countertops, cabinets, flooring and much more. This year's show will be a one-stop shop to help you build the home of your dreams!

The La Crosse Area Builders Association (LABA), along with the help of our members, vendors and public support, continues to raise money for our annual Tools for School Program. If you are not familiar with Tools for Schools, it is a fundraiser established by LABA to promote the trades within our schools. In the last few years alone, LABA has donated over \$10,000 in tools per year to over 20 different area high schools across five local counties (La Crosse, Vernon, Trempealeau, Monroe and Jackson). At this year's Home Show, you will have the chance to help provide high school students with a multitude of opportunities to learn more about the trades. We thank you for your support!

Again, thank you for attending the 2022 La Crosse Area Builder's Association Home Show!

Andrew Lamprecht

LABA President





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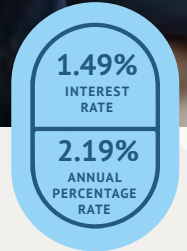
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Home Buyers Rank Their Top Kitchen and Bath Features

Features delivering flexibility and comfort are key.

Photos by Hazel Media LLC

New buyers have a variety of choices when it comes to modern home design. Two areas in the home—kitchens and baths—generally attract the most attention. While styles, sizes and décor can vary, there are certain key features home buyers want in kitchens and baths. The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) recently surveyed prospective and recent home buyers and found that the most desired kitchen and baths features provide flexibility and comfort.

Most-desired kitchen features

During the pandemic, many individuals spent less time entertaining in the kitchen and more time devoted to actual cooking. With a variety of kitchen gadgets and cooking ingredients, it's no surprise that double sinks and pantries stood out as “must have” items in the kitchen. In fact, more than four of every 10 buyers think the double sink is so essential they would be unlikely to buy a home without it.

The survey also revealed buyers' preferences for more space to accommodate time spent preparing and enjoying meals. The survey results showed that more than 70 percent of buyers wanted a table space for eating (78 percent), a central island (77 percent) and drinking water filtration (76 percent).

The survey results also revealed that buyers would like both practical and customizable features in a kitchen. More than two-thirds of all buyers said they wanted recessed lighting (69 percent), a customized backsplash (69 percent) and pull-out shelves (68 percent).

Most-wanted bathroom features

The four most-wanted bathroom features are all related to the home's primary bath. At the very top of the list: a linen closet in the primary bath, rated as essential or desirable by 76 percent of home buyers. Other features that were among the most desired in the primary bathroom were a shower stall and a tub (74 percent) and a double vanity (69 percent).

The shower and tub combination in the primary bath ranked as the most “essential” feature, with more than a third (36 percent) of buyers stating they would be unlikely to purchase a home without this feature.

Adapted from National Association of Home Building, NAHBNow blog, www.nahbnow.com.



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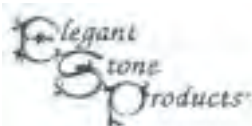
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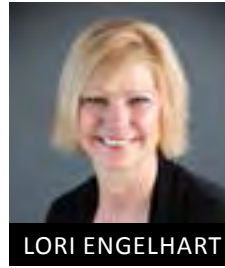
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Preparing to Buy a Home in 2022

Congratulations! You've decided to buy a home this year. Homeownership has many rewards, including building up equity and having a place to call your own. Whether you're a first-time buyer or a trade-up buyer, the sooner you start preparing, the better—and the La Crosse Area Builders Association boasts several members with just the advice you need to help you feel confident and prepared to find the perfect home for you this year.

Determine your home search criteria

In a hot housing market, you may not get all the home features you want in a new place within your budget. You'll have to decide what you're not willing to compromise on. It is crucial to sit down and think through what your needs and wants are. Even seasoned homeowners will find it a good use of time to make a list of new-home must-have features.

Christopher Richgels, Realtor with the Mike Richgels Team, RE/MAX Results in Onalaska, suggests beginning by choosing the locations or communities you are open to. "Some areas have lower average price points and less buyer competition," he says. And with limited home inventory, a situation we are facing now, it pays to have broad search criteria. "Start with a price range and location to see the available options," Richgels says. "A narrow focus may leave the buyer without any choices." For example, he says, only considering a four-bedroom, three-bath home with a fenced yard and detached garage doesn't allow you to consider three-bedroom, two-bath options with unfinished basements with the potential of adding the rooms and features you desire.

Prioritizing your list is important, but so is keeping an open mind, especially when it comes to the smaller stuff. Most home buyers will have to compromise on at least a couple of items to find a house within the budget. And "plan for multiple offers for more than the

asking price," Richgel advises. "If it's a home you love, odds are that there are other buyers who feel the same way."

Check your credit score

Credit requirements have become stricter in recent years, making it challenging for some buyers to find home loans. Having a favorable credit score can make a huge difference in getting approved for a loan. Experts recommend checking your credit report even if you think nothing has changed. You'll have to make sure you are not being unfairly penalized for old debts, which can sometimes linger on credit reports.

"Your credit history plays a role in your credit score, which is an important factor in the home loan application process," says Tina Mueller, mortgage lender at Merchants Bank. "Your credit score ultimately impacts your chances at obtaining the best rates possible



Christopher Richgels (left) and the Mike Richgels Team, RE/MAX Results



*Tina Mueller,
mortgage lender with
Merchants Bank*

on a home loan.”

Typically, borrowers with scores in the low 600s and even high 500s can still find lenders who will qualify them, but ideally, you should strive for scores in the mid-to-upper 700s to land the best rate.

“Having a major credit card from your local bank is a great way to establish credit, and paying off the balance in full each month is a good way to develop a credit rating,” advises Mueller. “Be diligent about spending and make your monthly payments on time. If you want to gauge your progress, you can request a free credit report from www.annualcreditreport.com.”

Erik Beach, senior lender and vice president at Bremer Mortgage, recommends keeping credit card balances at or below 30 percent of the credit limit on each card you have. “This will help maintain a positive credit score,” he says. “And do not apply for or obtain any new credit prior to getting preapproved unless it is absolutely necessary. Consult with your loan officer prior to taking out any new credit during the home-buying process.”

Get pre-approved

“Applying for mortgage pre-approval with your local bank is an absolute necessity in today’s home market, especially with the amount of competing offers I’ve seen on homes over the last two years,” says Dawn Garms, mortgage lender at Merchants Bank. “In many cases, sellers won’t even consider you if you don’t have a pre-approval letter. Going through this simple application process can definitely give you an edge over other buyers.”

Beach offers these tips for guaranteeing a smooth approval process: “Make sure you have a full two-year job history,” he says. “If you don’t, be prepared to explain why. And do not quit or change jobs during the home-

buying process.” If you are self-employed, he says, “Be prepared to show two years of your business and personal tax returns, as the lender will average out the two years of income.”

Decide how much you want to spend

Don’t let your maximum loan approval amount dictate your home-buying budget. Honestly examine your finances and determine what you can safely, realistically afford. Experts say your total monthly home expenses should not exceed more than one-third of your gross monthly income. Don’t forget to calculate into your final budget how much you’ll need to cover any loan fees and closing costs.

“Your lender will calculate your debt-to-income ratios to determine what price range you should be considering for your purchase,” says Brenda Fisher, real estate loan originator with Altra Federal Credit Union. “We want to see members get the house of their dreams, but we also want to help them to not over-extend themselves.”

Garms points out that the pre-approval process can help you determine what you can spend on a home. “You can also go over what to expect for monthly payments, down payments and other mortgage options,” she explains. “It really gives you a clear picture of what you can afford and how that fits into your personal monthly budget.”

“Most loans will require a 5 percent down payment,” Fisher says, “but there are programs that allow 1 to 3 percent down,” and your lender will need your two most recent monthly savings and investment account statements to document the source of the down payment. “Eligible veterans can obtain a federal VA loan without any down payment,” she adds, “and in some communities, grants and/or forgivable loans may be available for first-time homebuyers with low or low-to-moderate income.”

Home buying may seem daunting, especially in the current market, but success can be found by building a team of professionals who can guide you with expert advice and years of experience. These and other LABA members are happy to help you achieve the goal of purchasing a home.

Adapted from National Association of Home Building, NAHBNow blog, www.nahbnow.com.



*Erik Beach, senior
lender and VP at
Bremer Mortgage*



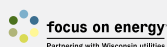
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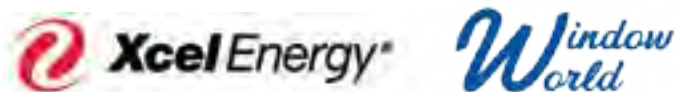
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Kendhammer Roofing & Construction	(608) 790-9111
Riverland Exteriors Corporation	(608) 289-6420
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The La Crosse Area Builders Association is a nonprofit trade organization uniting more than 180 building-related companies in western Wisconsin.

In 2021, we celebrated our 50th year as a respected and successful association.

We are proud to

- Educate our members and consumers about the latest trends and innovations in the building industry.
- Advocate for affordable housing at local, state and national levels through responsible, active engagement.
- Provide meaningful and lasting networking opportunities for our members so they can build successful relationships within the industry, which is so beneficial to the consumer.
- Host the annual Parade of Homes and Home Show, as well as other special events throughout the year.

What does LABA provide?

- Doing business with LABA members ensures you will receive quality service and materials in the communities we serve in La Crosse, Jackson, Monroe, Vernon and Trempealeau Counties in Wisconsin.
- Behind each of our members is a state and national association providing the latest and most relevant industry information.

We work to better the building industry.

- We are watchdogs for changes that can affect home building and remodeling.
- We offer a membership of trained, qualified and insured builders and tradespeople to the consumer.
- We believe in the future of the industry and fund and support workforce and career development efforts like Tools for Schools (putting tools into the hands of high school students), scholarships, and Building Careers Day.

Our members provide the best experience for you!

- Working with LABA members can open doors to a better experience with home projects, whether big or small.
- Our members are committed to providing consumers with exceptional services, quality products and the best materials available. They take pride in your most important and treasured lifetime purchase ... your home.
- LABA members stand by a code of ethics and complete continuing education credits to keep up with industry standards and certification requirements.
- LABA members participate in many service projects to help strengthen our communities and help those in need.
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GET STRONG ON A SHOESTRING

Build a home workout space without breaking the bank.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Simple PVC pipes mounted on the wall (above) or easy-to-find Y-shaped hooks (far right) are among the money-saving ideas Jaime McCormick and her husband developed for creating her home gym for personal training. You can use those same ideas to create a workout space without spending a fortune.



Did your New Year's resolution center around working out more regularly, but you struggle to find the time, routine or funds to make a gym membership make sense? Perhaps it's time to consider creating a workout space in your home.

Holmen personal trainer Jaime McCormick has experience in making the most of home spaces for herself and her family. In her previous home, her husband surprised her by transforming what was previously a kids' playroom/sensory space into a training space, and their current home has a space large enough to host small classes.

But she insists that you don't have to go to that extent to create a home workout space that works for you.

BARE BASICS

McCormick says working out at home doesn't require a huge dedicated space or expensive equipment. It just takes a few feet of floor and a handful of essentials that can be easily stashed away when your "home gym" is not in use.

Her essentials:

- A mat (or even a towel)
- A long resistance band (which can be doubled or looped as a small resistance band)
- Small dumbbells—just 3-lb. or 5-lb. options if you are starting from scratch.

Bonuses:

- A fan for air circulation
- A mirror to check form (a basic full-length mirror available at any home store is fine)

All of these can be incorporated into a family room or guest bedroom, where you use the space for workouts, then put away your equipment in a basket in the corner and return the room to its intended purpose.

Other easy-to-stash equipment you might want to consider that expands workout possibilities includes a stability ball, a jump rope and a step (or use stairs in your home for the same purpose).

FINDING SPACES

If you want a space just for your workouts, McCormick says to think outside the box. While her family built a fitness studio specifically for her business when building their home five years ago, not all of her equipment fits there. Her treadmill is in a space just off a craft room that is literally an unfinished closet space—just big enough for the treadmill and nothing else.

Consider an extra corner in the basement, an unused bedroom or even open space in the garage, though temperature extremes may require flexibility in planning workouts.



While Jaine McCormick's home gym in Holmen was created with her personal training business in mind, she says that the elements included are simple for others to use at home, including anchoring eyebolts into a wall stud at varying heights to use for exercises with resistance bands or using a basic stair railing as a balance point for barre exercises. A mirror is great for checking form, but McCormick says it doesn't have to be as large as hers—any full-length mirror from a home store will work just fine.

"You really just need a space large enough to lay a mat down in," she says, where you can stand with arms extended and take a step to the front and back or side to side.

"It's great if you have a window," she says, "but this is the real world." Not everyone is going to have a view from their stationary cycle that matches a Peloton ad.

SETTING UP YOUR "GYM"

If you have a dedicated space, additional ideas to increase functionality without a huge budget include sinking eyebolts into a wall stud at various heights. These can serve as anchors for resistance bands, opening up a wide range of exercises that can be done, again, in a space the size of the average closet.

Standard stair rails hung on the wall provide a balance point for barre exercises (and can also be an anchor for resistance bands). And an eyebolt in a ceiling beam, if available (such as in an unfinished basement storage area), is perfect for hanging a TRX® Suspension Training apparatus. Those exposed ceiling beams can also be a great place to install a pull-up bar.

If you have a cardio machine such as a treadmill, but no place to put anchors into the wall, your cardio machine can serve the same purpose by wrapping the resistance band around it, McCormick says, and a TRX trainer can be hooked over the top of a door.

As for the floor, a rubberized mat is best for grip, cushioning and to protect your floor, but that doesn't mean you have to purchase expensive specialized mats. McCormick says she has clients who have used simple locking mats such as those for children's play areas to gain the same benefits.

McCormick credits her husband with devising innovative and cost-effective storage options for the equipment she uses. Foam rollers

and rolled-up mats are stored out of the way and off the floor in lengths of PVC piping hung on one wall. Small dumbbells hang from simple Y-shaped hooks mounted to boards—supplies you can easily find in any home improvement store.

GOING ALL OUT?

If you are building a new home and ready to create a true home gym, it still doesn't need to be big. McCormick says a space the size of a small bedroom can easily accommodate a cardio machine, floor space and the equipment you might need for a great workout without leaving home.

Technology may be another consideration in your planning, from installing a smart TV for streaming the many live and recorded workout options now available to choosing a cardio machine that inspires. While something as simple as a trainer to turn your regular bicycle into an indoor cycle can get your heart rate up, the sky is the limit in the possibilities for internet-connected treadmills and cycles.

While Peloton is legend for its live classes and aspirational commercials, many brands of cardio machines now come with wi-fi enabled technology to incorporate live or recorded workouts that allow you to cycle the streets of European cities, hike mountains or run virtual races alongside a trainer.

McCormick insists, however, that you don't have to have a huge space or a huge budget to create a place to keep your fitness resolution and routine going. "Ask a trainer to show you what to do with what you have," she says, and make the most of it. **CRW**

Coulee Region Women editor Shari Hegland keeps a yoga mat, stability ball and dumbbells next to the couch to inspire her to get up and do something more than scroll Facebook in the evenings.

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DUTTON NAMED ALTRA SENIOR VP

Altra Federal Credit Union has promoted Cheryl Dutton to Senior Vice President, Chief Marketing Officer. Dutton joined Altra in 2012 and has since led an award-winning team that has enhanced Altra's brand awareness throughout their core markets and as an organization known for giving back to the community.

Dutton will champion Altra Financial Advisors and oversee Altra's advocacy efforts and industry-leading member experience team. "Cheryl has elevated Altra's profile to become top-of-mind when choosing a financial institution," says Steve Koenen, Altra President and CEO. "Under her guidance, we will continue to grow the Altra brand and make positive contributions to the communities and members we serve."



AAUW TURNS 100

The La Crosse Branch of the American Association of University Women is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2022. In January 1922, a group of college educated women gathered at the La Crosse library to hear a talk by the national president of the AAUW, followed by a unanimous vote to establish a local affiliate of the national organization. The La Crosse branch has since been active in promoting education and opportunities for women and girls and in the community at large.

More information about AAUW La Crosse (WI) Branch can be found at www.aauwlacrosse.org



MINDFUL WAY COMES TO DOWNTOWN LA CROSSE

Kendra Holzer, a licensed psychologist practicing in diverse settings for over 20 years, has created Mindful Way LLC to make a healing space available in downtown La Crosse for individuals interested in cultivating deeper self-awareness, attuning to strength-based qualities and growing their capacity to draw from a place of inner steadiness. Mindful Way holds as its central tenet the value of developing a practice of being present, thus nourishing a fuller sense of empowerment. Throughout life's waves and storms, therapy can help create enduring peace. To pursue individual or group psychotherapy, contact Mindful Way at 608-535-9677 or kh@mindfulwaytherapylacrosse.com.



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SERVING THE U.S. SKI JUMP TEAM

Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse will be sending Dr. Alecia Gende, a member of U.S. Ski and Snowboard Sports Medicine, to the FIS Ski Flying World Championships March 10-13 in Vikersund, Norway, as a team physician.

Gende will provide onsite coverage for competitions to assist athletes with basic medical needs as well as assisting local EMS crews in case of a crash landing.

"The experiences I gain caring for high-achieving athletes allows me to bring that quality of care to members of our community," Dr. Gende says. "Working with the U.S. Ski team also gives our community a reputation in sports medicine—it helps put us on the map in the world of athletics."



JEN BARNEY TAKES THE CAKE—AGAIN!

La Crosse's own Jen Barney, owner of Meringue Bakery, has done it again, winning her third championship in Food Network's "Holiday Wars," which aired in November 2021, with the final championship episode airing December 19.

Part of the three-member Team Dough Angels, Barney and teammates Ramon Camacho and Asia Coffee competed against eight other teams, ultimately winning the \$25,000 prize with a cake interpretation of Santa's sleigh with coffee as the cake flavor.

Barney previously won seasons four and five of "Holiday Baking Championship," also on Food Network. To sample the award-winner's delicacies yourself, visit Meringue Bakery at 313 Main Street in La Crosse.



Holding the Center

Sales director Elizabeth Poh focuses on keeping visitors happy and safe.

BY JOAN KENT | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

When Elizabeth Poh returned to her job as La Crosse Center sales and marketing director on March 18, 2020, following three months of maternity leave, she faced a world being rapidly changed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

“All the events for the 2020 second, third and fourth quarters had to cancel due to what we could allow in our building,” she recalls. “It was definitely challenging.”

Born and raised in La Crosse, Poh graduated from University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with a degree in recreation management and had held several marketing positions including Onalaska Omni Center events/building coordinator.

PLANS PUT ON HOLD

The first woman to hold the La Crosse Center position, she hadn't been at the center for a year. During that time, the center was undergoing a \$42 million expansion, including rebuilding and heightening North Hall, creating 12,400 square feet overlooking the Mississippi River and Riverside Park.

The expansion, plus the addition of new hotels and restaurants downtown, made it easier to sell the center, Poh says. “A lot of event planners reached out to us. We booked events we hadn't seen in 15-20 years.” In addition,

she says groups and businesses that had used the center before could expand their events because of additional meeting space, and the center could hold two conventions at the same time in different sides of the building.

But the pandemic brought the easy sell to an abrupt halt. Poh came back to on-site work for three days and then worked from home for two months. “One of the blessings was that I had extra time with our daughter,” she says.

She worked with clients to book them in 2022 or the latter part of 2021. “Many did not want to see their events stop,” she said. “There were several back-to-back so everyone had to work harder. It took a lot of communication and teamwork, but the clients' feedback made it worth it. Keeping them happy and coming back is what it's all about.”

REOPENING SAFELY

“We cooperated with the city and local health department to see how to set up and clean up to keep our events safe,” Poh said. That included masking, social distancing of chairs and controlling traffic flow with six-foot tall signs.

The boys' and girls' February-March 2021 Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic

Association basketball tournaments were a true test. Everyone, including players and coaches, needed to wear masks, and spectators could only purchase certain chairs together. Center crews sanitized everything, and concessions were in separate baskets.

“Every day was a new day of learning,” Poh recalls. “Things were changing constantly. We wanted everyone to be happy, but we also wanted them to be safe. We conveyed the rules ahead (of time). Some didn't want to, but we said, ‘These are the rules, and if you won't follow them, you can't be here.’ It was good. Everyone was happy to still have the tournaments.”

To recharge, Poh spends time with her husband, William, and their daughter and her parents, Mary and Keith Carson. “I can't say enough about my support system,” she says. “My family helps in many ways and encourages me. They tell me, ‘You can do this.’ You need to have a support system, whether it's at home or in the office or counterparts in your field.” **CRW**

Joan Kent is a retired journalist, last at La Crosse Tribune, who lives in La Farge with her husband, Don Foy, and their kitties, Liza and Misty.



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Baking for the Art of It

Laura's Baking Delights brings visual appeal to sweet treats.

BY JAN WELLIK | PHOTOS BY BRIAN NARVESON PHOTOGRAPHY



Laura Luidahl, owner of Laura's Baking Delights, often turns sweet treats into works of art. She shares ideas for turning simple recipes, such as the raspberry cream cheese brownies above, into beautiful bites worthy of any Valentine's Day celebration.

Baking started as a hobby, about 12 years ago," says Laura Luidahl, owner of Laura's Baking Delights. "I'm a very creative person, and I have to have a creative outlet: sewing, scrapbooking, making cards, baking."

When she started baking, she worked in the jewelry department at JCPenney and brought in treats for her co-workers, she explains. "Soon someone asked me for a graduation cake and a birthday cake, and then it grew by word of mouth into a part-time job," she says.

"As the kids have grown, and I don't need to entertain them 24 hours a day, the business has grown," she explains of her journey. "Now it is my full-time job."

Luidahl has lived in Holmen and has been married to her husband, Lane, for 22 years. They have two teenage boys—Connor, 16, and Aidan, 13—and a dog, Jasper. "We like to travel, go camping and downhill skiing," she says of their family interests.

A MAKER AT HEART

Before she got into baking, she went to college for theater costume design, owned a Curves franchise in Holmen for five years, worked at

a bridal shop and in jewelry at JCPenney.

She is now teaching son Connor to sew; he made a vest for himself and a shawl for his girlfriend. "I have plans to make us all renaissance costumes," she says.

"I have to be making things," she adds. "I'm a maker at heart."

As the oldest of three children growing up, "It was my responsibility to make cookies," she says. "My mom makes sculptures out of clay, and my dad is a photographer, and he decorated our birthday cakes as kids. We always made and decorated Christmas cookies together and all the other holidays," she says. "Since we are a Norwegian family, we made Norwegian cookies and krumkake."

Luidahl bakes out of her home and formed an official LLC in 2014. For a few years she shared a licensed incubator kitchen on Kane Street in La Crosse. "During that time, you couldn't bake out of your home for profit," she explains. When that law changed, she went back to baking from home.

CREATING WORKS OF ART

"I love decorating," she says. "I do the baking because I have to



have something to decorate, but the love is in the decorating.”

One thing Luidahl loves about her business is the variety. “I do several different things in a week,” she says. “One day I’m making the cupcake batter, the next day frosting.” No two cakes are the same, she says. “They are their own unique piece of art.”

Luidahl started teaching decorating classes at area community centers the past four years. Classes coming up include opportunities to make cookies with buttercream, royal icing, chocolate-dipped strawberries, cake pops, gingerbread Valentine houses and French macarons. She teaches in three different locations: Holmen Park & Recreation, Holmen Area Community Center and La Crescent-Hokah Community Education Center—where they have a big kitchen with seven full kitchen stations, she explains happily.

Luidahl’s Valentine’s Day baking tip: “Start with something that you already love,” she says. “Make it special for Valentine’s with sprinkles!” **CRW**

Jan Wellik loves the art of baking cookies, brownies and cakes ... but finds it dangerous (for herself) to have a pan of fresh baked goodies in the house.

UPCOMING CLASSES:

<https://laurasbakingdelights.com/classes-2/>



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Cupcake

- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup unsalted butter melted
- 1½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 1½ tsp. almond extract
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ⅔ cup cake flour
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. baking soda
- ¾ tsp. salt
- ¾ cup buttermilk plus 2 T
- 3 T maraschino cherry juice
- 8 maraschino cherries, finely chopped
- 3 egg whites

Frosting

- 1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. almond extract
- pinch salt
- 3 T heavy cream
- 3 ½-4 cups powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line two standard cupcake pans with 16 liners, set aside.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy, about 2-3 minutes. Add the vanilla extract and the almond extract.

In a medium-size mixing bowl, whisk together flour, cake flour, baking powder,

baking soda and salt. In a glass measuring cup, mix together the buttermilk, cherry juice and chopped cherries. With mixing speed on low, alternate dry and wet ingredients; mix until batter is smooth and homogeneous (being careful not to overmix).

In a medium-size mixing bowl (using a hand mixer), beat the egg whites until stiff peaks form. Fold into the batter.

Scoop the batter into the cupcake liners, filling each ¾ of the way full. Place in the oven and bake for 20-25 minutes or until the cupcakes spring back when touched. Remove from oven and allow to cool in pans for 5 minutes before removing and transferring to a wire rack to cool completely (about 25 minutes).

While cupcakes are cooling, in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, combine butter, vanilla extract, almond extract and salt. Beat until fluffy (2-3 minutes).

With mixing speed on low, add heavy cream, then gradually add ½ cup powdered sugar at a time until the mixture becomes soft but firm enough to hold its shape. Beat frosting for an additional 3 minutes until light and fluffy. If the consistency is too thick, add a little more cream and beat for 30 seconds more.

Pipe or spread onto cooled cupcakes, decorate with crushed almonds or cherries if desired.



Special Treats For Your Sweets

Make your favorite brownie—like these raspberry cream cheese brownies—into a Valentine's Day delicacy with heart-shaped cookie cutters and festive presentation. You can find the recipe Laura Luidahl likes to use at <https://domesticallyblissful.com/raspberry-cheesecake-brownies/>.



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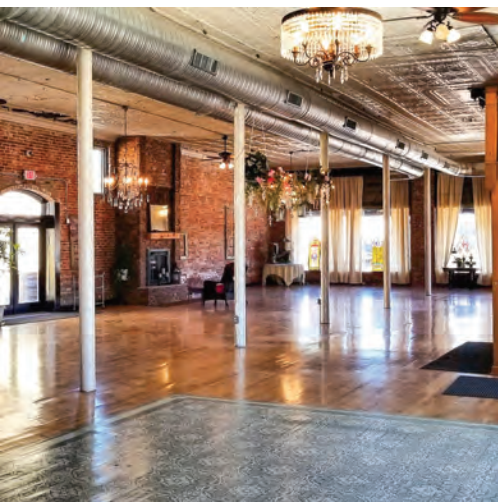
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GOOD BONES

Coulee Region business owners work to restore and maintain historic buildings.

BY TALLITHA REESE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



B's Place in West Salem, Leithold Music in La Crosse and the Historic Fortney in Viroqua are examples of renovated buildings that continue to stand the test of time. Historic Fortney photo by Pink Spruce Photography.

When looking at real estate, potential buyers first consider basic things like the foundation of a building. Does it have “good bones”? Is it structurally sound?

For several area businesses that call historic buildings home, those “good bones” don’t just hold up the physical structure they’re located in; they also lay the foundation for the personality and heart of the business.

B’S PLACE



Stephanie and Dave Bentzen, owners of B's Place in West Salem

When Stephanie Bentzen toured the building at 102 Leonard St. North in West Salem in April 2017, she was met by a dimly lit, damp main room full of clutter with containers strategically placed to catch leaks from the ceiling.

“It had the odor of clothes that sat too long in the washing machine without being dried,” recalls Bentzen, who, along with her husband Dave, had been on a longtime hunt for a location where she could make her dreams of creating a premier wedding venue a reality.

But there was something about the old building that spoke to Bentzen.

“The building exterior was brick, so somewhere under layers of paneling, there had to be brick,” says Bentzen. “It already had the original 1901 tin covering the soaring ceilings, and she boasted a gorgeous oak staircase.”

By the end of May 2017, the building was theirs. Then the work began, with the first task being just cleaning. Multiple dumpsters were needed to start, and then a public sale was held for any salvageable items.

For the next year, the Bentzens worked to uncover what the years had hidden. Though the original brick walls and windows were eventually discovered and restored after removing several layers of paneling and a layer of skim coat concrete, the original wood flooring couldn’t be completely saved due to water damage. Next came a renovation of the

building’s kitchen and new bathrooms.

“At first we couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel, but with each piece of the pie completed, our goals seemed to be coming into focus,” says Bentzen. “And none of this could have been accomplished without the help of our family and friends. We have had so much help and support during this journey that we can’t begin to thank everyone.”

In September 2018, B’s Place hosted its first wedding and continued to flourish until Covid-19 brought everything to a halt.

“We have been coming back slowly and are looking forward to a busy 2022,” says Bentzen.

LEITHOLD MUSIC

Leithold Music in downtown La Crosse is a multigenerational business that has been a fixture in the Coulee Region for many years, as has the 133-year-old building it occupies.

The building was originally designed by local architects Stoltze and Schick for Tillman Furniture Brothers and completed in 1889. The furniture business closed in 1962, and Leithold Music purchased and moved into the building in 1964.



Abbie Leithold-Gerzema, co-owner of Leithold Music in La Crosse

“The building was largely unchanged from the original design except for enclosing the grand staircase in the center of the building (for fire safety), creating separate display rooms on the second floor and adding teaching studios,” says Abbie Leithold-Gerzema.

With such a historic building, ongoing maintenance is a requirement, and as the windows deteriorated, current owners Leithold-Gerzema and her brother, Paul Leithold, made the decision to not just replace them, but to renovate the entire façade of the building.

“Through a grant from the city of La Crosse, an architectural and engineering analysis was completed by Zettler Design Studio,”



Above: Renovations on the upper floors of Leithold Music in La Crosse revitalized the business's recital space, along with adding energy-efficient windows while maintaining the historic character of the 1889 building.

Above right: Amy Wrobel and her mother-in-law, Sue Wrobel, put in personal time and effort refurbishing pieces such as the original front desk of the Historic Fortney Hotel in Viroqua as they reimagined the space, built in 1899, as a location for multiple retail businesses and, someday, boutique hotel rooms.

Right: Before-and-after photos show the transformation of Stephanie and Dave Bentzen's downtown West Salem building from a dimly lit, damp room into an event facility highlighting the best of the historic building.



says Leithold-Gerzema. "In order to use state and federal historic tax credits to help fund the renovation, strict historical standards had to be followed."

The approved plan included double-hung windows from the third floor to the sixth-floor attic being rebuilt by Wadsworth Construction, the re-creation from historical photos of the second-floor display windows by Kirchner Custom Builders and Glass Service Center, a redesign of the first-floor entrance and display windows to look more historic and energy efficient and the reveal of prism glass squares, which are now visible behind the new Leithold Music sign.

"Major renovations continue on the west side (alley view) as more windows are restored and the loading dock is refurbished," adds Leithold-Gerzema.

"Paul and I are humbled when we are frequently thanked for investing in downtown and the restoration of the building," she says.

THE HISTORIC FORTNEY

The Historic Fortney building sits on a prime corner in downtown Viroqua, and as a three-story Queen Anne-style structure with a brick exterior and several circular three-story oriel bay windows, it certainly has a presence.

Originally constructed in 1899 as Hotel Fortney, time took its toll. The northwest wall began caving in and several of the bay windows were starting to come away from the building.

When Amy Wrobel's husband, Brian, mentioned that it was for sale, she didn't think much of it until he set up an appointment to tour the building in 2017.

"There was clearly a lot of potential there, but the amount of work that would need to be done was staggering," says Amy. "We continued to discuss the possibilities off and on for the next three years, sketching hundreds of floorplans on napkins and scratch paper, until we finally came up with a way to make it all work."

At that point, the couple brought Brian's parents, Sue and Larry, into the conversation, and they all decided to jointly purchase the building, taking ownership in January 2020.

Since then, they've gutted the building down to the studs, made the necessary immediate repairs and built out the first floor for several commercial business spaces—including the new Historic Fortney Lounge—added an ADA ramp and painted the building's entire exterior, which hadn't been done since 1979.

"Along the way, we also refurbished several items, such as the front desk that now serves as our bar in the lounge, a number of doors and some stained-glass windows," explains Sue.

Though the second and third floors have not yet been restored, eventually those spaces will become boutique hotel rooms.

"The challenge is time," says Sue. "But to do it right, I don't think it can be rushed. The fact that the restoring process for just one floor has taken a few years, is perhaps a blessing in disguise. It's done with passion, and it's done well, and I think that shows." **CRW**

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



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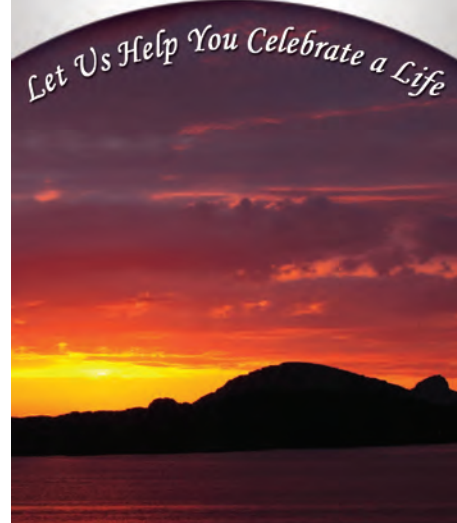


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Your Time Is Now

Ready for international travel?
Here are tips for navigating requirements,
restrictions and more.

BY CHRIS HALL | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



You've renewed your passport and are ready to travel internationally again after an almost two-year hiatus—but after looking at all the requirements and tests required to get on and off planes in different countries, you're so confused you want to toss your passport back into the drawer and slam it shut. Don't give up! It's really not that difficult—we just learn to travel a bit differently than we used to.

Lisa Bourget of Quiet Meadow Travel Agency traveled abroad in late 2021 on a cruise down the Danube and on a trip to Costa Rica, so she has some great advice on how to start. Once you've decided on where you are going, she says, take special note of the travel requirements of the country you are visiting. "If you are visiting more than one country, the requirements could vary (e.g. requirements coming from the United States into Germany may be different than United States to Mexico to Germany.)

NAVIGATING TESTING REQUIREMENTS

A travel agent or agency is one of the best ways to help you through all the necessary requirements; traveling with a tour group can also lessen your stress. If you are a bit more independent, check out the website joinsherpa.com. Sherpa is an easy-to-use website that allows you to enter your dates of travel and your destination, and it will immediately give real-time requirements and restrictions. There's also always the [state.gov](https://www.state.gov) website for the latest updates on requirements. And finally, your airline will keep you up-to-date and informed on what you need to do to board. Always check your flight information a couple of weeks in advance and in the days before your trip—it could change.

Then, Bourget advises, "The important piece in planning is to mark your calendar several weeks prior to your departure date to make an appointment for your Covid-19 test. If you wait until the last minute,



Lisa Bourget, owner of Quiet Meadow Travel Agency



you might not get an appointment close to your departure.” Most Covid test requirements are that you must have it less than 72 hours before your flight.

Depending on where you live, most medical clinics, Walgreens and CVS can do these tests. Appointments are necessary, especially for a certified travel test. In some places eMed (a self-administered Covid-19 antigen rapid test you take at home or in your hotel room) is another solution. But Bourget says to check your airline or country requirements, as it might not be accepted everywhere.

Bourget reports that, as of the time of this writing, in mid-December 2021, Mexico and the Dominican Republic had very few restrictions, making for easier travel. “However, for returning to the United States, keep in mind all travelers are required to have a negative Covid test,” she says. She also says that many resorts offer complimentary on-site Covid testing for the return trip home, which takes the stress out of figuring out where to schedule a test.

UNDERSTANDING VACCINATION RESTRICTIONS

Another thing you should do before booking travel to the country of your dreams is research what the restrictions are once you get there. Some countries have very tight limitations on unvaccinated people. If you arrive at a country and then find out you cannot get into a restaurant, nightclub or museum without proof of vaccination, your vacation might not have been worth it. If you are vaccinated, keep your Covid-19 Vaccination Record Card close to you, right along with your passport. It’s almost just as important. This card will also allow you to undergo fewer Covid-19 tests or quarantines than you would have to endure in some places if you are unvaccinated.

A printout of your state’s immunization registry is also a handy document to have. My cousin just returned from a freighter cruise to the South Seas and was able to use this document in place of her Covid-19 Vaccination Record Card (although she had that along also). This registry printout shows all the vaccinations you have had, including your Covid-19 shots and booster, flu shots and more.

MAKING MASKED TRAVEL MORE COMFORTABLE

Now that you’ve gotten your trip planned and Covid-19 test scheduled, you’re ready to go—but how can you make your trip more comfortable in this uncomfortable time? Bourget advises to make masks part of your regular travel checklist from now on. She says if you’re on a long international flight, have a couple with you so you can change them out—it’ll make you feel refreshed. My own advice is to dress comfortably—there’s no need to dress up in these times of social distancing. And forget the earrings and makeup on your flight; after all, you’re wearing a mask! On an overnight international flight, it’s better for your skin and for you to concentrate on being comfortable and healthy. Instead, put on some moisturizer, an eye mask and a fresh face mask, and nod off, waking up in your dream destination ready to go.

The most difficult challenge after booking your trip months in advance may be the stress of wondering what will change between when you book your trip and when you actually board your flight. The emergence of the Omicron variant is the perfect example. Just as we thought we were getting our feet under us, new restrictions are unfolding. The best thing you can do is keep your eye on your vacation date and keep in touch with your travel agent. It is also advisable to take a close look at cancellation policies and change fees, reminds Bourget. “Many suppliers are offering trip protection with affordable cancel for any reason (CFAR) coverage—usually two different options, one CFAR plan for cash back (higher priced) and one CFAR plan for future travel credit (lower priced). For any international travel, it’s important to consider not only CFAR but medical coverage to take care of those unexpected travel emergencies that can arise.”

As Bourget reminded me, travel is back. I am certainly ready. Don’t let the new way of traveling hold you back from your adventures. Your time is now. **CRW**

Just two years ago Chris Hall was in France with no idea Covid-19 was silently making its way into our world. Having been grounded for so long, she is ready to cross the seas again with a new understanding of the Covid-19 tests she’ll need to navigate.

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Community Calendar

ONGOING EVENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

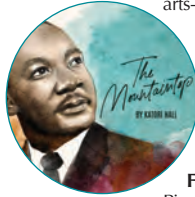
Please contact each group to confirm meeting status and location.

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

CALENDAR EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Feb. 3, Mads Tolling & the Mads Men, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.



◀ **Feb. 3-13**, *The Mountaintop*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Feb. 5, Duelyly Noted Dueling Pianos, 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

Feb. 6-13, Frozen River Film Festival, Winona State University, www.frff.org.

Feb. 10, Recycled Percussion, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Feb. 12, Galentine's Day Brunch, 9-11:30 a.m., Court Above Main, La Crosse, bit.ly/nhgalentinesdaybrunch, 608-791-2610 ext. 1305.



Feb. 12, The Magic of Isaiah: Magic Mystery Matinee, 2 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

◀ **Feb. 12**, *Celtic Stories and Songs*, 7:30 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Feb. 12, La Crosse Symphony Orchestra Valentine Ball, 5 p.m., Cargill Room, The Waterfront, www.lacrossesymphony.org, 608-783-2121.

Feb. 13, Winona Outdoor Collaborative Monthly Meet Up: X-Country Skiing, 1-3 p.m., St. Mary's overflow parking lot, Winona, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

Feb. 17-27, *Night Mother*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Feb. 18-21, Winona Outdoor Collaborative Retreat: Winter Camping and Exploration, 12 p.m. Fri.-10 a.m. Mon., Boundary Waters, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

Feb. 19, Missoula Children's Theatre presents *Red Riding Hood*, 3 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

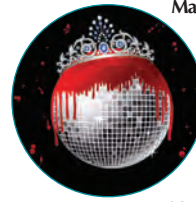
Feb. 22, Canadian Brass, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Feb. 25-26, Sacred Listening retreat with Shannon K. Evans, 6-8 p.m. Fri., 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Feb. 25-26, A Night at the Opera, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Feb. 26-Mar. 6, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse, www.uwlax.edu/theatre-arts.

MARCH



Mar. 4, The Four C Notes, 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

◀ **Mar. 4-6**, *Carrie: The Musical*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Mar. 5, The Young Tchaikovsky and Rising Stars, 7:30 p.m., La Crosse Symphony Orchestra, www.lacrossesymphony.org.

Mar. 10, Aquila Theatre: *The Great Gatsby*, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Mar. 12, The Magic of Isaiah: Magic Mystery Matinee, 2 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Mar. 15, Winona Outdoor Collaborative Monthly Meet Up: Indoor Rock Climbing, 5-9 p.m., Wabasha Recreation Center, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

Mar. 17, Church Basement Ladies, 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Mar. 18, Collen Raye & Bobby Vandell: Country Duets, Hits & More! 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

Mar. 19, Collage-Making Retreat: Lenten Prayer Spiral, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Mar. 19, 7 Bridges: The Ultimate Eagles Experience, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Mar. 20, *Pete the Cat*, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Mar. 22, Jim Witter's The Long and Winding Road, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Mar. 24, Art Dash fundraiser, 6:30-8 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, register by March 23 at www.fscenter.org.

Mar. 25-27, La Crosse Area Builders Association Home Show, Onalaska Omni Center, www.labaonline.com.

Mar. 26, Moors & McCumber, 7:30 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Mar. 27, Night Fever: The Bee Gees Tribute, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

APRIL

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

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

Apr. 1-17, Single Black Female, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

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