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AREA HOME AND LIVING MAGAZINE

Celebrating
Mt. La Crosse

Making Stranger
Connections

Little Hearts
for Mental Health

Building a
Beautiful Board

Touring Ireland
—DIY Style

A SENSE OF SELF

CHOYA WOODS
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Pictured on the cover: Choya Woods, owner of Melanin Beauty Bar. Photos on cover and above left by Frontier Photography.

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Financial Advisor
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Jenny Akins, AAMS™
Financial Advisor
jenny.akers@edwardjones.com
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Kris Birkholz
Financial Advisor
kris.birkholz@edwardjones.com
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Onalaska



Denise Halverson, AAMS™
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Sparta



Heidi Lydon
Financial Advisor
heidi.lydon@edwardjones.com
608-487-9509
Sparta



Margaret Severson, AAMS™
Financial Advisor
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Who am I? Who would others say I am? My LinkedIn profile will tell you I am a writer, editor, content creator and even more, a storyteller.

Over on Facebook my brief bio says “runner, writer, wife and mom.” I’m not entirely sure why I chose that order when I first wrote it years ago, though the alliteration at the beginning probably played a role. Or maybe it was not wanting to start my identity with who I am in relation to others. Not everything in that short bio fits as well now—my running has tapered off in recent years—but that doesn’t mean I’ve left it entirely behind.

And then there are the other parts of me: I’m a Nebraskan at heart, though I’ve been gone from that state just as long as I lived there. I’m a daughter, a sister, an aunt and great-aunt, a niece, a granddaughter. I’m a country kid who grew up a long way from a small town that really was the middle of nowhere. I’ll always identify as a horse person, though I’ve only ridden once in the last 13 years. I’m a college graduate. I’m a friend (something I’m not always as good at as I would like to be). I’m an introvert and homebody, and I have a strong need for time outdoors in nature.

Who we are and the sense of self we carry inside can be at odds with who others see us as (or want us to be), and many women may struggle to balance the internal and external pressures surrounding those identities.

Maybe we’re the mom who needs, as Lindsey Meindl recommends, a little more

protein on our plate and a little more self-forgiveness in our heart.

Maybe we struggle to love the body we have, as Zoe de Boer experienced in her teens. Let her story help you see the perfection in who you are.

Counselors Monica Gorski and Cindy Erickson say that we can reconcile our various identities by recognizing them as they change across our lives, whether that means setting goals and taking baby steps toward the objectives that matter most to us or simply acknowledging that every new stage will likely bring conflicting emotions. And that’s OK.

Within these pages we invite you to explore your sense of self.

If you are an extrovert, express your artistic side when hosting your holiday parties with a charcuterie masterpiece following the steps Emily Boland uses to wow her customers at Hunt & Gather Grazing Boards.

Introverted like me? Grab your crochet hook or knitting needles and spend a quiet evening creating precious signs of love for The Little Heart Project.

Or explore your adventurous side and join Darcie Breidel on the slopes of Mt. La Crosse to make the most of the winter weather that will inevitably find us here in the Coulee Region.

However you choose to treat yourself this season, embrace who you are. Celebrate that woman—with all of her diverse interests and talents, all of her wrinkles and eccentricities, all of her doubts and all of her gifts. As Gorski says, we are a rich tapestry (maybe a bit frayed in places, but still beautiful). Celebrate your self.

There’s just one more ME I have to share. A “me” that our cover woman Choya Woods saw and pulled out in the briefest of conversations. I am, if only just barely, a “curly girl”—and Woods gave me the advice that will help me live out that self more fully (with more body, even!) going forward.

Cheers to good hair days, good friends and being our authentic, complex, messy selves in 2024!

Shari

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PUBLISHER

Betty Christiansen

EDITOR

Shari Hegland

DESIGNERS

Kate Brue
Jaclyn Berg
Bonnie Martin

MARKETING ACCOUNT REPRESENTATIVES

Rachel Persson, Director
Claire Ristow-Seib
Olivia Walker

PHOTO EDITOR

Diane Raaum

PHOTOGRAPHY

Diane Raaum Photo
Frontier Photography
Jordana Snyder Photography

DISTRIBUTION

Jennie Kolek
Heide Harron

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CELEBRATE WOMEN'S CHRISTMAS AT THE FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY CENTER

The Franciscan Spirituality Center continues its tradition of celebrating women with its annual event, Women's Christmas: An Epiphany Celebration, 5:30-8 p.m. Friday, January 5.

A wonderful tradition from Ireland has become a tradition at the FSC. On the Feast of Epiphany, women gather together for Nollaig na mBan, or Women's Christmas. As the busy Christmas season comes to an end, this is a time to set aside responsibilities and gather with friends to rest, give thanks, celebrate and reflect on the possibilities and invitations the new year brings.

Join Friday evening for a delicious Irish dinner, great conversation and a fun, meaningful program. Each guest also will receive a gift! Cost is \$60.

If you would like to participate in Women's Christmas and extend your stay, settle in for a comfortable and quiet night of retreat during Epiphany Day of Rest.

Guests will stay in one of the center's beautifully appointed, private rooms after the Friday evening event and enjoy a time of quiet meditation, visiting together, gentle body movement and creative activities from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, January 6. Participants are also welcome to simply bring a book and just relax!

Cost for the extended time is \$165, which includes a bedroom stay on Friday, Women's Christmas event, breakfast and lunch on Saturday.

Register for one or both events at www.FSCenter.org or call 608-791-5295.

YWCA HONORS OUTSTANDING WOMEN

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Eight Coulee Region women were recognized in October by the YWCA of La Crosse at its Tribute to Outstanding Women event celebrating female trailblazers and legacy makers.

Maichor Lee, with La Crosse County, received the Eliminating Racism Award for her advocacy for women and the Hmong community, along with participation in the Wisconsin Well Women Program. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Lee helped create tailored communication strategies to reach the Hmong community with public health information.

The Empowering Women Award was presented to Dr. Alecia Gende of Mayo Clinic Health System and Erica Koonmen with the American Association of University Women. Dr. Gende is chair of the American Association of Women Emergency Physicians and locally leads Women to Women, a group for female physicians at Mayo Clinic Health System-Southwest Wisconsin where she hosts multiple gatherings per year, leading discussion on a broad variety of topics tailored to benefit female physicians in their career. Koonmen advocates for women and girls through work for women's rights, gender equity and economic security for women and girls. She supports and provides critical guidance for a number of events and initiatives to deepen the impact of AAUW in the area.

Elizabeth Fryseth received the Social Justice Award for her involvement seeking increased accessibility in the region, especially for people with disabilities. She serves on the MTU ADA committee, the La Crosse Area Transit Advocates and the Disability Action Network. She has also served as a board member, president and vice president of the La Crosse Lions Charities and is a strong advocate for guide dog awareness and education.

Outstanding College Student Awards were presented to Moua Torgerson, an employee at Mayo Clinic Health System who is continuing her education, having played a key role in communications for the system during the pandemic, and Jenasea Hameister, a University of Wisconsin-La Crosse student, La Crosse City Council member and a peer mentor through the UW-L Fostering Success for Independent Scholars Program.



FROZEN FLICKS TO WARM UP WINTER

Want to see some amazing and inspiring women on the big screen? Winona's 2024 Frozen River Film Festival, hosted February 4-11, includes two features about very different women: roller derby athletes and an astrophysicist. *Minnesota Mean* follows a year in the lives of six members of Minnesota Roller Derby as they compete for the

top international prize in the sport. *Space Hope and Charity* is a documentary following the life of Charity Woodrum on a challenging and tragic journey to her career goal.

These are just two of the independent films playing during the weeklong festival, which also includes short films that will take viewers from Nigeria to the Middle East and on a schooner on the Hudson River.

A complete schedule of in-person viewings will be released in January at www.frff.org. Online viewing can be accessed beginning February 11. Ticket options include all-access passes, online-only passes or tickets to individual film screenings.

In addition to the film screenings in February, the organization hosts summer film-making camps for middle school and high school students.



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Left-Right: Sheryl Gora-Bollom, MS, LCSW;
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THE CROWN JEWEL OF HER COMMUNITY

Hairstyling by Choya Woods includes lessons that build confidence and self-acceptance.

BY MICHELLE BYOM | PHOTOS BY FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHY

Hair, no matter how you cut it, is part of our identity. Its length, texture, volume, color and style gives hints about our personal story. A “good hair day” looks different from one person to the next. Many would agree that feeling good about our hair can help to make us feel better about our overall appearance and boost our self-confidence.

Choya Woods, owner and stylist at Melanin Beauty Bar on La Crosse’s North Side, says her own hairstyle changes daily with her mood. “It depends on how I feel when I get up in the morning,” she declares.

WEAR YOUR CROWN

Woods helps her clients learn to manage their hair naturally and to wear it proudly, learning to feel comfortable while embracing their ethnicity and identity.

“It’s our crown,” she says about the role hair plays. Sometimes people express themselves through their hair. It can also represent pride, frustration or sadness to those who experience hair loss or whose hair is different from those around them.

Katie Heyer is a longtime client and friend. She has found a lot of her identity as a Black woman by having Woods do her hair.

As a young Black teen in La Crescent, Heyer had hair that looked much different from most girls when all she really wanted was to blend in. “I would go to school and see the girls with the long, silky, smooth blond hair,” she says. She found her own hair unmanageable, no matter what she tried. “It was this annoying thing to take care of,” Heyer, 23, recalls.

Her mother heard about Woods, who was working at another salon then. “Choya taught me that my hair is its own personal being,” Heyer explains. “I am now so proud of my hair as a Black woman,” she

emphasizes as she describes the different styles she wears with ease, from box braids to dreadlocks or her afro.

CHICAGO ROOTS

Woods describes how as a young girl in her Humboldt Park neighborhood on Chicago's West Side, she straightened, braided and styled hair for her friends and family. She has a fond memory of styling her great-grandmother's hair.

"My great-grandmother was half Shoshone and Black," Woods recalls. "She had the most beautiful long black hair with very little gray. Her name was Esther! Every time I would visit, I braided her hair. I would grab a comb, brush and a cup of water to dip my brush. Every once in a while, I would use just a little hair grease, Royal Crown, to be exact," Woods remembers.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE STYLING CHAIR STAYS THERE

Woods was raised by her mother. She explains that she and her three sisters and two brothers are not all biological siblings, but she adds that her definition of family today extends outside the lines of its traditional meaning. Woods emphasizes that she is forever grateful for the support of her husband and four boys. "They have sacrificed so much of their time for my journey," she says.

One could say that her clients are also family.

Longtime relationships between stylist and client are often genuine, due to the personal, uninterrupted time together. "I think that it is the focus that I have on that person, in that moment," Woods says. Some clients use their appointment as quiet time, and others appreciate talking with their stylist, who has their undivided attention.

Heyer appreciates the supportive relationship she has with Woods and explains how her white family members have also found their identities through Woods. "She is supportive; she is someone we can confide in or talk about current events or just make conversation with," Heyer says.

LOVE YOUR NATURAL HAIR

Woods prefers to teach people how to manage curls and texture and learn to love them rather than using chemicals to straighten and ultimately damage their hair. "I would prefer not to perpetuate that," she says. Woods explains that she was a young girl when she started chemically straightening her hair much too frequently.

Woods helped Heyer learn about the dangers of chemicals. "I was going to Choya before the Black community was educated about the chemicals and products we used," Heyer says. "We learned together."

GIVING BACK IS A PRIORITY

Erin Raymus, restorative justice coordinator with YWCA La Crosse, describes Woods as humble. "She is genuinely a good soul," Raymus says with emphasis. Woods and her stylists at Melanin Beauty Bar donated their services in YWCA La Crosse's annual Get Fresh event, where school-age kids, many with curly and textured hair, are treated to a fresh hairstyle before going back to school. "I remember glowing in the chair," Raymus says of her own experience as Woods' client.

On occasion, a homeless person will enter Melanin Beauty Bar, and Woods is more than willing to cut their hair. "It's just my time," she says. "I am OK with that."

JUST BE YOURSELF

If Woods could share one message, it is "Be yourself. So many people are worried about what their friends or spouse might think," she says. Instead, she asks her clients: "What would you like?" **CRW**

Michelle Byom is a writer who lives in Holmen. She savors time with her stylist, and from now on, she will try to appreciate her hair despite not knowing how to straighten it very well.



IT WAS THE STAGE OR STYLE

As a young teen, Choya Woods had two goals centered around creativity: she would become the next Whitney Houston, or she would pursue a career as a stylist. One of her idols, singer-songwriter Mary J. Blige, styled her own hair, so Woods thought perhaps she could do both, too.

"We learned that I could sing when I was in the seventh grade," she explains. "My uncle had a recording studio, and he signed me as a solo artist on a record label."

She and several girls started a singing group—Primadonna—and performed at venues throughout the Chicago area. Though it was a lot of fun, her mother worried about late-night hours and dangerous areas of the city. Woods eventually chose hairstyling as her career, and in 2005, she graduated from the Scientific College of Beauty and Barbering in La Crosse.

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EXPECT MORE



Darcie Breidel, president and general manager at Mt. La Crosse, is excited about the updates coming to the ski area for her 35th season on staff.

SOMETHING NEW EVERY SEASON

Darcie Breidel shares pride in improvements entering her 35th year at Mt. La Crosse.

BY HEIDI OVERSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Mt. La Crosse president and general manager Darcie Breidel can barely contain her enthusiasm as she gets ready to kick off the area's 63rd ski season. That "new season" excitement is something she's experienced for 35 years, but this year she says there are bigger-than-usual improvements to the local resort.

"We're all very excited about our updates," Breidel says with a wide smile. "Many of our longtime customers feel a deep sense of belonging here, and we think they'll be excited, too. As we have worked toward new changes, we have kept our history and culture in mind and held on to the traditions and aura that our visitors treasure."

AT HOME ON THE SLOPES

Breidel has every reason to be thrilled about her workplace, which is truly her second home. While she explains the most recent improvements, the pride she has in the area is blatantly evident—Mt. La Crosse is so much a part of her, and for that reason, any changes will be good changes that will enhance everyone's experience.

Breidel has worked at Mt. La Crosse for 35 years. She started as a cocktail waitress during her freshman year of college. She was soon a ski instructor and then moved into sales. When the second owners, Todd and Cindy Schini, purchased the ski area, Breidel became general manager. Now recently under new ownership by Waloon Investments, a locally owned company, she continues as general manager and president.

"Like so many of our patrons, all of my children grew up skiing here," Breidel says. "It's a unique business, with a strong culture of family and friendliness. Our customers feel that, and we are proud to be a place that brings families and generations together."

MORE SNOW, MORE SEATING

"Our No. 1 priority has been to increase our snowmaking capacity," explains Breidel. "This is something we started working on as soon as the last season ended. The project is time-consuming and costly, but with cooperation from Mother Nature, we will be able to make much more snow earlier in the season and hope to get more of our runs open earlier."

While the focus has largely been on snowmaking and on-hill improvements like new lighting on Damnation, one of the Midwest's true double black diamond runs, there have also been exciting updates in the chalet and on the patio area. Visitors will enjoy more outdoor seating on the slope-side patio and more room for grilling.

"We took down two trees that were here for years," says Breidel. "One was dead, the other was dying, and it was sad to see them both go, but we made their stumps into stools for the patio, so they are living on in that capacity."

"Mt. La Crosse is such a treasure for the La Crosse and surrounding communities, and all of us on the team are feeling a renewed sense of excitement as we enter into the new ski season," Breidel says. "It's the first real investment in snowmaking and building updates in many years, and we are excited to share the changes with our customers." **CRW**

Heidi Overson doesn't ski, but after touring the chalet and meeting Darcie Breidel, she sure wants to learn! There's a better chance you'll find her in the St. Bernard Room, though.

“WE’RE ALL A LITTLE WEIRD”

Lisa David Olson’s *Stranger Connections* podcast is just one more way to feed her passion for communication and humor.

BY MARTHA KEEFFE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



The *Stranger Connections* podcast is one of many ways Lisa David Olson shares her love for communication, quirkiness and humor. Photo courtesy of cine1productions.com.

If you’re weird, if you’re strange, Lisa David Olson would love to talk to you. “I’m a curious beast,” says Olson, explaining her penchant for conversing with the peculiar. “I have a love for meeting wonderfully weird people and for hearing their quirky stories. So if you have a thing for collecting plastic Jello cup containers, give me a call.”

For more than two decades, Olson—author, performer, speaker trainer, business humorist and TedTalk presenter—has used her wit as a means of bringing people together. And whether she’s conducting a seminar or just out having fun, one of Olson’s goals is to make people see their own silliness through the eyes of others.

“If I can get people to let their guard down, to laugh together and have fun, then I’ve gotten them to make a connection,” she says. Using her ability to combine embarrassing experiences with humorous anecdotes, Olson can take a ho-hum meeting and turn it into a “connection” of shared moments of awkwardness. “People relate well—and feel less vulnerable—when they learn that we’re all a little bit weird. That’s something we all have in common.”

CURIOSITY, SPARKS AND INSPIRATION

It was this realization that three years ago motivated Olson to launch her own podcast. Aptly named *Stranger Connections*, the podcast opens up the world of weirdness to a wider audience as she seeks out and interviews people who have original life stories or wacky careers. One of these stories sparking curiosity in a listener, or inspiring another to take on a new challenge, is reason enough for Olson to stay on the air.

“If you’re podcasting for money, don’t,” laughs Olson, noting that much of the business of podcasting is devoted to finding and booking the interview, then recording, editing and uploading the interview. “I have quit (podcasting) so many times in my mind. But then something golden happens, and I just hang in there.”

Fortunately, these golden moments happen a lot—so often that Olson has plenty of material to produce one broadcast per week. And considering that most podcasters quit after a few episodes, she must be doing something right.

ASK “WHAT IF” AND “WHY NOT”

“I always keep the spirit of exploring,” she says. “I never want to interview the same field over and over.” Featuring anyone from a 91-year-old nationally recognized athlete who began running at the age of 61 to a dog whisperer who can communicate your dog’s needs, Olson has stayed true to her goal of delivering interesting content. “I have interviewed the Amazing Kreskin, a man who was rescued from a cult and even a woman who found a message in a bottle,” says Olson, as testament to the range of topics she’s covered. And when asked what she’s learned from these interactions, she doesn’t hesitate to answer.

“It’s to be brave, be bold and always ask ‘what if’ and ‘why not.’ In short,” she says. “I like doing things that make me sweat in weird places.” **CRW**

Martha Keefe lives and writes in La Crosse. She has also been inspired by Olson to take on a new challenge. So if you hear something weird while hiking in the woods, it just might be Martha playing her oboe.



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LOVE YOURSELF

Former Miss La Crosse Oktoberfest Zoe de Boer champions body positivity.

BY LEAH CALL | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Zoe de Boer, Miss La Crosse Oktoberfest 2022, channeled her own experiences into her platform focused on breaking free from body shame.

Though Zoe de Boer recently ended her reign as Miss La Crosse Oktoberfest, she continues to spread the message of her platform, “Breaking Free of Body Shame.” Suffering from body dysmorphia—a condition that distorts one’s perception of their physical appearance—de Boer knows firsthand the impact body image can have on mental and physical health.

“When I was around 16, I started to be really aware of my changing body and looks, and I really started experiencing pretty severe body dysmorphia,” says de Boer. “From that moment on, I have struggled with a number of eating disorders and body image-related issues.”

As Miss La Crosse Oktoberfest, de Boer jumped at the chance to help other women and girls going through similar struggles. “I never believed I was pretty enough, skinny enough, whatever enough to be a pageant girl, but I ran for the pageant to check it off my bucket list—and I won,” says de Boer. “I knew if I was going to be a role model for young women for an entire year, I was going to do it very much my way.”



While her reign has ended, Zoe de Boer continues to reach out to others through a podcast, *Hello Good Humans*.

She stuck to that pledge, advocating body positivity and sharing her own body image journey at speaking events throughout the year. De Boer continues to tell her story and inspire other women to be their best selves in her podcast, *Hello Good Humans*.

“The podcast is a platform to allow people to tell their stories, to talk about the good works they are doing in the world,” she explains.

CONSIDER MEDIA CONSUMPTION

How we feel about our bodies is tied to self-esteem and mental health. Self-love—flaws and all—typically leads to healthier relationships and healthier overall behavior. Sadly, television and social media can destroy positive self-image through constant exposure to unrealistic beauty standards.

De Boer recalls, as a teenager, scrolling through social media to see which girls’ selfies got more likes than her selfies. “I would try to mimic them, thinking if I looked more like them, I would get more likes and more comments. I was destroying my own self-image, because I believed so deeply that who I was wasn’t good enough.”

Therapists specializing in eating disorders and body image advise limiting exposure to media that encourages comparison and dieting. De Boer notes, “I had to put pretty serious boundaries on social media for

myself. That means not following anybody that makes me question my own worth.”

That’s not an easy task. De Boer suggests asking, “Are these pictures or videos bringing good vibes about yourself, or are they bringing bad vibes?”

POSITIVE SELF-TALK: FOR YOU AND OTHERS

Practicing positive self-talk helps develop a positive body image. “Speak to yourself and your body how you would speak to the ones you love,” states a Body Image and Body Love handout from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Counseling and Testing Center.

It’s especially important for moms to make a conscious effort to use positive self-talk. Women who comment “I look so fat today” may hear their 8-year-old daughter saying the same thing when she looks in the mirror.

How we talk to others is also important. We should help other women and girls celebrate the beautiful human beings they are. “I’m a firm believer in complimenting other people freely,” notes de Boer. “But don’t make those compliments focused on physicality

and appearance. Compliment people on the work they’ve done, something they’ve created, their parenting or other accomplishments.”

MOVEMENT AND MORE

Finding physical activity you enjoy can also help boost body love. Note how it makes you feel, and appreciate what your amazing body can do to improve your overall wellness.

De Boer was able to break the grip body shame had on her life with the help of therapists and dietitians. She also recommends reading books, such as *The Body Is Not an Apology* by Sonya Renee Taylor and *Body Kindness: Transform Your Health from the Inside Out—and Never Say Diet Again* by Rebecca Stritchfield.

“True health is a combination of mind, body and soul,” says de Boer, who works as director of youth ministries at Onalaska United Methodist Church. “I know I can always work on my mental health, whether that is through journaling or therapy or prayer.

“The thing that grounds me is that I hold this belief that God created humans in his image, and if we believe that God is the



most perfect being, how could we believe that we—that are created in his image—are not perfect?” CRW

Westby-based writer Leah Call was inspired by Zoe de Boer's journey to self-love and courage to tell her story.



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“IT’S NORMAL TO FEEL GOOD”

One Coulee Region mom reclaimed her happiness—now, she helps other moms do the same.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Lindsey Meindl balances motherhood, a career and a coaching business, *Rebuild Your Brain*.

Lindsey Meindl is a busy woman. A mom of four, she works full-time as an engineer, maintains a hobby farm with her husband and runs her own coaching business, *Rebuild Your Brain*. She’s built a happy life.

Yet she didn’t always feel this way. In the past, she often felt overwhelmed and frustrated and struggled with her mood. “I was yelling at my husband, I was barking at my kids, I was hating who I was becoming—like, just screaming in my pillow. I really thought that I had lost myself,” she says.

She tried the usual advice: regular exercise, a healthy diet, counseling, chiropractic, massage, meditation, acupuncture, prayer and church. But she still felt overwhelmed. Then she learned how neurotransmitters—like serotonin and dopamine—can affect physiological functions like mood and energy. “And I was like, oh my gosh, of course I’m spinning my wheels! My serotonin isn’t firing. It doesn’t matter what I try, what I do; if my happy switch doesn’t flip naturally like it’s supposed to flip, it doesn’t matter what things I’m trying to do to be happy,” she says.

So she began working with a coach to leverage her knowledge of brain chemistry, started taking amino acid supplements and continued to focus on nutrition and exercise. Soon, she began to feel better. When she still felt better years later, she became a certified recovery nutrition coach and launched *Rebuild Your Brain* to help other moms get back to feeling more like themselves.

STEPS TO REGAIN YOUR HAPPINESS

Meindl wants moms to know: “It’s actually normal to feel good.” Not all the time—but in general, it’s possible to feel good, to like yourself and to design the life you want.

What’s her advice for moms to help themselves feel better?

First, eat regularly—and eat protein. “The No. 1 thing, anytime mommas reach out to me, is there’s always a reason to eat protein! Mom is very worried about everybody else and feeding everybody else,” Meindl says, “and oftentimes is not feeding herself enough. And that is so simple, but momma needs to be reminded to eat.”

Second, manage your thoughts. “It’s so important to have positive thoughts, even if they feel forced,” Meindl says. “You can do all the things to try to feel better. And if your thoughts are just stuck in the gutter—like you’re just negative, and you can’t have a positive thought—then your brain is going to release stress chemicals even if you’re not in a stressful situation.”

You can repeat to yourself, “I want to feel happy. I want to feel relaxed. I want to enjoy my time with my kids.” Then, shift that to “I am happy. I feel relaxed. I am enjoying my kids.” This simple exercise can help you change your thought patterns.

Finally, Meindl encourages moms to show themselves compassion and grace. “One of my phrases is ‘as the mother goes, so goes the family.’ Mom is just oftentimes a reflection of the whole family,” she says. So, moms—take care of yourselves: you’re worth it. **CRW**

Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a La Crosse-based writer.



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Reflecting Their Family

Modern farmhouse details create a sense of home for a Holmen family.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | PHOTOS BY DIANE RAAUM PHOTO



Above: Tarah Raaum chose a calming palette of natural wood tones and neutral gray, black and off-white for the farmhouse she shares with her husband, Nate Janney, and their family.

Left: A broad entry that opens onto the front porch is the perfect place to greet the family pet, Maggie..

For Tarah Raaum, building a “farmhouse” was about more than matching an architectural style. The home she and her husband, Nate Janney, designed and built, tucked deep into Wildwood Valley east of Holmen, is surrounded by reminders of her own childhood growing

up on a farm with generations of family heritage near Viroqua.

Raaum says that she and Janney share the same taste in architectural styles, which made it easier to create the perfect home for their blended family, which includes her 15-year-old daughter, Julia, and his 5-year-old son, Ryker.

It would be hard to miss the garden spaces carefully fenced off to keep the plentiful wildlife from raiding the bounty. “There wasn’t room for that when I lived in Milwaukee,” says Raaum. “It was something I was really looking forward to again after growing up on the farm with all that fresh food.”

The home itself, completed in July 2022, is welcoming with classic farmhouse elements, including vertical siding and a wide, inviting front porch, but is personalized by the choice of Iron Ore by Sherwin Williams, a custom color sourced through Wisconsin Builder Supply. The dark color is far from foreboding when coupled with cedar posts and porch ceiling and a rust-colored front door.

Raaum’s farm roots are anchored on that front porch by a pair of rockers and a bench, all made by a friend from barnwood that came from her family’s farm in Vernon County.

NEUTRAL PALETTE AND NATURAL LIGHT

Step through the front door, and you enter the heart of the home: an open-concept living room, dining room and kitchen that are the center of the split-bedroom layout. With huge windows overlooking both the front porch and its backyard counterpart, the home is filled with natural light.

The palette throughout the home is one of wood tones, black, white and gray. “I like things calm and clean,” Raaum explains.

Wide oak planks (actually luxury vinyl) provide continuity throughout the main living space, with the light color continuing to add to the calm atmosphere. An electric fireplace set into a dark brick wall centers the living area and provides both warmth and atmosphere with a range of color settings while avoiding the indoor air quality concerns of natural gas.

The 15-foot ceiling peak features a dark beam reminiscent of the exterior color.

In the kitchen, designed by Elevations at Wisconsin Building Supply, Italian tile in tones of brown, white and black provides a splash of pattern between the concrete-look countertops and the off-white cabinets with dark hardware. A farmhouse sink positioned below a window offers a view of the backyard, and a walk-in pantry provides ample storage for food and small appliances.



The oversized island, with the microwave placed into a cabinet beneath, is perfect for casual family meals or as a serving area for hosting larger gatherings. The porch in back, positioned to avoid the heat of the summer sun, is another favorite for family dining.

“The first year we didn’t eat at the dining room table for four months,” Raaum says. “We expanded (the back porch) this summer because we spend so much time out there.”

ROOM FOR ALL

The split-bedroom layout of the home, along with a bedroom/bathroom combination in the basement, means everyone in the family can enjoy their own space.

One of the two bedrooms at the west end of the main floor has been Raaum’s home office and art studio. She is an architect specializing in health care facilities. The other bedroom, complete with a dinosaur mural on one wall, is the perfect space for 5-year-old Ryker.

The master suite is situated on the east end of the house, with a window intentionally placed to allow the morning light into the bedroom. The adjoining bathroom features both a striking black soaking tub and an intentionally large shower to accommodate Janney’s height. The bathroom, separated from the bedroom by a barn door, includes access to his-and-hers walk-in closets as well.

Just outside the master suite is another connection to Raaum’s farmhouse childhood: a laundry room/mudroom/entrance with a door directly outside. Dirty shoes and clothes can go directly into the washer or utility sink or be hung on convenient hooks in the hallway without tracking further into the house.

Daughter Julia’s space is in the walkout basement, where she has a bathroom to herself and a wide window providing afternoon light for her plants.

The basement also features a sink, counters and fridge near the walkout door and a large playroom/family room space to provide plenty of options for all ages.



Clockwise from left: High ceilings were a must to accommodate the 13-foot Christmas tree on the family’s wish list. Alongside the master bath’s dramatic soaking tub is an oversized shower and access to his-and-hers walk-in closets. Raaum’s home includes meaningful details, including this pair of flowers painted by her teenage daughter, Julia.

PERSONAL DETAILS



Two other spaces in the basement are designed to accommodate personal interests for the family: an exercise room with a treadmill, yoga ladder and strength training equipment, plus a specialized area in the storage room dedicated to ski maintenance and repair. Raaum is a lifelong skier, her daughter competes in alpine racing and Janney is joining the Mt. La Crosse ski patrol this year.

The family’s outdoor adventure style is reflected also in the three-and-a-half-car garage, where there is additional storage for skis, as well as bicycles and more.

And while the home is tucked into a rural subdivision with little traffic, that doesn’t mean they don’t enjoy celebrating the holidays—electrical outlets were built into the roofline outside specifically for the Christmas lights Janney, a career firefighter at home on ladders and roofs, installs and programs each year.

FINALLY FEELING AT HOME

Raaum says the process of creating the perfect home for their family was made easier by trust in a few key people. Their realtor, Lisa Kind, helped sell the homes Raaum and Janney had each owned while construction was underway.

She gives credit to general contractors Chad and Karen McCathie for carrying out their vision. “I was so busy with work, I didn’t want to micromanage,” Raaum says, but she knew from their other projects that the McCathies shared her aesthetic.

“It is very much a family home,” Raaum says. “It was really fun to host Christmas here—we had enough room for both sides of the family.”

While getting from initial concept and planning to completed home is a long process (and it may never really be complete, Raaum admits, outlining plans for more minor changes), the result is worthwhile.

“It feels so good to want to come home,” she says. **CRW**

Coulee Region Women editor Shari Hegland would be perfectly content curling up on one of Raaum’s comfy couches with a cup of coffee to watch snow fall in the winter.

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GRAZING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

Follow Emily Boland's instructions to create charcuterie boards that add delicious art to your party.

BY JAN WELLIK | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



A business born during the pandemic, Emily Boland's Hunt & Gather Grazing Boards offers classes and delicious spreads of all sizes—from boxes for one sold at area markets to catered events up to 400 people.

The idea came to Emily Boland in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic: she started making charcuterie boards at home while she was a stay-at-home mom with her three young daughters. Boland's husband, Matt, is a nurse and worked on the Covid floor during the pandemic, so the girls were schooled from home. "I learned that I love making the boards," she says. By 2021 she started making charcuterie boards as a business and opened Hunt & Gather Grazing Boards in La Crosse.

Boland graduated from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with a degree in therapeutic recreation and a minor in psychology. "My résumé reads like I'm built for disability advocacy," she explains. But her new business was calling. "I'm a firm believer in stepping outside my comfort zone and just going for it," she says.

Every morning Boland tells her girls (currently ages 4, 8 and 10): "You are brave, kind, capable and loved," as a way to empower them. She credits her husband, who has worked on a medical surgery floor at Mayo Clinic Health System for 10 years, as "a huge reason why this business is even possible," she says. "Many days I am stressed from the kitchen and call him to do another grocery run."

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Hunt & Gather Grazing Boards creates charcuterie boards in sizes from single-person snack boxes all the way up to wedding reception bonanzas.

The grazing boards can be picked up at the business kitchen at 721 King St. in La Crosse or set up at a venue or in private homes. The largest group they have served is

400 for a wedding, according to Boland, who says they serve mostly boards during cocktail hour as "grazing before the meal." But they do offer the full meal and simply double the portion amount of meat, cheese, veggies and fruits, she says.

"There are so many possibilities with the business," says Boland. Customers can add on platters and salads, for example. "That's what makes this so customizable to what your guests want."

They also offer make-and-take classes both publicly and privately and in two sizes. "We have everything down to the cutting boards and knives. Folks walk away with the entire board, and they learn how we do it in our own kitchen," she explains.

Most recently at make-and-take classes, Boland offered cucumber and meat roses



Hunt & Gather Grazing Boards can be created to suit a wide range of needs from brunch to dessert and everything in between.

and taught how to chip and cut up cheeses. “We teach a few different ways of making a board, and people walk away with a few new techniques,” she says. Each class is different. “In some classes we focus on meat folding and different cheeses.”

Although some holiday classes might focus on certain elements, like hosting for

Thanksgiving, they offer skills to use year-round, she says.

Boland does much of the work herself, but she also has help with social media from graphic design consultant Hannah Coady of La Crosse, who does much of the website design and behind-the-scenes work, according to Boland.

In addition, Boland currently has one part-time staff person who does some of the prepping. Otherwise, Boland is the hands and heart behind both classes and boards.

FROM ADVOCACY TO SELF-STARTER

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helped me speak up for myself and others, and helped me to become a better business owner," she says. "I know my experiences led me to where I am right now."

Boland loves creating charcuterie boards because "they are just fun," she says. "There is something for everyone, and you get to explore your creativity." For those who bring their own charcuterie boards to social events, she insists, "It's like bringing art to a party. You are bringing people together over food."

BUILDING A PEOPLE-PLEASING BOARD

Boland offers a few suggestions for creating a simple board for your next gathering.

"The best cheeses and meats to use are the ones that your guests will enjoy," she says. For cheese, she recommends "a variety of hard and soft cheeses along with different colors to help the board pop." This might include a good white cheddar and red wine white cheddar, which are always crowd-pleasers on grazing boards, she says.

As for meats, you can use anything from prosciutto to meat sticks. "We have found that the most enjoyable boards are the ones where people see some of their favorites on the menu," Boland explains. If your guests prefer more meat, you might have more variety of meats. If they prefer fruits or veggies, you can add more of those. "There are a lot of options to make this the best board for you" she says.

Boland uses a variety of brands, including Columbus and Stone Ridge for meats and cheeses, and a wide variety of Harmony Cheese. "We have connected with a few different local businesses, such as Paulin's Provisions and Low Ridge Honey, but we're always looking for more ways to connect and support other local businesses," she says.

Grazing boards are best eaten immediately but can stay fresh 24-48 hours after they are made as long as they stay refrigerated, says Boland. **CRW**

Jan Wellik is a writer and educator in the La Crosse area.

STEP-BY-STEP BOARD MAKING

1 Grab your favorite cutting board and add grape clusters to corners and focal points to build around.



2 Add meat rivers and roses connecting the grapes.



3 Add your favorite hard cheeses around the meats you have just placed.



4 Place some soft cheeses on the board such as brie or goat cheese.



5 Add berries to the grapes and make berry medleys.



6 Fill in pockets with crackers, nuts, dried fruits and chocolates.



7 Grab your cutlery, and you are ready to serve your creation.



Boland suggests starting with two different kinds of meats and three to five different cheeses, such as white or yellow cheddar, goat cheese, brie, red wine marbled or white cheddar. In addition, you can add grapes, berries, nuts, crackers or chocolate.

She suggests starting by placing grapes on the board first, then move to meats, then place cheeses. You can add berries throughout in small clusters and fill in holes with nuts, crackers and chocolate. "Have fun with it and don't overthink it," she says. "Your guests will love the thought you've put into it."

If you are looking to make your board festive for the holidays, you might add special favorites like candy canes for accents, says Boland.

Most importantly, "have fun with it and be creative," she says. "Your family and friends will love that you created this grazing board just for them. It doesn't have to be perfect to be delicious!"

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DRESSING WITH DIGNITY

Clothes closets offer a welcoming atmosphere and fashion that feels good.

BY NICOLE CZARNOMSKI | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Left: A teen shopper looks through the selection of gently used clothing offered at the First Teen Clothes Closet.

Right: Lori Lunney, left, and Patty Shepard are among a dozen volunteers who organize and host shopping hours at the First Teen Clothes Closet.

Many teens define their sense of self by the clothing on their backs. Each day's events can be a fashion runway. However, if a family can barely afford the cost of groceries, rent, car payments, gas and other necessities, there isn't much left over for fashionable clothing.

BOUTIQUE EXPERIENCE FOR TEENS

The First Teen Clothes Closet, a ministry started by First Lutheran Church in Onalaska, is a boutique-style shopping experience housed at Trinity Lutheran Church on the North Side of La Crosse. "It's a boutique for teenagers in need to find gently used, fashionable clothing. It's open every Monday evening from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. or by appointment," says volunteer Lori Lunney.

Volunteer Patty Shepard adds, "It's a welcoming environment staffed by 12 volunteers who all help host store hours." Teens are given a clothes basket to shop for a free wardrobe: pants, tops, dresses, undergarments, socks, shoes and accessories. The First Teen Clothes Closet even offers toiletries like shampoo, conditioner, feminine products and ethnic hair kits. "The ethnic hair kits are purchased with assistance from salon owner Richelle Brunn, using a grant from The Women's Fund," she says.

NEW AND GENTLY USED CLOTHING IN A VARIETY OF SIZES

There is always a need for hoodies, leggings, coats and brand-name athletic shoes as well as bras and underwear. When donations are delivered, volunteers review the clothing to ensure it is clean, in good condition and fashionable. "Sometimes with monetary donations we can shop for brand-new clothing and shoes. We want teens to be able to find clothing they feel good in," says Lunney, noting that all socks and undergarments are purchased new.

She goes on to say the First Teen Clothes Closet tries to keep a variety of sizes in stock. Teens who may be size extra-small or extra-large can still leave with something they feel good in.

"Teens have enough on their plate these days; they shouldn't have to worry about clothing," Shepard says. While there is a recommended amount of clothing teens can take for each visit, volunteers try to allow them to take what they need. Teens are even sent out the door with all items in a reusable bag just like any other boutique clothing store.



Deb Keller, volunteer at The Children's Clothing Closet.

CHILDREN'S CLOTHING CLOSET

Trinity Lutheran Church is also host to a children's clothing closet serving families with infants through elementary age children. "The Children's Clothing Closet is for families that are financially insecure," volunteer Deb Keller says. "Most families need their money for food and housing, so even clean and safe clothing basics can be a burden."

While parents shop for clothing, kids can pick one toy or book to take with them. The Children's Clothing Closet always

needs coats, boots, underwear, socks and shoes in a variety of sizes.

"Collaboration is what makes the Children's Closet possible," Keller says. "There are so many volunteers who help make the Closet successful. There's a wonderful synergy within the walls of the Children's Closet." **CRW**

Nicole L. Czarnomski is a freelance writer in southeastern Minnesota who loves to shop for anything fashion related.

LITTLE HEARTS FOR HEALING

Onalaska's Kathleen Jensen turns yarn into positive thoughts for mental health.

BY JULIE NELSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Kathleen Jensen's The Little Heart Project has shared uplifting messages across at least 20 states since launching in April 2022.

Kathleen Jensen's words bubble out as she tells story after story of the simple, perhaps lifesaving, project she founded and created in her home in Onalaska.

If you have picked up a crocheted heart with a note of encouragement attached, you have experienced The Little Heart Project in action. At its core, the project is a random act of kindness, but Jensen says her larger goal is to reduce the stigma around mental health issues and, ideally, prevent a person from getting to a place where they feel suicide is the only answer.

25,000 HEARTS AND COUNTING

Despite her bubbly personality, Jensen knows what it's like to live with serious depression and daily thoughts of suicide. Jensen credits "a husband who will never leave me, a therapist who will never give up on me" and a series of treatments with the drug ketamine for pulling her out of an eight-year battle with her mental health. It was her therapist who first suggested a project in Texas involving crochet hearts as a tool for healing.

"I already knew how to crochet and thought, 'maybe I can't do a lot, but I can do this.'" So, in April 2022, she officially launched The Little Heart Project. Seventeen months later, Jensen had distributed 25,000 hearts with notes that have since been found in 20 states and four different countries. She has no idea how many other people have taken on the project and are doing their own version of it, but she encourages them all. "If you come to me with an idea, my answer is yes," she says. Some people crochet hearts, some knit them. A school group in Bangor uses Perler beads and attaches the resulting hearts to every backpack in the school.

REACHING THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING

Jensen does a lot of public speaking about the project (something she never anticipated when she started), which has led to amazing encounters with people who found just the message they needed attached to one of the hearts. "I've met so many incredible people; that's been the gift to me," she says.



MAKE YOUR OWN HEARTS
 Find crochet and knit patterns for making the little hearts at <https://www.thelittleheartproject.org/patterns/>. The website also includes downloadable PDF files to print the two-sided tags with uplifting messages and information about suicide prevention and hotlines.

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KNIT the RAINBOW

In addition to a full-time job, Jensen devotes 20 to 30 hours each week to the project. Her husband helps with tagging, her sister manages the website, her neighbor does graphic design and groups such as the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) crochet buckets and buckets of hearts. Her dream is to find the financial backing that would allow her to do the project full time.

Anyone is welcome to take the idea and run with it. Both knit and crochet patterns and 144 sayings can be found online at www.thelittleheartproject.org. Jensen loves hearing where hearts have been distributed and the impact they have made, but heart projects she never hears about are just as encouraged.

Jensen can't stress enough the importance of making it common to discuss mental health. "Talking about suicide does not cause suicide. Hopelessness causes suicide. You never know what someone else is going through," she says.

And you never know when a small crocheted heart will make someone's day. CRW

Julie Nelson is a regular contributor to Coulee Region Women and is looking forward to distributing the bag of hearts she received from Kathleen.



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MANAGING LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

How to find and keep your sense of self through changing roles and relationships.

BY ANASTASIA PENCHI | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

When was the last time you encountered a milestone in your life? Milestones are more than just baby's first steps or even high school graduation.

"We are developing throughout our whole life," says Monica Gorski, owner of Conscious Practice, holistic mental health in La Crosse. "New parts of us emerge at different points in our lives."

Sometimes, recognizing who we are—separate from our relationships with others, such as our parents—requires a concerted effort, as Cindy Erickson, owner of HeartJourney in La Crosse, says.

A young woman who was anxious and depressed sought out Erickson for help. It was clear the woman's emotions were tied to her sense of self—she dreamed of moving across the country, but stayed here because she was an only child and her parents wanted her nearby.

"That wasn't her dream—she had a different dream," says Erickson. "It was making her very, very anxious."

Erickson helped the young woman develop a new life plan using "baby steps." They set up a timeline with specific goals. The woman identified where she wanted to live. She found a roommate. She didn't even need the typical "How will I tell my parents?" planning session, as details came out during regular conversation.

"I think they saw her plan was so concrete and realistic," Erickson says, so her parents ultimately supported the move. The woman's mother even drove her across the country to her new home.



Monica Gorski, owner,
Conscious Practice



Cindy Erickson, owner,
HeartJourney

CONFLICTING EMOTIONS

Life is filled with transitions: moving out, marriage, career changes, parenthood (and empty nesting), divorce, loss of loved ones, retirement and more. And with each transition may come a range of emotions.

"We can acknowledge that different parts of us may have different feelings and reactions to what is happening, even if they seem contradictory," Gorski says. The birth of a child is a wondrous occasion, but it changes the lives of the parents. You may be thrilled about marrying your soulmate, while also mourning a loss of the independence you previously had.

"Really listening and allowing those feelings to flow" is key, Gorski says. "We move through the transition easier if we can acknowledge those small wounds."

FINDING SUPPORT

Gorski points out that many of the milestones in adulthood were traditionally celebrated within community as rites of passage, but today's society is often more focused on individual growth.

Finding a group to share the milestone with—whether that is friends, family, a formal support group for new parents or people experiencing grief—provides an "emotional container" in which to explore what you are feeling.

"We aren't made to go through these transitions alone," she says.

STILL YOURSELF

While it may seem that each new change in life brings a new identity—wife, mom, entrepreneur, boss, caregiver, retiree—taking on a new role does not erase the previous identity.

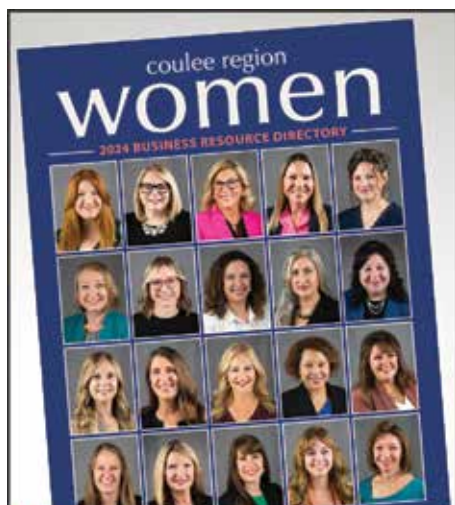
“It is really helpful to remember that the parts of us that are born over our lives don’t require the death of an old part,” Gorski says. “We hold in us all of those identities.” And while we are “relational beings,” who we are in relationship with others is not our entire identity.

“It’s just one piece of the tapestry that we are as multi-dimensional beings,” Gorski says. “Remembering and claiming our wholeness and inner diversity—relationships, interests, roles—and being attentive to our actual feelings can serve us through our losses and transitions.” **CRW**

Anastasia Penchi knows the value of supportive friends and therapy. She can be reached at callmeloislane@hotmail.com.

CINDY ERICKSON’S “BABY STEPS” TO REACH A GOAL

- 1 Take a deep breath. Close your eyes and visualize yourself feeling energized and fulfilled.
- 2 Make a step-by-step plan of what you need to do to accomplish this goal. You won’t know all the steps right away. List the ones you can think of now.
- 3 Take action on one step. Sometimes it helps to start with the easiest step, or the step you are most excited about. Congratulate yourself for accomplishing this step.
- 4 As you see other steps, add them to your list.
- 5 Take another step. Repeat any steps that might be helpful.
- 6 Create a timeline for the goal on a roll of paper. Freezer paper or a roll of paper from a craft store works.
- 7 Continue taking baby steps, one at a time.
- 8 Gradually fill in more details.
- 9 As details become clearer and the timeline is more specific and realistic, you will feel more and more confident you can accomplish your goal.
- 10 If you feel overwhelmed, stop and give yourself self-compassion. Say to yourself, “This is hard. Everyone feels like this sometimes. It’s going to be okay.”



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THE COULEE REGION WOMEN

SELF

gift guide

Turn the tables on gift giving with a few indulgences from local boutiques.

BY ELISE WEINBENDER | PHOTOS BY JORDANA SNYDER PHOTOGRAPHY

Amid the hustle of holiday shopping, we tend to think of ourselves last. Check off your own boxes this year and indulge in something just for you with our self-gift guide.



Elevate your space and your spirit with beautiful winter décor from **Practically Posh**. Find the perfect pieces to let your home décor ideas shine—like these glimmering trees and matching brass-toned vases.

Rust bottle brushes, \$17.99, \$13.99, \$8.99; brass vases, \$10.99; ornament, \$6.99; etched votive, \$6.99; wooden riser \$29.99.

Treat yourself to quality accessories that express your personal style. Nothing completes an outfit like the perfect purse, boots and earrings from **Shiny Objects**.

Hawk H20 Chestnut Suede boots, \$150; Nash purse, \$235; WorldsSoftest socks, \$12.99; Seth Barnum earrings, \$30.



Put yourself first with good-for-you skincare from **Larson's General Store**. Natural and locally made body and beauty products will add a moment of self-care into your busy day.

Driftless Skincare Citrus Foaming Soap, \$14; Driftless Skincare Carrot & Pumpkin Seed Eye Cream, \$18; Driftless Skincare Lavender Body Cream, \$16; Driftless Skincare Hibiscus & Evening Primrose Face Cream, \$20; assorted Driftless Skincare soaps, \$7 each; soap holder, \$8; sponge, \$22. ▼



◀ Make it a luxury night in with cozy flannel pajamas from **Touch of Class**. Curl up with a good book and a hot water bottle for an evening of “me” time.

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IRELAND—DIY STYLE

These 10 stops give you the flavor of the Emerald Isle on a drive-it-yourself tour.

BY DIANE RAAUM | PHOTOS BY DIANE RAAUM PHOTO



Among the sights you'll see on this tour of southern Ireland are the city of Dublin, the Black Castle remains in Wicklow (middle) and Miners Way (bottom).

Ireland is known for stone castles, seashore views, sheep and shamrocks. You can enjoy all these and more on a DIY (Drive It Yourself) adventure visiting the following 10 spots in southern Ireland. Discover the history of this country and enjoy its beautiful geography when driving and exploring at your own pace.

DUBLIN

Dublin is an easy starting point for your week of travel in Ireland. After booking your flight, book your lodging for your first and last night's stay in Dublin. If you are comfortable exploring and taking a chance on finding a bed-and-breakfast each day during the week you travel around the region, you'll gain the flexibility to spend more time in places you enjoy. If you are not comfortable winging it, you can easily book wonderful accommodations online prior to traveling.

The first thing to do at the airport after picking up your rental car is to familiarize yourself with driving on the left side of the road. Taking a spin in the parking lot to get the hang of it before you head out into Dublin is probably a good idea. Be sure to ask for an automatic transmission if you are not comfortable with shifting a manual car.

Dublin is the capital and also the largest city in Ireland. The River Liffey runs through this historical city recognized for



arts, education and industry. It is a global ranking city and fairly easy to get around in. The Temple Bar and district are popular for nightlife with many venues for listening to Irish music. Visit the Jameson Distillery to learn the secrets of making Irish whiskey and, if you desire, purchase your own personalized bottle of whiskey there. The Guinness Storehouse Brewery Tour is always on tap with the history of brewing and stout ales.

WICKLOW

Wicklow is a charming seaside town south of Dublin. Friendly people, shopping and small restaurants and pubs give an

Irish welcome to your countryside journey. An excellent place for a picnic lunch is the remains of the Black Castle, which is an easy walk from town. The remains of the castle stand on a rocky point with views of the town and of the incoming ships on the North Wicklow coast. The location offers one of the many Facebook- and Instagram-worthy photo opportunities on this trip, so begin clicking away.

GLENDALOUGH

Glendalough is famous for its scenery and history. The Glendalough Valley was carved by glaciers, and the two lakes here were formed when the ice melted. The monastic site built here offers architecture, monuments and archaeology from the late sixth century.





Don't miss iconic stops at (from left) Kilkenney Castle, Cahir Castle and Blarney Castle.

*If you ever go across the sea to Ireland, Then maybe at the closing of your day,
You will sit and watch the moon rise over Claddagh And see the sun go down on Galway Bay.*
— “Galway Bay” by Arthur Colahan

Walk through the sites and stroll on the easy walking trails, and history will come alive. Driving the countryside offers plenty of pictures of stone fences and sheep.

MINER'S WAY

Miner's Way is home to the Miner's Village, where mines and tunnels were once used to transport ore. The tramway and rail systems are gone now, but the remains of the ore crushers that were used can be seen here, and you get a glimpse into the lives of the past miners.

KILKENNY

Kilkenny is a bustling town full of historic buildings and is a very popular tourist stop. The Kilkenny Castle is located right in town, and this splendid castle was built in 1195 to control a fording point of the River Nore, where the towers and massive ditch were used for defense. There are lots of other sites to see in this town, including gardens, museums and cathedrals.

CAHIR CASTLE

Cahir Castle is one of the largest castles in Ireland. It is well preserved and has been used as a set in many movies. It is located

in the center of Cahir, County Tipperary. Guided tours are available, or view at your own pace. The small town offers shopping and Irish dining.

COBH

Cobh is a picture-perfect seashore town, and it is sure to steal your heart. Located on an island in Cork city's harbor, its views of the water include superb sunsets and sunrises. The large cruise ships passing through today dock in the same harbor as the Titanic did when it made its last stop there in 1912. The Titanic Glass Memorial Wall lists the names of the passengers on the Titanic, and the Titanic Experience Cobh visitor center is located right in town as well. The Cobh Heritage Center offers information about how Cobh was an embarkment point in Ireland's mass emigrations. Spike Island, known as Ireland's Alcatraz, is now a vacant prison and open to the public. A ferry gives rides throughout the day to this site.

BLARNEY CASTLE

Blarney Castle is now a partial ruin; however, there are still some rooms open to visit. The infamous Stone of Eloquence, better known as the Blarney Stone, is located

at the top of this castle. You may hang backward and upside down over a sheer drop to kiss the stone, which is said to give the gift of eloquent speech. Expect a very long line to climb to the top to smooch this rock in hopes of improving your communication skills. The gardens that surround the castle are beautiful and well maintained.

CLIFFS OF MOHER

The must-see Cliffs of Moher are located in County Clare. This popular destination of sea cliffs rises above the Atlantic Ocean, reaching a height of 702 feet and running for about 9 miles. Visitors are allowed to walk on the edge of the cliffs to experience the majestic scene. The sheer dropoff of the cliffs offers breathtaking views.

GALWAY

Galway is a scenic city located on the west coast of Ireland, known for its many festivals and traditional Irish music. It is the perfect way to end your DIY adventure in Ireland. CRW

Diane Raaum is the photo editor of Coulee Region Women. Her photography can be viewed and purchased at diane-raaum.pixels.com

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Community Calendar

ONGOING EVENTS

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

CheezLand Uke Band, Wed., 6-8 p.m., Moose Lodge, 1932 Ward Ave., cheezland.info@gmail.com, www.cheezlandukeband.com/

Coulee Country Embroiderers Chapter of EGA 2nd Mon. (Sept.-June), 9:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., Our Redeemer Parish Hall, La Crosse, <https://tinyurl.com/egaccc>.

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

Holmen Area Rotary Club, Wed., 7 a.m., Holmen Community Center, holmenrotary@outlook.com.

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

La Crosse Area Quilters 4th Tues., 6:30 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel-Conference Center, Onalaska, www.lacrosseareaquilters.org.

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

La Crosse Lions, 2nd and 4th Wed., 6:30 p.m., Lunda Center, Western Technical College; www.lacrosselions.org

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

La Crosse Rotary East Mon., noon-1 p.m., Schmidy's Bar & Restaurant, La Crosse, www.lacrosserotaryeast.org.

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

League of Women Voters Lunch and Learn, 2nd Wed., 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Waterfront Restaurant, www.lwvlacrosse.org.

NAMI Support Groups
See namilacrossecounty.org/support for programs, times and locations.

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

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

Rotary After Hours, 2nd and 4th Tues., 6 p.m., The Main Event Center, La Crosse, www.rotaryafterhours.org.

Valley View Rotary, Wed., 7:30-8:30 a.m., La Crosse Family YMCA-Houser Branch, Onalaska, www.valleyviewrotary.com.

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

Women with Purpose, 2nd Wed., 11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center, cr.wwpwi.org.

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

CALENDAR EVENTS

DECEMBER

Dec. 1-31, Rotary Holiday Lights, open daily 5-10 p.m., Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 5-9 p.m., Riverside Park, La Crosse.

Dec. 1-2, 8, 10, 15-16, *A Nice Family Christmas*, 7:30 p.m. Fri. and Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theater Blackbox Series, Weber Center for Performing Arts, <https://lacrossetheatre.org/>.

Dec. 1-3, 7-8, 10, 14-17, *The Wizard of Oz*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs. and Fri., 2 p.m. Sat. and Sun., La Crosse Community Theater, Weber Center for Performing Arts.

Dec. 1-10, *The Wolves*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat, 2 p.m. Sun., Toland Theater, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse, www.uwlax.edu/theatre-arts.

Dec. 1-2, No Mistakes Zentangle Retreat, 6-9 p.m. Fri., 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat., Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration required. www.fscenter.org

Dec. 2-3, A Viterbo Christmas: The Holly and the Ivy, 7:30 p.m. Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Conservatory for the Performing Arts, Viterbo University, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center

Dec. 2, Old Fashioned Christmas, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

Dec. 2, Holiday Happening at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, 1-6 p.m., S3361 Hwy. 131, La Farge. www.kvr.state.wi.us.

Dec. 2, Frothbite Beer & Bites Festival, 2-6 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

Dec. 2, Ugly Sweater 5k Run, 4:15 p.m., Riverside Park

Dec. 2, I Love the '90s Tour, 7-9 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

Dec. 8-10, La Crosse Dance Centre's 34th Annual Nutcracker Ballet, 7:30 p.m. Fri., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Dec. 8, Looney Lutherans' *Hold the Lute*, 7:30-9:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

Dec. 8, *Sana Illahe*, 7:30 p.m., Pump House Regional Arts Center, www.thepumphouse.org.

Dec. 9, Great River Makers Market Holiday Market, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., La Crescent Area Event Center.

Dec. 9, La Crosse Community Theater Holiday Gala and *The Wizard of Oz* performance, cocktail hour at 5 p.m., Weber Center for Performing Arts.

Dec. 13, League of Women Voters Lunch & Learn, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Waterfront Restaurant, www.lwvlacrosse.org.

Dec. 13, *A Church Basement Ladies Christmas*, 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Dec. 14-15, String Ties Holiday Show, 7:30 p.m., Pump House Regional Arts Center, www.thepumphouse.org.

Dec. 16, Jingle Bell Walk/Run and Rudolph's Dash for kids, 7 a.m., R.W. Houser Family YMCA, Onalaska, www.laxymca.org.

Dec. 16, The Nativity Experience, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration required. www.fscenter.org.

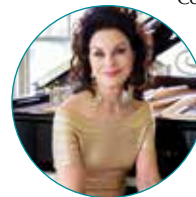
Dec. 16, 125 Strong Holiday Celebration, La Crosse Symphony Orchestra, Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.lacrossesympphony.org

Dec. 16, Highway 61 Concert Series: Kickin' Up Country Christmas, 7-10 p.m., St. Cecilia Theatre, Winona

Dec. 18, Macy Gray & The California Jet Club, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Dec. 21, Winter Solstice Labyrinth Walk, 4-7 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Dec. 21, Longest Night: An Evening of Prayer and Reflection, 6:30-8 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration required, www.fscenter.org.



Dec. 23, An Intimate Christmas with Lorie Line 2023, 3 p.m., Weber Center for Performing Arts

Dec. 31, VARC New Year's Eve Gala, supporting VARC Child & Youth programming, 6 p.m.-midnight, The Cargill

Room, Waterfront Restaurant & Tavern, La Crosse, www.varcinc.com/gala.

JANUARY

Jan. 5-6, Women's Christmas and Epiphany Day of Rest, 5:30-8 p.m. Fri., 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Sat., Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration required, www.fscenter.org.

Jan. 7, 14 & 21, The Complete Bartok String Quartets, 3-5 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Jan. 10, League of Women Voters Lunch & Learn, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Waterfront Restaurant, www.lwvlacrosse.org.

Jan. 12-13, Johnsmith, 7:30 p.m., Pump House Regional Arts Center, www.thepumphouse.org.

Jan. 13, Highway 61 Concert Series: Rumours & Dreams, 7-10 p.m., St. Cecilia Theatre, Winona.

Jan. 15, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Celebration, 7 p.m., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center.

Jan. 18, Women in Medicine workshop, 4-7 p.m., Gunderson Hotel & Suites La Crosse, hosted by Gunderson Health System and Hilary Hoff with Northwestern Mutual. Register at <https://fb.me/e/3h88K6A1j>.

Jan. 18, Yesterday Once More – The Sound of Karen Carpenter, 7:30-9:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

Jan. 20, Mallrats Presents MTV Unplugged, 7:30 p.m., Lyche Theater, Weber Center for Performing Arts.

Jan. 21, Doktor Kaboom: Look Out! Science is Coming, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., La Crosse Community Theater, Theater for Young Audiences Series, Weber Center for Performing Arts.

Jan. 26-27, Heart of La Crosse – Dr. Pendleton's Laughter & Improv-erization Show, 7:30 p.m., Pump House Regional Arts Center, www.thepumphouse.org.

FEBRUARY

Feb. 2-4, *Tar Beach*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat, 2 p.m. Sun., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

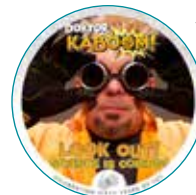
Feb. 3, Matt Vee and The Killer Vees Celebrate the Music of Neil Diamond, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.



Dec. 8, Looney Lutherans' *Hold the Lute*, 7:30-9:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

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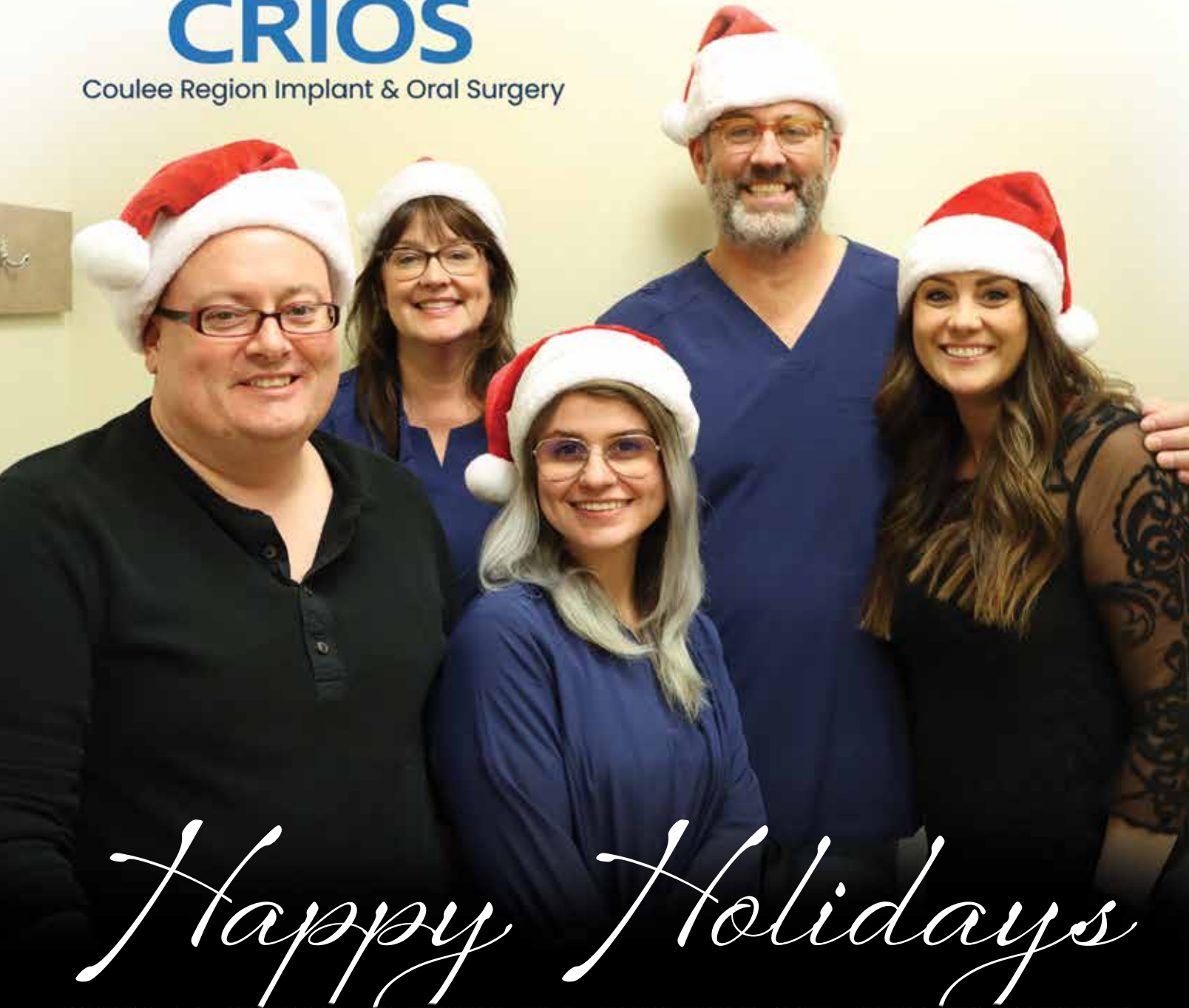
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