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# women

AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE



## How Does Your Garden Grow?

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Pictured on cover: From left, GROW La Crosse operations director Linda Vale, interim executive director Kari Bersagel Braley and outreach and communication coordinator Bonnie Martin. Photo by Jordana Snyder Photography.

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*Knee Joint*



Photo by Diane Raaum Photo



**M**y Grandma Peterson was a wizard with plants. She had a little sunroom off one side of her modest farmhouse that was filled with them. Plants dangled from hangers and rested on the floor, their found pots set on plastic coffee can lids. I remember the spiky, funky aloe vera, a few varieties of cactus and countless green, draping things. There was nothing fancy about this space and its Depression-era thrift, but those plants thrived. It's what I remember most about Grandma.

Her green thumb passed easily down to my mother, who displayed her collection of plants in macramé hangers she braided herself or in whimsical ceramic planters picked up at garage sales and arranged on our bay window sill. She grew philodendrons and geraniums, ivy and ferns, Christmas cactuses that bloomed right on cue. She trained vines to grow around window frames and knew just where to cluster sun-lovers for optimum health and colorful impact. She even bathed them all to ward off dreaded spider mites.

Once, when my older sister Sue was young, she got angry with my mother and retaliated by pinching off the leaves of one of her favorite plants. They grew back better than ever, and Sue was hooked. She, like my mother, can grow anything, and has whole windows and sun porches devoted to her plants. They pass plants back and forth, share offshoots and discuss them like children: "Is that from the philodendron slip I gave you? It's doing *so well*." "My spider plant had

babies! Do you want one?" "Do you know what you need here? A nice little jade plant."

My house, on the other hand, is where plants go to die. Sue made the mistake of leaving her precious charges with me once while traveling, and they foundered until another sister intervened with a watering can. "They need more than you think," she advised. Plants were gifted to me and died, over and again. My great-aunt's China Doll, the ivy I started from my wedding bouquet, a magnolia—all gone. It's no accident the plants haphazardly lining the half wall in my kitchen are succulents. If they don't meow or demand a snack, they are on their own.

I am in awe of those who have the patience, attention and devotion to grow not only plants, but entire gardens. All of us at *Coulee Region Women* are, and we are celebrating summer, new opportunities and growing optimism with this issue's theme: "How Does Your Garden Grow?" In fairness to us all—those with green thumbs and those without—we considered the many ways women promote growth in our community. We feature gardeners, of course, and the gorgeous gardens they produce, but we also lift up those around us who grow families, grow health, grow businesses and more.

The women behind GROW La Crosse, our cover women, grow a love of gardening and earth-grown food in kids as they cultivate school gardens. Amy Jo Moe combines the healing power of plants with a sweet store in Winona. Deep Rooted CSA grows tomatoes and, with them, inspiration. The Kane Street Community Garden volunteers grow an astonishing amount of food as well as accessibility for all who wish to dig in. Nurturing mental health is the goal of youth directors at the Boys & Girls Clubs, and business is blooming in Jackson Plaza thanks to women entrepreneurs.

Combine all that with flowers galore, and we think you'll agree that this issue blossoms with inspiration. It's certainly made me feel better about what I can and can't grow. My growing children, long-cultivated friendships and commitment to this community remind me that growth isn't limited to the cobweb-covered plants on my half wall, as I recently explained to Sue.

"Are you sure those aren't spider mites?" she replied. "You should try bathing them."

*Betty*

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Moon Tunes

## SUMMER FAVORITES RETURN!

After a yearlong hiatus, many of the Coulee Region's favorite summer events are back in full (or nearly full) swing in 2021. Evenings and weekends this summer will be filled with music, art, stories and more. Here's a snapshot of what you can look forward to.

**La Crosse Concert Band—Wednesdays 7 p.m.** Pack up your lawn chair and head to Riverside Park in La Crosse to enjoy an evening of themed music by the La Crosse Concert Band. Concerts will be held Wednesdays June 9-23 and July 7-28. [www.lacrosseconcertband.org](http://www.lacrosseconcertband.org).

**Moon Tunes—Thursdays 5:30-8 p.m.** Don't put away those lawn chairs—there's more music to come from favorite local bands. Performances take place Thursdays June 3-17, July 15-29 and August 5-26 in Riverside Park. [www.moontuneslacrosse.com](http://www.moontuneslacrosse.com).

**Artspire—June 12, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.** Enjoy music, art and more at the Artspire Art Fair & Sale, held outside the Pump House Regional Arts Center in La Crosse. [artspire.thepumphouse.org](http://artspire.thepumphouse.org).

**La Crosse Storytelling Festival—July 23-24.** Located at the Pump House La Crosse (50 guests) and virtually, the fest begins with Tales of the Creepy and Scary Friday night at 6 p.m., then continues 10:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Saturday with performances and workshops. [www.lacrossestoryfest.com/2017-festival](http://www.lacrossestoryfest.com/2017-festival).

**Art Fair on the Green—July 24, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.** Back for one day only—but with free admission—this beloved juried art fair will be held in a new location: Myrick Park in La Crosse. [www.artfaironthegreen.org](http://www.artfaironthegreen.org).

**Riverfest—June 30-July 4.** The granddaddy of all summer celebrations, Riverfest La Crosse offers music, food and fun galore, culminating in its famous Fourth of July fireworks display over the Mississippi River. [www.riverfestlacrosse.com](http://www.riverfestlacrosse.com).



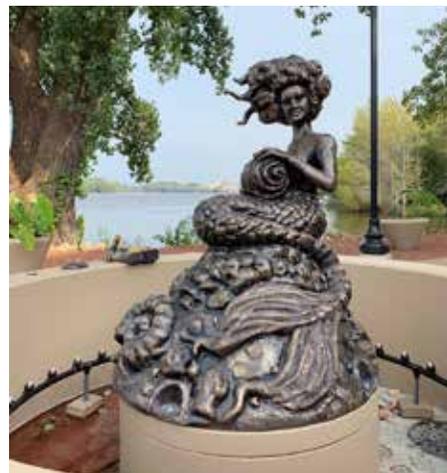
Drift Bikes in Riverside Park

## DRIFT BIKE SHARE

Along the river, through towns, on the marsh trails—the opportunities for biking in La Crosse are endless, and a new opportunity opens up options for residents, commuters or tourists who “drift” in for a visit. Drift Bike Share, launched in April, provides rental bikes at eight locations throughout downtown La Crosse, offering an alternative and environmentally friendly means of transportation for running errands, getting to work or sightseeing.

Launched by La Crosse Neighborhoods, Inc., and Koloni, an Iowa-based bike-sharing company, Drift Bike Share offers 40 bikes for rent from eight points throughout downtown La Crosse. The distinctive orange bikes can be rented via an app by purchasing a membership at \$10 per month, \$25 per season or \$50 per year. The bikes can also be rented on a short-term basis for \$1 per 30 minutes. New riders can enjoy a free 60-minute ride, and users can rent up to five bikes at a time for families and small groups.

For information on how and where to rent bikes through Drift Bike Share, go to [lacrosseneighborhoods.org/drift](http://lacrosseneighborhoods.org/drift).



Mami Wata, a Cameroon mermaid of the sea and river, perches on a point where three rivers meet.

## THE WORLD EXPANDS AT THE INTERNATIONAL GARDENS

If you're just returning to the International Friendship Gardens in Riverside Park in La Crosse after a long quarantine, you'll find a new garden to enjoy: the Cameroon garden just west of the Visitor Center. This garden celebrates the sister relationship between La Crosse and Kumbo, Cameroon, with colors featured in the Cameroon flag and artwork crafted to celebrate Cameroon's history and rich cultural traditions. Meet the mermaid Mami Wata and the Sense Pass King, inspired by myths and stories that celebrate women spirits and heroes, and enjoy strolling under metal raffia palm trees. To learn more, or to become a volunteer in the gardens, go to [www.riversidegardens.org](http://www.riversidegardens.org).



## TAKE A STROLL THROUGH THE GARDEN

Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR) will host a Garden Walk Friday, July 9, 4-7 p.m. and Saturday, July 10, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Eight gardens, located in and around La Farge, will feature prairie plants, flowers and vegetables. Tickets will be available on line at [kickapooofriends.org](http://kickapooofriends.org) or at the KVR and some of the gardens. The cost is \$20 for the weekend or \$5 a garden. (Children under 18 are free with an adult.) Social distancing recommendations will be followed, and masking encouraged and may be required at some gardens.

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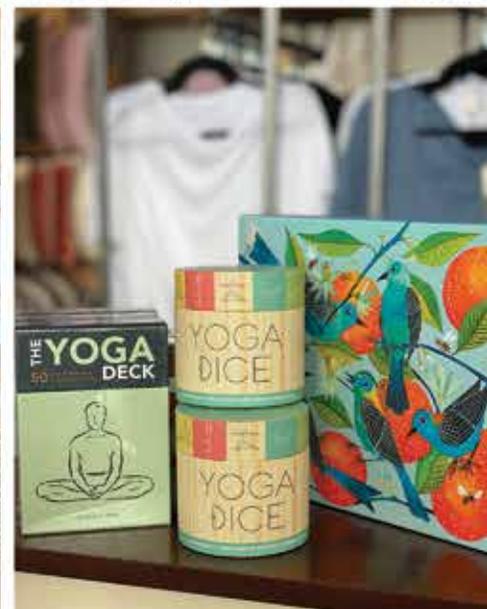
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The staff and board of GROW La Crosse are passionate about getting kids digging in the dirt and learning where their food comes from. From left, Jennifer Klein, Linda Vale, Amy Sherrill, Kari Bersagel Braley, Sarah Pember Giannini, Katie Wagoner and Bonnie Martin.

## One Bite at a Time

**GROW La Crosse uses school gardens to encourage kids to dig into veggies and nature.**

BY JULIE NELSON | PHOTOS BY JORDANA SNYDER PHOTOGRAPHY

**K**ari Bersagel Braley is a mom and educator who wants to see her kids—all kids, really—develop healthy eating habits. So, once upon a time, she and a group of other concerned women approached State Road Elementary in La Crosse with an idea that would get kids outside, offer them hands-on learning and open their minds to healthy foods and new flavors. Sure, there were potential obstacles: the project would involve reallocating some playground space for a garden, and the space would be flourishing in the summer when kids are not in school. But the group's passion and enthusiasm won the day, and GROW La Crosse was born.

### PROPAGATING NEW LOCATIONS

State Road and, soon after, Hamilton elementary schools dedicated time and space for kids to learn about where healthy foods come from. Nine years later, the growing spaces

have become so popular, other schools and organizations are coming to GROW asking to get a garden started. "It's very exciting. That shows me we are doing something meaningful and doing it well," says Bersagel Braley, the co-founder, then program director and now interim executive director of the organization.

GROW maintains the gardens and leads students in six garden lessons each school year. Linda Vale is the organization's operations director. "This is project-based, hands-on, full sensory learning. Kids don't all naturally have a palate for vegetables, so we encourage them to explore textures and tastes and describe what it is they do and don't like," she says. When students come to the garden, they may be able to crush a mint leaf in their hands and smell it, or they may be able to take a bite of a pepper and describe how hot it is.

GROW gardens are now blooming in seven different locations in La Crosse and La Crescent. As kids become more familiar with

healthy foods, they begin to make healthier choices at home, too. "We teach kids that even if they don't have room for a garden where they live, they can still make nutritious choices at the grocery store," says Bonnie Martin, GROW's outreach and communication coordinator.

### SAVORING NEW FLAVORS AND PEACE

As the gardens grow, the produce routinely ends up in the school's cafeteria, providing another opportunity for students to sample goodies such as fresh salsa, slices of cucumber at the salad bar and fresh raspberries. When the students have been involved with the care of the plants, they are more interested in trying the finished product. And as any parent knows, the more you try something, the more likely you will learn to like it.

Vale also sees how the green space affects kids' behaviors. "Grabbing a handful of raspberries before school provides natural

“Kids come to the garden during recess, and say, ‘How are we helping today?’ And they know that in the garden, they walk slow, and they talk slow, and they’re going to be helpful. They leave with a sense of accomplishment and knowing they have found a soft, quiet place to recharge.”

—Linda Vale, GROW La Crosse



GROW La Crosse volunteers lead kids at schools throughout La Crosse and La Crescent in gardening activities, teaching them new skills and giving them the satisfaction of planning, planting and enjoying their own gardens.

energy, helps regulate blood sugar and allows kids to focus in their morning classes.” On the other end of the spectrum, the garden provides a respite for students looking for a quieter place. “Kids come to the garden during recess, and say, ‘How are we helping today?’ And they know that in the garden, they walk slow, and they talk slow, and they’re going to be helpful,” says Vale. “They leave with a sense of accomplishment and knowing they have found a soft, quiet place to recharge.”

### GROWING PARTNERSHIPS

Recently, GROW La Crosse merged with Hillview Urban Agriculture, a move that became highly beneficial during the pandemic. The merger included the use of the horticulture center on Seventh and Vine streets that is part of the Western Technical College campus, and it provided an opportunity to record video lessons that were later shared with students. Going forward, the horticulture center will allow kids to get into the garden all year round. “The partnership with Western has been amazing,” says Vale.

The future holds even more exciting opportunities for the school gardens to expand. The GROW team sees the Washburn hoop house as an ideal space to offer summer school programming, and students who started in the gardens in elementary school are now requesting their middle and high schools offer a similar growing space. Increased

interest in horticulture among students gives Western an opportunity to offer early college credit to high school students who are learning in the greenhouse on their campus and to attract them as full-time Western students after graduation. Western students could then serve as interns for GROW, bringing the entire project full circle.

As GROW organizers look to provide a learning experience for kids from pre-K all the way through college, they have learned how to use technology to engage a wider audience, in all kinds of weather. They are excited to provide more learning opportunities using the new hydroponic growing system at the greenhouse. They also hope to expand their reach into the community, providing more family education, “so when those kids do get really excited and come home and say, ‘We had this lesson at school in the garden and I want to try this,’ the parents have some more resources to make sure they’re able to continue that support at home, too,” says Martin.

“Hopefully, that sets students up for that success of carrying these healthy eating habits throughout their life,” adds Vale.



### BRINGING GROW LA CROSSE LESSONS HOME

For those looking to encourage healthier eating in their own families, GROW’ers recommend leading by example and being willing to try new and different foods. They also suggest making healthy snacking as easy as possible by having fresh fruits and veggies cut up and simple to find. And if your efforts fail, know that you are not alone. Bersagel Braley will be the first to admit that, despite her best efforts, her kids don’t always eat the way she had hoped they would. “I give myself some grace in that regard and hope that, as they become adults, they will at least know how to make healthier choices and will do so eventually.”

Bersagel Braley is as enthusiastic as ever about the potential for GROW and the healthy habits it promotes. She knows sometimes this begins at the most elementary level—one bite at a time. **CRW**

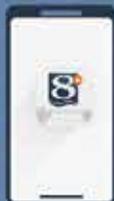
*Julie Nelson is much better at killing plants than growing them and is suitably impressed at the number of gardens GROW is able to maintain.*

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# THE HEALING POWER OF PLANTS

Amy Jo Moe's Green Thumb Artistry brings sunshine and peace to downtown Winona.

BY ELIZABETH TEVIS | PHOTOS BY JANELLE KIEFFER PHOTOGRAPHY



Amy Jo Moe has filled Green Thumb Artistry's space in Winona with plants and positive energy, providing area residents with the same sense of peace she finds with her hands in the soil.

**R**ooted among piles of Spanish moss and pots of jade, fiddle leaf fig and rattlesnake plant in Winona's Green Thumb Artistry shop are the stories of profound love that inspired it. And to hear owner Amy Jo Moe tell them in her sunny space is to witness the power of relationship that brings plants and people—as well as a community—to life.

"They want to know how to take care of something and watch it grow," Moe says of the diverse customers who frequent her houseplant store, including many who visit weekly. "It's from young to old. It's college students. It's men. It's women. Everybody."

## CREATING A HAPPY PLACE

Despite the pandemic, Green Thumb Artistry has thrived under Moe's approach, informed by years of experience in social work. "When they're planting a plant or playing in soil," Moe says of individuals struggling with anxiety or depression, "their heart rate comes down. Mental-health wise, plants have just been good for people during the pandemic."

Moe, a self-described plant addict, says sales through the pandemic increased. "I think part of that was people weren't traveling and were spending more time in their home. They wanted something to take care of. Something to brighten up their home."

Customers describe Green Thumb Artistry as their happy place. "They like the space," she explains. "They like the positivity of it." Tall windows and sunlit shelves provide an ideal setting for plants, local and fair trade art, décor and self-care items, as well as events from engagement and graduation photo sessions to birthday and bachelorette parties or business team-building.

These days Moe also packages her plant projects to go and plans to host outdoor warm-weather plant workshops. She's also begun offering

plant memorials featuring beloved pets' bowls and toys, and she even offers to take in distressed plants to help diagnose and return them to health.

## FINDING HEALING IN THE SOIL

Moe credits her mom and grandmothers, who loved gardening and terrariums—a popular offering in the shop and the topic of many workshops—for introducing her to the fun of playing in the dirt and the empowerment born of time spent learning among plants. "They are my therapy, that's for sure," she says.

Moe founded her business after her daughter, Sophia, was killed in a car accident. She says she couldn't return to social work, and instead, with encouragement from her son, Jack, and husband, Rick, she turned to the creative and healing potential she knew plants offered—and that she now extends to others.

"It makes me feel better," says Ellie Reed, one of Sophia's friends who now serves as manager of Moe's shop. "It brings you peace."

Moe smiles as she reflects on the wholehearted embrace she's received from the Winona business community in her endeavor—from collaborative classes at Blooming Grounds Coffee House to advice from Flowers on Broadway to a good-natured sidewalk sign war with nearby Yarnology.

"Winona has been awesome," she enthusiastically affirms. "Our patrons and the community have welcomed us with open arms." Open arms and, if Moe has her way, dirt-happy hands and hearts, too. **CRW**

*Elizabeth Tevis is a plant-loving gardener and librarian based in Winona. She holds a master's in literary nonfiction and is completing her MA in library science through UW-Madison.*



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From left, Julie Diermeier and Renee Thies run with Moms on the Run Onalaska coach Lynn Frise. The coaching program welcomes women of all ages and abilities and has created a community of friends among the participants.

## It's Not Just About the Body

Exercise helps women of all ages build strong bodies, social connections and mental wellness.

BY SAM STROOZAS | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Sometimes exercising can be intimidating. Older women may have even been discouraged from it in their youth. But no matter their age, Coulee Region women, their coaches and their doctors now understand the power of exercise to build not only strong bodies, but also friends and happiness.

### MORE THAN MOMS AND BORN RUNNERS

Moms on the Run Onalaska coaches, sisters Chris Davis and Lynn Frise, work with their runners to build an environment of encouragement and community through practice, compassion and the power of friendship. Moms on the Run is a franchise with groups all over the country; Davis bought the franchise chapter for Onalaska in January 2020. Because of Covid-19, they couldn't start classes until August 2020. Davis has been running since she was 10, and Frise

was a high school coach for cross country and track in the Onalaska School District. They are both personal trainers as well.

A common misconception of the group is that it is only for moms, but Davis said that isn't true: any woman can join. "You don't have to be a mom to join. I feel like we have all become friends; we are in a group text and talk every day," she says.

Women join Moms on the Run Onalaska for myriad reasons—building endurance, getting out of the house or having a safe social activity during Covid-19. Regardless of the reason, the friendships the group has created are unbreakable.

"The bonds I have watched form are incredible. Some of them were never runners and used this as a way to meet people or get in shape, but it definitely harbored friendships," Davis says.

Adapting their sport for Covid-19 wasn't as difficult as others.

“The reason you do exercise shouldn’t be to lose weight. It is part of a mind and body experience; it is really a form of self-care.”

—Dr. Elizabeth Cogbill, Gundersen Health System



Moms on the Run Onalaska franchise owner and coach Chris Davis, left, says the training program offers both physical and social benefits for participants like Fabiana Burns, center, and Stacey Komperud.

They still maintain social distancing during class and do not share equipment. In the spring, they met twice a week, but for the summer there are options to meet once or three times per week. Some runs begin at the Great River Landing trailhead in Onalaska, but during winter’s shorter days, the group opted to run on lit sidewalks.

Typically, they run 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the level of participants. They may run an endurance run, a slow distance or a tempo run. The group starts and ends with stretches to warm up their bodies and do core work.



Dr. Elizabeth Cogbill, internal medicine physician and geriatrician at Gundersen Health System in La Crosse

years doing stuff with them. Now it is time I can do something for myself,” she says.

Krueger hopes more women will join Moms on the Run, even if they’re a little nervous about starting or getting back into running. “If you really want to do it, don’t let fear stop you,” she says. “It is a great group, and everyone is so welcoming.”

After classes, Frise has noticed how proud her fellow runners feel of themselves. Whether they had a bad day or didn’t feel like running, she says they are always happy they came to class and feel better afterward.

“A big part of Moms on the Run is emphasizing that you don’t have to be a runner,” she says. “Maybe you haven’t run in years, but it’s for any ability. We are here for everyone, from a beginner to an advanced runner.”

Joining exercise later in life is becoming more common as adults look for ways to improve bone density, endurance and balance to protect them as they age. Mental health is another benefit of physical activity, especially in group settings.

### A NEW FORM OF SELF-CARE

Elizabeth Cogbill, M.D., an internal medicine physician and geriatrician at Gundersen Health System in La Crosse, says that many of her patients have felt isolated during Covid-19 because their normal exercise routines were disrupted.

Some of her patients previously used the YMCA, attended an aquatics class or

participated in group exercise, but when classes were canceled last year due to Covid-19, and with many being hesitant about returning, the disruption has impacted their mental health. Dr. Cogbill says that during the pandemic exercise looks different because of what options are accessible. The key is finding an activity you actually enjoy, rather than forcing yourself to work out.

“For some of my patients who don’t identify as lifelong exercisers, it can be really intimidating to try to start an exercise program. But even really small steps make a big difference,” she says.

Dr. Cogbill says that exercise benefits all spaces of your life. While for some patients, especially for women, there can be pressure on participating in exercise for weight loss based on societal stigmas and body-shaming, exercise should be more focused on a healthy mind than weight loss, even though women have been persuaded to believe the latter.

“The reason you do exercise shouldn’t be to lose weight,” she says. “It is part of a mind and body experience; it is really a form of self-care.”

During the pandemic, she has been talking a lot about mental health with her patients and how exercise can be used to support the mind. She reminds them that it is important to pay attention to how you feel during exercise—what are you thinking about, what are your goals and how does exercise fit into your life? It can be as simple as walking a dog or more involved, like participating in a virtual yoga or Pilates class, but regardless of its form, exercise can fit into your routine if you embrace its adaptability. **CRW**

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## *How Does Your Garden Grow?*

Explore the beauty of flowers from simple annuals to an Onalaska couple's one-of-a-kind daylilies.

BY HEIDI OVERSON | PHOTOS BY DIANE RAAUM PHOTO

If you're not a fan of winter, you've enthusiastically embraced spring—and now summer—with grateful joy. Winter coats and mittens went to the back of the closet, and out came the gardening gloves.

How is your gardening going so far? Do you still have some spots to fill with flowers but aren't quite sure what kind? Here's a little guide to planting everything from annuals to perennials, plus a spotlight on

a very special Coulee Region couple who bring their yard to life with a brilliant showcase of gorgeous daylilies, hostas and more.

### ANNUALS INVITE EXPERIMENTATION

We tend to have a love-hate affair with annuals—we love them when they're alive and hate it when they leave us. Nonetheless, they bring us joy while they're here.

Dave and Aurora Myers have turned their rural Onalaska home into an oasis of summer color. As shown here and on p. 21, their garden includes more than 200 varieties of hostas and daylilies, many of the latter unique hybrids they developed themselves.



What's really great about annuals is that you can grow them in a garden, around your house or in planters and pots. If you're not happy with a particular annual, you can say goodbye to it at the end of its blooming cycle and try something different the following year. For flower lovers, browsing the rows of annuals in a greenhouse is like being a child in a huge candy store—you want one of everything.

Rising Sun is one of several Amish greenhouses in rural Viroqua offering flowers and advice to regional gardeners and homeowners.

One favorite with the greenhouse's owner are geraniums: easy to grow, the roots don't need a lot of room and they come in a variety of gorgeous colors and thrive in full sun. Other best-selling annuals include petunias—which hummingbirds love—along with hydrangeas and calibrachos, which all enjoy part sun and grow beautiful blossoms.

Don't be afraid to mix different kinds of annuals together in a garden or pot. Just make sure they have the same sun or shade and watering requirements.

If you'd like to pot your annuals, Rising Sun suggests planting six plants to a pot, and three plants to a large watering-can planter. It takes about a month for them to mature into beautiful blossoms that will brighten your home and your days.

## PERENNIALS PROVIDE LASTING BEAUTY

These plants will become good friends that return every year, so heed your parents' old advice: Choose them wisely, and treat them well.

Valley Market in Coon Valley offers a large variety of perennials. They suggest that before you choose your plants, make sure you know your zone. The Coulee Region's zone is 4b (you can check [planthardiness.ars.usda.gov](http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov) and enter your zip code to find your zone,

but your greenhouse will know as well). They also suggest reading your plants' stakes carefully, as they will indicate how much water and sun each plant needs.

One employee at Valley Market has had wonderful results planting miniature roses, as they grow very well and come in a variety of colors. She also pointed out a perennial better known for its unique foliage, the Brise d'Angjou (Jacob's Ladder). This is a great pick for people who want a plant that grows well in the shade. It fills your space with green and cream-colored leaves and delicate flowers in the spring.

Most perennials come with stakes indicating where to plant each of them, which is extremely helpful to novice gardeners. Coloratus is a "front of the garden" dense spreader with an evergreen vine and small leaves that turn purplish in the fall. Hidcote, a variety of English lavender (*Lavandula*) works best in the middle of the garden, as does lupine with its dramatic flower spikes and "May Night," a *Salvia* or meadow sage. If you'd like to create a butterfly and hummingbird sanctuary, these and other perennials will do the trick. Valley Market has a section devoted to flowers for butterfly and hummingbird gardens.

## THE SHARING GARDEN

Dave and Aurora Myers believe that a garden is just no good unless it can be shared, and they've done their share of sharing, welcoming friends, family and former co-workers to the three-quarter-acre backyard paradise near Onalaska they've cultivated for the last 26 years.

The garden's crown jewels are more than 200 varieties of daylilies and hostas.

Dave, a former biology teacher, spends his summers hybridizing the daylilies to create new varieties. "We simply love them. They're easy to grow, and they remind me of the orchids I enjoyed raising years ago," he says.

There are countless varieties of daylilies, especially when one hybridizes. Daylilies bloom from the end of June into July, when they're in full bloom, and all the way to September. They open up during the day and die at night. New buds open every day.

"They're just so pretty, I've always had a hard time tossing any away, so that's when we started giving them to anyone who was interested," says Aurora. "That's how our memorial flowers became a big thing. One of our friends came and chose one to grow. She named it after her mother, who had recently passed. Now many people come and pick out their memorial flowers."

Both Dave and Aurora work hard tending to their flowers, and they strive to share their passion with as many people as possible.

"We cultivate our own younger gardening friends," says Aurora. "In the summer, we have them come over and choose what flowers they want, and they return in the fall to take them home."

"We love encouraging young people to garden," adds Dave. "I even got my nurse over here, starting about 10 years ago. She comes and gets something to take home and plant every year."

The couple enjoys having people tour their flower gardens filled with perennials and annuals that bloom at different times—there's always something to enjoy, no matter what month one comes to visit.

Why do their flowers grow so well? The black loam soil certainly helps, but the main reasons have to be the Myerses' TLC and generosity. The flowers seem to know how much happiness they bring to people, and they know they'll be shared. They react by growing to their maximum, joyous splendor. **CRW**

*Heidi Overson really enjoyed writing this article and hopes it will help turn her thumb green. You can see more of what Heidi loves on her site, [createsegue.com](http://createsegue.com).*

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# GET YOUR VEGGIE FIX

Deep Rooted CSA grows tomatoes and so much more.

BY LEAH CALL | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



*Tiffany Cade, owner of Deep Rooted, brings the bright colors and flavors of her Westby-area farm to markets around the region. Photo by Drew Shonka Photography.*

**V**eggies reign supreme when it comes to preparing nutritious and delicious summer meals. If you don't have the space or time to grow your own, you're in luck. Numerous community supported agriculture (CSA) farms and farmers markets in the Coulee Region provide an abundant source of locally grown ready-to-eat vegetables for your enjoyment.

Deep Rooted near Westby is a source for both the seedlings to start your own garden and a variety of organically grown produce sold at farmer's markets and through its farm share program. Tomatoes are the star among the bounty of delicious vegetables grown and sold through this CSA. In fact, Deep Rooted grows 30,000 pounds of tomatoes annually.

"We specialize in organic tomatoes," says Deep Rooted owner Tiffany Cade. "We have three greenhouses where we grow over 40 varieties of certified organic tomatoes."

Deep Rooted starts its tomatoes in January. By late May, the crew harvests and delivers early varieties to grocery stores and restaurants. They also sell tomatoes and other produce at the Viroqua farmers market and the Cameron Park market in La Crosse and through their farm share program.

Cade's favorite tomatoes are the Pink Berkeley Tie Dye, Sun Gold and Green Tiger varieties.

## WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

Deep Rooted's farm share program functions like a typical CSA membership with a twist. Members get fresh, locally grown produce throughout the season while also supporting their local farmer. While Deep Rooted members get a weekly veggie fix, they control their purchasing options.

"Instead of us deciding what goes into the box ... members can

spend that money on anything Deep Rooted," Cade explains. "If they run out of money, they can add more money to their credit."

Farm share members can pick up their selected produce at the farm or at a nearby delivery point. They can even use their farm share credit to purchase produce from Deep Rooted at the Viroqua or Cameron Park farmer's markets—no need to carry cash.

Wondering what to do with fresh kohlrabi, kale or garlic scapes? Members receive a weekly newsletter indicating the products that are available along with some details on those lesser-known varieties. "We give a bit of history, storing and handling tips, and we also include recipes," says Cade.

They even offer tips for those adventurous gardeners interested in planting something new. "That is one thing nice about our farm. We start everything from seed. We've done the research on different varieties," adds Cade. "We know the varieties that do well in this area."

## VEGGIES AND MORE

The spring garden center at Deep Rooted sells annual bedding plants, perennials, native plants and certified organic vegetable and herb seedlings, which are sold on-farm and at area food co-ops. Additionally, Deep Rooted grows microgreens year-round that are sold at Festival Foods and area food co-ops.

"We have a lot of moving parts on the farm—each season we add something new," says Cade.

One of the farm's newest offerings is a cut flower subscription. Similar to the produce farm share, the cut flower subscription offers subscription options for fresh cut flowers, beginning with a four-week spring share, which starts in April. Other options include five- and ten-week summer subscriptions and an "all season share" for gorgeous cut flowers from June through October.



“About four years ago we devoted a section of our field solely to cut flowers. It started as a passion project—growing flowers just for fun. Then I realized there was actually a demand for it,” says Cade, who sells flowers to restaurants, businesses and individuals.

Deep Rooted kicks off the season with a spring planting workshop where people can create their own flower basket. They plan to offer other events throughout the growing season, including a pick-your-own-bouquet day. The farm’s signature event, the Tasty Tomato Festival, celebrates the end of the season. Though canceled last year due to Covid-19, the festival, which takes place over Labor Day weekend, drew nearly 400 people in 2019.

“It is an all-day event with live music, a taco bar and Bloody Marys,” says Cade. “The main thing is tomato tasting. All of our varieties are sliced up and set out for people to sample and vote for their favorite. We also invite other farmers and backyard gardeners to submit tomatoes.”

### A LABOR OF LOVE

Cade started Deep Rooted eight years ago, after moving back to the area to help her family through a health crisis. “I didn’t have plans to start a farm at that time, but after the first year, it just really took off,” says Cade, who managed a Chicago office for a Viroqua-based CSA for five years prior to starting her own venture.

“Each year gets better and better. Farming is a lot of work with long days, but it is rewarding to work outside with plants versus sitting in an office,” adds Cade, who is hands-on from planting to deliveries as well as running the business end of Deep Rooted. “My favorite part is that no day is exactly like the previous day or the next day.” **CRW**

*Westby-based writer Leah Call makes a trip to Deep Rooted every spring for tomato and pepper plants.*

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## Kale Caesar Salad

- 1 bunch kale
  - 3 cloves garlic, minced
  - 2 T anchovy paste or 6 anchovy filets\*
  - 1 T capers
  - 2 T lemon juice
  - 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
  - 2 tsp. dijon mustard
  - 1/3 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
  - 2 hard-boiled eggs
- Optional: feta cheese and croutons

To destem the kale, grab the stem end of the kale and gather the leaves between the thumb and forefinger of your dominant hand. Pull back and away along the stem in one confident motion, applying even pressure to strip the leaves from both sides. Discard stem and chop leaves into 2-inch strips. Mix garlic, anchovy or vegetarian substitute, capers, lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce and mustard in a glass jar with a lid; shake until well mixed. Massage the dressing into the kale and top with Parmesan, hard boiled eggs and any extra ingredients of your choice.

Make it a meal by adding sliced chicken or grilled shrimp.

\*Vegetarian option: Seaweed, capers, olives or Bragg's amino acids



## Grilled Garlic Scapes

Massage the scape with oil and sprinkle it with salt and pepper. Toss onto the grill and brown both sides. Remove when soft on the inside and crispy green and golden brown on the outside. Serve hot with more olive oil, sea salt and black pepper.

## Garlic Scape Pesto

- 10 large garlic scapes
- 1/3 cup unsalted pistachios
- 1/3 cup finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 tsp. Kosher salt (plus more to taste)
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper (plus more to taste)

Puree the garlic scapes, pistachios, cheese, 1/4 salt and 1/4 tsp. pepper in a food processor until very finely chopped. With the processor running, slowly pour the oil through the opening. Season the pesto with additional salt and pepper to taste. Store pesto in the refrigerator covered for one week, or one month in the freezer. Use it as a sauce with pasta or spread it on crostini.

## Tomatoes with Balsamic Glaze, Basil and Fresh Goat Cheese

- 3-4 heirloom tomatoes
- 5 fresh basil leaves
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Fresh goat cheese

Slice tomatoes; add salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle the balsamic glaze over the tomatoes. Top with chiffonade basil and fresh goat cheese.

### For the Balsamic Glaze:

- 2 cups balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar

In a small saucepan, heat the balsamic vinegar and sugar over medium heat, stirring constantly until sugar has dissolved. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low and continue to cook until the sauce is reduced by half, 15-20 minutes. Cool. The glaze will continue to thicken when removed from heat. When cooled, pour into a jar with a lid. Store extra in the refrigerator.

## Pico de Gallo

- 1 lb. red slicing tomatoes, finely diced
- 1/3 cup chopped cilantro
- 1/2 cup finely chopped white onion
- 1 small fresh jalapeño or serrano chile, finely chopped, including seeds
- 1 T freshly squeezed lime juice, or more to taste
- 1 tsp. sea salt

Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl. Season to taste with additional chile, lime juice and salt. This salsa keeps in the refrigerator for up to one day. Before serving, stir it well and drain any excess liquid that has accumulated in the bowl.

Tip: Make sure to drain as much liquid from the tomatoes as possible when seeding and chopping.

# From Green Newbie to Gardening Master

Marla Cameron shares growing experience and love of plants through extension program.

BY HEIDI BLANKE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Marla Cameron, Master Gardener, cultivates both vegetable and flower gardens at her home. She has also grown milkweed and pollinator gardens.

**M**arla Cameron is proof the world works in mysterious ways, at least when it comes to finding your passion. Though she's now a Master Gardener, she didn't grow up gardening. That started when she moved into a Habitat for Humanity home and the area Master Gardeners helped with a landscaping plan. From their example and dedication, her zeal for gardening germinated.

## GROWING HER INTEREST

Cameron says she renewed her connection with Master Gardeners about eight years later. "I'd moved to Soldiers Grove and had a lot of acreage. I knew I wanted to have a garden," she says. That February, her husband came home with a newspaper article announcing Master Gardener classes. "I said, 'I want to do that.'"

Today Cameron, a full-time nurse and a Master Gardener, cultivates both flower and vegetable gardens. "I would prefer flower gardens, but there's nothing like a summer tomato," she says. She has eight raised beds for both vegetables and cutting flowers, but a past project was a milkweed garden. "My goal was to start ten different kinds of milkweed," she says. She currently has six. She not only grew the plants, but also raised the monarch caterpillars. Her favorite flowers to grow, though, are zinnias. "They're such beautiful flowers, and they come in so many colors," she says.

## GARDENING AS A MASTER

All Master Gardeners take part in community projects as part of retaining their status. Cameron helps maintain the pollinator gardens at the Crawford County Fairgrounds in Gays Mills. "We call it the Birds 'n Bees garden," she says. This year, she is part of a new project aimed at helping address concerns around food security. "We are all growing food to donate to shelters."

Because of Covid-19 restrictions, classes and education moved mostly online, she says, though Crawford County typically holds "lawn chair learning" in the summer. Master Gardener information and activities vary by county, so she recommends visiting the Master Gardener website for information. Look for your county at [mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu](http://mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu).

## PLANTING THE SEEDS

When asked how a beginning gardener should start, Cameron recommends a soil test. "The Extension Service will test your soil and send you a report. You know exactly where you are starting and that's the basis for everything. If you have bad soil, you are going to struggle," she says. After that, she simply says, "Start. Buy some seeds and put them in the ground. Make sure you read the labels on how to plant." Cameron suggests a pollinator garden with common milkweed, coneflowers, black-eyed Susans, phlox and honeysuckle.

Cameron herself starts seeds early indoors. "I'm kind of a fanatic," she says. She even has a greenhouse. "We made it ourselves."

## KEEP ON BLOOMING

"My favorite part of gardening is that every year I try to do something different. These things can go drastically wrong or right," she says with a laugh. "This year I'm grafting tomatoes. It's kind of fiddley."

Whether you grow zucchinis or zinnias, this summer is the perfect time to learn to master your garden. **CRW**

*Heidi Griminger Blanke spent hours gardening last summer (for lack of normal summer activities) and discovered she enjoyed seeing things grow. Could she be a future Master Gardener? Probably not, but it's a nice thought.*



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# Business Is Blooming

Jackson Plaza entrepreneurs cultivate a flourishing business community.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER  
CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Jackson Plaza is home to shops, restaurants and other businesses. Its uniqueness comes from the stories of the business owners who have chosen to grow their businesses here—many of them women.



Theresa Held's Bean Juice has been serving coffee in Jackson Plaza for 20 years.

## THERESA HELD, BEAN JUICE

"We have the best sunrises!" says Theresa Held, owner of Bean Juice.

It's one of the perks of having her coffee shop on the east-facing side of Jackson Plaza. It also benefits from plenty of parking, Highway 33 and wonderful neighboring businesses.

Held is one of Jackson Plaza's long-time business owners, helping launch Bean Juice (then AJ's Java Joint) in 2001 before buying the business a few years later at age 25. She recalls doing everything from planning the menu and helping with ordering, to staining the floorboards and painting the walls. Today, Held is more focused on the wholesale portion of the business.

"I'm not up front as much anymore," she says, "but when I am there, I do everything. I don't mind sweeping up the floor, wiping up ... because we're all part of this machine to keep it going."

Held is passionate about great coffee. One of her big ideas when she bought the shop was to add a roaster, so the coffee is as fresh as possible. She's also passionate about creating great experiences. "Coffee isn't just coffee, right?" She describes having coffee and conversation with friends. "It's a verb, it's an action word!"

She also wants the experience of great coffee to be accessible. "I hate when people say, oh, are you a coffee snob? I hate that word. I'm not. I do not want any snobbery in my store." Never had a macchiato? "Let's try it—it will be fun! If you don't like it, spit it out; we'll give you something else. I've said that many times," she says, smiling.

"I hope that if we were to take coffee out of the equation—not that it would ever happen," she laughs, "but you'd still have that experience, that welcoming feeling ... that's what built us."

## KAY M. MAZZA, OOLALA CONSIGN

Kay M. Mazza is the relative newcomer to Jackson Plaza. She acquired the Elite Repeat Consignment Shop in February 2021, then rebranded it as Oolala Consign. She's not new to retail, however: She's worked for retail giants in New York and other cities, plus local stores.

What's more, it's not Mazza's first time working in Jackson Plaza. "It's where my very first job was at Major Drug; I was the candy counter girl. It's in the exact same location—it's the most serendipitous place," she says.

Mazza took the "pause in hyperactivity" the Covid-19 pandemic provided to think about her life and what she wanted to do. "I try to wake up every day and think: What other creative thing can I come up with?" Mazza says.



*Kay M. Mazza is one of Jackson Plaza's newest business owners, having just reimagined the former Elite Repeat Consignment Shop as Oolala Consign.*

She's put that creativity to work with the store, starting with a name and décor change that honors her French heritage and pays homage to a retailer she loves, Henri Bendel. She also added men's consignment, a music listening station with vinyl, cassettes and CDs, local artists' works and fresh floral from Bittersweet Flower Market. She adds, "I really want this to be a legacy business. It's been owned by two other women over 30 years in La Crosse already, so it's important for me to carry it on even though I have a name change in place."

Mazza exudes joie de vivre. She has an infectious smile and professes a deep love of music, the arts and great attitudes. Her retail savvy, combined with her energy and magnetism, have other Jackson Plaza business owners delighted she's joined their ranks.

In turn, Mazza is excited about working with other business owners in Jackson Plaza. She says, "Smart women want fellow women to succeed in their own businesses ... I can't wait to see how I grow in an arena like this, around other women that are running successful businesses."

#### **KAT SOPER, PALM + PINE YOGA STUDIO + SCHOOL**

The wood floors of the studio gleam and the light filters through the plants hanging in the large windows, reflecting off the white walls. The setting creates a feeling of serenity; it's a beautiful space. Kat Soper herself conveys an unhurried calm and focus—perhaps thanks to her

Come watch the sun rise at Bean Juice. Develop a yoga practice at Palm + Pine. Find a cashmere sweater you'll treasure at Oolala Consign. Jackson Plaza offers many special experiences, cultivated by special people.



*Kat Soper offers a place for growth and focus at Palm + Pine Yoga Studio + School.*

regular yoga and meditation practice—as she shares the story of how Palm + Pine came to be.

When she and her husband moved to La Crosse, she taught at other studios and focused on getting to know the community. She came to believe there was room to offer another flavor of yoga here, and Jackson Plaza was a good fit for the studio she envisioned.

The studio grew quickly and was doing well, so "we were like, let's bring yoga to more people! So, we decided to open up our second location in Holmen," she says.

Then, the pandemic hit.

Soper credits embracing technology with helping Palm + Pine survive. They added a digital studio that allows people to practice live from the comfort of their homes, plus pre-recorded classes. Now, that technology isn't going away. "Coming to the studio will always be great," Soper says. "But there are times where life happens and knowing that we can practice a little bit from home, and cut out a commute, is better than not practicing at all. I'm looking at it as a positive that we have this whole other aspect now that we can offer people."

Her favorite part of running her business is witnessing other people grow. "The service that we offer," she says, "growth is inherent in that, so I feel very privileged and grateful that I get to see that in folks, and how they feel in their bodies and their minds and their hearts after practicing." **CRW**

*Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a La Crosse area writer and marketer. She agrees: The sunrises viewed from Jackson Plaza (coffee in hand) are terrific!*

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# Feeding the Community

Kane Street Community Garden brings together volunteers to nurture vegetables, relationships and healthy eating.

BY JANIS JOLLY | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



*Clockwise from top left: Volunteers from Viterbo University and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of La Crosse join volunteer leaders for a work day in the Children's Garden building new raised beds. Visitors of all ages enjoy the sights, smells and flavors of the garden throughout the year. Shelley Fortner, executive director of the Hunger Task Force, and garden coordinator Todd Huffman say the new greenhouse adjacent to the Kane Street Community Center adds new opportunities for the garden, which is open to all.*

**A**t Kane Street Community Garden, they say, “When we grow it together, we will grow together.”

Volunteers with the Kane Street Community Garden, located on city property on La Crosse’s North Side, produce food for anyone who wants it, averaging 30,000 pounds a year. The work is done mostly by volunteers—children and youth groups, families, individuals, retired people and church groups. According to Todd Huffman, garden coordinator, volunteers are the backbone of this monumental endeavor, providing both labor and expertise.

Students from Western Technical College’s horticulture program are regular helpers and are knowledgeable on the newest techniques. Among volunteers have introduced vegetables from their culture. One retired professor from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse studied tomato culture and greatly increased the garden’s production.

“Everyone is welcome here,” he says. “You don’t need to be low-

income to work here or to take fresh vegetables home. We hope anyone who likes to garden, or wants to learn about gardening, or just likes to eat fresh vegetables will feel welcome to come and join in.”

Besides working in the garden, WTC horticulture students plant around 100 trays of seedlings in their own greenhouses, each worth about \$25.

By early spring, a surprising number of plants are already growing. A large, movable hoop house sits on rails, allowing it to be moved between two adjacent fields. In April it was moved off so spinach plants could grow quickly in the direct sun of spring and became home to beautiful new butter crunch lettuces and broccoli. Huffman says the garden would have broccoli to harvest by the time this magazine hits the newsstands.

A new greenhouse attached to the Community Center on Kane Street has also been a boon to the garden. It is closer and more

convenient that the WTC greenhouse and is used to start some of the seedlings.

### WELCOMING ALL

When the City of La Crosse announced plans to build affordable housing in the space then occupied by the garden, the garden was moved to an adjacent equal-sized plot. The city's plan was to include some handicapped-accessible apartments earmarked for veterans. In response, the garden staff looked for ways to make gardening accessible to people in wheelchairs or those who found it difficult to bend over to work.

In October 2020, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of La Crosse built a raised-platform garden with help from Viterbo University students. A colorful mural was painted on the front side. Eagle Scouts made and installed four wooden raised gardens. This April, the groups returned to install a second ADA accessible garden on a new concrete pad just off the parking lot, where the Eagle Scout raised beds will also be located. Now folks in wheelchairs or with mobility issues will be able to grow their own vegetables comfortably.

The children's garden combines a play area and garden plots in a fenced area, including new raised beds that were installed the same day this spring as those in the accessible space. The Boys & Girls Clubs often brings groups of young people to harvest vegetables they have raised and then learn to prepare them at the Boys & Girls Clubs facility. All children are welcome to use the space.

### DIGGING IN TO HELP OUT

In seven years of volunteering, Cheryl Hansen has planted lots of flowers and made many friends, including Alice McGuire. Hansen

has beautified the rock garden next to the parking lot and has designed and planted other flower plots throughout the garden area. Both women enjoy digging in the dirt, learning about gardening and meeting new friends. Having access to more types of vegetables than can be found in the grocery store is another plus.

### THE HUNGER TASK FORCE

The Kane Street garden is an arm of The Hunger Task Force. The other arm is the food bank on Clinton Street. It is the only food bank in western Wisconsin, supplying food shelves and pantries at 108 different sites throughout the area, says Shelley Fortner, executive director of the Hunger Task Force. During the pandemic, the organization expanded its services by holding food giveaways in parking lots around the city. Pre-pandemic, the Task Force gave away around 1.5 million pounds of food each year. During the pandemic, it has increased to nearly 6 million pounds with added federal emergency food assistance programs.

The food bank's biggest fundraiser of the year is coming up on August 19. Taste of the Garden will include local food, wine, beer, veggies and an auction, with local food vendors offering garden-inspired appetizers.

Kane Street Garden and Hunger Task Force leaders Huffman and Fortner are both looking forward to this gardening season. "Everyone could benefit from eating more vegetables and fruits. Growing food at Kane Street Community Garden is a way to improve life for everyone," Fortner said. **CRW**

*Janis Jolly is a gardener and plant enthusiast who is in awe of the Kane Street Community Garden and all who make it happen.*

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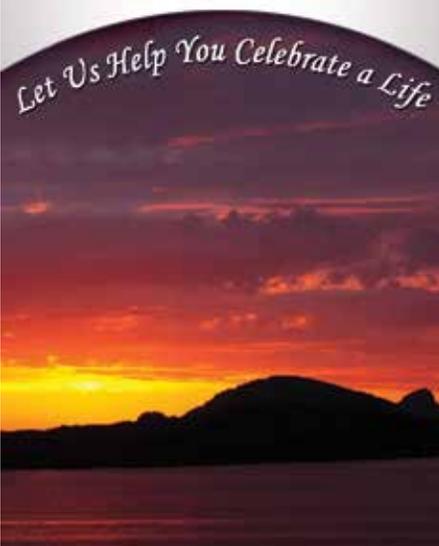
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**VMH's Kim Larson Receives  
Ambassador Award**

Vernon Memorial Healthcare (VMH) has announced that Kim Larson, VMH Lab Manager, is the recipient of the 2021 Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC) Rural Health Ambassador Award. RWHC's Ambassador Award recognizes employees at member hospitals who have promoted their respective organizations and made noticeable contributions to rural health care. Larson is a Viroqua native and a graduate of Western Technical College. She became VMH Lab Manager in 2016.

"This award is a great honor for all of us," Larson says. "This is an opportunity to shine a light on the important role the lab team plays in patient care." For more information about the services offered at VMH please visit [www.vmh.org](http://www.vmh.org).



**YWCA  
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The YWCA of La Crosse recently awarded Heidi Eglash the 2021 Olga Schleiter Memorial Philanthropic Award and Jane Benzschawel the 2021 Emily "Sis" Hutson Volunteer of the Year Award.

Eglash, longtime YWCA board member, is an attorney at Eglash Law Office LLC, where she promotes the sound stewardship of human and financial resources and helps individuals and small businesses to succeed. Benzschawel, current vice president of the YWCA board, was honored for her pursuit of justice for individuals facing gender-based violence or racism. She is working toward a master's degree in social work.

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Marcy West, executive director of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR), has resigned after more than 24 years of service. The first and only director of KVR, West helped establish the 8,600 acres with the mission to protect, preserve and enhance it. She leaves a legacy that the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board, Friends of KVR and others will continue to uphold. West will be the new director for the Office of Rural Prosperity for the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC).

KVR invites those who have enjoyed its outdoor opportunities to consider a gift in West's honor to the KVR Enhanced Discovery Center campaign to build an education center for KVR's classes, workshops and summer camps. To make a gift or learn more about KVR, go to [kickapoovalley.wi.gov](http://kickapoovalley.wi.gov).

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BY BETTY CHRISTIANSEN | PHOTOS BY DIANE RAAUM PHOTO



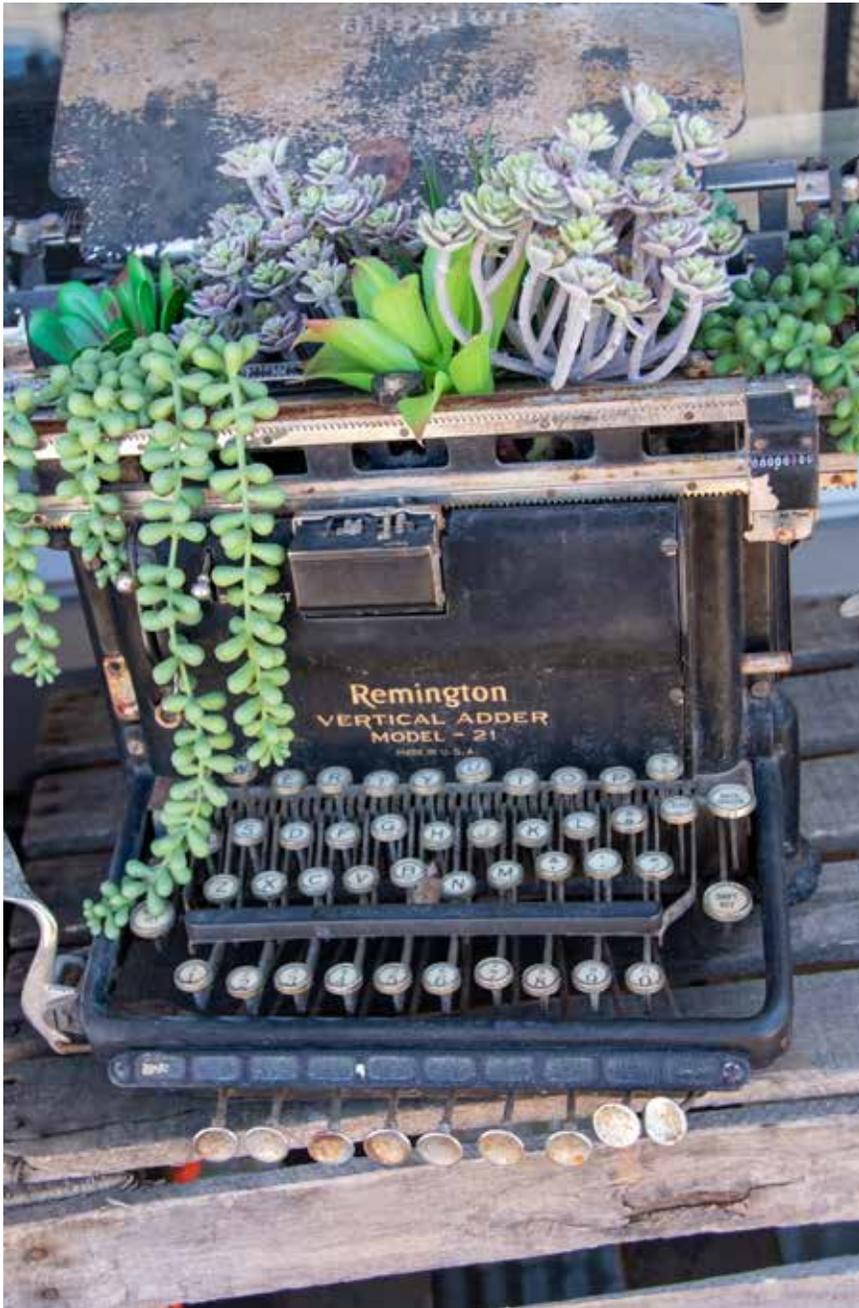
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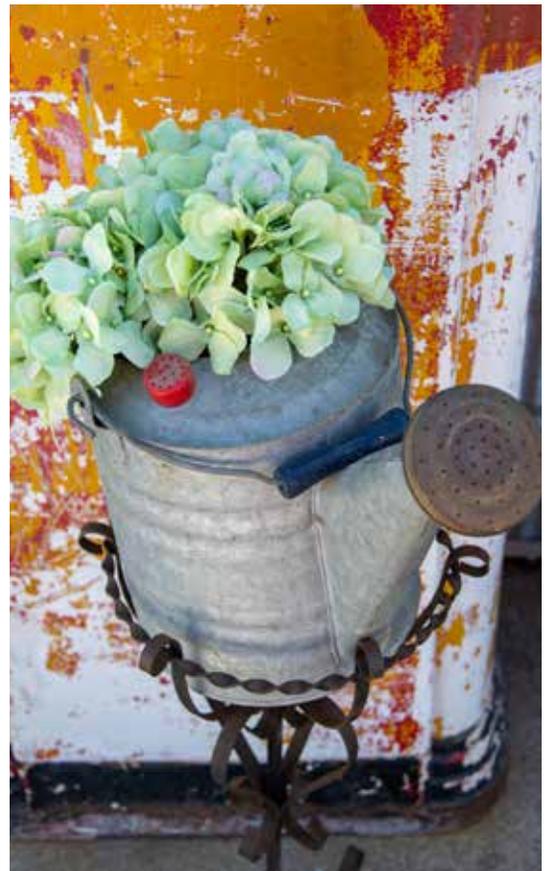


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Boys & Girls Clubs youth and family services director Justice Lawson smiles behind the mask with youth from the organization's North Side locations.

## HEALING FAMILY SYSTEMS

Boys & Girls Clubs help youth grow healthy social and emotional skills.

BY JAN WELLIK | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

**B**uilding relationships with youth is at the core of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse. From individual case management to group programs, fostering mental health is a key part of health and wellness for La Crosse youth and family services directors Laquita Becker and Justice Lawson, who provide youth with healthy social and emotional skills.

### TEACHING HEALTHY SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

“There are a lot of pieces to the role, which is more preventative,” says Lawson of their roles as youth and family services directors. Lawson and Becker provide mental health and wellness support to youth and families, facilitate partnerships with community members and develop staff support and education.

“BCG does a great job of keeping up with the needs of kids and families,” Lawson says.

Becker has worked at Boys & Girls Clubs (BGC) for five years and oversees the three sites on the South Side: Mathy Center, Hamilton Elementary and Huber housing. Lawson has overseen the North Side sites since 2018: Erickson, Northside Elementary and Schuh neighborhood.

Lawson and Becker provide social-emotional skill building, including communication, coping skills, friendship, self-esteem and

bullying prevention. “We do a lot of the groundwork,” says Lawson. Group programs include positive peer interaction, self-regulation, emotional regulation and goal setting.

“The focus is often on socioemotional based skills: dealing with big feelings, problem solving, body awareness and how my feelings affect my body, and how to calm myself,” explains Lawson.

At Hamilton Elementary, Becker works with students struggling in school and collaborates with school counselors to help guide them. “The sooner you can wrap around them and fill their deficits and needs, the better,” explains Becker.

Their work is “fluid and based on the needs of the youth,” according to Lawson.

The women develop plans for kids’ mental and behavioral health in collaboration with Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse, with funding support from Courtesy Corporation. This unique partnership earned the behavioral health program recognition as the Wisconsin Boys & Girls Clubs State Program of the Year in 2020.

### TRAINING STAFF

In addition to working directly with youth, Becker and Lawson are responsible for training staff who work with youth and collecting behavior data that is used to help make positive changes.

“Most of our part-time staff are college-age, and a majority are interested in education and human services,” Becker says. She and Lawson help staff respond to behaviors and help kids get the resources they need.

Lawson says an important part of her job is “getting to know the people in our community and being intentional in my work.”

### GROWING FROM THE PANDEMIC

During the Covid-19 pandemic, BGC sites were closed for spring 2020 and reopened with reduced capacity in summer 2020. In fall 2020, sites served as academic resource hubs for students to do their online zoom classes in the center.

“We were all in crisis mode and supporting them in a new way,” says Becker.

However, with the reduced volume of students in the building, “I was able to build stronger relationships with kids,” she says.

During the pandemic, support for the kids and their families changed. Sometimes this meant providing household and food items or arts and crafts to do at home, says Lawson. Staff also provided virtual club experiences, including prerecorded videos on mental health topics, guided meditation and journaling prompts kids could try at home.

“I continue to see the program expanding to meet the needs of more families, to help our youth and how they are impacted by the



Laquita Becker, center, serves as youth and family services director for the South Side locations of the Boys & Girls Clubs of La Crosse.

pandemic,” says Lawson. “These days I’m focusing on slowing down with kids. We’ve had to make so many adjustments over the past year.

Now we can focus on checking in and help them out where needed.”

### SETTING UP FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

“We have a lot of kids that have the deck stacked against them since birth,” explains Becker. “We help get them on a path for success.”

Becker says that “mental health is a stigma among kids and adults,” but adds, “they deserve to be heard and validated.”

Becker and Lawson each have bachelor of science degrees in psychology. Becker has a master of science degree in mental health counseling from Viterbo University; Lawson will graduate with the same degree from Viterbo this spring.

“We hope to expand so I can utilize my license more and do therapeutic treatment,” says Becker.

In terms of moving forward, Becker would like to see a shift to more family-focused programming. “We are dealing with kids who come from family systems that need to heal,” she explains. “I want to help heal the family system.” CRW

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

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## CATCH THE CAMPING CRAZE

From tents to permanent sites, outdoor enthusiasts flock to campgrounds for family fun.

BY ANASTASIA PENCHI | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Lori Hesse of La Crosse grew up tent camping with her family as a young girl, and she will never forget the time her family found snakes under their tent as they packed up. That's all it took for her parents to upgrade to a pop-up camper. Later came a hard-sided camping trailer, and then an even larger one.

"I think that is how a lot of people progress through it," Hesse says.

Hesse didn't let the coronavirus pandemic stop her from camping last year because she feels safe camping, but it has definitely affected her camper acquisition process.

### COVID-19 CAMPER CRAZE

Hesse is in the midst of a camper upgrade. She, too, started with a tent as an adult, but switched to a pop-up camper and then a hybrid model (a hard-sided trailer with tents that pull out). In April of this year, she was trying to upgrade to an even larger camper with her husband, Cameron.

"It's so hard to find campers right now," says Hesse, who got interested in one Facebook-advertised camper only to find it sold three hours later. "They go so quick."

Covid-19 has resulted in mixed outcomes to the camping industry. Dealer and private camper sales exploded last year, but as a result there is limited inventory this year. One area dealer says he normally has 80

campers for sale, but this year has only eight.

That's likely due to the whopping 48 million households who went camping in 2020, according to the 2021 North American Camping report by Kampgrounds of America (KOA), the world's largest system of open-to-the-public campgrounds. There are more than 525 KOA campgrounds located throughout nearly every U.S. state.

The number of new camper households last year totaled about 6 million. More than half of those new campers (55 percent) reported that their plans to try camping were directly related to the pandemic as they deemed it an affordable, safe way to pursue leisure vacation travel.

### TOP CAMPING HACKS

- Hang freshly washed dishes in a mesh laundry bag to dry.
- Fill a just-emptied 2.5-gallon laundry jug with water and leave outside on a picnic table for hand washing.
- Cut up foam noodles to mark awning braces and tent stakes.
- Use solar lights to mark walking paths at night.
- Increase storage by using a hanging shoe organizer.
- Use plastic shower caps to cover plates of food left on the picnic table to keep bugs out.



Lori Hesse and her husband, Cameron, have made camping a central part of their relationship—he even proposed during a camping trip, on one knee in front of their camper.

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY ADVENTURES DURING A PANDEMIC

Lucas Freng, who purchased Bluebird Family Campground in La Crosse with his father a couple of years ago, says while La Crosse County campgrounds got a late start last year due to Covid-19 limitations, he anticipates a full opening this year. The number of reservations being made at Bluebird has been steadily increasing, he says.

Freng says many people like that hiking, swimming and sitting around the campfire are safe activities a family can do together despite Covid-19, and there is no additional cost to do them once you get to the campground.

While many of today's campers enjoy being unplugged from their phones and internet at campgrounds, they are still using



## GLAMPING AT JUSTIN TRAILS RESORT

If you love the great outdoors but prefer a roof over your head, consider a “glamping” getaway. Snug cabins at Justin Trails Resort near Sparta offer rustic escapes with just enough civilization—its Tipi, Snuggalo and two Camping Cabin options are the perfect cross between “roughing it” and the comforts of home. Drive-in tent campsites with access to amenities like hot showers are available, too.

that technology to upgrade their equipment and get campground recommendations from others. The Wisconsin Campers Facebook page has about 25,000 members doing that.

Jeannine Waterson, a part-time page administrator, says Wisconsin Campers was created by her family in 2016 to help friends and fellow campers buy and sell units because dealers weren't accepting older models as trade-ins, and owners felt they were being offered less than they were worth.

In the five years since its creation, the site has evolved into one where camping equipment is bought and sold daily, campground recommendations are made between members and camping hacks are shared.

permanent sites so their campers can be left at the campground instead of taking them home between trips. The campground where she wants a site is telling people they will be on a waiting list for three to five years before a seasonal site is available.

For La Crosse camper Hesse, who is starting to think about having kids, being able to have a good time safely outside of the home is one of the appeals of camping during a pandemic. She says she already limits her camping trips by inviting only a select number of friends and family.

“If I were a parent, that would be something on my mind,” Hesse adds. “You can keep your family safe while also having fun.”



Waterson says the page averages 15-30 membership requests per day, and all but about 10 of its members are Wisconsin residents. The others are out-of-state people who have seasonal campers in Wisconsin they want to sell.

“I don't know if it's a Wisconsin thing or a Midwest thing, but (camping) has blown up,” Waterson adds.

## CAMPING IN ALL OF LIFE'S STAGES

Waterson shares a familiar “starting-to-camp” story. First the West Bend, Wisconsin, woman went tent camping with family, but soon they upgraded to a pop-up camper. Nowadays, Waterson takes her own kids camping with close friends and family (their large group typically reserves four sites) in her own camping trailer.

But this year Waterson has family members wanting to take a next step—transitioning to

Hesse is confident she and her husband will take their own kids camping one day because he loves camping as much as she does. He even proposed to her during a Fourth of July camping trip after she returned home from military training in Romania. She says Cameron tried to make arrangements for both of their moms to be there to witness the proposal, but plans got confused and he ended up going down on one knee all alone with her in front of their camper.

“It wasn't the big show he originally planned because it all fell apart,” Hesse says. “But it was cute, and we were out camping—doing what we love to do in the summer.”

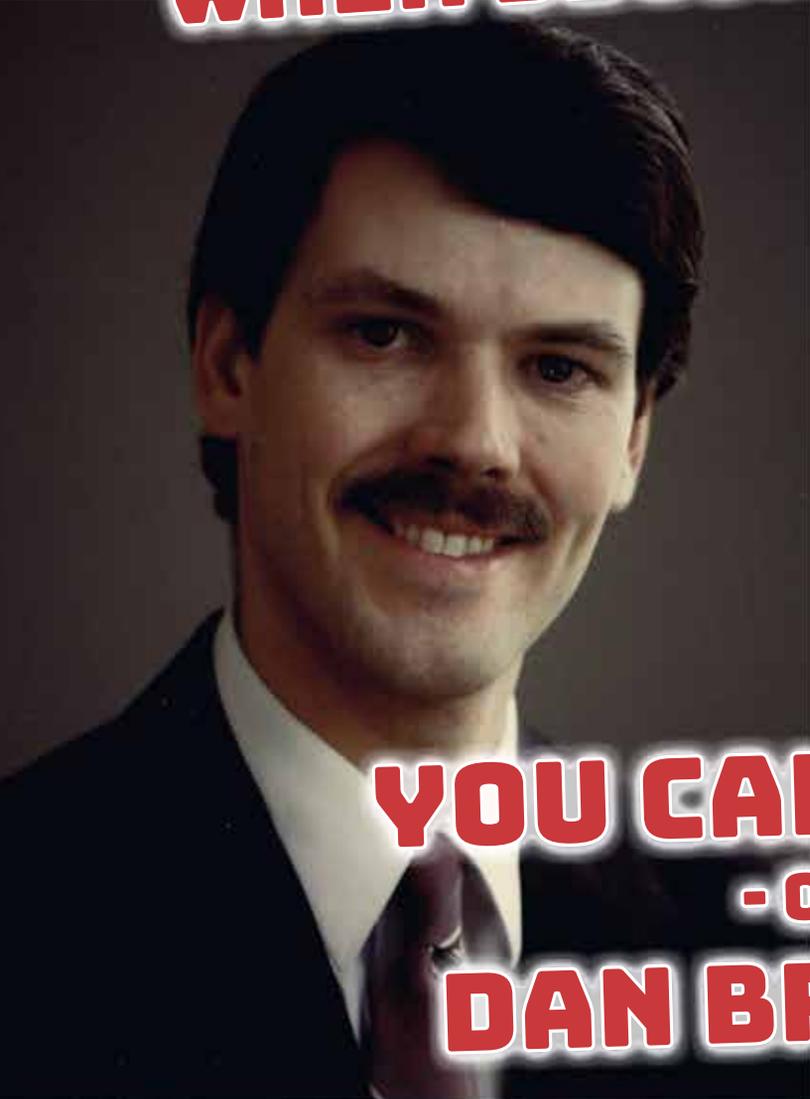
CRW

*Anastasia Penchi went from tent camping on the Mississippi River islands to buying a park model in a campground. Then she switched gears to a pop-up camper and later to a travel trailer. She can be reached at callmeloislane@hotmail.com.*



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# Community Calendar

## ONGOING EVENTS

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

**Cameron Park Farmers Market**, May-Nov., 4 p.m.-  
dusk Fri., 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat., Cameron Park, La  
Crosse, www.cameronparkmarket.org.

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

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

**La Crosse Rotary** every Thurs. noon-1 p.m.,  
Radisson Center, www.rotarycluboflacrosse.org.

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

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

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

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

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

**Set Me Free Shop**, Saturdays & Sundays, 30  
minutes before & after services. First Free Church,  
123 Mason St., Onalaska. Also available by appt.  
608-782-6022.

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

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

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

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

**Please contact each group for  
meeting status at this time.**

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

## CALENDAR EVENTS

### JULY

**July 7**, La Crosse Concert Band, 7 p.m., Riverside Park, La  
Crosse.

**July 8**, Meditation for Emotional Health (via Zoom or  
in-person), 6:30-7:30 p.m., preregistration required, www.  
fscenter.org.

**July 9**, LABA Golf Outing, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., Golf Club at  
Cedar Creek, Onalaska, www.labaonline.com.

**July 9-10**, Garden Walk, 4-7 p.m. Fri., 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat.,  
various sites around La Farge, kickapoovalley.wi.gov.

**July 13**, iPhone 101, 11 a.m.-12 p.m., La Crosse Public  
Library, register at www.lacrosselibrary.org.

**July 14**, La Crosse Concert Band, 7  
p.m., Riverside Park, La Crosse.



**July 15**, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8  
p.m., Riverside Park, www.  
moontuneslacrosse.com.

**July 17**, Writing for Your Own  
Amazement with Fran Rybarik (in-  
person), 9 a.m.-5 p.m., preregistration  
required, www.fscenter.org.

**July 17**, Backpacking Workshop, Winona Outdoors  
Collaborative, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., register at www.  
winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

**July 19**, Art as Prayer (via Zoom or in-person), Franciscan  
Spirituality Center, 6-7:30 p.m., preregistration required,  
www.fscenter.org.

**July 20**, Android 101, 11 a.m.-12 p.m., La Crosse Public  
Library, register at www.lacrosselibrary.org.

**July 21**, La Crosse Concert Band, 7 p.m., Riverside Park,  
La Crosse.

**July 22**, Winona Outdoors Collaborative Monthly  
Meet Up: Paddling the Backwaters, 6-8 p.m., Kiwanis  
Shelter, Prairie Island, Winona, register at www.  
winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

**July 22**, BYOB: Bring Your Own Book Club online book  
discussion, 7-8 p.m., La Crosse Public Library, register at  
www.lacrosselibrary.org.

**July 22**, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8 p.m., Riverside Park, www.  
moontuneslacrosse.com.

**July 23-24**, La Crosse Storytelling Festival, 6 p.m. Fri., 10:30  
a.m.-10 p.m. Sat., The Pump House, www.lacrossestoryfest.  
com/2017-festival.

**July 24**, 63rd Annual AAUW Art Fair on the Green,  
10 a.m.-4 p.m., Myrick Park, La Crosse, www.  
artfaironthegreen.org.

**July 27**, Email Tips & Tricks, 11 a.m.-12 p.m., La Crosse  
Public Library, register at www.lacrosselibrary.org.

**July 28**, La Crosse Concert Band, 7 p.m., Riverside Park, La  
Crosse.



**July 29**, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8  
p.m., Riverside Park, www.  
moontuneslacrosse.com.

**July 30-31**, **A Midsummer Night's  
Dream**, La Crosse Community  
Theatre youth production, 7  
p.m. Fri., 2 p.m. Sat., Riverside  
Park Bandshell, La Crosse, www.  
lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Please note that some events in this listing  
are live and some are virtual-only. Live events  
during this time may be canceled on short  
notice. Please utilize the contact information  
provided for each event to double-check its  
status before attending.

### JUNE

**June 3**, Meditation for Emotional Health (via Zoom), 6:30-  
7:30 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration  
required, www.fscenter.org.

**June 3**, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8 p.m., Riverside Park, www.  
moontuneslacrosse.com.



**June 5**, "Prep to Publish" online  
workshop by KaNikki Jakarta, 1-3  
p.m., Driftless Writing Center,  
preregistration required, www.  
driftlesswritingcenter.org.

**June 5**, The Heart of Self-Care (via  
Zoom), 9 a.m.-12 p.m., Franciscan  
Spirituality Center, preregistration  
required, www.fscenter.org.

**June 5**, Camping Basics Workshop, Winona Outdoors  
Collaborative, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., register at www.  
winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

**June 5**, National Trails Day Event, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Kickapoo  
Valley Reserve, kickapoovalley.wi.gov.

**June 5**, Trial and Triumph (Livestream), 7:30-8:30 p.m., La  
Crosse Symphony Orchestra, www.lacrossesympphony.org.

**June 5-6**, Rock and Gem Show, Coulee Rock Club,  
10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat., 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sun., Onalaska  
Omni Center, contact Allison Conrad, 507-895-8109,  
rockinbabe@acegroup.cc.

**June 7**, Virtual Poetry Cafe (via Zoom), 6:30-8 p.m.,  
Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration required,  
www.fscenter.org.

**June 8-13**, Superior Hiking Trail Backpacking Trip,  
Winona Outdoors Collaborative, register at www.  
winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

**June 9**, La Crosse Concert Band, 7 p.m., Riverside Park, La  
Crosse.



**June 10**, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8  
p.m., Riverside Park, www.  
moontuneslacrosse.com.

**June 12**, **Artspire Art Fair &  
Market**, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., King and  
Front Streets, La Crosse, https://  
artspire.thepumphouse.org.

**June 14**, iPhone 101, 11 a.m.-12  
p.m., La Crosse Public Library, register  
at www.lacrosselibrary.org.

**June 16**, La Crosse Concert Band, 7 p.m., Riverside Park,  
La Crosse.

**June 17**, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8 p.m., Riverside Park, www.  
moontuneslacrosse.com.

**June 19**, Misdummer Fest (in-person and virtual), 10 a.m.-3  
p.m., Norskedalen, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

**June 19-20**, Picker's Pig Out Weekend flea market and  
Sweet Lou Barbeque food truck, Gasoline Alley/Relic Road,  
N5539 Penney Lane, Onalaska, 608-615-7751.

**June 21**, Art as Prayer (via Zoom), Franciscan Spirituality  
Center, 6-7:30 p.m., preregistration required, www.  
fscenter.org.

**June 21**, Android 101, 11 a.m.-12 p.m., La Crosse Public  
Library, register at www.lacrosselibrary.org.

**June 23**, La Crosse Concert Band, 7 p.m., Riverside Park,  
La Crosse.

**June 24**, BYOB: Bring Your Own Book Club online book  
discussion, 7-8 p.m., La Crosse Public Library, register at  
www.lacrosselibrary.org.

**June 28**, Facebook Tips & Tricks, 11 a.m.-12 p.m., La  
Crosse Public Library, register at www.lacrosselibrary.org.

**June 30-July 4**, Riverfest, Riverside Park, La Crosse,  
riverfestlacrosse.com.



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