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women

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Food & Wine

Pictured on cover: From top:
Lori Helke, Traci Weber, Corynn Wieland
and Kathy Wilhelm, owners of
4 Sisters Wine Bar & Tapas Restaurant, La Crosse.
Photo on cover by Bruce Defries Photography.



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Many food lovers would agree, there's nothing like a perfect tomato, straight from the garden. I'm not talking about the offenses that dutifully appear in grocery stores in February, tough spheres with forced color and no flavor. I mean the real thing, heavy in your palm and still warm from the sun's rays. This is the tomato you eat by itself, juicy and tart, the perfect foil for bacon and lettuce or fragrant basil and fresh mozzarella.

When my husband brought the first tomato home from the garden on our farm—offering it like a prize in his tractor-grease-stained hands—it felt like a holiday. What would we do with this gorgeous fruit? What meal was worthy of its sanctity? We made a grocery run for good bacon and savored every tangy bite of BLTs that day. Then he brought home a 5-gallon bucket full. Then he brought two more. Then four.

We gave two buckets to my mother-in-law and got busy ourselves. I felt a little proud of myself when I canned several quarts of whole tomatoes, and downright smug when I produced a lovely batch of tomato sauce. Then we discovered the two dozen jars of sauce left from last year. And the tomatoes kept coming.

You just can't process 20 or 30 gallons of tomatoes that fast, and they began to take over our lives, as they do every fall. The sanctity of the perfect tomato begins to fade when they start spoiling in your kitchen. You can have a large pot of tomatoes cooking down on every burner of your stove, and still barely make a dent in the bounty that surrounds you.

But come February, we'll open a jar and be greeted by September sunshine, and it will all be worth it. That distinction is one any food lover will appreciate.

In this issue of *Coulee Region Women*, we celebrate food and its companion, wine, and not a moment too soon. This is the time of year when, historically, food takes center stage. The harvest is in and the holiday season is building, and with it the anticipation of meals to prepare and enjoy, traditional favorites and culinary adventures alike.

Food takes center stage for the women featured in this issue as well, beginning with the four sisters behind 4 Sisters, the wine bar and tapas restaurant that has encouraged many Coulee Region diners to enjoy something new. We feature other foodie entrepreneurs as well: Shawn McManus of Savory Creations, Barb Leis of Red Pines Bar & Grill, Jackie Hoch of Hoch Orchards and Carolyn Austin of Austin's Rush Creek Farm—whose business selling homegrown canned goods puts my tomato-canning operation to shame.

But we'll also meet the caring minds behind organizations such as the Hunger Task Force, which exists so that everyone in the region has food to eat, and Grow Your Brain, which teaches children the important connection between food and its source. We'll visit restaurants that put farm-to-table fare on their tables, we'll send you around a world of international cuisine right here in the Coulee Region and we'll take you on a wine-tasting tour. Whether you find delight in an exquisite meal, a generous pour or a single, perfect tomato, you'll find something to savor in this issue of *Coulee Region Women*. Bon appétit!

Betty

coulee region women

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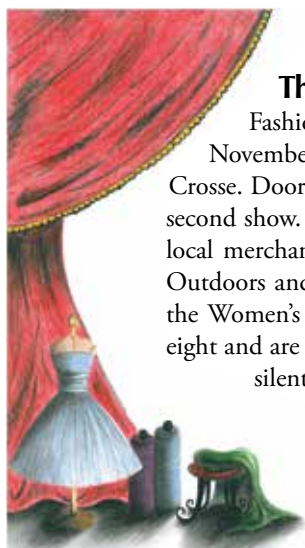
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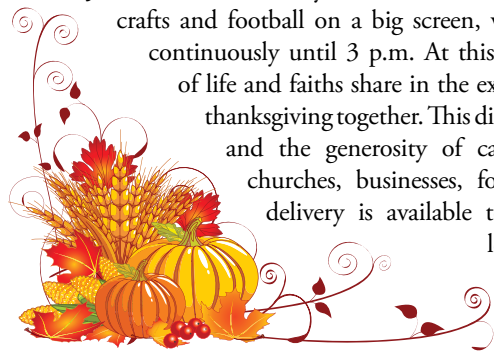


FASHION CORNUCOPIA

The Women's Clothes Closet will hold its seventh annual Fashion Cornucopia Style Show and gourmet meal on Saturday, November 8, at Our Savior's Lutheran Church at 612 Division St., La Crosse. Doors will open at 11 a.m. for the first show and at 5 p.m. for the second show. The style show will feature women's and men's fashions from local merchants, including Dale's, Lillians, Lark, Jo Ba Flat, Three Rivers Outdoors and Touch of Class. The event includes live music and tours of the Women's Clothes Closet. Tickets are \$35 each or \$240 for a table of eight and are on sale now with reserve seating available. Quilt raffle tickets, silent auction items and table wine are available for purchase. All proceeds will benefit the Women's Clothes Closet, which provides gently used clothing to low-income women who are entering or in the workforce. For tickets, call 608-782-3468 or visit oursaviorslutheranchurch.net.

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Come down to the La Crosse Center for the 33rd annual La Crosse Community Thanksgiving Dinner, held 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. November 27, Thanksgiving Day. Join fellow community members for activities including music, dancing, arts and crafts and football on a big screen, with a delicious Thanksgiving meal served continuously until 3 p.m. At this annual celebration, people from all walks of life and faiths share in the experience of community and enjoy a day of thanksgiving together. This dinner is made possible by countless volunteers and the generosity of caring individuals, students, organizations, churches, businesses, foundations, entertainers and artists. Meal delivery is available to homebound persons upon request. To learn more or request a home delivery, visit lacrossethansgivingdinner.com. Donations can be sent to P.O. Box 662, La Crosse, WI 54602.



HOLIDAY HARVEST WINE AND FOOD FESTIVAL



Love food and wine? Start your holiday season right by indulging in some great holiday foods and wines on the Great River Road Wine Trail. On November 8-9 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., you can take part in the Holiday Harvest Wine & Food Festival with featured wines and ciders paired with holiday foods at each of the nine wineries on the trail. The Great River Road Wine Trail runs from Marquette, Iowa, north to Cannon Falls, Minnesota, and on to the Coulee Region wineries. Registration for this fun-filled event is \$30 per person, and each ticket holder receives a Wine Trail glass and a six-bottle wine tote at the first winery visited. The ticket and wineglass also entitle the holder to free wine and food tasting at each winery. Plan to enjoy the event for the entire weekend, and visit all of the nine wineries. A reduced ticket price is offered for those designated drivers who can say no to wine but yes to some great food! Purchase your tickets and get further information at greatriverroadwinetrail.org.



IT'S BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU TIME!

For wine drinkers, November 20, 2014, is a day to celebrate. In France, the third Thursday of each November is Beaujolais Nouveau Day—the day that year's vintage of the wine by the same name is released (under French law, at exactly 12:01 a.m.). Beaujolais nouveau is made from Gamay grapes harvested just weeks before in the Beaujolais region of France, creating a fresh, fruity, young red wine best drunk immediately.

The release of the wine is a marked by days-long festivities in France. While the wine appears with less fanfare in the United States, it's still a lovely way to ring in the holiday season. The wine can be found in many stores around the Coulee Region, so whether you're celebrating an old tradition or starting a new one, drink up! *Le Beaujolais nouveau est arrivé!*



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Start out your holiday season by helping area people in need at the 28th annual Tiny Tim Gala. Last year alone the event raised more than \$42,000, and in the past 27 years more than \$950,000 has been raised for local charities. Enjoy a festive evening complete with fantastic food, entertainment and auction items. The gala will begin November 15 at 5:30 p.m. at the Waterfront Cargill Room in downtown La Crosse and will be followed the next day with a Jingle Bell Brunch from 10 a.m. to noon followed by the Festival of Trees from noon to 4 p.m. Enjoy the mouthwatering brunch and beautiful tree festival to close out your weekend. Make it a new family tradition! Reservations are required for each event. Call 608-392-4208 or visit tinytimgala.org.



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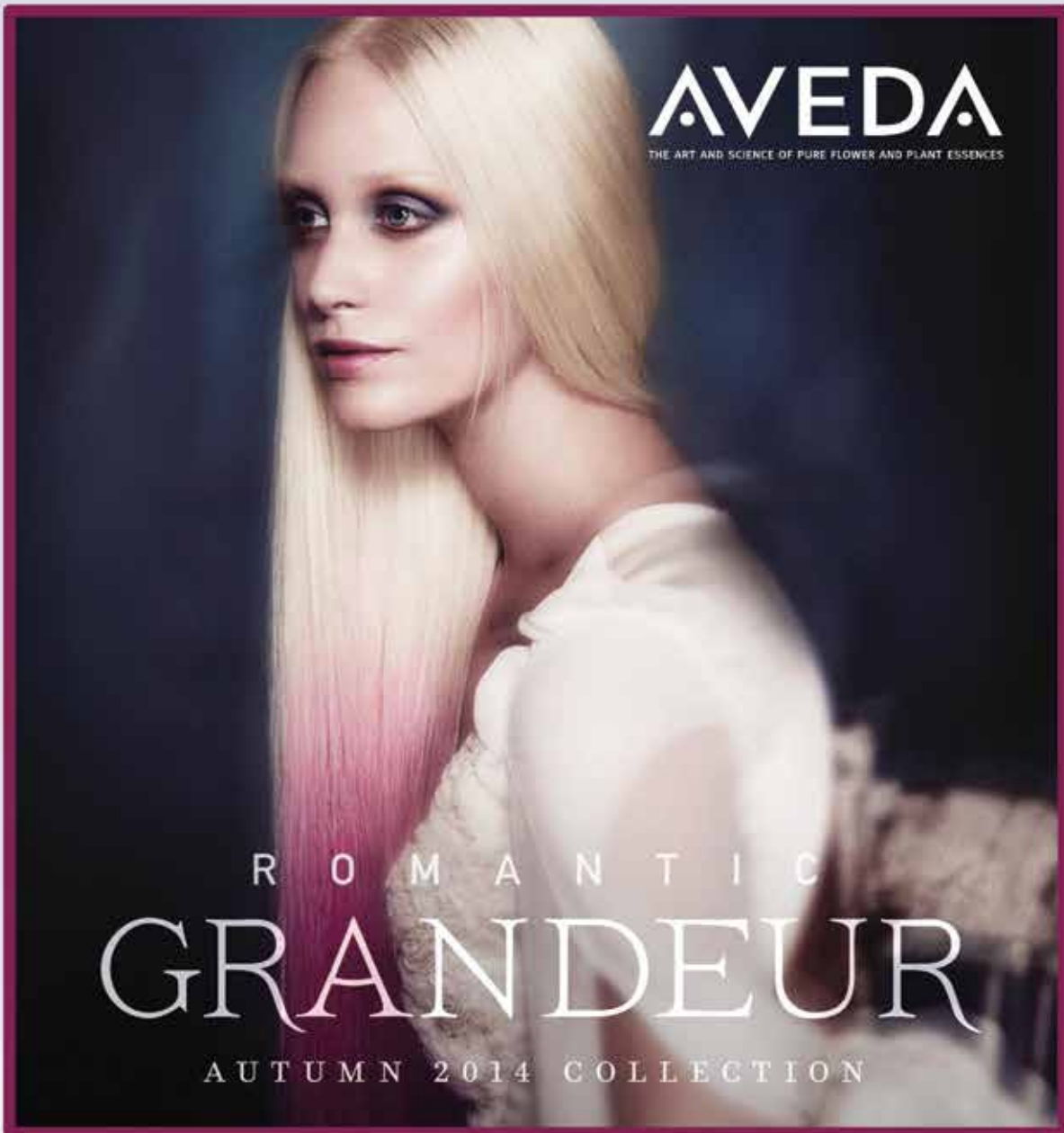
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Meet the four sisters behind 4 Sisters (from left): Traci Weber, Lori Helke, Corynn Wieland and Kathy Wilhelm.

A Sister Act

4 Sisters Wine Bar & Tapas Restaurant unites a family and a community.

BY MARTHA KEEFFE
Photos by Bruce Defries Photography

In a region of the country where fish fries, comfort foods and all-you-can-eat buffets are the norm, there's nothing typical about the fare—or the sisters—who own and operate 4 Sisters Wine Bar & Tapas Restaurant in La Crosse. Open since November 2010 and located on Front Street directly across from Riverside Park, 4 Sisters—co-owned by sisters Kathy Wilhelm, Traci Weber and Lori Helke, with sister-in-law Corynn Wieland—has introduced La Crosse to a new concept in dining, and the sisters possess an enthusiasm that keeps people coming back.

“We thought we could contribute to the character of La Crosse by opening a fun place where people could relax and visit while they try something new,” says Wilhelm, whose expertise lies in researching and delivering unique beer and wine options to customers, as well as

keeping our conversation focused on the interview despite her sisters' good-natured interruptions. “We continually update ourselves on trends and come up with fresh ideas.”

“That’s different”

“Whenever we traveled, especially to cities like Chicago or New York, we kept seeing tapas, tapas, tapas, so we became very familiar with this way of serving food,” says Weber. “But in the beginning, we had to really educate our customers on what tapas are, especially since it's more of a Spanish or European thing.”

“Plus, we had to keep telling people we were opening a *tapas* bar, not a *topless* bar,” quips Wieland, beating the other three sisters to the punch.

Described as appetizer-size portions of varying cuisines, the diverse



Known for its eclectic wine selection, chic and cozy atmosphere and, of course, its unique tapas fare, 4 Sisters has become a favorite destination in La Crosse.

tapas served by the sisters encourage customers to experiment beyond their comfort zone, whether they enjoy a single tapa as a snack with a glass of wine or in combination with other selections to create a meal. Diners can find familiar options like hot spinach artichoke dip and barbecue pork with Memphis-style creamy coleslaw served on mini pretzel buns to more exotic fare, such as stuffed peppadews (peppadew peppers stuffed with goat cheese) and ceviche (sea scallops and shrimp marinated in lemon and lime juice, red onions, jalapenos and cilantro and served with tortilla chips).

“We’ve included items that are familiar and ones that are unconventional,” says Helke. “That way, you can sample something new without going home unsatisfied or breaking your bank.” It’s a philosophy that the sisters use to keep the menu—updated every six months—dynamic and original.

Helke, chef and mixologist, revels in the challenge. “I traveled a lot because my husband was in the military, and I picked up a lot of different ways of cooking,” she says. “Cooking just became a passion for me that I shared with my family.” Now her family accuses her of taking the joy out of eating and turning it into work. “I’ll admit it; I’m constantly analyzing recipes and foods to come up with new ideas. I like to keep on top of trends.”

A brave new business

Despite the less-than-perfect business environment that preceded the restaurant’s debut, the sisters decided to pursue success in an arena that has a notoriously high failure rate. With little restaurant experience to draw on, the sisters rallied together and found the gumption to dive in and make it happen. “My thought was, if we open it, they will come,” says Wilhem. Soon they found themselves developing a business plan, meeting with financial officers and dreaming up a dining atmosphere that was not only eclectic and chic, but also comfortable and inviting. Because they were seriously understaffed, they persuaded their dad to be the dishwasher—an appointment that lasted two weeks. Weber even joked that she would be the cook. “We were overwhelmed,” she says. “Here we were using cardboard cut-outs to figure out where to place furniture and washing big blue bins full of dishes. We were also looking at some really big budget numbers.”

“After looking at those numbers, I never thought that it would

come to fruition,” adds Wieland, who has an established background in business and handles the financial aspects of the restaurant. “We were literally relying on our passion and determination. We were too stubborn to fail.”

Customizing for customers

According to Helke, in those first months, they were so immersed in the learning process that they sometimes forgot to put cash in the registers. “Things were tough at first, but anyone who came from out of town really enjoyed it. We had some very loyal locals, but in general tapas was a hard concept to sell,” she says, noting that the La Crosse customers knew what they wanted and suggested they add more microbrewed beers, funky drinks and dinner options beyond the small plates. In response, they expanded the menu to include entrees, added a salad bar (which is available during the day and displayed on the bar), educated themselves on how to pair wines and beer to enhance food selections and created libations that can be considered 4 Sisters exclusives.

“We infuse our own vodka,” says Weber, noting that they complete the process on site using as many in-season fruits and herbs as possible, including mint and basil that they grow on their patio. “Then we use it to make some awesome mojitos—with no added chemicals and dyes.”

Adds Wilhem, “In regard to some of our drinks, we literally do farm-to-table in the weirdest ways.”

Around the table

It’s not just the departure from a standard menu that sets them apart, but also their team approach to running the restaurant. Whether there’s tension over finances, discussions about staffing or enthusiastic input about a new recipe, they always remember that they are not just business partners but sisters and friends. “Here’s the thing about us,” says Weber. “We put everything out on the table. After four years of saying what’s on our minds, we know how to deal with each other. We really are four sisters.” **(CRW)**

Martha Keefe lives and writes in La Crosse. She also enjoys an occasional 4 Sisters citrus mojito—with tapas, of course.

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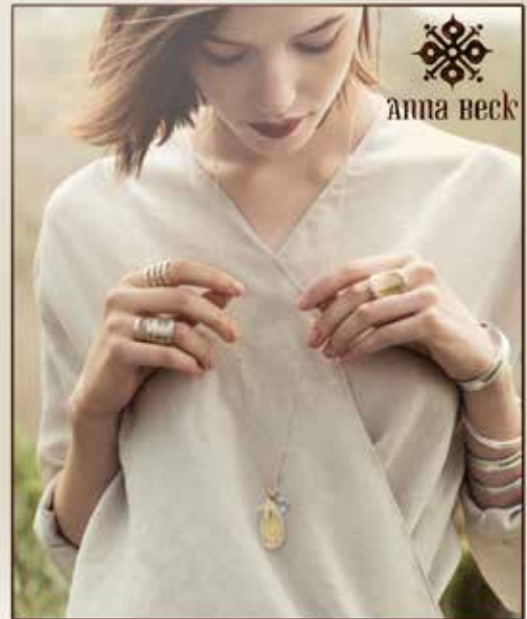
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THE *Sweet Taste* OF SUCCESS

Chef Shawn McManus spices up the cooking scene in La Crosse.

BY SUSAN C. SCHUYLER

Contributed photos



Famous for its exquisite catering fare, dinners and classes, Savory Creations merges the passions—past and present—of chef and owner Shawn McManus (bottom center).

The road to the October 2013 grand opening of Savory Creations, a cooking school and catering business located on La Crosse's North Side, took unexpected turns and detours for executive chef and owner Shawn McManus. However, nothing has ever thrown him off course in his drive to learn more about his craft and himself.

"I'm always looking to learn more. That's what this field is," says McManus.

A spark and smoke

McManus's life story jumps back and forth between California and Wisconsin, where he spent summers at his grandparents' Sparta campground. During his 16th summer, he ignited his passion for cooking during his first weekend shift at Sparta's Club Oasis. "I was able to create something that someone actually enjoyed. And that spark is what began everything," McManus says.

That first weekend was also the last after smoke from garlic bread McManus forgot in the oven traveled through the ventilation system

into the busy dining room. "I was told during that termination that I wasn't cut out for the food-service industry," he says. "And just hearing those words made me strive to prove them wrong."

In 2000, McManus returned to California to complete a culinary arts program at Orange Coast College, giving his résumé a more professional flavor. One of the many culinary jobs McManus juggled during the program inspired a new passion. "Catering was where it was at," he says.

To be closer to his family, he returned to Wisconsin, where a job as a dietary manager at Gundersen Health System offered something new to learn and love. McManus enjoyed doing cooking demonstrations for a broad audience for the Winning Weighs program. As a result, teaching is important today at Savory Creations.

A shift to teaching

A back injury took him out of the kitchen for a time, which offered McManus time to pursue his other passion—fishing—as he healed.

"This is where the story gets very interesting," he says.

He accepted a weekend invitation to visit a fishing buddy in Madison, which McManus was excited to discover is a "foodie" town. He did some quick research about Madison's job market and demographics. "I fit right in," he says.

He applied for a job immediately, and by 9 a.m. Sunday he had a job interview. "I asked my friend for a button-up shirt, and I headed in," says McManus. He started as the executive sous chef at the Concourse Hotel the next day.

McManus hadn't intended to work as an executive in the industry again. "I wanted to learn more about the instruction portion," he says. He researched boutique cooking schools and made a good living by teaching at several while still working at the Concourse.

Soon it was time for another stop on his career path. "I wanted my own cooking school," he says. "And I knew I had a good team here in La Crosse."

Catering to clients and community

His business in La Crosse's Old Towne North is the perfect blend of everything that came before, even if McManus didn't use a simple recipe to create it. He estimates that the bulk of his business comes from his private cooking classes and catering.

Students in his popular private classes, 80 percent of whom are women, choose the menu and enjoy a full, three-course meal that they help prepare with McManus' guidance. Students can prepare the meal with the chef or just watch the magic. Savory Creations' unique farm-to-wedding catering concept involves the wedding couple from the ground up, quite literally. McManus recently dug in with one

couple. "We went out with a pitchfork, pulled out organic potatoes and used them in the wedding (dinner)," says McManus.

McManus is quick to acknowledge the support of many top Coulee Region chefs who have helped him along the way in starting his new venture. Top billing goes to his mother, Barbara McManus, who is co-owner and business manager for Savory Creations.

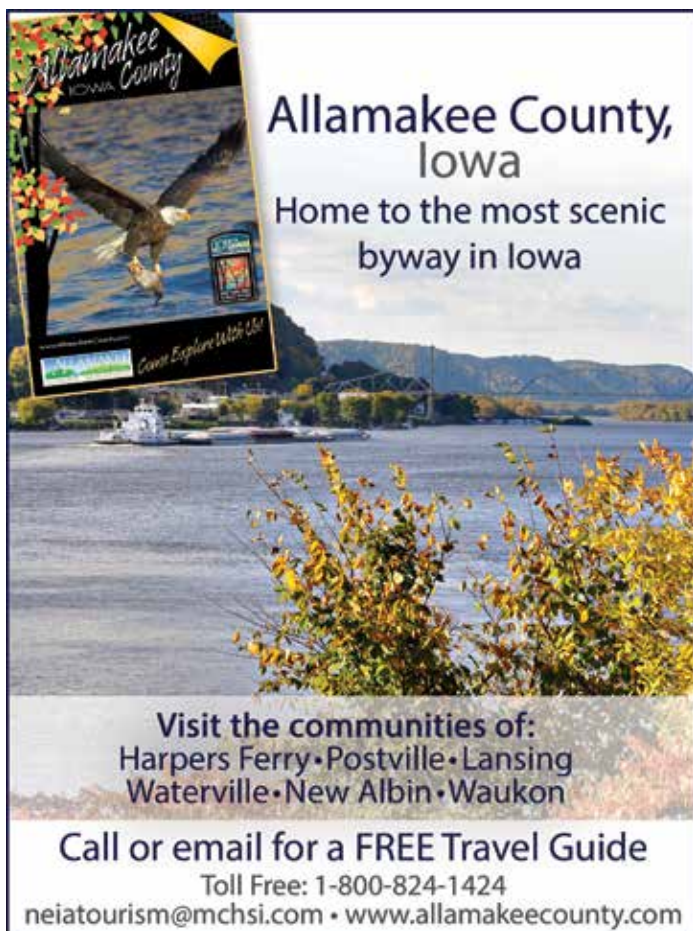
Given his history, it's no surprise that this self-described "foodie nerd" also is exploring other avenues for his talent, including a farm-to-school program at Cathedral Elementary School and Meet the Chefs, a series of community education cooking classes. After placing in the top five on Spike TV's reality-television show *Frankenfood* this summer, he may consider future competitions.

No matter what direction he chooses, his marketing model is straight from the heart. "Giving back to the community with education and donation has been some of the best advertising I've done," McManus says. **(crw)**

Susan C. Schuyler is a freelance writer and instructor at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse who is hungry after writing this article.

Savory Creations

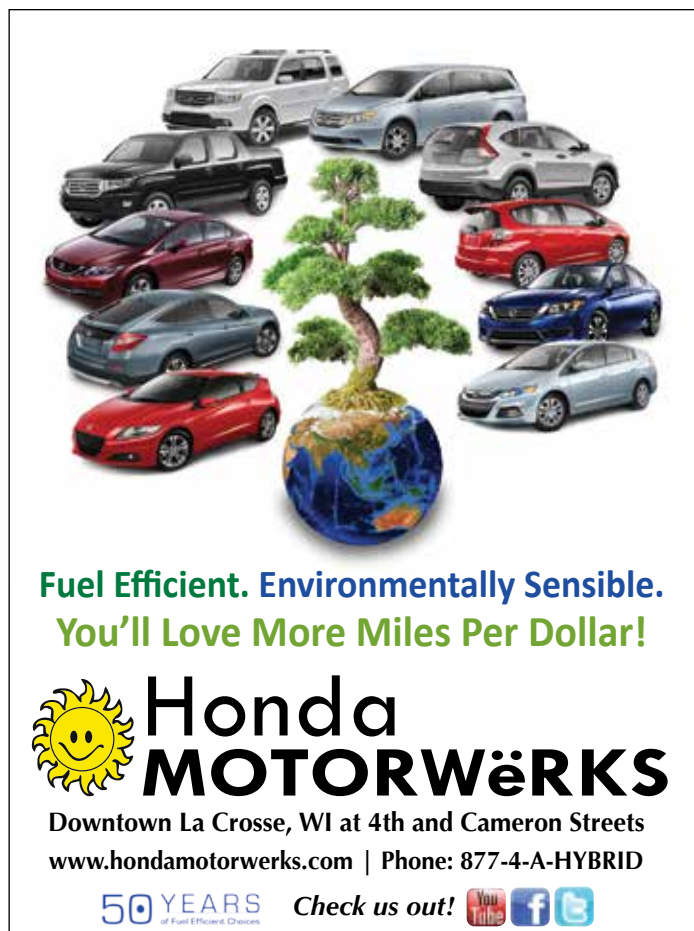
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Barb Leis' 30-year restaurant career has a flavorful history.

BY SUSAN T. HESSEL
Contributed photos



In just a few bites, a Madison food critic identified Barbara Leis' culinary history. "He detected pieces of my past and how I put them together here," she says of Red Pines Bar & Grill in Onalaska.

Leis' restaurant career began when she was a 17-year-old drive-in carhop. The first restaurant she co-owned was Nate's Supper Club in Viroqua, which featured steaks and seafood. From there, she opened Picasso's in La Crosse, serving fresh California cuisine. After that, she ran Culina Mariana at the Shrine of Guadalupe in La Crosse, where she featured some Picasso items along with a beautiful bakery.

From retirement to Red Pines

When she left Culina Mariana in 2006, Leis retired—or thought she did. After four years living in Brice Prairie and frequenting Red Pines, Leis and her husband, Larry, bought the place.

"I decided I needed to reconnect; I missed the public and the young energy in the food industry," she says. "I have a huge passion for food and food preparation. I needed to get back into it."

Leis brought recipes for steaks and seafood from the supper club and salads, wraps and desserts from Picasso's and Culina Mariana. She also added burgers and pizza to her menu.

"Red Pines has a more casual environment, and we have a lot of fun with live music and events, such as our hog roasts and St. Paddy's Day," Leis says.

As with her other restaurants, customers love Red Pines. In the first annual Best of La Crosse County competition, Red Pines scored second place for top rural bar and second place for best fish fry. Their server Donna Schleis took third place in the county.

Family traditions carried forward

Leis gained her passion for food from her mother, Grace Hanson, whose family included seven kids. "She was very instrumental in teaching me a lot about baking and cooking," Leis says. "She taught me about quality and pride in food preparation, making sure it looked good and tasted good."

Hanson, who went to work as the baker at the Vernon County Home (which housed people with mental illness) when Leis was in first grade, baked for the family once a week. "That's where I got my love for the smell and flavor of bread," Leis says.

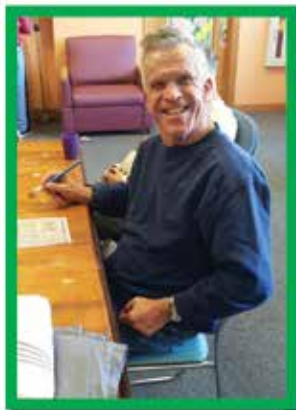
While her children have not gone into the food business, Leis says she believes their work ethic and pride in their professions came in part from seeing the hard work that made their mother's restaurants successful.

Red Pines customers frequently reminisce about the foods they ate in Leis' other locations, as do people she runs into elsewhere in La Crosse. "They may not remember my name, but they remember the food."

Leis points out that a restaurant is as successful as its team. "Most people in the industry work so hard and are very dedicated," she says. "You can be as creative as you want, but you have to have a great team in production, service and public relations. We have a lot of loyal return customers. I'm very happy they support us." 

Susan T. Hessel is a La Crosse personal historian and writer who knows food brings back memories in our lives, yummy and otherwise.

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FOOD OF THE GODS

Ancient traditions inspire a Viroqua chocolatier.

BY THERESA WASHBURN

Contributed photos



Achieving the divine bars of Del Sol Chocolate (left) requires equally divine ingredients: cocoa beans and vanilla beans (right; photos by Drew Shonka). Working the alchemy is chocolatier Lynn Kronschnabel (center; photo by Richard Bock).

If Lynn Kronschnabel's work has turned sweet, it is not for love of sugar but for a near-sacred fascination with *Theobroma cacao*, known to most of us as chocolate, the creamy, rich and deeply satisfying treat that melts in our mouth and tugs at our senses.

A divine food

The scientific name translated from Greek (*theo* means "god" and *broma* means "food") describes well the cocoa seed containing healthy theobromine, which widens blood vessels and stimulates the heart. But it is not only the well-known healthy benefits of chocolate that intrigue Kronschnabel and drive her to produce her handcrafted Del Sol Chocolates; it is the sacred and mystic history of the cocoa.

"Cocoa is a superfood," explains Kronschnabel as she hands me one of the delicate seed pods. "My interest in it comes from rainforest ecology, Mayan pre-Colombian art and cultural anthropology." As I chew on the creamy seed, noticing the smoky dark flavors, Kronschnabel describes her journey. "My husband and I started a company called Fizzleology, and I learned a great deal during that time, including how to run a commercial kitchen. But my first love was cocoa, so when we split, I started investigating the chocolate industry."

Her desire to learn chocolate making from the actual beans led her to Canada. "I volunteered for a week in a kitchen and learned to roast, grind and create chocolate from the beginning point; the process was steeped in the Mayan tradition."

A human touch

While most chocolatiers buy the product premade, Kronschnabel creates everything in a state-approved commercial kitchen attached to her home. "The ingredients are very pure: cocoa, extra-cocoa butter, sugar and whole-bean vanilla; that's it." Kronschnabel chooses not to add preservatives but sometimes adds essential oils, maple syrup or hickory nuts to the chocolate. In addition, she infuses flower essences into the sugar. "I make every batch with intention and an open heart."

Always experimenting, Kronschnabel is now in pursuit of different sources for her cocoa beans. "I have directly connected with a farmer in Nicaragua and found some small farms in Peru. All of the cocoa is purchased at above fair-trade prices." When I asked if different beans held different flavors, she offered an exuberant yes. "There is a French winemaking concept of *terroir*, meaning that the flavors are driven by all the factors of the soil, humidity, sun and surrounding plants. This is true of cocoa beans as well."

Del Sol Chocolates can hardly be termed a candy bar. The chocolates, which are available in La Crosse at People's Food Coop, Root Note and Ground Up Coffee Shop, are a work of art, carefully crafted to offer the most in health benefits. Meant to be enjoyed bite by bite, they are rich in flavors derived from ancient rain forests. Not too sweet, the artisan chocolates offer a complex blend of creamy, nutty and ambrosial mystery. "Chocolate is a feeling food," says Kronschnabel. "It opens us up." *(crw)*

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

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THE FOOD & SCHOOL CONNECTION

Teaching kids about food helps them to make lifelong healthy choices.

BY KIM SEIDEL

Contributed photo

Anne Seehafer was shocked when she learned what her son ate for a snack his first day of preschool: a large sugar cookie, covered in frosting, along with chocolate milk.

"I thought immediately that my child was going to have enough of a problem sitting still and focusing in school without eating like that," Seehafer says. Even worse, he stopped eating the vegetables he once enjoyed, because his friends didn't like them.

What Seehafer discovered while seeking a solution is what many food experts, such as chef and food educator Monique Hooker, passionately share with parents, educators and others: Most kids need healthy foods before they can meet soaring expectations for academic and extracurricular performances.

"Food is the basis of life, and it's what sustains us to learn better," Hooker says. "It's one of the major tools to build healthy brains and bodies to ensure the ability to study and to pay attention. There's so much emphasis on education, but without the good food, (kids) won't do academics and sports as well."

Bridging the gaps

Today, the gaps between living a healthy lifestyle and surviving on fast food run wide. Many families live somewhere in the middle,

doing some of both, while others tend to lean more toward one side or the other. The goal, experts say, is to strive for a better balance; no family is perfect. And there are steps you can take to help your family make more wholesome choices, including incorporating more fruits and veggies. The benefits—such as better report cards and lower rates of heart disease and cancer as adults—are worth the effort.

Planting seeds of food knowledge

In their research, Seehafer and Kari Bersagel-Braley found solid ground for improving children's health through gardening. Kids will be more apt to sample and eat fruits and veggies when they observe the produce growing and witness their peers eating it.

"They've put their hands in the dirt to plant the seed and nurture it," Seehafer says. "It's not so strange to them then."

Seehafer and Bersagel-Braley, moms of school-age children, have seen results firsthand as founders of Grow Your Brain. Assisted by Hillview Urban Agriculture Center, the organization created gardens at Hamilton-SOTA and State Road elementary schools in La Crosse. Thanks to garden coordinator Jamie O'Neil and grants, parents, volunteers, the schools and countless others, kids have gardened for three years, and the project continues to blossom.

5 Steps to Raising Healthy Eaters

- Introduce kids at an early age to whole foods, including a variety of veggies and fruits, while their senses are still developing and they don't yet crave sugars and additives, says Hooker. Be patient. It takes a child about five tries to learn whether they like a food, and to adopt one they're not familiar with.

- Start by making your own baby food. "When they're toddlers and older, they should eat whatever we're eating," Hooker says. "Today's blenders and food processors make it easy."

- When shopping and eating together, encourage your children to use their senses, which are sharp when they're younger. "They'll notice when something looks good, feels good, smells good and tastes good," Hooker says. "That is an important tool to get children to like fruits and veggies."

- Talk about the different vitamins found in each food and how the vitamins help their bodies. For example, orange and yellow vegetables contain vitamin A, which provides a strong immune system to help prevent colds.

- Never underestimate the advantages of eating dinner together. "Talk about the food and have fun, relaxing times," Hooker says. "It should never be stressful and always be a family affair to look forward to."

Behavior and focus issues improve not only with good food but also with spending time in nature and doing physical activity, Seehafer says.

Getting close to the source

The more distance children feel from their food, the less likely they'll be to eat a wholesome meal or try new foods, Hooker says. Bring children close to the food source and include them in cooking and shopping.

Gardening is one way to instruct them where food originates. If your school doesn't have a garden, start a small one in your backyard. Even having a pot or two of tomato plants is a great education in food.

Taking kids to farmers' markets and introducing them to those who grow food is another way to increase children's knowledge, Hooker says. Also, hang a map in the kitchen and locate where foods at the dinner table originate.

"Knowing where your food comes from is as important as knowing the alphabet, numbers and geography," Hooker says. "Food not only sustains us but sustains the farmers who grow food close to home, the land we walk on, the ecosystem around us and, of course, the community we live in. We owe our children that knowledge to connect the dots." 

Kim Seidel is a writer and the mother of two daughters and knows that there's always room for improving food choices in her family.

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GROWING A BUSINESS

At Austin's Rush Creek Farm,
a cottage industry blossoms.

BY ASHLEY REYNOLDS
Contributed photo



Carolyn Austin has had a passion for farming since she was a little girl hoeing tobacco with her grandparents, and she has transformed that passion into great success. She and her husband, Brian, are sixth-generation farmers who own and operate the award-winning Austin's Rush Creek Farm in Ferryville, Wisconsin. We at *Coulee Region Women* decided to dig a little deeper into Austin's business—canning garden produce and selling it to local grocery stores—and share with you her story of growing it.

Your business is a cottage industry success story. How did you start it?

My husband and I both worked many years in manufacturing. In 1997, we purchased my ancestral family farm and planned to move there when our children were out of high school. In 2009, we left our jobs in manufacturing and moved to the farm. We began growing produce and selling it fresh at farmers' markets. Each week we had produce left over. We had seen so much waste in our manufacturing experience and just did not like to see it here on the farm, so we started canning the abundance. We found that we loved doing the processing work just as much as the fieldwork.

Our customers loved our canned foods (jams, jellies, pickled beans, pickled beets) and wanted to know where they could purchase them if they could not make it to the market. This encouraged us to get our processing license and sell in stores. We started with several small specialty stores and are now moving into larger grocery stores. This spring we completed construction of a kitchen right here on the farm and received our processing license in June.

What is the most challenging part of running your business?

The most challenging part is getting all of the work done. Having to wear every hat—owner, operator, financial adviser, quality manager, marketing manager, sales representative, delivery person, website designer—is a challenge. Distributing our product is also a challenge. Transportation costs are high, and it is difficult to schedule multiple deliveries in one trip.

What roles do you and your husband play in the day-to-day business?

This is definitely a family operation. While I am the owner and focus all of my time on the business, Brian is deeply involved. I do the finances, planning, recordkeeping, marketing and quality assurance. Brian is in charge of maintenance, sales and distribution. We both share equally in production and harvest activities. During the busy harvest and processing season, we hold weekly meetings to ensure we are working on the right tasks to meet our goals.

What are some of your goals as your business moves forward?

Our main goal is to grow a successful business here at our farm that will provide a comfortable living for us and future generations. We want our children to be able to move to this farm and enjoy the quality of life it has to offer. To achieve this, our goal is to provide a quality product using high-quality, local produce. We want families to enjoy our foods so much that they tell others about them and purchase them for gifts and special occasions, as well as an everyday treat. (crw)

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



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FOOD FOR ALL

The Hunger Task Force strives to eliminate hunger in the La Crosse area.

BY FRAN RYBARIK
Contributed photos

“No one in this community should be hungry,” says Shelly Fortner, Executive Director of The Hunger Task Force of La Crosse. “We work to eliminate hunger by harvesting community resources and being the voice of the hungry. We want people to have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food.”

The need keeps increasing. Half of all children in La Crosse schools get reduced or free meals. Sites offering free meals on a regular basis have increased. Food pantries, originally set up to meet emergency needs, have become a way of life for many people.

The Hunger Task Force is a nonprofit organization funded by the United Way, grants and other donations. It has two main arms: the Kane Street Community Garden and the Food Recovery Program.

Growing good food

The garden started in 1998 and operates from March to October on two block-sized plots at 801 Kane St. Harvested fruits and vegetables are distributed three days a week to volunteers who help plant, tend and harvest and to anyone who needs them.

“We hope to inspire our community to make healthier food choices by growing and distributing 30,000 pounds of fresh produce

each year,” says Todd Huffman, garden coordinator.

Mary, a daily volunteer, proudly points out the children’s garden area, saying, “We have children’s workshops, too.” In 2014, the garden was named The Best Community Asset and awarded a block grant.

Filling pantry shelves

The Hunger Task Force Food Recovery Program distributes food to 64 food pantries and meal sites in three western Wisconsin counties. “We are the only food bank between Rochester and Madison,” Fortner says. “We call ourselves ‘the food pantries’ food pantry.”

Last year, the warehouse moved to Clinton Street and increased its capacity by nearly 10 times. Fortner points out their new walk-in freezer and refrigerator. Stepping into the enormous cooler, she says, “Ten of our previous coolers could fit in here. We can accept more refrigerated donations from places like Organic Valley now.”

Strategizing sources

The task force recovers thousands of pounds of food from local grocery stores, restaurants, distributors like Reinhart Foods and seasonal farmers’ markets. Donations also come from food drives. “We

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have requirements for food safety, especially for dairy. Did you know that the only food item that the FDA requires to be dated is baby formula? Since the dating systems used on foods are not consistent, we use the date as a baseline and then follow 'COT' guidelines—we check for Color, Odor, Texture. If it can't be eaten, it goes to the garden for compost," Fortner explains.

If the need keeps increasing, staff, volunteers, grants and donations won't be able to keep up. "We need to have a better picture of whom we serve so we can coordinate

resources more efficiently," Fortner says. "Meal sites should be able to serve balanced, nutritious meals, and individuals shouldn't have to go to pantry A to get bread, pantry B to get mayonnaise and pantry C to get tuna to make a sandwich."

There is more information about The Hunger Task Force on their website: lacrossehtf.com. 

Fran Rybarik was wowed by the passion of everyone working at The Hunger Task Force. She writes from her home in La Crescent.

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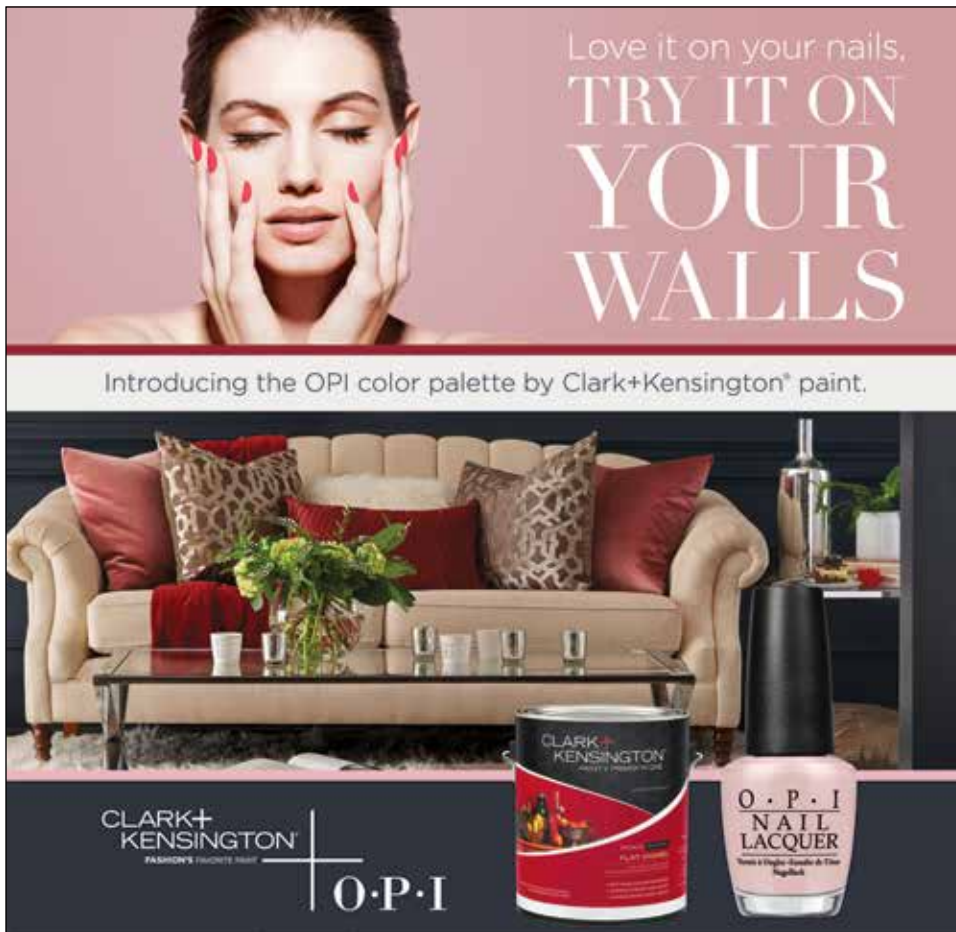


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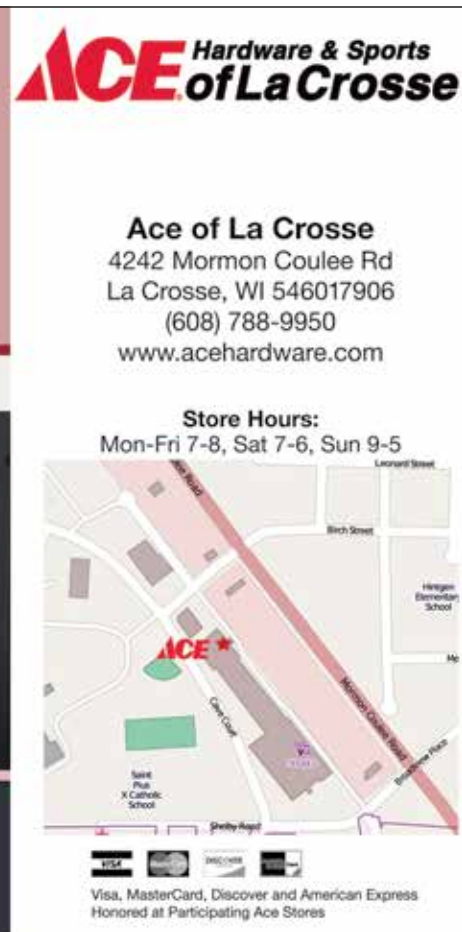


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In (and Out) of the Lawrence Kitchen

Bev and Jim Lawrence designed their house around cooking, entertaining and living.

BY JULIE NELSON

Photos by Julie Nelson



Bev Lawrence (left) custom-created a kitchen to serve her love of entertaining. There are never too many cooks in her spacious “double-wide” cooking space.

Bev Lawrence loves to entertain. “I’d have a party every weekend if I could,” she says. Her husband, Jim, loves to cook. And so, when this couple began designing their dream home in La Crescent, they started with the kitchen.

The Lawrences created their kitchen to be a place where everyone gathers around but not in. The living room, dining room and kitchen are all one big open space enhanced by high ceilings and a wall of windows overlooking the Mississippi River bluffs. Separating the guest space from the cook’s space is a kitchen island topped by a 500-pound piece of granite, which Bev says was quite a sight to see getting installed. The gold- and silver-flecked black granite is Jim’s favorite design, and it also makes up the countertops next to the sink and the stove.

Six guests at a time (perfect when the Lawrences’ adult children come home for some of Dad’s specialty, homemade pizza) can sit on one side of the island while Jim cooks at the end of the island opposite the stove. Bev stands directly across from the guests, doing the prep work and cleaning.

Designed for flow

The Lawrences’ primary objective in designing the kitchen was flow. The main refrigerator is to the right of the stove, at the edge of the living-room space. This way, when noncooking people need to access the fridge, they don’t need to enter the cooking space. In an effort to further minimize the use of the main refrigerator, the Lawrences included a second, smaller refrigerator for beverages only. To the left of the stove is the pantry, then the oven and then the sink. Garbage cans are under the island, on rollers, and can be pulled out or tucked in, depending on the need.

A big stress reducer in this busy kitchen is the “double wide.” The space between the island and the ovens and sink has twice the space of most kitchens, allowing two people to pass with ease, even if one of them is carrying a full sheet of cookies.

Jim’s other highlights of the kitchen are a five-burner, 36-inch gas stove, complete with a commercial-grade venting hood and a double oven (they are looking forward to their first Thanksgiving in this house with a turkey in one oven and potatoes, stuffing and/or pies



In addition to space, the Lawrences' kitchen is filled with desirable details: a five-burner stove, a double oven and a layout that accommodates a meticulous chef's mise en place.

"I'd have a party every weekend if I could"

—Bev Lawrence

in the other). Pots and pans, as well as plastic containers, are stored in drawers, a system the Lawrences hadn't used in the past but quickly came to love once they tried it. The pantry is like a huge closet at the back of the kitchen, and it's the perfect spot to store food staples as well as the slow cookers and serving dishes that are integral to the Lawrences' parties.

Bev's kitchen highlight, meanwhile, has nothing to do with creating food. Her favorite part of the kitchen is the lighted cubbies on top of the counters. This is where she displays her antiques. From the cup her grandmother always had in the kitchen for drinking water to the first cereal bowls her kids used, each piece has a story and a family connection. "Antiques are really my passion," says Bev. "Jim doesn't enjoy them as much as I do; otherwise, I would have a lot more on display."

Designed for living

The antiques, the cooking and the entertaining don't stop on the main level. The downstairs is Packer party central. The 72-inch TV screen is easily viewable from all spots in the room, including behind the bar, where Jim, ever the party host, is usually stationed. One of Jim's Packer specialties is

an Italian beef that Bev says is delicious but, because Jim doesn't use a recipe, is rarely the same two games in a row. The basement room is where Jim displays his collectibles, including old Budweiser beer memorabilia and signed football prints of Bart Starr and Brett Favre.

When Jim and Bev sit down to enjoy the game, they plop onto a huge leather couch with three individual recliners and ample cup holders in between. Bev says one of the advantages of designing their own house was taking into account the huge furniture they knew they wanted to move in. Instead of relying on movers to navigate twists and turns in the regular stairway, the Lawrences included an entry to the basement that comes in from the garage and goes downstairs in one straight shot.

In designing, the Lawrences thought about how they would enjoy the house now, and what they might need to stay in the house later. Bev owns several transportation services, including Access Mobility, and is well aware of mobility issues for those who break a hip, get a knee replaced or face some other physical limitation. For that reason, the top floor could be easy to navigate in a wheelchair. The master bathroom has no

doors to the shower; it's a wide, tiled space someone could wheel into if necessary. The Jacuzzi bathtub, which Jim initially thought would be good downstairs, next to their exercise room, is instead on the first floor, where they can access it without having to navigate any stairs.

Planning for what may be happening in their house in the years ahead isn't all preventative, though. The downstairs is also designed to be a welcoming space for the Lawrences' children and grandchildren. Two bedrooms and a bathroom downstairs mean the kids can be completely separate from Bev and Jim upstairs. And, in the coolest little kid space ever, the crawl space under the stairs is painted in a kid-friendly color and is furnished with the makings of a small playhouse.

Whether they have spent their day cooking for friends or family or just relaxing alone, the Lawrences end their day looking at the stars. Their master bedroom has no curtains, just a picture window open to the sky, the bluff and the river below. "I just love it," says Bev. (crw)

Julie Nelson is the public relations director at The Salvation Army. She wishes her kitchen at home had room for two people to pass with ease.



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4



5

KITCHEN CHIC

From funky to functional, these pieces help make your kitchen your own.

Photos by Janet Mootz Photography

Whether kitschy or elegant, the kitchen is the place in a house people are drawn to most. The serving and setting pieces featured here, favorites of our local merchants, ensure that any event you set a table for captures the flavor of the occasion and your own personal taste.

1. Lenox Tuscany Classics Collection pierced pitcher, \$54, and Pinot Grigio glasses, set of 4, \$54. From **Macy's**, Valley View Mall. La Crosse wine, \$15. From **River View Winery**, La Crescent.
2. Nora Fleming bread board, \$62, and grape embellishment, \$12; Le Jacquard Français tea towels, \$18 each. From **Touch of Class**, downtown La Crosse.
3. Noritake Colorwaves 4-piece place setting, \$80; Martha Stewart Collection kitchen towel, set of 2, \$14.99. From **Macy's**, Valley View Mall.
4. Bocca fish platter, \$45; Bocca pinch bowls, set of 4, \$22. From **Macy's**, Valley View Mall.
5. Beatriz Ball petit bowls with spoons, \$57 each, and pedestal plate, \$158. Foxy Gourmet savory dips, \$7 each. From **Touch of Class**, downtown La Crosse.



REINVENTING AN ORCHARD

Hoch Orchards is a model of health
for food, farms and families.

BY DEBORAH NERUD

Photos by Deborah Nerud

Recipes analyzed by Gundersen Health System dietitians

Very few of us can say that we eat, sleep and play in the same place where our food is grown. Jackie Hoch, co-owner of Hoch Orchards in La Crescent, enjoys such a life of integration and sustainability. “Choices are hard, but you have to make those tough choices to live the life you want to live,” she says. She and her husband, Harry, have owned and operated the Hoch family orchard together since 1997, but the orchard has been in the Hoch family since the 1950s.

As the couple pursued their educational paths (Harry has an associate degree in horticulture, a bachelor’s in integrated pest management and a master’s in technical communications and sustainable agriculture; Jackie has a bachelor’s degree in medical technology and a master’s in business), there was a lot of discussion about how they wanted to raise their family. Knowing that she wanted to retire by 40 to raise their daughters, Angi and Missy, Jackie recalls, “We knew that we wanted our kids to have a life that really reflected our values, and we knew we belonged on the farm.” Retirement from a career in medical technology at Gundersen Health System came at age 42, but Jackie is quick to point out that while it may sound like a fantasy to retire to the bucolic countryside and grow apples, “It requires a lot of money and a lot of structure to do something like this. You really need to create your own framework and see the life that you want further down the road.”

Growing food and opportunity

Today, according to Jackie, “Our primary source of income is the farm.” The Hochs have diversified their farm’s offerings; beyond the apples, raspberries, juices, jellies and sauces the Coulee Region has enjoyed for years, Hoch Orchards, which is certified organic by Midwest Organic Services Association (MOSA), has expanded in many areas. The Hochs have increased vegetable production with eyes on future community-supported agriculture (CSA). They raise rare swine breeds—the nearly extinct Mangalitsa and Ossabaw Island hogs—which are primarily pastured and fruit- and forage-fed, based on what is left after the harvest. They also offer Windfall Cider, a hard apple cider developed by Rob Fisk, a University of Minnesota graduate and former Hoch Orchard intern.

Jackie stresses that Hoch Orchards is a learning farm: “We hope more folks investigate the internship opportunities here and eventually go on to start their own farms.” The internship program at the orchard has hosted people from all over the world, and it includes housing and meals. “Whether your interest is in animals, farm management, brewing, integrated pest management or biodynamic engineering, we hope to give our interns as much as they need to get started on their own,” Jackie says.



Left: Angi Hoch represents her family farm at the Cameron Park Farmers Market. Center: Mangalitsa pigs add diversity to Hoch Orchards' offerings, as does hard apple cider (right).

Abundance everywhere

With two sprawling properties that sit upon the verdant southeastern Minnesota bluffs, the orchards host a bevy of diverse species. From the hives that buzz in the setting sun to the pollinator plots that have been reestablished without chemicals (supported by the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems at the University of Wisconsin-Madison), there is, according to Jackie, “abundance everywhere here.” Whether growing food for their staff, their family, their interns or for restaurants (The Mint, a new farm-to-table restaurant in La Crosse, will feature Hoch produce and beverages), the farm, and this way of life, is a better model, says Jackie. “Our current model of cheap fuel and cheap food is not healthy for us. It’s not sustainable. Nourishment should be more than just calories. It’s about biodiversity and health for your mind, your body, your soul and your environment.” 

Thanks to childhood summers spent in Minnesota, Deborah Nerud (pie maker and hard cider drinker) learned that there was more to apples than just red or green; happily, even her two children know the difference between a Zestar and a Macintosh.

APPLE RASPBERRY CRISP

Serves 6.

- 4-6 apples, sliced
- 1 cup raspberries
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup salted butter
- 1 cup rolled oats
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp nutmeg
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Place fruit in a buttered shallow baking dish. In a small bowl, mix all remaining ingredients until crumbly. Spread over fruit. Bake at 350°F for 40 to 45 minutes or until fruit is tender.

280 calories, 9g fat, 3g protein, 50g carbohydrate, 7g fiber, 75mg sodium.

PORK WITH APPLES AND ONIONS

Serves 8.

- 3 T olive oil
- 1 4 lb. pork shoulder roast
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 cups apple cider
- 3 Honeycrisp apples, sliced
- 3 medium onions, sliced
- 1 bay leaf

Sauté onions until brown (you also may add them raw to the roast). Set aside. Heat olive oil in a large pot over high heat. Salt and pepper pork roast, then sear on all sides. Reduce heat to low. Add apple juice, apple slices, onions and bay leaf. Cover and put in the oven at 300°F for 3 hours.

Remove the roast, apples and onions to a platter. Raise heat to medium-high and boil liquid, reducing it until thick and rich. Spoon sauce over the roast, then cut the roast into slices. Serve with the apples, onions and wild rice.

440 calories, 14g fat, 47g protein, 33g carbohydrate, 3g fiber, 210mg sodium.



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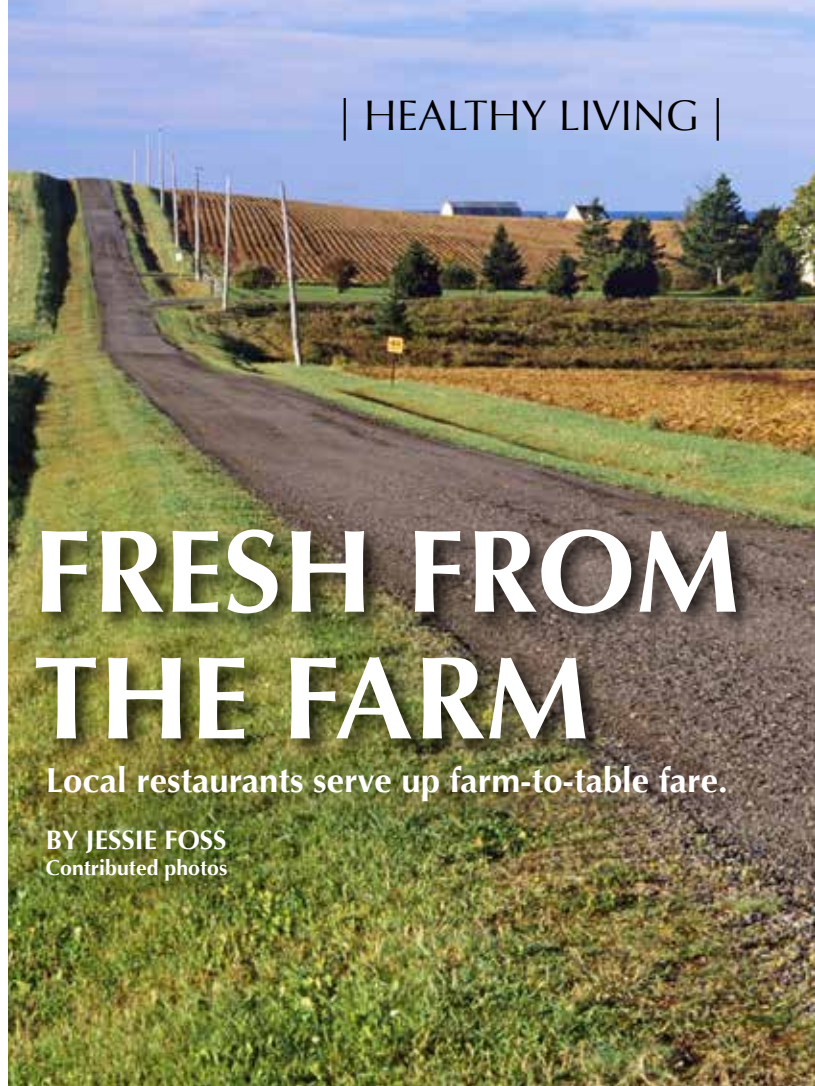


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FINE DINING

| HEALTHY LIVING |



FRESH FROM THE FARM

Local restaurants serve up farm-to-table fare.

BY JESSIE FOSS
Contributed photos

Whether veggies straight from the ground, meat fresh from the farm or eggs not far removed from the chicken, locally grown food, most agree, just tastes better.

With this in mind, several Coulee Region restaurants have decided to incorporate local foods into their menu by joining what has become known as the farm-to-table movement.

Charles George, executive chef at Hackberry's Bistro in La Crosse, says a farm-to-table approach typically leads to items that are fresher, picked at a riper stage and have a direct link to the local economy.

"I would describe the farm-to-table concept as eliminating the large distribution warehouses as much as possible and working in a more direct fashion with the farmers and producers, giving both them and us a face to relate to, not just one large corporation working with another large corporation," says George.

Diners in the Coulee Region looking for restaurants serving food from local farms don't need to look far. Signatures in Winona, Driftless Café in Viroqua and Hackberry's Bistro in La Crosse are three of the area's restaurants serving up cuisine made from local foods.

Signatures

Signatures is a AAA Three Diamond-rated restaurant that features gourmet entrees and homemade desserts. The restaurant has had

farm-to-table offerings for the six-plus years that sous chef Rico Perez has been with the restaurant. At first, says Perez, most of the food came from CSAs; now, most of the food-to-table offerings come from local farmers.

Approximately one-fourth to one-third of all meats served at Signatures are supplied by local farms. The restaurant's duck is supplied by Au Bon Canard in Caledonia, Minnesota, and the lamb chops come from O'Neal Family Farm in Rushford, Minnesota. Signatures' fish and chicken is also local and comes from places like Utica, Minnesota, and Menomonie, Wisconsin.

Perez says some of the specialty meats the restaurant receives from local farms are of such high quality "it's an honor to prepare it."

Fresh, locally grown produce is more difficult to source year-round in Minnesota. But to help lengthen the growing season, Signatures has its own greenhouse. The greenhouse allows the restaurant to provide fresh produce earlier in the season. The restaurant also tries to lengthen the season by offering vegetables, such as squash, that grow later into the fall.

Signatures is located at 22852 County Road 17, just southeast of Winona. Signatures is open for dinner Monday through Saturday from 5 to 9 p.m. and Sunday from 4 to 8 p.m. More information and online reservations can be made at signatureswinona.com.



Scrumptious entrees made from as much locally raised food as possible are standard fare for restaurants such as Signatures (above left), Driftless Café and Hackberry's Bistro.

Driftless Café

Located just off Main Street in Viroqua is Driftless Café, a restaurant that solely offers farm-to-table food.

Luke and Ruthie Zahm, owners of the café, grew up in the area, but Luke Zahm's big awakening about the Driftless region came while he lived in Chicago. He came across an Organic Valley cheese display, and seeing La Farge, Wisconsin, on the packaging gave him a new sense of pride for the area where he grew up.

Zahm had planned on studying to become an attorney, but his interests kept returning to food. He knew he wanted to open a restaurant and thought, where better to do so than where he grew up—in an area becoming nationally known for its small, family-run, organic farms?

Zahm says supporting local farmers is something of utmost importance to him.

"We carefully track how much we put into small family farmers," he says. "Last year we put \$62,000 into (their) pockets. It's super-rewarding and a number we constantly want to grow."

The menu at Driftless Café changes nightly. Farmers bring the food to the café, and at 2:30 every afternoon, Zahm and the restaurant's sous chef sit down and build a menu based on what the farmers have brought.

"It's our goal to create five really spectacular entrees," Zahm says. "We don't ever want diners to have the same experience twice. That's a beautiful, unique thing to do."

Driftless Café is located at 118 W. Court St. in Viroqua and is open Tuesday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Friday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. More information can be found at driftlesscafe.com.

Hackberry's Bistro

Overlooking Cameron Park and sitting above People's Food Coop in La Crosse, Hackberry's Bistro incorporates local ingredients and organic options throughout the menu as much as possible.

"In the summer this is easier, as our growing season is in full swing and we see a large variety of fresh produce available," George says. "As winter approaches, however, this means our local produce available is usually root vegetables and heartier items such as squash, making it a little more difficult."

Hackberry's recently started working with Nordic Creamery in Westby, and the creamery is now supplying all of the cheeses used in the bistro. Most of the meat served at the bistro is raised within 150 miles of La Crosse.

George says the regular customers at Hackberry's like to support the local economic base, making farm-to-table a popular choice.

"These are points that matter to our customer base, as many of our customers try to be locally and globally conscious of the choices they make day to day," he says. "(Our customers are) amazed at what is potentially being grown in their backyard and how they can cook with it, which makes for very exciting scratch cooking for us."

Hackberry's Bistro can be found at 315 Fifth Ave. S. It is open Monday through Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Thursday through Sunday from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. More information is available at <http://www.pfc.coop/in-the-store/hackberrys>. 

Jessie Foss is a freelance writer who lives in La Crosse. Growing up on a dairy farm in northwest Wisconsin gave her a sincere appreciation for food straight from the farm.



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For the adventurous palate,
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AROUND THE WORLD IN 15 BITES

BY CHARISH BADZINSKI
Contributed photos



Midwestern diners with a taste for something beyond the Coulee Region staples of pizza, cheese curds and fish fries have recently been feasting on an influx of decidedly more adventurous eats. From Mexican street food to authentic Korean goodies to French fine dining, the region serves up enough worldwide variety to satisfy even the most jet-setting of palates. And restaurateurs are creating dishes that are not only true to their roots but also approachable, even for finicky eaters.

A feast for foodies

In just the past handful of years, foodies have been able to add Thai, French, Indian and authentic Mexican restaurants to their dining rotation. Just as the food origins vary widely, so do the price points. And whether you're looking for a quick meal on the go or a night of unforgettable dining, the Coulee Region can accommodate any taste.

Authentic Mexican street food

Iguana's Mexican Street Cafe serves up rave-worthy food at budget-friendly prices. Fair warning: If you're looking for ground beef tacos, you'll need to go elsewhere. But folks in the know take that as good sign: All of the food here is authentically Mexican. Soft shell tacos are

stuffed with pork or steak, onions and cilantro. Rice and beans are cooked on the stove every morning. Salsas are made fresh daily. And there's a customer call list for when carnitas are available. The tiny restaurant's popularity has grown fast since it opened two years ago, overflowing its seating for 15. "The response has been phenomenal," says owner Rebecca Absalon, a native Minnesotan who met her husband, Alejandro, while vacationing in Mexico. "We're using family recipes, so periodically I have to call my mother-in-law."

While Absalon says there are no plans to expand the restaurant itself, their menu offerings have grown. They recently began offering *paletas*—Mexican ice cream bars in exotic flavors like passion fruit, mango, pina colada and jamaica—made from hibiscus flowers. The results are just like what you'd find sold on the beach in Mexico and unlike anything in this region. In addition, Iguana's has begun to serve up custom platters for off-location events requiring that authentic Mexican goodness.

French fine dining

Just down the road, at the historic Mons Anderson house, the dining experience is a world away at Le Chateau, which brings French fine dining to the region. Now in its third year of operation, word of mouth has led to growing popularity for the only French restaurant

around. And if you're a little nervous about French food, don't be, says owner Eva Ewers, sommelier of the restaurant. "We are an authentic French restaurant, but we remember we are in the Midwest," she explains. As a result, they serve entrees like steak frites, a traditional French dish of steak and french fries, which also appeals to local tastes. And if you're feeling more adventurous, you can try some of the many specialty dishes including truffles, escargot, duck, foie gras, partridge or quail. "We change the menu every season," explains Ewers. "So we've been adding more French items now that people know what we're doing and trust us."

While her husband, Tim, is the restaurant chef, Ewers enjoys selecting French wines for their wine list, a commitment that requires her to work with five purveyors to accommodate discerning tastes. Today their list includes more than 100 labels of wine. Those who want to sample the wines or the food can check out wine classes and tastings the first Tuesdays and Thursdays of every month, the release of the Beaujolais Nouveau in November or Le Chateau's tasting menu with optional wine pairing, offered four times a year.

Meals at Le Chateau are an event, and guests are welcome to linger for hours. But in the future, the restaurant expects to be able to serve those with something else in mind. Expansion plans include a lounge in the basement, an outdoor terrace and a glassed-in porch. The owners have decided to back away from weddings, though their services are in demand, and focus on what they do best: serving authentic French food to those who appreciate the finer things in life.

The sampler platter

Have a taste for adventure? Want to find that rare Wisconsin tavern that serves Korean food? (Hint: see The Sports Nut). Cuisine choices are only limited by the boundaries of your appetite. Including the restaurants featured above, here are some stops you'll want to explore the next time your hunger goes international. (crw)

Charish Badzinski travels the world and collects recipes in an attempt to make her kitchen the best restaurant in Wisconsin. She has taken cooking classes in Thailand, learned from a Croatian chef in his home kitchen and gained tips from countless street vendors while patiently awaiting her dinner. She blogs about it all at <http://rollerbaggoddess.wordpress.com/>.

MEXICAN

1. Iguana's Mexican Street Cafe

1800 State St., La Crosse

608-519-3112

Specialties: carnitas, fish tacos, queso crema (chicken/mushroom burrito)

KOREAN

2. The Sports Nut

801 Rose St., La Crosse

608-784-1811

Specialties: blu go ki (Fridays), egg rolls, kim chee fries

LEBANESE

3. Fayze's Restaurant and Bakery

While not a Lebanese restaurant, Fayze's features talame buns, a Lebanese specialty.

135 Fourth St. S., La Crosse

608-784-9548

FRENCH

4. Le Chateau

410 Cass St., La Crosse

608-782-6498

Specialties: duck breast, foie gras, crab risotto, steak frites

SOUTHEAST ASIAN

5. Hmong's Golden Egg Rolls

Formerly 929 State St., La Crosse (due to re-open in the first floor of the new apartment building on the same property, The Hive)

608-782-0096

Specialties: pho soup, Hmong-style eggrolls, Hmong sausage

IRISH

6. Dublin Square Irish Pub

103 N. Third St., La Crosse

608-519-2509

Specialties: corned beef and cabbage, bangers and champ, shepherd's pie

ITALIAN

7. Kate's on State

333 Main St., La Crosse

608-784-3354

Specialties: pastas and ravioli

CHINESE DIM SUM

8. Dim Sum Teashop

221 Pearl St., La Crosse

608-738-1221

Specialties: dumplings, baozi (buns), chang fen (rice rolls)

JAPANESE

9. Sushi Pirate

200 Main St., La Crosse

608-785-2288

Specialties: sushi, udon, donburi

SPANISH

10. 4 Sisters Wine Bar & Tapas

100 Harborview Plaza, La Crosse

608-782-8213

Specialties: tapas, ceviche

THAI

11. Flavors of Thai

1505 Losey Blvd. S., La Crosse

608-519-3033

Specialties: green curry, pad thai, crab rangoon

INDIAN

12. Taste of India

1812 Jackson St., La Crosse

608-782-8133

Specialties: curries, tandoori, samosas

GREEK

13. Big Mama's Gyros (food truck)

Dave's Guitar Shop parking lot

1227 Third St. S., La Crosse

Specialty: gyros

14. Gracie's Gyros & Pastries

1908 Campbell Rd., La Crosse

608-784-6664

Specialties: gyros, falafel, baklava

GERMAN

15. Stolpa's Stein Haus

324 Jay St., La Crosse

608-519-2421

Specialties: 30 kinds of bratwurst, German breakfast


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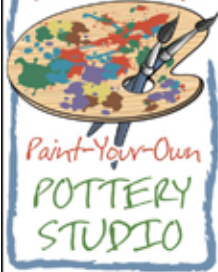


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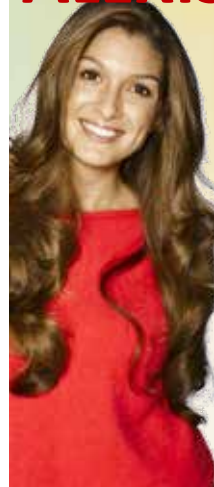
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TAKE A COULEE REGION WINE TOUR

Follow your nose (and your palate)
through a wine-tasting tour of the region.

BY HEIDI GRIMINGER BLANKE

If you thought the West Coast was the place to be for wine, think again. Because of grapes developed for northern climates, exquisite wineries are popping up all over the Coulee Region, so grab your designated driver and start your tour now. No matter which direction you head, you'll meet up with some grapes you're sure to love.

For more wineries, explore the Great River Road Wine Trail: 11 wineries scattered along the river in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa (greatriverroadwinetrail.org).

Winery hours tend to be seasonal, so check websites or call for up-to-date information.

Prosit! Salut! Cin cin!

NORTH

Elmaro Vineyard, Trempealeau

elmarovineyard.com, 608-534-6456

October & November: Tuesday to Thursday 12-6 p.m., Friday & Saturday 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Sunday 12-5 p.m.

Awards: (numerous gold medals) 2013 U.S. National Wine Competition, 2013 & 2014 Riverside International Wine Competition in California, 2014 Wisconsin State Fair, 2014 Mid-America Wine Competition

Set among acres of grapevines, Elmaro Vineyard stands on property homesteaded in the 1850s. While the first grapes were planted in 2006, a white pine on the property, captured on the vineyard's label, is more than 150 years old. Elmaro both produces wine from its own grapes and purchased grapes.

Enjoy wine tastings inside the airy building or on the patio, then peer into the sparkling lower level to view the winemaking apparatus. From a complimentary three glasses to a \$25 educational tasting of seven paired wines, you'll find the perfect fit. Artisanal and local cheese, sausage and bread plates, olives and chocolate are available for purchase.

Throughout the year, Elmaro holds special events like wine parings, music, artists' receptions and even yoga on the patio. Check their website for details.

Wine Sitters, Holmen

winesitters.com, 608-738-3752

Call or check the website for current hours.

Looking for a unique Coulee Region experience? Register for Wine Sitters' Make Me Wine class and walk away with 28 bottles (6 gallons) to add to your wine cellar. Add your own label, and you've got a bottle to be proud of.

Wine Sitters does not have a vineyard but instead purchases grape juice from all over the world. Take advantage of the six free tastings, then browse the retail section not only for wine, but for wine- and beer-making items.

CENTRAL

Lost Island Wine, Onalaska

lostislandwine.com, 715-570-9463

October & November: Thursday 4:30-9 p.m., Friday 11:30 a.m.-9 p.m., Saturday 12-9 p.m., Sunday 12-5 p.m.

Awards: 2014 Between the Bluffs Beer, Wine and Cheese Festival, including third place People's Choice

Lost Island's slogan is "Get lost with Lost Island Wine," but their location is easy to find, just off Theater Road in Onalaska.

Lost Island concentrates on scrumptious fruit-flavored wines like Peach Beach, Strawberry Sunset and Blueberry Lagoon, but also produces more standard wines. Grapes come from the West Coast and from local growers. Like what you taste? Join Lost Island's wine club and be the first to try wine produced specifically for members, a combination of value wines and reserve wines.

Delight in three tastings for free or purchase a bottle of wine and six tastings. Lost Island even offers the option to create your own vintage, with choices of flavor, bottle color and label. Cheese and crackers are available for purchase.

WEST

Garvin Heights, Winona

ghvwine.com, 507-313-1917

October: Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

November: Saturday & Sunday 1-5 p.m.

November 8 & 9: Great River Holiday Event, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

Awards: 2013 International Cold Climate Competition and 2013 Mid-America Wine Competition

On your way to Garvin Heights, stop to take in the 7-mile view from the Minnesota bluffs. Garvin Heights is run by wine lovers Marvin and Linda Sappanen, a couple who have traveled all over the world tasting and learning about wine. They began growing grapes 25 years ago and turned to producing and selling wine in 2007.

Given their Finnish background, the Sappanens constructed a winery building resembling a Finnish lakeside cabin. The main floor houses the sales and tasting areas, while the lower level contains the winemaking facilities. The view from the deck extends from the top of the bluff to the undulating farmland and hills below.

Proudly, the Sappanens only use grapes grown within a 50-mile radius. Tastings are \$5 for five wines, with the \$5 applied as credit toward a bottled selection; cheese and crackers are available for purchase.

River View Winery, La Crescent

riverviewwinery.com, 608-385-1209

Saturday & Sunday, 1-6 p.m.

Awards: 2012 & 2013 International Cold Climate Competition

There's more than apples growing on Apple Blossom Drive. The River View vineyard was started about 10 years ago, with winemaking added in 2011. A full 60 percent of River View's grapes come from its own acreage, with the rest supplied by four local growers.

A breathtaking view of Lake Onalaska awaits you on the River View patio. Unlimited tastings are free, as are the accompanying cheese, crackers and fruit. While you're there, ask for a tour of the vineyards and winery.

EAST

Branches Winery, Westby

brancheswinery.com, 608-634-9463

Sunday to Thursday 1-6 p.m., Friday & Saturday 1-8 p.m.

Awards: 2013 & 2014 Wisconsin State Fair Professional Wine Competition

Pizza and wine? You bet, especially if the pizza is covered with brie and pears and comes straight from the area's only outdoor wood-fired oven (available through October). Set on one of the highest points in Vernon County, the view from the patio is both relaxing and breathtaking. Branches produces wine exclusively from its own grapes and prides itself on using local ingredients and made-in-America products.

Taste three wines for free or seven for \$5, and accompany them with artisanal meats and cheeses.

During the year, take advantage of concerts, wine pairing dinners, educational programs, community fundraisers and art events. The property includes a 14-acre vineyard and a brand-new building housing the tasting area, banquet room and wine production facility.

Vernon Vineyard, Viroqua

vernonvineyards.com, 608-634-6181

October & November: Friday 1-7 p.m., Saturday 11 a.m.-7 p.m., Sunday 12-6 p.m.

What could be better than settling into a glass of wine among acres of vineyards nestled into the heart of the Driftless Region? How about if almost every bottle of wine is made exclusively from Vernon County grapes? It doesn't get more local than that.

The first five tastings are free; additional samples are available for a single \$5 fee, applied to a wine purchase. Pair your aromatic tastings with crackers, cheese or pizza.

Vernon Vineyard has space for any kind of meeting or special event: professional, private or just for fun. A well-stocked gift shop offers everything from wine-related jewelry to kitchen towels.

Heidi Griminger Blanke, Ph.D., is a Coulee Region freelance writer for Orah Communications. She is thrilled to see a growing Driftless Region wine industry so that she can continue to improve her wine palate.





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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

ONGOING EVENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Women in Networking and Support (WINS) 2nd Wed. of each month, Fayze'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

Oct. 4-5, The Hotel Casablanca, 7:30 p.m. Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Fine Arts Center, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Oct. 10-12, Pippin, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Fine Arts Center, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Oct. 11, 19th Annual Historic Downtown Day, La Crosse.

Oct. 11, Orfield and Whyte Jazz Concert, 7:30 p.m., Heider Center, West Salem, heidercenter.org.

Oct. 11-12, Fall Gift and Craft Show, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat., 10 a.m.-3p.m. Sun., Onalaska Omni Center.

Oct. 11-12, Home Party Showcase, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Oct. 11-12, Voices from the Past: Woodlawn Cemetery Walk, noon-3 p.m., Woodlawn Cemetery, Winona, 507-454-2723, winonahistory.org.

Oct. 17-20, Winter Fun Showcase, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Oct. 17-26, 8 (The Play), 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Toland Theatre Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse.

Oct. 18, Living Authentically workshop, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, La Crosse, 608-791-5295, fscenr.org.

Oct. 19, Alpha Pi Red Dress Brunch, 11 a.m., Stony Creek Inn, Onalaska, 920-382-0305, zimmerma.kell@uwla.edu.

Oct. 23-25, Ghoulies in the Coulees, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Thurs., 6-9 p.m. Fri.-Sat., Norskedalen, Coon Valley, norskedalen.org.

Oct. 24-25, BOO-seum Halloween Party, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, funmuseum.org.

Oct. 24-Nov. 2, The 39 Steps, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Oct. 25, Supporting Individuals with Developmental Disabilities through Grief and Loss, 8:30-11:30 a.m., Gundersen Health System, La Crosse, call 608-775-4747 (ext. 54747) to register.

Oct. 25, 12th Annual West Salem Holiday Craft Show, 8 a.m.-2 p.m., West Salem Elementary School, West Salem.

Oct. 25, Trick or Treating, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., downtown La Crosse.

Oct. 25, 125 Years of Song by the Viterbo Show Choir, 7:30 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Oct. 26, Cooking with the Calamari Sisters, 2 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Oct. 26, Halloween Spooktacular, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Oct. 29, WOW Showcase, 4-9 p.m., Boot Hill Pub Dock #7, La Crosse, Cathy Norris, 608-786-0387.

Oct. 31-Nov. 1, Nov. 6-8, The Pillowman, 7:30 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, thepumphouse.org.

Nov. 1, Ailey II Dancers, 7:30 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Nov. 6-9, The Man Who, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Frederick Theatre Morris Hall, UW-La Crosse.

Nov. 7, Holiday Open House, 5-9 p.m., downtown La Crosse.

Nov. 7, Phat Pack, 7:30 p.m., Heider Center, West Salem, heidercenter.org.

Nov. 8, Fashion Cornucopia, 11 a.m. and 5 p.m., Our Savior's Lutheran Church, La Crosse, 608-782-3468.

Nov. 8, Missoula Children's Theatre: The Pied Piper, 1 and 4 p.m., Fine Arts Center, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Nov. 8-23, Youth Theatre: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Nov. 14-16, Headshot! 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Fine Arts Center, Viterbo University, La Crosse.

Nov. 15, Tiny Tim Gala, 5:30-9:30 p.m., Cargill Room, The Waterfront, La Crosse, 608-392-4208.

Nov. 15, Santa's Arrival, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Nov. 15, Old School Variety Show, 8 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, thepumphouse.org.

Nov. 15-Dec. 24, Visits and photos with Santa, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Nov. 16, Jingle Bell Brunch, 10 a.m.-noon, Cargill Room, The Waterfront, La Crosse, 608-392-4208.

Nov. 17, The Monster Who Ate My Peas and Other Stories, 10 a.m. and 12:45 p.m., Heider Center, West Salem, heidercenter.org.

Nov. 20-23, Downtown Shopping Weekend, downtown La Crosse.

Nov. 20-23, Holiday Fair, La Crosse Center.

Nov. 28, Black Friday, Valley View Mall, myvalleyview.com.

Nov. 28-Jan. 1, Rotary Holiday Lights, open daily 5-10 p.m., Riverside Park, La Crosse.

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