

coulee region

women

AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE

Parenting

**Amy DuPont:
Anchor Mom**

**Surviving the Squeeze
of the Sandwich
Generation**

**Get Your Family
Outside!**

**A Home for
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CONTENTS | June/July 2014
coulee region
women
AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE

11 PROFILE

ANCHOR MOM

Amy DuPont is the cornerstone of *Daybreak* and her sons' lives.

14 CAREERS

KIDS, PARENTS, WORK, STRESS

Many women feel the squeeze of the Sandwich Generation.

17 FAMILY

THE GREATEST GIFT

Sometimes it takes a village to have a child.

19 WOMEN IN THE REGION

THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Raising grandkids brings joy and challenges.

23 HEALTHY LIVING

SEE MOM MOVE

When it comes to getting outdoors, you can set the example for family fitness.

26 NONPROFIT

CARING FOR CAREGIVERS

The Parenting Place assists parents and child care providers with their "wonderful and challenging" roles.

29 HOME

A PLACE BUILT FOR YOUNG AND OLD

Sue Weidemann's ranch house is built to accommodate family members—all of them.

34 FOOD

IT'S MY PARTY

Keep kids safe from food allergies without excluding them from the fun.

38 RETAIL THERAPY

TRUE BLUE

Cool hues make for cool kids when summer sizzles.

41 Q&A

DAD @ HOME

Coulee Region Women celebrates the joys of parenting—from a dad's point of view.

43 TRAVEL

QUALITY FAMILY TIME

Destination family reunions combine family togetherness with adventure, forging a lasting connection.

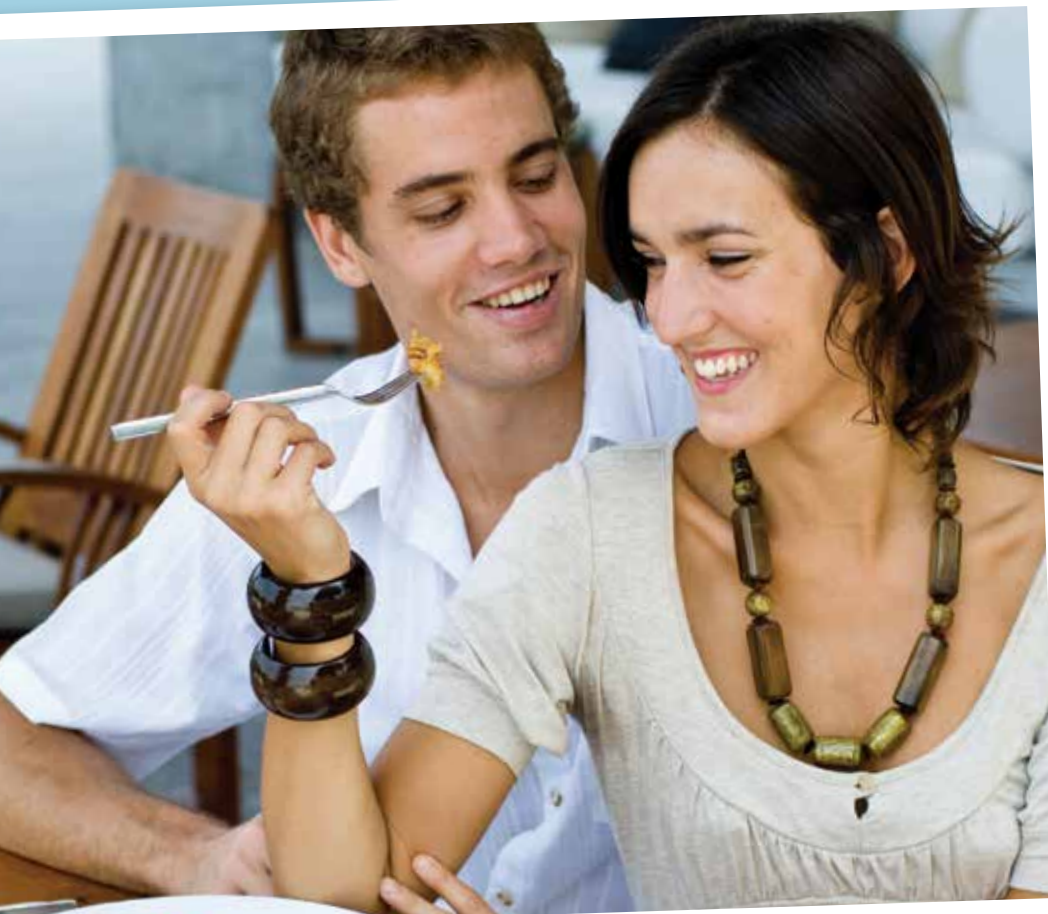
45 COMMUNITY

Pictured on cover and this page: Amy DuPont, anchor of *Daybreak*, WXOW. Photos by The Studio. Other photo credits: Janet Mootz Photography, page 6

In every issue: From the Editor 6

In the Know 8 | Accomplishments 33

Advertiser Index 54 | Community Calendar 54



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| FROM THE EDITOR |

"Mom," a little voice pipes up. I'm working at home, multiple deadlines are looming and panic has set in.

"Mom." That one small word threatens to jettison my schedule. I drop my fingers from the keyboard and look into my 5-year-old daughter's inquiring brown eyes. "What, Ivy?"

"I need a tattoo," she says, pointing to the spot on her slim arm where yesterday's rainbow has faded. If she gets one, her younger sister, Elin, will need one, too, and the minute it will take to affix both seems like time I should spend working. It could also be a sweet minute of looking into their giddy faces and, together, counting down the seconds while a wet washcloth melts a heart or daisy onto their skin. I don't know if, years from now, they'll remember the minute I took to put tattoos on their arms—it's not exactly an experience that stands out—but they might remember the days they played at home while their mother worked, and was not too busy for a tender indulgence.

That's what I remember most clearly from being a child—not big events, like the rare family vacation—but the very small moments when I was my mother's entire world. She might have only been scrubbing my ears or brushing my hair, but I deeply remember her touch and her attention.

Anyone who's raised children endures a cruel relationship with time. We wrestle with dressing them in time when they're running naked, getting them places on time when every ant on the sidewalk must be stepped on first, and literally not running over them when, on the headlong dash out the door, they abruptly stop to examine their shoe. Then, in a blink, they're on to the next stage of life, and we are the ones who are not ready. I've hummed "You Can't Hurry Love" many a morning to help me remember what this parenting thing is really all about.

At its core, parenting is making the room in our life—and our heart—for another. It means sharing our time and ourselves with others—small children or not. Some, like our cover woman, Amy DuPont, do this while balancing the challenges of career and single parenthood. Others share lives and homes with adult children, elderly parents or even grandchildren. We'll see how extended family is important in other ways: how a sister can step in to help conceive a child, and how family gatherings can bring joy and connection.

"Mom." That one small word can throw off a day but enrich a lifetime. Parenting is no small challenge, but it's one worth celebrating, as we do in this issue of *Coulee Region Women*.

Betty



coulee region women

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DRAGON ON THE RIVER

Mayo Clinic Health System – Franciscan Healthcare is bringing dragon boating back to La Crosse this summer with the second annual Big Blue Dragon Boat Race, celebrating the bravery, strength and teamwork that accompanies breast cancer survival. The race takes place on July 5 at Riverside Park in conjunction with Riverfest. This year, 50 competing teams and more than 2,500 spectators are anticipated.

Equal parts sporting event and spectacle, dragon boating is a team sport stemming back to ancient China. The Big Blue Dragon Boat Race is designed to promote fitness and teamwork for everyone in the community, while also raising awareness of breast cancer and celebrating survivors. Proceeds from the Big Blue Dragon Boat Race support the Center for Breast Care in La Crosse. Area women served by programs on breast cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment and survivorship will benefit from the funds raised.

For more information, visit www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/lacrosse.

MIDSUMMER FEST

Rain or shine, family fun abounds at the Midsummer Fest, held June 21-22 at Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center. You don't have to be Norwegian to appreciate the full return of light that Scandinavians celebrate on the summer solstice, but you can get a taste of their traditional foods, watch demonstrations of heritage crafts, meet friendly farm animals (and perhaps a few trolls) and enjoy children's activities, wagon rides and much music. Midsummer Fest is held 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday. Regular admission prices apply: \$6 for adults, \$3 for kids, \$15 for families and free for members. For more information, visit norskedalen.org or call 608-452-3424.



EVERY KID A SAFE KID

With summer comes an increase in kids' activities outdoors—and with that, a reminder from the Safe Kids Coalition of the La Crosse Coulee Region on how to ensure your kids enjoy those activities safely. Fifty percent of injuries among children occur in the months of May, June, July and August, and Safe Kids seeks to prevent child injury and unintentional death by educating kids and adults on safety topics such as water and boating safety, the importance of helmets and bike safety, traffic safety and safe car seat usage. Led by Gunderson Health System, Safe Kids programs include Slide into Safety day with the La Crosse Loggers, Life Jacket Loaner Stations offered in partnership with the Wisconsin DNR and La Crosse Parks & Recreation Department, water safety programs and free swimming lessons offered in partnership with the YMCA, helmet education programs, car seat programs, Walk to School Day and more.

You can support the efforts of Safe Kids Coalition of La Crosse—and help to preserve the health and save the lives of kids in the Coulee Region—by making a donation. For more information on Safe Kids Coalition programs, or to make a gift of support, call 608-775-2011, email klombard@gundersenhealth.org or visit safekidswi.org/SafeKidsWisconsin-LaCrosseCouleeRegion.asp.



ART ON THE GREEN

The 56th annual Art Fair on the Green, sponsored by the La Crosse branch of AAUW, will be held Saturday, July 26, and Sunday, July 27, on the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus lawns at 16th and State Streets. More than 100 professional artists from around the country will display a wide variety of artwork available for purchase, including sculpture, jewelry, photography, woodwork, paintings, fiber art, pottery and more. The fair will also feature a raffle of artwork, live music and food. All proceeds go toward scholarships for area high school students, as well as for students currently attending La Crosse's three local colleges and universities. Show hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday. For more information, visit aauwlacrosse.org or find AAUW Art Fair on the Green on Facebook. Admission is \$4 for adults and free for children 12 and under.



MINDS IN MOTION BICYCLE TOUR

Get your mind and body moving on Saturday, June 14, at the Minds in Motion Bicycle Tour, featuring a new 5K family fun run/walk this year.

The one-day bike tour offers riders a choice of five levels of difficulty: a 5- to 20-mile family ride, 16 miles of flat terrain, 32 miles of rolling hills and longer climbs, 62 miles of rolling hills and major climbs, and a 100-mile challenge ride. Riders receive a free T-shirt, rest stop refreshments, sag wagon support and lunch. The century challenge starts at 7 a.m. All other riders begin at 8 a.m. and the fun run participants head out at 9:30 a.m. The event is held at Onalaska Middle School. Proceeds support children's wellness and nutrition throughout the Onalaska School District. The cost is \$10-\$40. To register, go to mimbiketour.org. For more information call 608-783-6136.

A photograph of a woman and a young girl wrapped in a plaid blanket, looking out a window. The woman is in the background, looking out the window, and the girl is in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The blanket is a mix of green, orange, and blue plaid. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a view of nature.

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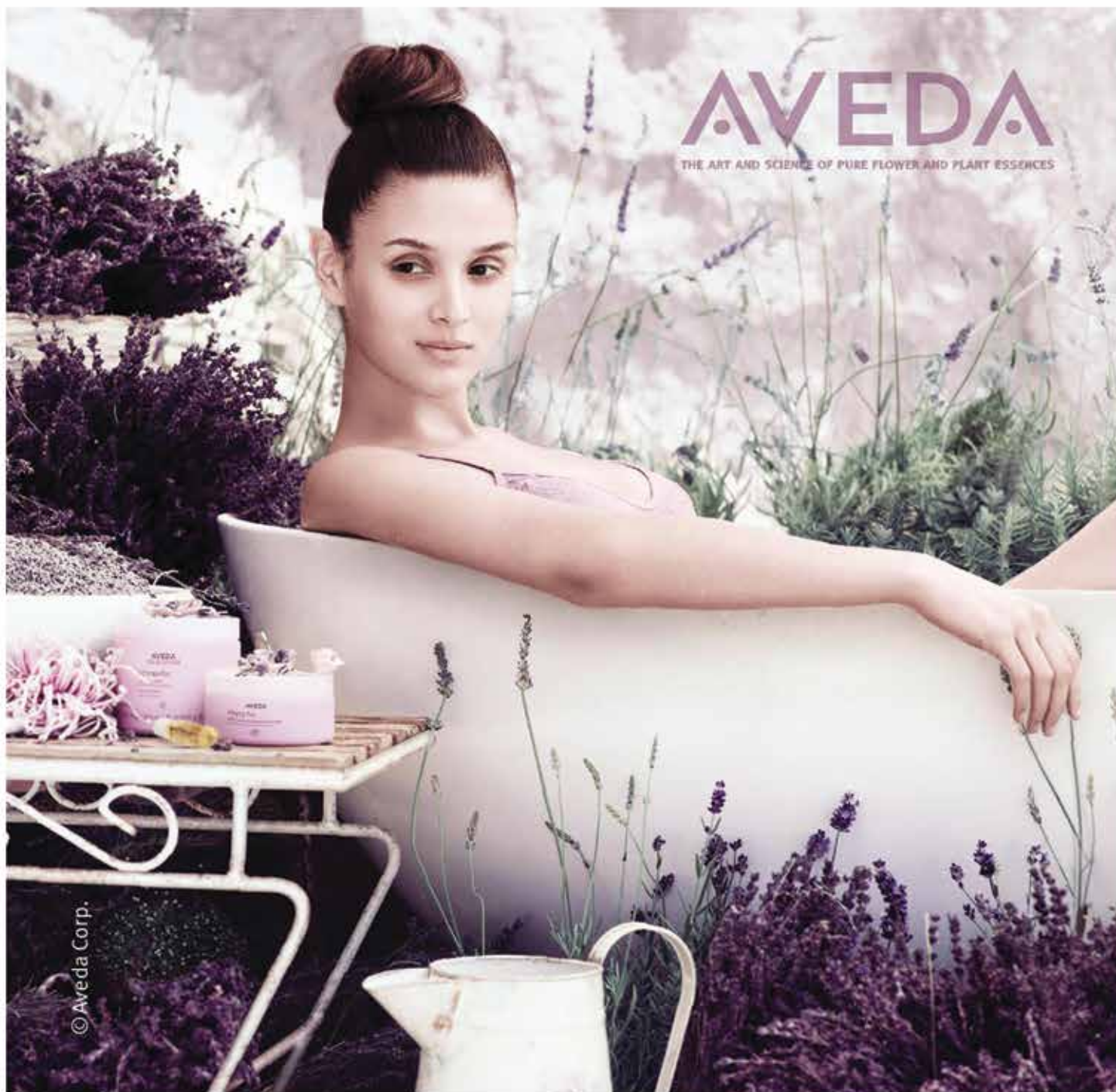
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ANCHOR MOM

Amy DuPont is the cornerstone
of *Daybreak* and her sons' lives.

BY LEAH CALL
Photos by The Studio

WXOW News 19 *Daybreak* anchor Amy DuPont is a part of the morning routine for many in the Coulee Region. For more than 10 years, she has informed viewers from 5 to 7 a.m., brightening the weekday mornings with her infectious smile and upbeat personality.

When she was a student at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, DuPont once made a visit to the campus career lab that revealed four “ideal” career matches: personal trainer, Broadway performer, stunt

double and broadcast journalist. She chose the latter, eventually doing an internship at News 19 and officially beginning her career with WXOW in 2001. In 2004, she took over as morning news anchor.

A winner of three Emmy awards and recipient of several other notable accolades, DuPont is happy with her career choice. “I get to meet really cool people,” she says. “I’m not talking about celebrities, just average people who are doing really cool things, people I probably would never have had the chance to meet had I not chosen this career.”



While Amy DuPont is best known as a local anchorwoman, her other important job is raising her sons, 6-year-old Bryce and 3-year-old Aiden.

In May, News 19 aired a special segment on DuPont's travels to Ethiopia with 13 volunteers from the Gundersen Health System Global Partner's program. She considers the traveling assignments to be one of the top job perks.

"I'm lucky the station lets me travel a little," notes DuPont, who did a stint at Marine Corps boot camp in San Diego, traveled to Hawaii with a group of Pearl Harbor survivors, traveled to Washington, D.C., with the Freedom Honor Flight and accompanied area health care providers to Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

"I love to do those stories where they send me somewhere and we shoot for a week," says DuPont. "It's the hardest work I do, but it is also the most fun."

Super mom

While a career as a TV journalist has given DuPont some rewarding opportunities, few people could maintain this local celebrity's pace as a single mother. A typical day for DuPont, who averages 4½ hours of sleep per night, begins at 2:15 a.m. She arrives at the station around 3 a.m. and goes through the morning script with fellow *Daybreak* anchor Dustin Luecke and producer Howard Sapiro. Then it's off to get dressed and do hair and makeup before beginning *Daybreak* at 5 a.m.

DuPont and Luecke take turns weekly handling the cut-ins for *Good Morning America* from 7 to 8:30. "Then at 9:30 we have a story meeting, where we sit down with the other reporters and discuss what we think is the lead story," says DuPont.

When DuPont leaves the station, she gets little rest before beginning her second important job as mom to 6-year-old Bryce and 3-year-old Aiden.

Because she leaves the house so early, DuPont has an in-home child care provider who is there to wake the boys, feed them and get them off to kindergarten and preschool.

"I don't know what I would do without her," says DuPont. "It's a challenge finding someone that can be at your house overnight. She has a room in the basement. She works second shift someplace else, comes over at about 11 p.m. and sleeps here."

Family values

It's important to DuPont that her boys learn "to treat people with respect, to have patience and to be kind and to persevere," she says.

She witnesses perseverance daily in her youngest son, Aiden, who was diagnosed with arthritis at 16 months. "It is pretty rare for kids to have arthritis," notes DuPont. "He has bad days when it hurts to walk, but it doesn't stop him. Even when he is in pain, he doesn't let it slow him down. He wants to run and chase his brother and play at the playground."

DuPont is conscious of Aiden's health in everything they do, mindful that a broken arm or leg—a not-so-uncommon occurrence for other rough-and-tumble boys—can have severe consequences for Aiden, who requires frequent trips to Madison for treatment not currently available in La Crosse.

"He gets methotrexate once a week at home. It is a form of chemotherapy. That's how they treat arthritis," explains DuPont, who administers the injectable medication to Aiden.

"He cries, and for a long time I cried, too," says DuPont. "He'll say, 'It hurts. Mommy, don't hurt me. It's hard to tell a 3-year-old, 'Buddy, it will hurt now, but you will feel better.'"

Because Aiden receives special attention from his parents due to his medical condition, DuPont is conscious about also giving her older son, Bryce, the attention he needs.

Staying active

A youth and collegiate athlete, DuPont enjoys staying active with her children. She coaches the West Salem Co-op gymnastics team and usually takes the boys with her. "Hopefully they have learned a little about teamwork even at this young age," she says.

Because of his arthritis, it is important for Aiden to be active, notes DuPont. "We live half a mile from a park, so in the summer we walk to the park every day. We used to have a routine where we would go to the Children's Museum once a week and walk to the Co-op and get a treat from the bakery."

Because WXOW often features area events, it is easy for DuPont to stay on top of activities in the community, and she and the boys take advantage of all the La Crosse area has to offer.

When the boys look back at their childhood someday, DuPont wants them to recall those moments. "I hope they remember that we did stuff. We went to the festivals, we went to the circus and I read to them every night."

Sometimes the only activity they need is to play and be boys. Both boys love riding their bikes, playing with Power Rangers and racecars and, their favorite, wrestling. "I just referee," says DuPont.

"I realize that as a mom of boys, you just have to wrestle with them sometimes, and rub some dirt in it, and they are fine!" *(crw)*

Westby-based writer Leah Call has incredible respect for Amy DuPont. As a mother of three sons and one daughter, she can't imagine making it through the day with only 4½ hours of sleep.



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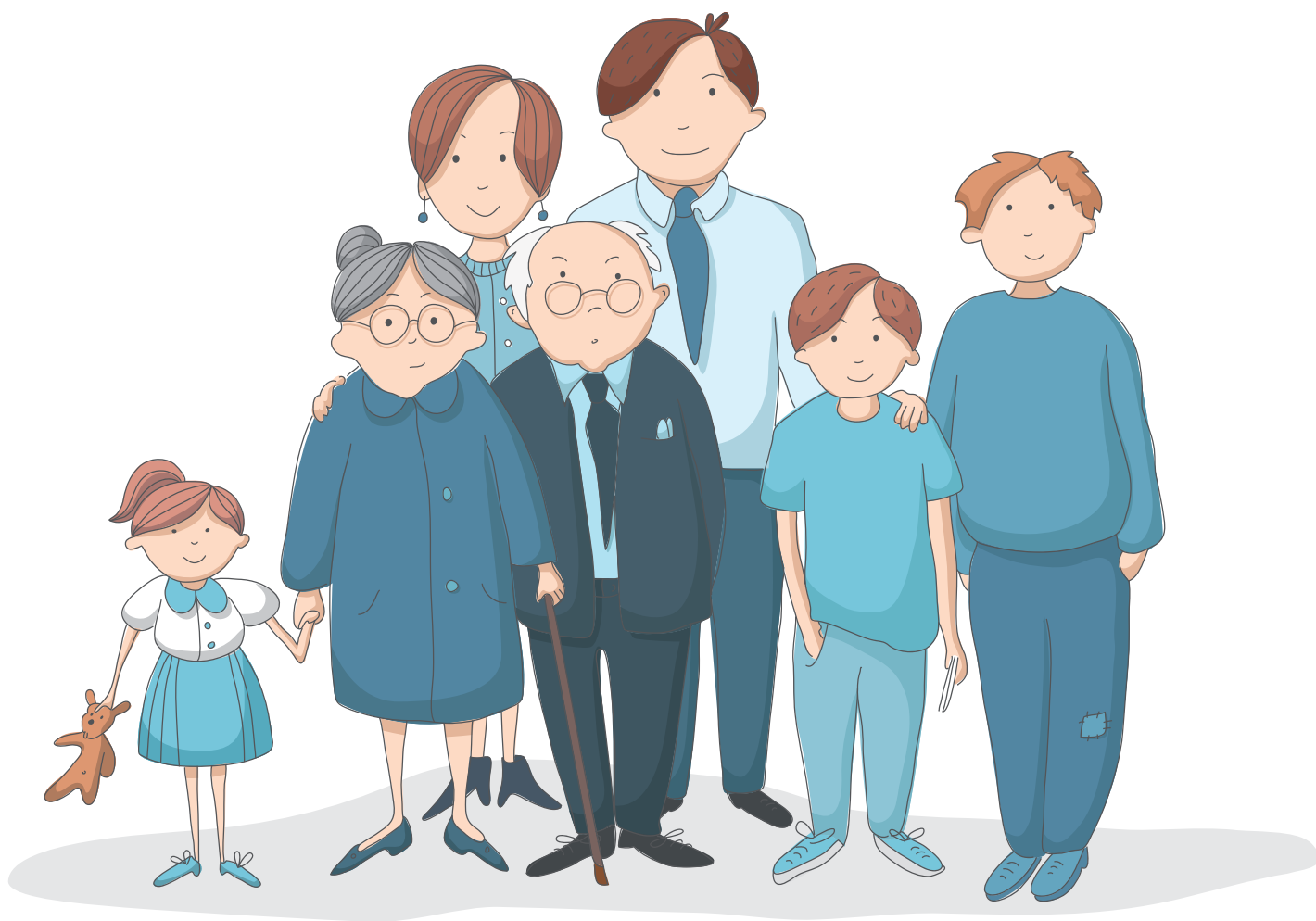
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Many women feel the squeeze of the Sandwich Generation.

BY SUSAN C. SCHUYLER
Contributed photos



During a recent grocery-store run, I dug in my purse to find my shopping list and two others: one from my 86-year-old, recently widowed father; the second from my 22-year-old son, who returned home last year. Moments like that are not unusual for me—and many like me. We are the Sandwich Generation, squeezed between caring for our parents and our adult children.

In January 2013, The Pew Research Center published “The Sandwich Generation” on pewsocialtrends.org with an analysis of

U.S. Census Bureau data: “Nearly half (47 percent) of adults in their 40s and 50s have a parent age 65 or older and are either raising a young child or financially supporting a grown child (age 18 or older).”

Most of those adults are women. According to AARP.org in June 2012, the typical Sandwich Generation member is an employed 48-year-old woman who spends an average of 20 hours each week caring for one or both parents.



Kay Adams, clinical therapist,
Gundersen Health System



Amy Wolff, associate lecturer,
Communication Studies, University
of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Caregivers need care, too

I know from experience that it's stressful to be one of those women. Kay Adams, clinical therapist at Gundersen Health System, who has a special interest in older adults, says, "The biggest source of stress is trying to balance the needs of others with our own obligations and responsibilities."

Adams spoke as a professional, but also shared personal experience. When she returned to school for her master's degree, her mother was diagnosed with early-stage Alzheimer's. "This started a period of time when I provided supportive care to my mother, father, grandmother, my father's cousin and my father-in-law. All this happened while I was also a wife, mom and employee."

We all experience stress differently, Adams says. However, warning signs may include feeling increased impatience or irritability, sighing more often, clenching the jaw, crying over small issues or feeling numb. The sidebar at right offers tips for managing caregiver stresses.

"When there are changes in appetite, sleeping too much or too little, feelings of hopelessness, or wanting to run away, the stress may be turning in to a mood disorder," Adams says. In those situations, it's time to contact a mental health professional, she says.

The Boomerang Children

The other half of the sandwich is Boomerang Children, or adult children living at home. In April 2011, Reuters released public opinion research data from The Kitchens Group that revealed that 9 percent of women had adult children older than 18 living at home for indefinite periods, 12 percent were financially responsible for their adult children and 31 percent reported their adult children at home relied on them but expected to become independent.

Their ranks are growing, especially after the economic downturn. The Pew Research Center data from the same study reported that in 2012, 36 percent of 18- to 31-year-olds lived in their parents' home, up 4 percent from 2007, when the U.S. recession began.

Home again

Amy Wolff, 37, an associate lecturer in the Communication Studies Department at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, fits the profile. When she was laid off as an adjunct instructor three years ago, she returned to her childhood home to live with her retired parents.

"I don't think that being part of the Sandwich Generation is for everyone," she says. Things are going smoothly, but she plans to leave the nest soon. Although privacy issues crop up, she says she owes her success to her patience and adaptability. However, Wolff suggests that parents and Boomerang Children "sit down and make a plan, setting some concrete boundaries."

Wolff is right on the money, according to Janet Bodnar in a 2013 issue of Kiplinger's Personal Finance. The author suggests parents sit down with adult children to agree on the length of stay, house rules and how the children will contribute cash or services.

The only currency that really matters to me as a Sandwich Generation member is love. My life in the middle is full, but I wouldn't have it any other way. **(crw)**

Susan C. Schuyler is a senior lecturer at UW-La Crosse who celebrates a new definition of family every day as hers continues to evolve.

10 Tips for Caregivers

Caregivers need to care themselves first and take steps to reduce stress. Here are some tips for doing just that:

1. Put your physical needs first. Eat nutritious food and avoid overindulging in sweets or alcohol. Get enough sleep, and nap during the day if need be. Exercise, even if it means having someone cover for you at home. Talk to a mental health professional if you experience depression symptoms or thoughts of suicide.

2. Connect with friends. Planning regular get-togethers with friends and relatives is a great stress reliever.

3. Ask for help. As friends and relatives to help you manage extra tasks, even if they aren't nearby.

4. Call on community resources. Look to outside service providers and volunteers to help with home maintenance and caregiving chores. Geriatric care managers can help you coordinate a care plan.

5. Take a break. It will help you and give those for whom you care some new companionship. Plan a weekend or long vacation and schedule respite or home health professionals to step in while you're gone. For shorter breaks, adult day care offers supervision for older adults who need it.

6. Deal with your feelings. Keeping emotions to yourself can harm your mental and physical health. Seek support from friends, family and co-workers who share your situation. A professional counselor or support group can be great outlets as well.

7. Find time to relax. Find something you enjoy, like reading or a hobby, to recharge and relax. Meditation, visualization and deep breathing also can be effective. Prayer can be powerful for those who are religious.

8. Get organized. Calendars and to-do lists are simple tools to help you set priorities. Don't worry if you can't check everything off the list; do the most important tasks first.

9. Just say "no." Resist the temptation to spread yourself too thin and turn down activities. Be realistic and honest about your limitations, and don't feel guilty about setting limits.

10. Stay positive. Don't dwell on what you can't do. Instead, focus on how much you do to care for your loved ones. Resolve conflicts during a family meeting or invite an elder care mediator to help.

Source: "10 Ways to Deal With Caregiver Stress," aarp.org. Updated July 2011.

Make bold plans



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The Greatest Gift

Sometimes it takes a village to have a child.

BY BETTY CHRISTIANSEN

Any woman who has dealt with infertility knows what a gamble—and a miracle—having a child can be. The good news for families who hope for a child, but struggle to make it happen, is that there are more options for having that child than ever before. Yet the toughest cases require the most inventive solutions—and often, a little help from outside.

Such was the case for a local woman who faced difficulties conceiving a child—and who wishes her name be withheld because she hasn't yet shared this story with her child. At age 35, after about half a year of trying to get pregnant, she and her husband met with an infertility specialist. After extensive testing, she discovered her options were limited. Simply put, she did not have enough follicles (eggs) to conceive a child on her own.

"This ruled out a lot of solutions," she explains. "I wasn't a candidate for artificial insemination, because I had no eggs. I couldn't use Clomid or other infertility drugs (to stimulate ovulation), because I had no eggs." The diagnosis left her with one viable option: in-vitro fertilization (IVF) using a donated egg.

First, an egg

Achieving pregnancy through use of a donor egg is a good option for women of advanced maternal age, women who can't produce their own eggs or who produce poor-quality eggs, and women who have faced recurrent pregnancy losses, says Joy Peterson, Embryology

Laboratory Director at Gundersen Health System. She and the staff at Gundersen Fertility Center have been assisting women in becoming pregnant with donated eggs since 2008, celebrating about a 75 percent success rate.

"We offer three options," Peterson explains. "Women can choose to use eggs from a known donor, an anonymous donor or an egg bank." With the first two options, eggs are considered "fresh," or cultivated from a donor at the same time that the intended mother is being prepared for implantation—a process that can take 6 to 8 months. Eggs from a bank have been donated anonymously and frozen for future use, allowing for a much quicker preparation and implantation process—2 to 4 months.

A sister's gift

At the time our Coulee Region woman was undergoing this process—about 10 years ago—she had to travel to another city for her medical services because they weren't offered at local hospitals. She also had the perfect donor: her twin sister.



"My sister had offered to do anything to help," she says. That included donating an egg. The process they went through closely mirrors the process Peterson describes happening at Gundersen, which begins with extensive testing, counseling and psychological screening to ensure that the donor and intended mother alike are physically, mentally and emotionally ready for the procedure. This mother recalls all parties involved—she, her husband and her sister—being thoroughly questioned by a psychologist to ensure no one had misgivings about the procedure, and that her sister was entering into the process willingly. "It was never an issue for us," says the mother, adding that to this day, her sister clearly sees herself as an aunt to the child she helped conceive. "But they had to make sure."

A painstaking procedure

Following the initial testing, both sisters were prepped for the procedure, beginning with months of hormone injections—for the mother, to prepare her uterus for pregnancy, and for the donor, to stimulate ovulation (Peterson notes that now, these injections take place over the course of weeks rather than months). At the exact time that both were ready, eggs were retrieved from the donor sister and inseminated, then checked for fertilization, cultured for several days and implanted in the mother. Typically, only one or two eggs are implanted to reduce the chance of multiples, and additional fertilized eggs may be frozen to further build the family in the future. In our mother's case, two eggs were implanted, one "took" and she became pregnant.

After implantation, Peterson adds, mother and eggs are closely monitored. A blood test is given several days after the procedure to verify pregnancy, and repeated two days later, with a follow-up ultrasound two to three weeks later (although these timelines varied slightly for our local mother). At that point, Peterson says, the intended mother "graduates" to her regular obstetrician, and the pregnancy proceeds as normal. For our local mother, that resulted in the birth of a healthy baby boy, now 8, and a special bond with her twin sister. "It definitely brought us closer," she says. Another gift came quite by surprise 15 months later: a second baby boy conceived the old-fashioned way.

Always a miracle

The procedure may sound cold and clinical, but at the heart of it all is the most basic of human desires, and conceiving a child in the face of all odds is its own unique miracle. This is not lost on the physicians involved in helping the miracle happen. "Our whole staff gets attached," says Peterson of the Gundersen Fertility Center professionals and the individualized care they provide. "You can't help but form personal relationships."

"It's amazing what they can do," our local mother says, noting that the cost, which can be significant, is well worth it in the end. "I would encourage any woman to look into it." **(crw)**

Betty Christiansen is the editor of Coulee Region Women.

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Susan Applebury (left) has embraced the responsibility of raising her grandson, Charlie.

The Second Time Around

Raising grandkids brings joy and challenges.

BY SUSAN HESSEL
Contributed photo

It is common for us grandparents to feel that, as much as we love being with our grandkids, we are more than happy to return them once we've had all the fun.

For some grandparents, however, Grandma's house *is* home. In those cases, grandparents end up raising their grandchildren. This is a role that Susan and Daryl Applebury accepted when it proved their then-4-year-old grandson, Charlie, the son of their younger daughter, Melissa, needed help.

"We love him, and there was an urgent need for somebody to step in," Susan says. Charlie's mother loves him, but she has battled drug and alcohol abuse since high school. Now, she is involved in his life whenever she can be.

Best of both worlds

In the nine years since Charlie came to live with them, the Appleburs have found the experience both invigorating and exhausting.

"He brings an energy to our home," Susan says, smiling. "The downside is that we don't have the energy that we used to have the first time around."

Even Charlie, now 13, has noted his grandmother seems "more lively on the weekends." During the workweek, he told her, she's more "like a zombie." Susan, who is the marketing manager for Hartland Lubricants and Chemicals, admits she doesn't stay up as late as she once did and is less interested in extreme sports as she might have been earlier in life.

Taking in Charlie as his permanent legal guardians nine years ago meant the Appleburs went back to the preschool culture of "daycare, SpongeBob and doctor's appointments" at a time when they otherwise might be thinking about travel and retirement. As Charlie has grown, they've found themselves back at parent-teacher conferences and cheering him on at his activities.

But there is no question that Charlie has enriched their lives.

*"Don't be afraid to take on the parenting role if you are needed.
I don't regret it. I would do it all over again."*

"Charlie adds a lot of life to the house. We have seen him grow up into such a good, kind kid who is very smart and mature," Susan says.

It's also meant they've had to assume a role that parents usually have. "We've had to be younger and do younger things with him around," Susan says.

Like any other grandparents—or parents—the Appleburys feel proud when teachers tell them that he is a true role model, and they wish there were more students just like him. "It's all been positive as he's gone through the years."

An extended family

The Appleburys have not raised Charlie alone. They receive a great deal of support from Charlie's paternal grandparents, Gena and Don King, with whom he stays every other weekend. Also helpful is their older daughter, Angela, who moved back to the La Crosse area from Michigan with her family.

Susan and Daryl each have two children from previous marriages, and Susan says, "Charlie is like the son we never had together." Darryl's children, David and Nicole, were still at home when Charlie came to live with them and were like a big brother and big sister to Charlie.

He entered their family at a time when they were more financially secure than when his mother and aunt were children. "I don't think I am as strict. I'm more mellowed out," Susan says, adding, "I have

more patience. It is a different experience when you are older."

Over the years, Susan has been pleased by the progress Charlie has made. "He has talked about how different his life would have been if he hadn't come to live with us. He knew it would not have been good." She adds that she believes Charlie is less likely to do drugs or alcohol because he has seen "the dark side of drugs." Susan and Daryl have great hope for Charlie that he goes on to college and finds a job that he loves. At this point, he has shown an interest and talent in filmmaking. He and his friends even won second place in a middle school student video contest for Crime Stoppers of the La Crosse area.

Words of wisdom

Susan says what has surprised her most is just how many grandparents are raising their grandkids. "I knew it was out there," she says, "but I did not realize how common it is now."

Her advice for other grandparents who find themselves in need of raising their grandchildren is this: "Go ahead and do it. Don't be afraid to take on this role if you are needed. I don't regret it. I would do it all over again." (crw)

Susan T. Hessel is a personal historian, freelance writer and grandmother, who is very aware of just how much grandparents love their grandkids, not to mention their kids as well.



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SEE MOM MOVE

When it comes to getting outdoors,
you can set the example for family fitness.

BY MARTHA A. KEEFFE

Once again, your daughter is lounging on the couch, her eyes glued to the laptop. It's a beautiful day outside, yet she can't see beyond the barrage of images on Facebook to notice that the sun is shining—and it's about to drive you crazy. You wonder why she doesn't get up and do something physical, and you'll ask her—as soon as you finish watching the show you've been streaming on Netflix.

Though it's no surprise that video games, TV and the Internet contribute to the ever-increasing sedentary lifestyle of our children, how engaged in physical activity we are as parents greatly influences how our kids will choose to use their downtime. Mary Ellen Renna, a pediatrician, physician nutrition specialist and author of *Growing Up Healthy the Next Generation Way: Add Years to Your Child's Life and Life to Your Child's Years*, writes, "When it comes to family fitness, parents need to remember one important rule: like it or not, you are your child's greatest role model. Therefore, it's not enough to just tell your child that they need to eat right and exercise—you need to show them how you are following a healthy lifestyle, as well, and set a good example."

So instead of chiding your child for not getting enough exercise, take an honest look at how active you are, then modify your own behaviors. If the majority of your leisure time is spent snacking while surfing the Internet, or sitting in front of the TV, why not find an activity that you and your child can enjoy together? "Having parents exercise along with children not only reinforces habit, but provides a regular family activity and keeps the whole family healthier," says Renna. And whether you are the parent of a toddler or a teen, the following list of ideas is sure to get your entire family moving.

Meet your match

What parent hasn't thought about chucking a ball at her kid who's turned himself into a Minecraft zombie? For a more productive alternative to lobbing balls at your child, take him to the tennis courts for a fun way to exercise together. Not only will you reap the aerobic benefits, he'll learn the skills necessary to play a game that can be enjoyed well into adulthood. The La Crosse Parks & Recreation department offers summer tennis lessons and leagues for kids and adults of all ages and abilities and even includes instruction for children as young as 4 if accompanied by a parent. And once you've both honed your skills with a racket, you and your child can meet across the net—instead of in the living room—for a casual volley of balls.

Fore!

Show your child that golf clubs are meant for more than whacking off the heads of dandelions by enrolling him in lessons that encourage the use of a ball and a tee. Forest Hills Golf Course in La Crosse offers beginner instruction for golfers age 7 to 16 and an advanced junior summer program for kids age 10 to 15 who are able to walk nine holes, carry their own clubs and play golf unsupervised. Classes and leagues for women of all experience levels are available, too. And remember, there are many health benefits associated with playing golf, from improved hand-eye coordination to stress relief. But don't let your child cajole you into renting a cart; all the extra calories you burn by walking and carrying your own gear around the course will justify the treat you'll want at the snack bar later.



Want to get your kids active? Invite them to join you in activities you enjoy. Just about any exercise—yoga, running, walking, biking and more—is more fun with a partner. Why not your kid?

Beyond the swimming pool

Swimming pools provide an excellent venue for kids and adults to get some exercise and enjoy the sun. But what happens when your kids have tired of the pool and begin to complain that there is nothing to do? Head over to Pettibone Park, where the La Crosse Parks & Recreation department rents canoes, kayaks and paddleboats for you to test your paddling skills on the quiet waters of Pettibone Lagoon. Or if you're up for something a bit more challenging, try paddleboarding, an activity popularized by dozens of celebrities as a trendy way to tone their abs and arms. And should this adventure inspire you to explore other waterways in the Coulee Region, hourly and daily equipment rental is available through Three Rivers Outdoors in La Crosse and Outdoor Connection at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. So when your daughter argues that she's too old to go swimming, remind her that she's never too old to sit in a boat and paddle.

No instructions required

Walking is possibly the most family-friendly physical activity there is. Regardless of your fitness level, if you can walk and own a comfortable pair of shoes—with the exception of flip-flops—you can participate. And with such a wide range of options within the city limits, you're guaranteed to find a trail that appeals to even the most reluctant member of your family. Catch a glimpse of native wetland wildlife, flowers and grasses as you meander through the marsh; make a trek to a scenic lookout for a bird's-eye view of the city, or get

your heart pumping with a brisk hike up and down the wooded hills and valleys of the Mississippi River bluffs. Popular trails include the marsh trails, Hixon Forest and the Human Powered Trails, and can be accessed via convenient parking areas and well-marked trailheads. But don't forget: Sometimes the best walks are the ones found right outside your door.

Get in the habit

Sometimes the best way to get your family moving is a new perspective on fitness. Lessons and fancy equipment aren't always necessary in order to exercise, explains Renna, but incorporating activity into your daily routine is. So park in the far corner of the lot and walk, play Frisbee with your kids or rake the yard together—not only will you burn calories, you'll encourage healthy habits for a lifetime. **(crw)**

Martha Keffe lives and writes in La Crosse where she finds plenty of ways—from rollerblading to skate skiing—to keep herself and her family moving.

For information on activities and lessons, visit

cityoflacrosse.org and link to Parks & Recreation

threeriversoutdoors.com

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CARING CAREGIVERS

The Parenting Place assists parents and child care providers with their “wonderful and challenging” roles.

BY JESSIE FOSS
Contributed photos



Jodi Widuch, executive director of The Parenting Place, speaks at An Evening with The Parenting Place.



Parents and children play at the Book Nook station at the Children's Festival, a celebration of creativity, activity and play that helps support parenting programs at The Parenting Place.

Simply put, The Parenting Place is a place for grown-ups who care about kids. This La Crosse nonprofit organization is committed to helping those who care for children by offering information on providing a caring, safe, healthy and positive environment for children.

At the helm of the organization is Jodi Widuch, who has been the executive director since 2002. “I started in 1998 as the assistant director when the organization was called Family Resources,” Widuch says. “I was looking for a new challenge and found it. I immediately loved the nonprofit world and found my professional niche.”

What is The Parenting Place?

The Parenting Place supports the Coulee Region by aiding child care providers and supporting parents. “Parenting is wonderful and

challenging at the same time, no matter how well prepared you are,” says Widuch, and The Parenting Place is for anyone who is a parent or other caregiver of a young child.

Part of the organization’s goal is to develop high-quality child care businesses in the area by aiding them with technical assistance and educating child care providers about early childhood. The Parenting Place maintains a list of child care providers and educates parents on how to choose one.

The Parenting Place also offers support to parents and other child caregivers through free education and support programs. There are no income requirements, and no populations are targeted, because the organization believes parenting is difficult for all, no matter their income level, ethnicity or educational background.

“The Parenting Place really is an organization that is here for all

parents,” says Widuch. “This can be a difficult message to get across. Some parents think that they aren’t ‘bad enough’ parents to come to one of our programs, and other parents think that they aren’t ‘good enough’ parents to use our services.”

A rewarding job

Widuch, who has a degree from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, came to The Parenting Place after working as a teacher, a church youth group director and an office manager for a bike and ski store.

As the executive director, Widuch focuses on strategic vision, leadership and community development, and she works with the board of directors. “I’m responsible for monitoring the organization’s external environment, projecting trends, anticipating changes and taking necessary actions to seize appropriate opportunities as they arise,” she says.

Hearing about the successes of the programs The Parenting Place offers is one of Widuch’s favorite parts of her job.

“I have lots of best parts of my job,” she says. “I get to spend my days with an incredible staff and love it when I hear laughter in the office from staff, parents or children. I also love the satisfaction of working in a strong collaboration with other community members.”

Although busy at The Parenting Place, Widuch still finds time for her interests outside of work. “I love reading—I’m usually in the middle of a couple of books—movies, going for really long walks with my husband, scrapbooking, gardening, canoeing. For exercise I go to Jazzercise three or four times a week, which is incredibly fun,” Widuch

says. She also has a daughter who is a senior majoring in economics at Macalester College in St. Paul.

Continuing to connect

Looking into the future, Widuch wants The Parenting Place to continue to be accessible to all families with young children. She also anticipates increasing the organization’s focus on appropriate play for young children—especially as screen time and technology infringe more and more on daily activity, including for the very young.

“Research is increasingly rich on the long-term, positive benefits of providing plentiful programming to all who care for young children,” Widuch says. “As the research is more known, accepted and valued, our services will become more valued and accessed more readily.”

The Parenting Place is always looking to connect with any caregivers who have questions or concerns, who need support or who wish to connect with other caregivers. The organization is also always looking for volunteers.

“We believe every young child is important and deserving of a great start in life, no matter what their parents’ demographics are, and we don’t want to limit our resources to only certain parenting populations.”

More information on The Parenting Place can be found at theparentingplace.net. [\(crw\)](#)

Jessie Foss is a freelance writer who lives in La Crosse. She always enjoys learning about organizations within the community, especially those whose goal it is to strengthen the community and its citizens.



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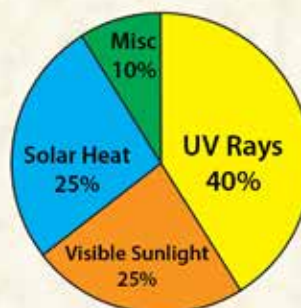


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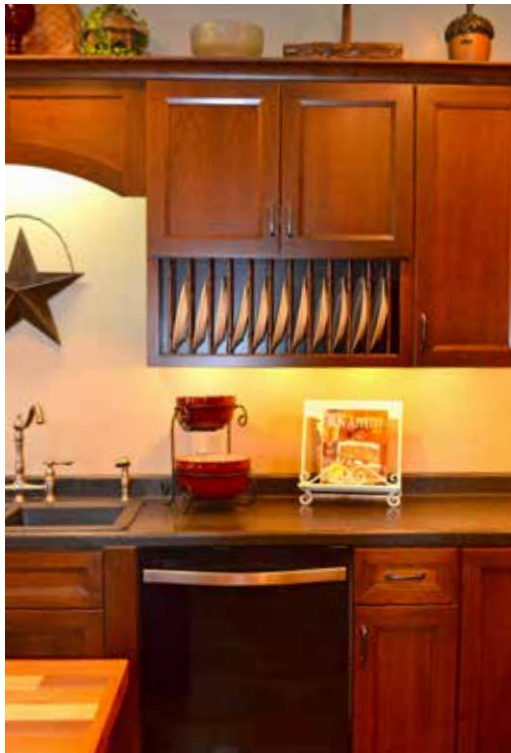
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A PLACE BUILT FOR YOUNG AND OLD

Sue Weidemann's ranch house is built to accommodate family members—all of them.

BY HEIDI GRIMINGER BLANKE
Contributed photos

Sue Weidemann and her husband, Mike, built a house for family—all 50 or so members of it. Their home sits nearly a mile off a main Holmen road, past the hills, through the trees and onto the prairie. And while it houses Weidemann, her husband and her daughter primarily, its doors are open to the extended family who visit frequently.

Weidemann points to a forested area at the property line of her backyard. “We loved the lot; we picked it because it has the woods in back, and that’s a natural area, so now nobody will ever build behind us.” The neighborhood was also a big draw, as Weidemann’s sister lives across the street, and other friends and family are nearby.

Finished for function

Weidemann’s house was designed with a passion for today, but with an eye to the future. Because she has rheumatoid arthritis, Weidemann

wanted a home that would provide easy access for years to come, not only for herself but for anyone with restricted movement.

This is the second home the Weidemanns have built; the first was in Barre Mills. “We lived on a hill, and with the arthritis, it was just not working out, so we knew eventually we’d have to be in a ranch.

“We knew,” Weidemann stops to correct herself, “I knew exactly what we wanted. You look at how your family ages and you go, ‘That’s going to be me someday.’ What can I do to make it easy for me?”

“I knew how I wanted it to function,” she explains. “We have a zero entry in from the garage. There’s a small, small ramp. I have an uncle who has Parkinson’s (disease), so he has issues walking, and I have a great aunt who uses a walker. I wanted a way for them to come in the house, so I wanted to make it as easy as I could with the way the house functions—plenty of room, large hallways for people to move around.”



A rustic entrance, a cozy kitchen, a welcoming fireplace and many places to sit, chat and relax—all these elements add up to create a home that embraces all who enter.

Level entry from the garage is somewhat uncommon, and the Weidemanns “had to bring a bunch of fill in” to put under the garage. The back patio is also accessible, as a door goes straight there from the garage.

Room to roam

Most of the living takes place on the home’s open-concept main floor. The large kitchen opens to the great room, which opens to a smaller den-type area, which opens to the patio. The entire house is a testament to the power of collaboration. While Weidemann, who is executive officer of the La Crosse Area Builders Association, had the overall vision for the home, her builder and family and friends in the construction business zeroed in on the how-to.

Pocket doors enable parts of the main social areas to be closed off. “We made everything so it’s separate, but it’s together. If we want, we have a little sound separation. Everybody is still together, but everybody can have their own conversation.” The home easily accommodates the Weidemanns’ many gatherings, including relatives who might sleep over.

“(Mike’s) kids are in Madison, so when they come, they all stay here. I need places for everybody to stay.” That’s about 14 visiting relatives sharing beds and couches.

“This is our potential,” Weidemann says of her home’s basement level. A large bar is waiting for walls and cabinets, and extra-high ceilings give the illusion of a grand space. Weidemann leads to yet another basement room, this one furnished with a dining-room

table, chairs and hutch. “We had gotten this set when Mike’s grandma passed away, and we needed somewhere to put it. It didn’t fit in my décor upstairs, so I said I’ll have to make a room for it.” The room will contain a “someday wine room.”

While the lower level is still in the works, two bedrooms and a bathroom there are completely usable. Weidemann’s daughter Jackie, 25, moved home to save money while she attends paramedic school. Weidemann calls her “my bounce-back,” because Jackie was on her own for a while. While the basement bedroom was not designed with the intention of housing a grown child, the accommodations suit everyone.

Crazy for Christmas

Anyone who knows Weidemann knows her passion for Christmas decorating. “I’ve got to show you my Christmas stuff,” she says. Every room retains some piece of Christmas decorating. The secret to her massive decorations are a series of storage boxes taking up a wall in the basement. Large plastic tote after large plastic tote, about 50 in total, line up across from another wall, where larger items are hung.

“My father is my worst influence. He is a Christmas-aholic. That’s kind of where it started from.” In Weidemann’s house, “there isn’t a room that isn’t touched; I change bedding, pictures, everything. I don’t even notice it anymore,” she says laughingly about some of her year-round Christmas decorations, “because it’s just a part of our lives.”

Furnished with finds

Weidemann is a consummate garage sale shopper, and many of the items in her house belonged to someone else first. Yet, it all fits. Furniture, artwork and knickknacks all have a story. The home’s rustic, lodgey décor is a perfect backdrop for it all. “I love repurposing things,” she explains. For example, a small black table and almost everything on it came from garage sales, but it looks as if it were part of a decorator’s scheme.

“Pretty much every weekend, my sister and I go in the summer. We need nothing, but we love doing it. It’s kind of our time together, and a couple of daughters tend to go with us. It’s just kind of that getaway time.” Yet, Weidemann can relate a story about a lamp handed down in the family, a wedding table decoration or 10 matching bar stools in need of a little TLC.

Lifelong lodging

The Weidemanns’ home is in it for the long haul. Though Weidemann talks about moving furniture around and future plans for rooms, it’s a place built with love for young and old. “We want to be able to stay in our house as long as we possibly can,” Weidemann says. “I really want to be here forever.” No doubt she and Mike will do just that. (crw)

Heidi Griminger Blanke, Ph.D., is a freelance writer who, after interviewing Sue Weidemann, is tempted to stop at garage sales instead of driving right by them.



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IT'S MY PARTY

Keep kids safe from food allergies without excluding them from the fun.

BY SHARI HEGLAND

Recipes analyzed by Gundersen Health System registered dietitians.

If you feel as though finding a snack or birthday treat that your child can safely share with his or her friends is becoming more difficult, you aren't imagining things.

Food allergies are on the rise, with the CDC reporting that in 2007, approximately 3 million children had a food allergy, making them unable to eat any number of common foods. Even more may have an intolerance that can cause discomfort but not a true allergic reaction. Food allergies and intolerances can be triggered by things as diverse as peanuts, shellfish, dairy products or gluten, the protein found in the common grains wheat, barley and rye. The top eight allergens, which are required to be listed on the labels of all processed grocery items, are peanuts, tree nuts, eggs, fish, soybeans, wheat, milk and shellfish.

With food allergies or intolerances impacting 1 in 13 children, chances are that any classroom in a school will have two children with dietary restrictions that may range from foods that simply give them mild discomfort to those that pose a risk of life-threatening anaphylactic shock.

But that doesn't mean birthday parties, class activities and extracurricular events can't be inclusive and safe for all of your child's friends. It may just take a little extra planning and vigilance.

Parents of children with allergies are typically prepared and willing to help you navigate the waters of dealing with allergies.

1. Talk to the parents of children with allergies.

Miriah White of Onalaska has two children who react to gluten, and her daughter is also allergic to tree nuts. She says the most important thing other parents can do is communicate with her and ask questions. While White is proactive about providing information to the schools and parents of other students in her daughter's class,

she still welcomes the opportunity to answer questions and help other people understand how important it is for her daughter to avoid nuts especially, which can cause life-threatening reactions.

White also shows the parents of her daughter's friends how to use the EpiPen her daughter carries in case an allergic reaction occurs. When you are hosting a child with an allergy, ask the parents what signs to look for and what you should do in case of a reaction.

2. But don't talk about it around the kids.

White says that research has shown that discussing a child's allergy in front of others can increase their feelings of embarrassment and anxiety. "Usually the children do have a fear, so keep that medical talk out of earshot," she says. And don't offer a child a food if you aren't certain they can have it, as that puts extra social pressure on them to accept it.

3. Don't be offended if children bring their own treats rather than eat treats you made.

Remember that some allergies truly are life-threatening, and most reactions occur as a result of accidental cross-contamination. Something as simple as your daughter stirring the cake mix after eating a peanut butter sandwich or a granola bar without having washed her hands could introduce peanut oil into the batter. Using the same knife to make sandwiches on gluten-free bread as you used on the regular bread—or even using a clean knife, but dipping it into the same jar of jelly—could transfer crumbs to what was supposed to be a gluten-free sandwich. It is nearly impossible to ensure that the average family's home kitchen is allergen-free.

Shari Ireland of Holmen sends a prepacked meal and her own treats with her first-grade daughter on nearly every outing. She discovered





That doesn't mean birthday parties, class activities and extracurricular events can't be inclusive and safe. It may just take a little extra planning and vigilance.



when her daughter was 3 that she reacts to dairy products, which are often hidden in such unexpected things as bread.

"We do appreciate the effort," White says. "We just want to be sure our kids are safe."

4. Read the labels.

If you choose to buy premade snacks, read labels carefully, even on foods that you may have purchased for the child before, as food formulations and manufacturers change. If the allergy is a potentially life-threatening one, even a note of the product being manufactured in the same facility as the allergen (for example, tree nuts) means it should not be served. Be sure to bring labels,

or even send a photo of the label, to the child's parents to read, as allergens can sometimes be hard to spot.

White and Ireland both recommend the brand Enjoy Life, which is available locally at Woodman's, Festival Foods and the People's Food Co-op, and has products ranging from granola bars and cookies to crackers, cereal and chocolate chips. All Enjoy Life products are free of the top eight allergens and produced in allergen-free facilities.

Both moms also recommended Linda's Bakery in West Salem for special-ordering gluten-free, dairy-free or nut-free cakes or cupcakes, saying they feel comfortable with

the steps taken there to limit the potential for cross-contamination.

5. Keep it simple.

If you decide to bring something homemade, stick with simple items made from fresh, unprocessed foods. It's hard to go wrong with fresh fruit and vegetables. You can also celebrate occasions such as class birthdays in non-food ways, such as by doing a special art project or buying a book or supplies for your child's class. (crw)

Holmen writer Shari Hegland has learned to navigate the world of food intolerances because both she and her 8-year-old son must avoid gluten.



EASY GUACAMOLE

Ireland recommends a simple guacamole with plain corn chips, such as the Garden of Eatin' brand or Simply Balanced brand from Target for a savory gluten-free and dairy-free snack. This easy guacamole recipe from allrecipes.com would fit the bill.

Serving size: 2 T.

- 2 avocados
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 ripe tomato, chopped
- 1 lime, juiced
- salt and pepper to taste

Peel and mash avocados in a medium serving bowl. Stir in onion, garlic, tomato, lime juice, salt and pepper. Chill for half an hour to blend flavors.

Recipe from allrecipes.com, submitted by Denise Goodman.

90 calories, 7g fat, 1g protein, 6g carbohydrate, 4g fiber, 0mg sodium.



HUMMUS

White's family enjoys vegetables with hummus, a simple dip made from chickpeas. This recipe, also, is from allrecipes.com.

Serving size: 4 oz.

- 2 cups canned garbanzo beans, drained
- 1/3 cup tahini
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 cloves garlic, halved
- 1 T olive oil
- 1 pinch paprika
- 1 tsp. minced fresh parsley

Place the garbanzo beans, tahini, lemon juice, salt and garlic in a blender or food processor. Blend until smooth. Transfer mixture to a serving bowl.

Drizzle olive oil over the garbanzo bean mixture. Sprinkle with paprika and parsley.

Recipe from allrecipes.com, submitted by RC2STEP.

260 calories, 17g fat, 9g protein, 22g carbohydrate, 1g fiber, 810mg sodium.

GLUTEN-FREE RICE KRISPIES TREATS

An easy gluten-free, dairy-free sweet treat that doesn't require purchasing special flours is treats made with Kellogg's Rice Krispies Gluten-Free Cereal (in a tan box next to the regular blue box in stores) and a dairy-free butter substitute such as Earth Balance spread (in the refrigerated organic/natural foods section at local Festival Foods stores).

Serving size: 1 square (pan cut into 20 squares)

- 3 T Earth Balance Vegan Buttery Sticks
- 5 1/2 cups Jet-Puffed Miniature Marshmallows
- 6 cups Kellogg's Rice Krispies Gluten-Free Cereal

Melt butter substitute in a large pan over medium heat. Add marshmallows and stir constantly until melted. Stir in cereal and mix well. Press into a 9 x 13-inch pan greased with Earth Balance and allow to cool completely. Cut into squares.

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DAD @ HOME

Coulee Region Women celebrates the joys of parenting—from a dad's point of view.

BY BETTY CHRISTIANSEN

Contributed photo



Erin Maslowski, Jacob Sciammas and their children, Ike and Nora, enjoy family time outdoors no matter what the weather.

Jacob Sciammas and Erin Maslowski combine career and family in a way that's becoming increasingly popular in the Coulee Region. Maslowski, a physician at Gundersen Health System, is the primary working parent, while Sciammas holds down the fort at their home in La Crosse. Here, this stay-at-home dad, part-time UW-La Crosse instructor and neighborhood advocate explains their arrangement and why it works.

How did you and Erin come to decide that you would be the main daytime parent?

The work that I do has always had a more flexible schedule, working mostly in higher education and outdoor recreation, so it was a natural fit. I also love lifelong learning by finding teachable moments through discovery and adventure, and being with the kids is the best version of experiential education for us all.

What does your typical day look like?

During the academic year, I am working on the computer from 5:30 to 7 a.m., until it is time to get the kids off to school. Two days a week, I return with our son, Ike, for "Daddy-Buddy time," and the other three days I take Ike to preschool and return home to do housework or prep for class. I teach Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, so there is a bit of chasing to be done around 3 p.m., when our daughter, Nora, is done at Emerson Elementary. The nights I teach, dinners are quick—otherwise, I am back home with a kid or two to make dinner and get things ready before Erin returns by 5:30 p.m. Nighttime is family time, but we are an early-to-bed and early-to-rise family.

What are advantages of being the stay-at-home parent?

Being closer to home means I can do the home maintenance and cooking (which I love even more in our new kitchen) as well as staying active outdoors without having to schedule a "workout"—things that have always been core values to me.

What about this arrangement challenges you?

Erin wishes sometimes that she could be the "main daytime parent" more, but she loves her work so much that it makes that easier. Sometimes I miss working full time, which is why I get involved in civic and service opportunities.

With Nora and Ike almost 6 and 4, things have gotten so much easier for us. With every passing day, I am more amazed with how helpful and independent they are. It isn't "easy street" all the time for the four of us; however, when I remind myself of how fortunate we are, my issues seem so trivial, and I am reminded that being the "daytime parent" is such a gift.

What other "gifts" do you and your family enjoy?

Since we are within a few miles of friends' houses, school, work and home, getting around couldn't be easier. We are dedicated walkers, bikers and sledders (which means I am pulling the kids, of course) no matter what the weather brings.

I always planned on having a career where I could be more flexible in one of the seasons, and so far it is working out. Erin and I appreciate how important summers together with family were growing up, and hopefully we can keep experiencing that with our children. **(crw)**



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Quality Family Time

Destination family reunions combine family togetherness with adventure, forging a lasting connection.

BY CHARISH BADZINSKI
Contributed photos

More than 100 family members attended the most recent Houghton reunion in Yankton, South Dakota, in 2013. The group picks a new destination for each reunion, which happens every third year, and family members make it a priority to be there.

For families seeking a truly memorable way to reconnect with their relatives, destination family reunions have become increasingly popular. Lisa Houghton of Rochester, Minnesota, says they travel around the country for weeklong reunions with her husband's side of the family every three years. She's been a part of the tradition for two decades. "I'm much closer to his family than I am to mine just because I see them so much more," she says. "You get the chance to really connect again, and I think that connection is what makes you want to go back every three years."

For Moe Dray of Onalaska, annual family reunions on her husband's side also take place around the country, as everyone takes turns hosting in their hometowns. "We've got relatives from one coast to the other, so it's pretty hard to get together if you don't make a conscious effort to wind up in the same place." Their destination reunions, usually about four days long, give them that chance, she says. Their reunions have been held in California, Phoenix, Las Vegas, New Orleans and La Crosse. "It makes it interesting. It gives the person who's hosting the chance to show off where they live." Smaller groups have even taken cruises.

Nuts and bolts

Both families appoint individuals to plan the event and logistics. That includes the important task of researching locations to ensure people of all ages will have a good time. Both say a gathering space

or community room is vital, to allow the group to gather to eat, play games and continue family reunion traditions. "There's always a huge card game, or some kind of dice game where we can have 30 people playing—little kids as well as grandpas and grandmas," Dray says. Most of their family reunions draw between 20 and 40 people.

For Houghton's family, reunions are big—including up to 180 people. They generally plan a talent show and softball tournament, and players are recruited for teams as soon as they're born. Newcomers who've married into the family face initiation, including insider trivia. And golf tournaments pair up cousins who might not otherwise get the chance to know one another. Their destinations have included South Dakota (from where the family originally hails), Colorado and California, including common vacation destinations. Sometimes the reunion has even incorporated a wedding.

For both, destination family reunions have offered a unique chance to get together with relatives for real quality time, and get to know them on a meaningful level.

"It's a pretty amazing family," says Houghton. "I remember when I went to the first one, I thought, 'Really, I have to commit to this every three years?'"

Dray echoes the sentiment. "It really has kept the family in touch. It's easy to keep up through Facebook in between. And when you see someone, you have a real connection."



Top left: The winning Houghton family softball team (one out of four teams that compete) displays their fancy trophy. Top right: All the Houghton cousins are assigned a night of cooking dinner during the week. Bottom left: Moe Dray's family sports shirts custom-made for their Las Vegas reunion. Bottom right: The Houghton family enjoys a wicked game of spoons.

Tips for planning

Jo Ann Buening, Rachel Gilbertson and Diane Nickelatti from Travel Leaders/Goli's Avenues of Travel in La Crosse contributed these tips for planning your next destination family reunion:

- Use a travel agent with experience in planning destination family reunions. When your agent understands your unique family dynamics, they are able to make recommendations that fit your family specifically.
- Start planning early. Travel agents have their finger "on the pulse" and know when best prices become available. Also, planning early helps ensure that as many as possible can travel, and it allows family members time to save for the trip if each family is responsible for payment.
- Establish two or three group leaders. Choose the destination, plan some activities and perhaps plan some special meals in advance. Then advise the family of what will be happening.
- Don't make it too long; a week to 10 days seems to be best for most families because it can fit into a working person's schedule as well as that of retirees.
- Consider everyone's ages and physical limitations when planning. Select a destination with at least some activities that will interest everyone in the group.
- Cruises make an easy destination family reunion, as there are

myriad activities for all personalities, age levels and interests. Food is included, plus a variety of ports of call that pique travelers' interests. Also, the opportunity to gather every day, at dinner, to exchange and share the day's stories and socialize is very important, especially to the organizer(s) and/or those paying.

- If a cruise isn't on your radar, consider an all-inclusive resort. This way, opening the wallet every time someone wants a snack or drink isn't required because all meals, beverages and snacks are included. Meeting daily for dinner is easy to do here as well.
- If the family reunion is planned around a milestone birthday or anniversary, a common and fun option, the celebrants should have the privilege of selecting the destination or travel type, especially if they're paying for everyone.
- Appoint one person to build and maintain all pertinent information for the travelers and liaise with the travel agent. Details are important, including legal spellings of names, birth dates, special needs, rooming lists, etc.
- If the travelers want flexibility, travel agents can set up a flexible group booking, so that each family can customize the trip to meet their wants and needs. **(crw)**

Charish Badzinski is a writer and traveler who lives in La Crosse. She shares her adventures on her blog: <http://rollerbaggoaddress.wordpress.com/>.

SPECIAL SECTION

COMMUNITY

La Crosse • Onalaska • Holmen • Winona • Viroqua • Westby • West Salem



COMMUNITY

Here in the Coulee Region, we are blessed with many things: **natural beauty, good people and strong communities.** Whether you call La Crosse, Onalaska, Viroqua or Winona your home, chances are good that you live in **a community with much to offer.**

Community isn't just about where you live. **It's about the people**—the residents, the business owners and the service providers—who make a community come to life. We at *Coulee Region Women* are featuring a special section in this issue, **celebrating those who make our own community a better, richer, healthier and friendlier place.** We've given them a space to tell you, in their own words, what they do and how they serve their own communities.

And as we do, **we thank you, our readers,** for being a part of our *Coulee Region Women* community, too. Certainly, **our area is a richer place because of what we all bring to it.**



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Real estate careers:

Local women find their place in the home industry



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Ask most women what they want in a career, and you'll likely hear they want something they enjoy that offers a good income and the flexibility to tend to family needs. Perhaps that's why so many local women are finding their career home in real estate.

A career without limits

When Tracey Kuehl was looking for a new career, she knew she would find it in real estate. She had seen her sister's life as a Realtor and liked what she saw.

"There's no ceiling with a career like this, and the flexibility is family friendly," says the single mom.

Kuehl joined Coldwell Banker River Valley REALTORS in 2012 and cites the company's excellent training, ongoing support and comprehensive, progressive sales tools among reasons she blew past her first-year goals — surpassing the national Realtor average by 50 percent.

"I interviewed several brokers before choosing," she says. "You can get your license, but after that what do you do? I needed a company that would support me in launching this new career, and Coldwell Banker walked me through. I couldn't have asked for more."



A simple wish

For Rose Thrun, it was a simple wish that propelled her into real estate. Her four children had never met any of their aunts, uncles or cousins from England. Thrun wanted to change that, but her restrictive work schedule and teacher's salary hindered her.

"I needed a career that would allow me the autonomy to determine my own schedule and have more control over my income," she says.

Thrun found both, plus a satisfying career, when she joined Coldwell Banker River Valley, REALTORS. "Buying or selling a home can be a stressful experience. Knowing I'm helping my clients get through it to achieve their goals is rewarding."

It's also rewarding for Thrun to achieve her personal goals in the process. After just two years in real estate, she now has plane tickets to England in hand. She's making her dreams come true.



An unexpected outcome — and income

Dawn Levandoski's story has a common beginning, but for this mother of two, it's taken an extraordinary turn.

Like many women, Levandoski quit working when her first child was born, and when her youngest started school, she found time to pursue something new. Having watched her husband flip a couple houses, she decided to get a real estate license just for her own education.

"I didn't intend to become a full-time agent until I went through the course and earned my license. But I realized this was something I really enjoyed and was passionate about," she says.

After interviewing numerous real estate companies, she chose Coldwell Banker River Valley, REALTORS. "I was really impressed. They are true professionals and offer the tools to help agents be effective."

And Levandoski has been very effective. Now, six years later, she has wildly exceeded her expectations, with an income, flexibility and professional fulfillment she never dreamed possible.

For more information on how to become a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker River Valley, REALTORS, visit them online at www.joincbvr.com or call 1-866-470-3996.



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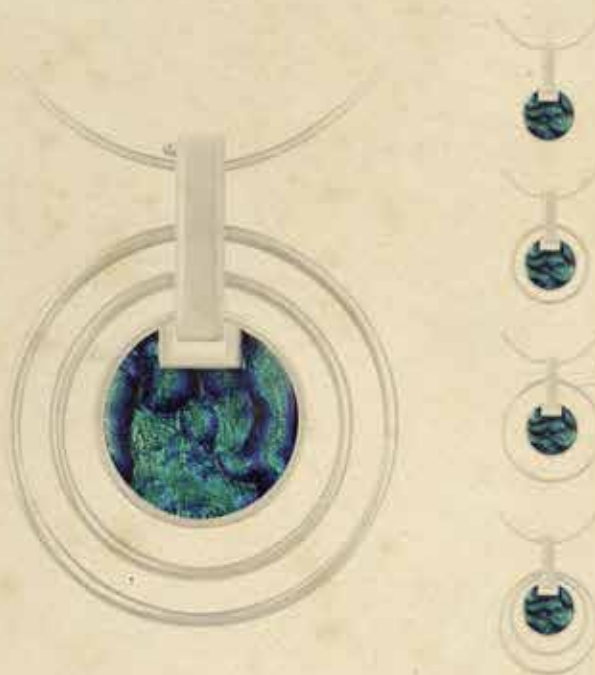
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~Amy & Scott Lattos

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Since 1999, attorney Heidi M. Eglash has advised individuals and families in legal work that impacts life's most important aspects: your loved ones and the property you've worked for over your lifetime. Since establishing her firm in 2005, Heidi and her colleagues have assisted clients in developing customized, comprehensive estate plans—whether simple or complex—that reflect the unique circumstances, values and goals of each of them. These allow clients to control their property during life, to care for themselves and loved ones during periods of disability, and to give what they have to those they wish, on their own terms and without unnecessary cost or delay.

In estate planning, as in each of the firm's select practice areas, Heidi and her colleagues never lose sight of their most important goals: to develop lasting relationships with those they serve and to be a dependable source of guidance, service and results.

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My sister Nancy and I, Barb, started our venture with Lillians eight years ago in downtown La Crosse. The only retail experience we had prior to that was the love of shopping ourselves!

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ADVERTISER INDEX

AAUW Art Fair on the Green.....	33
Altra Federal Credit Union.....	56
American Heart Association	40
Ameriprise Financial/Hanson & Associates	18
Artspired.....	21
Beyer Cabinets LTD.	31
Bittersweet Boutique & Antiques.....	18
Cain's Orchard	22
Cass Street Pharmacy.....	20
Coldwell Banker River Valley Realtors	47
College of Business Administration, UW-La Crosse.....	52
Coulee Carpet Center	28
Coulee Region Professional Women	53
CRC Printing & Promotions	53
D.M. Harris Law, L.L.C.	25
Downtown Mainstreet Inc.	46
Dayze's	37
Feist Dental	2
Floorcrafters	31
Flooring Interiors	51
G.E.C.U.....	37
Generous Earth Pottery	39
Gholson Periodontics Group	55
Great Rivers Shakespear Festival	52
Gundersen Health System	5, 13, 37, 55
Heart Journey Counseling.....	33
Hidden Valley Designs INC	51
Honda Motorwerks.....	22
Howes Diamond Jewelers	53
J Company.....	32
Jake Wieser Construction Inc.....	50
Janet Mootz Photography.....	37
La Crosse Area Builders Association	32
La Crosse Community Theatre	39
La Crosse Concert Band.....	37
La Crosse Radio Group.....	22
LARK.....	39
Law Office of Heidi M. Eglash	28, 50
Lillians.....	52
Mainstream Boutique	39
Mary Kay/Trudy Swenson	53
Mayo Clinic Health System	9, 16
Overhead Door of the 7 Rivers Region	27
Painted Porch.....	28
People's Food Co-op	37
River Trail Cycles	52
Rose Jewelers	48
Satori Arts Gallery.....	39
Schumacher-Kish Funeral and Cremation Services.....	25
Silhouette Shoppe.....	25
Southern Exposure.....	39
Stamp 'n Hand	39
Sun Control of Minnesota	28
Take It, Staging & Redesign.....	51
The Company Store Outlet	33
The Pilates Studio LLC	20
The Second Showing	51
The Studio	27
Thrive Health Center	49
Ultimate Insulation	31
Ultimate Salon & Spa	10
Valley View Mall	3
Wells Fargo/Neuman-Fortun Investment Group	22
Winona Health.....	25
Wisconsin Building Supply	32
WKBT Newschannel8	7
WXOW News 19	42

Accomplishments

D.M. Harris Law, L.L.C.	33
Stamp 'n Hand	33

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

ONGOING EVENTS

American Association of University Women (AAUW) 2nd Sat. of each month (Sept.-May), 9:30 a.m., 608-519-0548, aauwlacrosse@hotmail.com, aauw-wi.org.

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

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

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

Wee Move for ages 1-7 with adult, every Fri., 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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

La Crosse Concert Band Concerts in the Park 2014 every Wed., 7:30 p.m., Riverside Park, June 11, 18, 25; July 9, 16, 23, 30. Rain site Central High School, lacrosseconcertband.org.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CALENDAR EVENTS

June 8, YMCA Got Energy? Triathlon, 7 a.m., Swarthout Park, West Salem, 608-783-9622, laxymca.org.

June 13-14, Artspire Mural Unveiling, 5 p.m. Fri., Pump House, artspirelacrosse.com; Celebration of Arts, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat., downtown La Crosse, lacrossedowntown.com.

June 14, Minds in Motion Bicycle Tour, 7 a.m. Century Challenge, 8 a.m. all other rides, 9:30 a.m. 5K Fun Run, Onalaska Middle School, mimbiketour.org.

June 14, Freedom Fest, 11 a.m.-11 p.m., UW-La Crosse Veterans Memorial Sports Complex, freedomfestlacrosse.com, 608-797-2089.

June 16-19, Spanish day camp, 8:30-11:30 a.m. ages 4-7, Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

June 18, Go Red Luncheon, 10:30 a.m., The Cargill Room, The Waterfront Restaurant and Tavern, La Crosse, lacrossegoared.ahaevents.org.

June 19, American Red Cross Blood Drive, 12:30-4:30 p.m., Valley View Mall, redcrossblood.org.

June 21-23, Midsummer Fest, Sat. 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun. 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, norskedalen.org.

June 23-25, Build It day camp, 8:30-11:30 a.m., Children's Museum of La Crosse, ages 4-7, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

June 23, Riverfront Community Classic Golf Outing, Cedar Creek Golf Club, Onalaska, 608-785-3559, riverfrontinc.org.

June 25-Aug. 3, Great River Shakespeare Festival, Winona State University, 507-474-7900, grsf.org.

June 27, Freaky Friday day camp: Game of Life, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., ages 7-12, Children's Museum of La Crosse, Pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

July 2-5, Riverfest, Riverside Park, La Crosse.

July 4, La Crosse Jaycees Fireworks, 10:00 p.m., Riverside Park, La Crosse.

July 3, Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, 6 p.m., Riverfest Grounds, Riverside Park, La Crosse.

July 5, Big Blue Dragon Boat Race, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Riverside Park, mayoclinichealthsystem.org.

July 6, Art Fair & Wine Tasting, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, norskedalen.org.

July 11-13, Trempealeau Lions Catfish Days, Trempealeau.

July 11-13, Viroqua Bluegrass Festival, Vernon County Fairgrounds, viroquabluegrass.org.

July 12, Youth Outdoor Fest, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Pettibone Park, La Crosse.

July 14-18, Young Artists day camp, 8:30-11:30 a.m., ages 4-7, Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

July 16-20, La Crosse Interstate Fair, West Salem Fairgrounds, West Salem.

July 19, Rail Fair at Copeland Park, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Copeland Park, La Crosse.

July 19, Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing, 7 p.m., Theatre for Youth Performance, La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for the Performing Arts, La Crosse.

July 21-24, Spanish day camp, 8:30-11:30 a.m. ages 4-7, Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

July 24-26, Krazy Daze, 8 a.m. Thurs. Fri., 10 a.m. Sat., downtown La Crosse, lacrossedowntown.com.

July 25, Freaky Friday day camp: Weird Science, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., ages 7-12, Children's Museum of La Crosse, Pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

July 25-27, Hoedown Days, Houston, Minnesota, houstonhoedown.com.

July 26, Wellness Fest by Gundersen Health System, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., La Crosse Center, gundersenhealth.org/wellnessfest, 608-775-4717.

July 26-27, AAUW Art Fair on the Green, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat., 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sun., UW-La Crosse Campus.

July 28-Aug. 1, I Spy Science day camp, 8:30-11:30 a.m., ages 4-7, Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

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