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# women

AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE



Nikki Balsamo  
The Power and  
Beauty of Dance

*Grace*

Stories of Second Chances  
Receiving with Grace  
Family Holiday Flavors  
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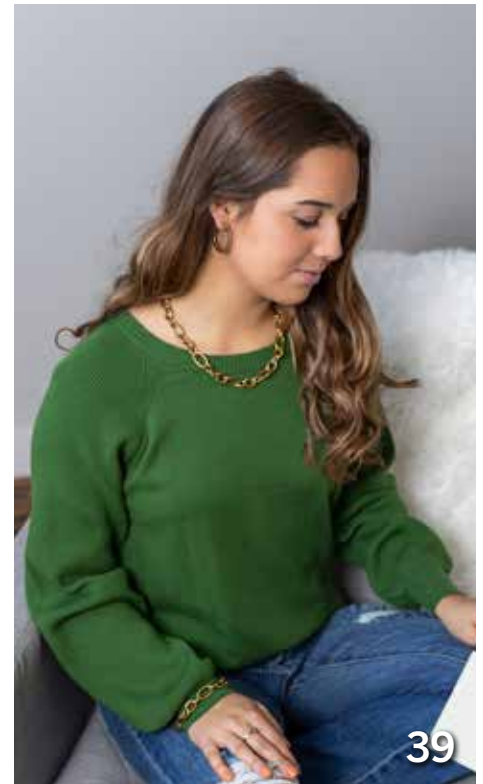
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Pictured on the cover and above left: Nikki Balsamo, owner of La Crosse Dance Centre. Photos by Isabella Mae Photography.

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# DREAMING UP THE IDEAL RETIREMENT IS YOUR JOB. HELPING YOU GET THERE IS OURS.

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Photo by Jordana Snyder Photography



**D**uring a recent yoga class, I was struck by a phrase used often in these classes: open your heart. I've enjoyed casual yoga classes for years, loving the opportunity to pause, refocus and center myself, even if just for an hour. But for some reason, on this particular night, that phrase caught in my mind. Open your heart.

Physically, it is a reminder to put our shoulders back, lift up our heads, take a deep breath and assume a posture that is the opposite of how so many of us spend our days—hunched over a keyboard or cell phone or even the steering wheel. Head down, shoulders rounded, caved in on ourselves.

Opening your heart provides room to breathe, a wider view of the world and a feeling of expansion.

But when Laura shared those words on the night in question, I felt a greater meaning to “open your heart,” in part because of the stories I had been entrenched in as we planned this issue. It became less about physical posture and more about mental and spiritual posture. Opening your heart to receive gifts and compliments, which we women can find so difficult to do. Opening your heart to explore new possibilities. Opening your heart to accept what is around you and let it fill you, rather than closing it off.

Grace can be viewed through both a physical and a spiritual lens as well, as shown beautifully in the life and philosophy of

Nikki Balsamo. Through La Crosse Dance Centre and its annual presentation of The Nutcracker, Balsamo teaches dancers not only steps and positions that flow with the beauty of movement, but also how to find the beauty of the spirit within each of them.

Dance is hard work, as are so many things that bring beauty into our world. A quotation from poet Alice Abrams shares the connection between hard work or hardship and its results.

*“In life as in dance, grace glides on blistered feet.”* — Alice Abrams

Blistered feet, broken hearts and broken bodies are among the challenges women in our stories today have overcome, exhibiting grace to those around them as they move forward in their lives with hope. The stories of Tara Herbst Kopp and Shelly Linskey illustrate how finding grace—for ourselves, as well as others—helps us move forward in times of trial.

Their stories and others in this issue—including how Natalia Breuer is sending support across borders and the women of Hope Restores seek to break down boundaries in the community—are a fitting close to our year.

You may not have noticed, but our themes for these last six issues come together to acknowledge a great truth about our community:

- Strength**
- Together**
- Rise**
- Overcome**
- Necessities**
- Grace**

**STRONG**

Our region is full of strong women who work together to raise each other up, to overcome challenges, provide those around them with the necessities of life and share the grace that they have developed through diverse journeys in life.

You are a part of this tradition of STRONG women. Pass it on to everyone around you and keep the strength and grace flowing.

*Shari*

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**women**

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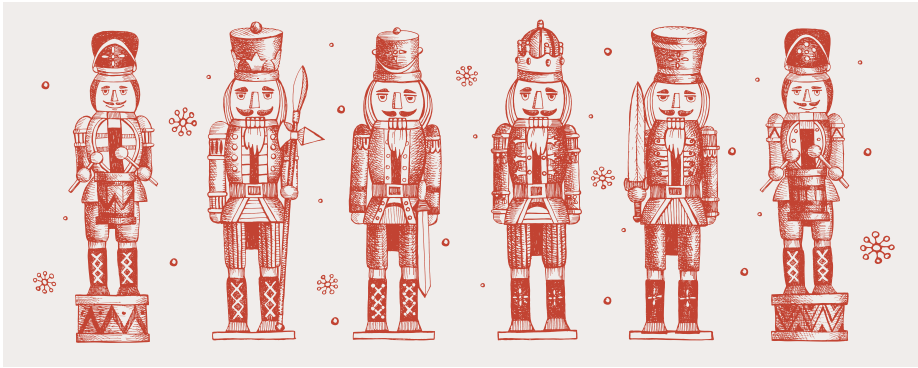
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## EXPERIENCE THE NUTCRACKER BALLET

The La Crosse Dance Centre's 33rd Annual Nutcracker Ballet will be presented in three performances at Viterbo University's Fine Arts Center Main Theatre: 7:30 p.m. Friday, December 9; 2 p.m. Saturday, December 10; and 2 p.m. Sunday, December 11.

This timeless tale tells the adventure of self-discovery for Maria, who receives a nutcracker doll from her Godparent Drosselmeyer on Christmas Eve. Join Maria on her journey as she defeats the evil Rat Queen, travels through a beautiful snow-covered land, and revels in the colorful Land of Sweets! The performance features a cast of more than 90 local dancers of all ages.

Tickets and information can be found at [www.viterbo.edu/events/la-crosse-dance-centres-33rd-annual-nutcracker-ballet](http://www.viterbo.edu/events/la-crosse-dance-centres-33rd-annual-nutcracker-ballet).



## FROM LOSS TO HOPE

A group of local families is focusing on saving lives by raising awareness about addiction.

The Amara Rose Foundation Inc. was founded in June 2022 by Randall and Heidi Overson. They started the charity to honor their daughter, Amara, who lost her battle with drug addiction. The charity's mission is to save lives by raising awareness and educating local schools and communities about the danger of using drugs, with an emphasis on fentanyl—where it's showing up and how it kills without mercy or discrimination.

The foundation's board of directors is made up of parents who've lost children to addiction as well as professionals who work with those struggling with addiction on a daily basis. Visit the website [www.amararosefoundation.org](http://www.amararosefoundation.org) to see how you can help to make a difference.



## PURL NAMED EMERGING LEADER

Great Rivers United Way's Lindsey Purl, director of Great Rivers HUB, was recently named Communities Joined in Action's (CJA) "Emerging Leader in Healthcare Transformation." CJA is a private, nonprofit membership organization that includes nearly 200 community health collaboratives—like the HUB—from 1,000 counties across the United States. This national award recognizes extraordinary community health leaders age 40 and under with 10 or fewer years in the field.

Purl was nominated by Care Coordination Systems (CCS), the software company that partners with Great Rivers HUB to offer a real-time, HIPAA-compliant database. In their nomination, CCS called her "an example of commitment to health and equity to all [who] know her" and cited her creativity, collaboration and desire to improve both herself and health systems as reasons why she deserved this award.



## HONORING THE ARTS

The City of La Crosse, including the city's Arts Board and partners at the Pump House Regional Arts Center, have been recognized by a statewide organization with a Wisconsin Creative Community Champion Award.

These awards, formerly the Arts in the Community Awards, are presented by Create Wisconsin in partnership with the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. The City of La Crosse was chosen for its support of and investment in the arts, culture and creativity, recognizing them as essential to community well-being, quality of life, and economic, workforce and civic growth and strength.

Among the most visible and impactful components of the city's involvement with the arts and creativity has been its partnership with the Pump House Regional Arts Center. The Pump House building is owned by the City and operated by the Pump House Regional Arts Center, Inc., a nonprofit organization. Programs include exhibition opportunities for students in 32 school districts in the region; Artspire, a free community celebration of the arts; the Compassion Project; and the development of sidewalk poetry and murals at the Pump House and in other areas of the city.

The Pump House was instrumental in the formation of the City of La Crosse Arts Board, a city advisory committee. The Arts Board serves as a forum to receive proposals and forward them to the appropriate council committee, advocates for the arts by commenting on policies and plans of the City and by seeking non-City funding for its advancement, and analyzes gaps and opportunities in programming, support, funding and promotion for the arts, cultural activity and economic development. Projects supported by the Arts Board include the development of public artworks throughout the downtown, consulting with city staff and advisors to establish policies for the acceptance and creation of public art and efforts to establish the Nii Hosto Art Park north of downtown.

The awards are sponsored by the League of Municipalities, Guardian Fine Arts Services and Heid Music.



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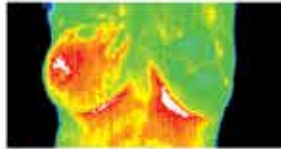
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# The Instrument of the Body

**Nikki Balsamo enables dancers to understand their own power and find kindness within.**

BY SUSAN C. SCHUYLER | PHOTOS BY ISABELLA MAE PHOTOGRAPHY

The glass-door entrance to the La Crosse Dance Centre (LDC) is one of many doorways facing an asphalt gash that slices through the stark industrial park. The text below the studio's logo on the door immediately sets the tone: "La Crosse's *Alternative* in Dance Education." The italics emphasis makes sense as you enter.

If, by chance, visitors miss the door's message, the studio's owner, Nikki Balsamo, offers a reminder, by way of introduction: "We do things a little bit differently."

Balsamo is wrapped in black athleisure clothing, which offers the perfect mix of comfort and flexibility required for the gamut of activities she navigates during her long days as owner and artistic director of the studio.

One Monday afternoon in early fall, she sits comfortably in a tufted, repurposed restaurant booth, the only furniture in a small, carpeted lobby between LDC's three studios. The wall opposite the booth is a colorful ad hoc gallery of children's artwork, crafted by dancers' siblings while waiting.

Balsamo's shoulder-length hair is loosely gathered in a ponytail, making room on her kind face to enjoy a sincere smile and her earnest gaze as she eagerly offers LDC's Mission/Vision/Values/Philosophy for inspection.

## TELLING A MOVING STORY

Its content opens the conversation and also begins the story of what makes LDC different. The lofty language of the two-page document would be at home on the website of any human-rights organization,

employing words like *empathy*, *awareness*, *respect* and *diversity*.

Also included are heartening promises to dancers for "a safe environment for everyone to learn" and "a nurturing time for them to explore who they are and who they want to become."

Balsamo's teaching philosophy, which she adds later, echoes that document, and is every bit as inspiring: "If everyone understands the beauty and power of the instrument of their body, they are happier in the world, and they are kinder to themselves and kinder to others."

## TAKING STEPS TOGETHER

That philosophy guides Balsamo in stewarding LDC's front-door promise, inviting 150 students and eight dance faculty to help make dance different. At LDC, dancers have creative ownership, practice a holistic union of biology and dance, and help mount a Nutcracker ballet production that is all their own.

For example, instead of a traditional dance recital, LDC presents a Spring Sharing. "The dancers have a huge say in what is presented," Balsamo says. Dancers collaborate in shaping the event: choosing music, writing the story and designing choreography and costuming.

Balsamo also honors student collaboration in her teaching. "Everyone is active creatively in class, as well," she says. To illustrate, Balsamo shares a copy of *Brain-Compatible Dance Education*, by dance educator Anne Green Gilbert.

In a workshop last summer, Balsamo was inspired by Brain Dance, Gilbert's methodology based on eight developmental movement patterns that integrate the brain and body. Balsamo uses Gilbert's eight-step

methodology as a warm-up in all of her dance classes, including Introduction to Dance, one of 17 classes she teaches each week.

### A TOUCH OF CLASS

A half dozen 7- and 8-year-olds trickle in for class. They chatter as they abandon their backpacks, stake their territory, and take stock of their reflections in the mirrored wall. Balsamo announces the week's theme, "energy," which is abundant as they begin class.

Balsamo demonstrates endless courteous goodwill as she keeps class on track while simultaneously corralling a whirling dervish of a boy. His frenzied movements often disturb his classmates.

Employing Gilbert's techniques, Balsamo encourages dancers to strike "sharp shape" poses, and "smooth" movements. "You are all choreographers!" Balsamo shouts to the dancers later, as they add their self-styled movements to the class dance combination.

With class half over, as Balsamo begins rehearsing jazz moves, the boy who moved as a blur earlier now stands focused and transformed. He moves his thin arms gracefully, in tandem with Balsamo, at her side.

### A DIFFICULT TRANSITION

After her father died in 2014 and her mother showed signs of dementia, Balsamo unexpectedly inherited LDC. Although already artistic director, being owner was overwhelming. She overcame that by applying the creativity and critical thinking she learned dancing. "I realized how easy things are when I go back to my training," she says.

Balsamo had one advantage: she literally



grew up with the business. She has danced there since age 3, and at 8 she told her parents she wanted to teach dance, which they encouraged.

In supporting Balsamo's passion, they also helped their shy youngster to manage social interactions. "They were open to me falling out of love with dance, which I never did," Balsamo says.

### LEARNING THE CRAFT

Indeed, she hasn't. She earned a bachelor of fine arts in modern dance from the University of Minnesota. Balsamo taught and performed in the Twin Cities after graduation.

Although she swore never to go home,

Balsamo relented in 2001, when she became LDC's artistic director after her mentor stepped down. After taking that post, Balsamo joined the Viterbo University faculty, where she was dance coordinator until 2014.

### CRACKING THE NUTCRACKER

Balsamo also inherited the Nutcracker when she returned. LDC first mounted the iconic ballet in 1990. Since then, LDC dancers have performed the Nutcracker for 33 consecutive years—although it was delayed once during Covid. It's back this year with a cast of 95.

Since its 1892 debut, many dancers have interpreted the Nutcracker. However, LDC dancers have truly made it their own. For example, to eliminate racial stereotyping in the Chinese and Arabian variations in Act 2, LDC uses sweets as themes instead.

### DIVORCING PASSION FROM PROFIT

"At the La Crosse Dance Centre, dance is an art form, not a commercial endeavor." Those words in the LDC Philosophy speak volumes. LDC offers \$20,000 annually in scholarships so everyone who wants to dance, can.

Easing dancers' economic burden brings grace to mind. "I interchange grace with ease," Balsamo says. "When we start from a place of ease, we can come up to obstacles differently." CRW

*Susan C. Schuyler is a freelance writer living in La Crosse.*



*Nikki Balsamo teaches 17 classes each week, from the youngest dancers to teens, in addition to her role as owner and artistic director of La Crosse Dance Centre.*



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# Finding Grace in All Things

**Jean Pagliario and the Franciscan Spirituality Center invite participants to grow in wholeness.**

BY TALLITHA REESE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Jean Pagliario has always found value in being part of a team with a shared mission, identifying needs and dreams within a community and ensuring that those needs and dreams are realized. Now, as the director of the Franciscan Spirituality Center (FSC) in La Crosse, that's exactly what she does on a day-to-day basis.



Jean Pagliario, director, Franciscan Spirituality Center

## LEARNING TO LEAD

The FSC is a sacred place, rooted in the Gospels, that welcomes everyone and is sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. The organization is dedicated to supporting anyone in their search for God, meaning and wholeness. The FSC offers in-person and virtual programming, retreats and spiritual direction, as well as on-site accommodation and dining options and professional meeting rooms.

Pagliario took on the role of director of the FSC in February, after serving as the program and retreat coordinator since 2017.

"It has been a very good transition," says Pagliario. "We have a well-functioning and equipped board and outstanding staff."

The journey that led Pagliario to where she is now began when she was majoring in social work at Carthage College in Kenosha while also serving as a counselor at a Bible camp during summers.

"Additionally, I was given leadership opportunities at my home congregation in Lake Geneva, and these three things—learning how to support people, helping youth grow in their relationship with God and learning how to be a leader in a congregation—led me to pursue a master of divinity degree," explains Pagliario.

After four years at seminary, Pagliario served a congregation for nine years and encouraged and celebrated with them as they used their gifts for ministry and mission.

## LOVED BEYOND CHALLENGES

One of Pagliario's personal beliefs is that we are beloved even in our biggest mistakes, failures and challenges, and that grace is always present.

"We [at the FSC] offer programming and spiritual direction so that our own stories can come to be seen as sacred," says Pagliario. "Most of what we do is an invitation to experience grace and grow in wholeness."

One of Pagliario's favorite offerings at the center is the conference Overcoming Challenges with Grit and Grace, where women are invited to share their stories of perseverance and faith in the midst of obstacles and difficulties.

"Many of us are encouraged in our own journeys as we hear these grace-filled and courageous stories," explains Pagliario.

Even while away from the physical building of the FSC for two years during the Covid-19 pandemic, Pagliario notes that virtual programming continued, connecting with people in nearly all 50 states, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. Now, many programs are back in-person and busier than ever.

"I experienced life-changing hospitality and grace here, and I hope that more and more people discover the amazing place that it is," says Pagliario. "We offer our space and gracious welcome, and the coffee is always hot!" **CRW**

*Tallitha Reese is a freelance writer and content manager based in Cashton. She owns Words By Reese, and you can find out more about her and her work at [www.wordsbyreese.com](http://www.wordsbyreese.com).*



## Her Saving Grace

Tara Herbst Kopp credits her husband's love and prison with a second chance in life.

BY JANIS JOLLY | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

From a distance, Tara Herbst Kopp's early life looked almost perfect. She was from a well-to-do family who bought her pretty much everything she wanted. But up close, she was a troubled, spoiled teenager. Before she finished high school, she withdrew money from her parents' account and ran away to California. There, she burned the candle at both ends and, after a year and a half, ran out of money, called her parents and asked to come home.

Once back home she received therapy and medication for her mood swings, but nothing worked. Her mental chaos continued. As time went on, she was fortunate to marry a wonderful man who stuck by her and loved her unconditionally. "He saved my life," she says. The couple had three children, but she still wasn't doing well. Her marriage faltered when her husband couldn't handle her mood swings. Later, when her behavior led to a charge of forgery, she was given the choice between a trial and a 17-month prison sentence; she chose prison.

### HELP IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

Ironically, prison provided the help she needed. Prison doctors diagnosed bipolar disorder and found medication that worked. A counselor taught cognitive-behavioral techniques to help her understand her destructive thinking. Doctors discovered kidney failure, and the kidney was removed.

While Herbst Kopp was in prison, her husband was single-parenting their three children. He stayed in touch with her by phone the whole time, seeking her input on the children. "He enabled me to co-parent from prison," she says. Herbst Kopp believes that prison,

and her husband's love, were the two blessings that brought her back to normal.

Returning to life in Galesville after her prison stint was not easy. "Jobs are hard to find there for everyone, and my record as a felon didn't help things," she says. Because her husband and children were integrated into that community, she couldn't go somewhere else. Yet many people in Galesville accepted her. One neighbor asked Herbst Kopp to watch her child while she worked, and before long she was running her own daycare.

### RETURNING THE GRACE SHE RECEIVED

Herbst Kopp can see the many ways people have supported and helped her and wants to give back. She and her husband have taken many children and adults under their wing. Many marginalized folks are welcomed into her art studio where they receive a listening ear, and sometimes help with medical and social issues. The couple has 10 "non bio" kids they help. She shares her own back story freely with family and friends, hoping to show that no matter how badly you mess up, you can turn it around. This, she says, is grace in action.

Herbst Kopp now has learned her second kidney is failing, and prospects of a donor match are not good.

"It's in God's hands," she says. A talented artist in stained glass and other media, she continues to work in her Rebel Glass art studio in Galesville and to share her story in the hope that others will be encouraged by her experiences. **CRW**

*Janis Jolly is a freelance writer in La Crosse who has often benefited from the kindness of others.*





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# STRENGTH IN SHARING

Shelly Linskey shares her lessons in acknowledging struggles and learning to receive.

BY LEAH CALL | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Shelly and Shawn McMahon with their three daughters. Shelly Linksey's family today, from left, Gus, Siena, AnneMarie, Michael, Caeli, Maria and her husband, Jarid, Shelly and Brett. Shawn died in 2006 when Shelly was pregnant with their son.

**W**omen are givers. We give time, advice, expertise, love. We volunteer, fundraise, pick up and cheer up. We find it hard to receive, harder to ask for help. Yet receiving with grace is a gift to both the giver and the receiver, a lesson learned by Shelly Linskey when her life turned upside down.

Sixteen years ago, Linskey's husband, Shawn McMahon, took his own life. At that time, she was a stay-at-home mom with three children, ages 7, 5 and 2, and a baby on the way. Suddenly, she found herself in a place she never thought she would be—grieving the loss of her husband, helping her three young daughters cope and wondering if she could ever pick up the pieces of their broken hearts and go on.

## SURROUNDED BY SUPPORT AND HOPE

"Honestly, I didn't know if financially I would be able to stay in my house," recalls Linskey, who had no family in the area. "Looking back now, I see there were so many pieces put into place to support me."

Many of those pieces existed at her church, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Holmen. Linskey recalls a pivotal moment after her husband's memorial mass. "My priest, Father Schaller, came up to me, put his hand on my arm, looked me straight in the eye and said, 'Shelly, people are going to want to help you, and you are going to have to let them.'"

Realizing she may not make it without help, she graciously opened the door. And help arrived. Financial support rolled in from acquaintances and strangers—fundraisers at the church, at schools, at the Holmen MOMS Club where she was a member. A teenage girl provided free babysitting so she could go grocery shopping. A friend

came over every week to watch her youngest children, so she could attend Adoration at church and begin to heal her heart and spirit.

"It was the worst part of my life, but also the best in just feeling supported and loved by those around me," says Linskey. "You have to have hope."

## NEW CHAPTERS BUILD THE FUTURE

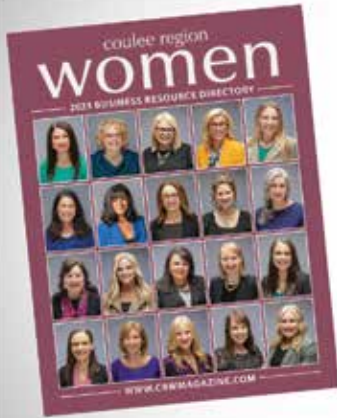
That hope and support enabled Linskey to move forward. A few years later, she remarried and had two additional children. Today she is a certified trainer at Fitness Lying Down in La Crosse and the La Crosse Area Family YMCA.

With the support of others, Linskey helped her children through the loss of their father. She describes her three oldest daughters, now adults, as resilient, independent and strong. Her son Michael, who never met his biological father, and her two youngest children are also thriving.

"I have never been quiet about what we went through," notes Linskey. "If they had questions, I always responded honestly. Being an example for them has been inspirational for me as well."

"I would say that women tend to suffer in silence. Our strength is in sharing with others—our burdens, our struggles—and lifting each other up," she says. "If we are able to acknowledge the struggle and move forward together, we are all stronger." **CRW**

*Freelance writer Leah Call was inspired by Linskey's strength, faith and ability to find hope at such a difficult time.*



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# Aging in Place, Aging with Grace

How to adapt homes and habits to fit changing needs.

BY JULIE NELSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



**A**h, young love. Carrying your new spouse over the threshold—though a bit corny—is just romantic enough to try it anyway, especially if you are a 20-something.

Fast-forward 60 years: carrying another person anywhere is out of the question. Diminished strength is part of aging, and if you add arthritis or a knee or hip replacement to the equation, even a wheelchair may be too much to lift up even a single step and into a home. The solution? Find a new way to stay in the home or move.

If you are looking around your own home or thinking about how much your parents would hate to move, you're not alone. Aging in place is growing in importance as individuals build or buy homes.

If you have the luxury of building a house from the ground up, you are in the driver's seat. You can create a home where at least one entry has no steps, with wide doors and hallways that could accommodate a wheelchair if necessary and there is a shower with no tub or lip to step over. Your architect can help you come up with even more ideas.

Most homes, however, were built long before age-friendly features were considered. Still, those of us who want to stay in our homes as long as possible have plenty of options.

## MAKE YOUR HOME SAFER

Carissa Pagel-Smith of the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) in La Crosse says a universal tip for aging in place is to prevent accidents. "So often a fall is a life-changing event," she says.

She recommends addressing throw rugs and other tripping hazards, bathtubs and showers with slippery floors, shelves that require climbing to access or even a clock, tissue box or lamp that is hard to reach from the bed.



Carissa Pagel-Smith, Aging and Disability Resource Center in La Crosse

From there, she says recommendations depend on the individual and what is needed at the moment. Can all your living needs be moved to one floor, or could you install a lift from one floor to another? How much support do you have from a friend, family member or neighbor who can check in on you or assist with errands and grocery shopping?

Pagel-Smith encourages people to call the ADRC and start asking questions. "Modifying a home can be quite overwhelming and too often people don't want to admit they need help, possibly because they fear that by asking, they'll end up in the nursing home. But truly, nothing could be further from the truth. Our goal is to help people maintain as much independence as possible."

ADRC can come into a house and look for ways to increase safety, including helping residents access low- or no-cost solutions, such as installation of exterior ramps and grab bars.

## ASSISTANCE WHEN YOU NEED IT

When levered door handles and lighted hallways aren't enough, the next step may be a service provider such as Grace Community Supported Living Services to tap into people power.

"We provide whatever care clients need to stay in their own home," says Cyndi Ripple, co-owner of Grace with Gwen Parr.

The organization can provide up to four visits per day.

"We have people who can come into a home and provide help with medications, do laundry, prepare meals, help with toileting or transfers and take clients on outings in the community—whatever is necessary that we feel we can provide," Parr says.



Gwen Parr, left, and Cyndi Ripple, owners of Grace Community Supported Living Services

Each client has an individualized care plan, Ripple says. "We want them to be safe, happy and healthy in their own home."

Grace opened four years ago, when Ripple and Parr wanted to spare others the experience their own parents had. Both families are from small towns where in-home care was not widely available, and the parents had to move out of their homes much too soon. "This is a passion for us," says Ripple. "We take pride in what we do. We treat every individual like we would want our own family to be treated."

## RESOURCES

### Aging & Disability Resource Center

[www.lacrossecounty.org/adrc](http://www.lacrossecounty.org/adrc)  
608-785-5700

### Grace Community Supported Living Services

[www.gracecls.com](http://www.gracecls.com)  
608-572-0839 or 608-963-4357

### Home safety checklist

[www.cdc.gov/steady/pdf/check\\_for\\_safety\\_brochure-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/steady/pdf/check_for_safety_brochure-a.pdf)

## CONSIDER YOUR COMMUNITY

When deciding where you want to live your retirement years, Pagel-Smith suggests thinking about one more aspect: community. Being secure and mobile at home can be no fun if you are isolated and have no one to talk to. She suggests looking for opportunities to get involved with social activities or volunteering. Sometimes giving up the comforts of home and moving to an apartment in a senior living situation can be the best fit in the long run.

If this seems right for you or your parents, put aside your fears ... and think of it as crossing a new threshold. **CRW**

*Julie Nelson saw her mom struggle to use a wheelchair at home while recovering from surgery and knows even little changes can make a big difference.*



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# Repaying a Debt

Natalia Breuer's project for Ukrainian refugees reflects a family connection.

BY JOAN KENT | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Left: Natalia Breuer sorts donations from Coulee Region residents. Right: Breuer's contacts in Poland distribute donations to Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war.

Natalia Breuer remembers the World War II stories her grandfather told when she was growing up in Poland, especially one.

“He grew up in a Polish town near the border with Russia,” she says. “When he was 14, Russian soldiers came to the town. They took him and his three sisters and both his parents and lined them up outside their house to shoot them. Their Ukrainian neighbor saw it and asked the soldiers for mercy, and they walked away. Now, so many years later, Russian soldiers are doing the same thing.”

Breuer moved to the United States as a teenager and is now sales and marketing director for Organic Valley's Prairie Meats. “When the current war started, I called the one person I know in Poland and asked how I could help,” she says. “I am trying to repay the debt that saved my grandparents' lives. I loved him so much and I feel connected to the Ukrainian people.”

## SENDING HELP ONE BOX AT A TIME

Since that call, she has collected and shipped 161 boxes containing 3,875 pounds of clothing, shoes and children's toys to families and centers housing refugees from the current war in Ukraine.

Refugees began coming to Poland the week the war began last February—5 million in just a few months' time.

## UKRAINIAN DONATION DROP-OFF LOCATIONS

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“The biggest need is for women and children's clothing. The refugees are mainly women and children because most men under 65 have to stay. The women left quickly, grabbing only a few clothes for their children,” Breuer says

First working with people her friend knows and schools in her town, and now also with about 10 refugee shelters, the two have organized a network mainly of working mothers to collect, ship and distribute the donations.

Breuer and her two daughters mend donations, sort by size and package for shipping. Tunde, 11, checks for things like missing buttons so people can use the clothes immediately. Reka, 9, keeps the spreadsheet.

Shipping by boat takes six to 10 weeks. Donations have covered the cost, so far about \$15,000. Most donations have been from individuals, with \$2,000 from the La Farge Lions as the largest single donation, and a silent auction raised \$2,000. Breuer now has enough clothes to fill about 80 boxes, which will cost another \$5,000 to ship.

## AS LONG AS PEOPLE KEEP GIVING

Breuer initially expected to be collecting and shipping for two to three months. “Now I know it will be at least until next year,” she says. “I'll continue as long as people are giving money for shipping and cleaning out their closets.

“It's the stories, the web of people that holds it together,” Breuer adds, recalling Reka's delight when she saw a photo of a Ukrainian girl wearing the fancy pink dress she'd had trouble giving up, and the stories from others willing to help strangers half a world away. **CRW**

*Joan Kent is a retired journalist who lives in La Farge and belongs to the La Farge Lions, where she learned about Natalia's project.*





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# A ROOM OF HER OWN

Coulee Region women create space for peace.

BY JAN WELLIK | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



These days especially, it can be difficult to find space to relax and be at peace. Yet finding this space is essential to good health and well-being. Declaring a room of one's own is one way women can enjoy their home and be connected to family history.

## SPACE FOR SOLITUDE AND STILLNESS

In Middle Ridge, LaVonne Hundt added a desk, chairs and bookshelves to turn what had been a kids' TV room and play area into "one of my favorite rooms," which she calls her library.

"It's a cozy place to sit and look out the front bay window," she says.

She lives at the end of a dead-end road with her husband, Michael, and their dog, Lena, who enjoys the window seat.

They built the house in 2000, and this room "was an extra space, underutilized and not cozy," she says. It was used by their five kids, now ages 16 to 26. It has French doors rescued from her husband's father's farmhouse. Her husband is a fifth-generation farmer, and their kids are sixth generation.

Hundt was inspired by friends who have a library in their home. "I thought, that's what we can do with the den to make it cozy!"

An Amish cabinetmaker made all the cabinets and shelves in the space, repurposing trees Michael cut on the farm. The color scheme is burgundy, yellow and cherry wood.

"I love to be in this room in the morning when everyone leaves and it's quiet," she says. "I have my coffee and say my prayers. And I love in the winter when it's snowing and watching the snow fall," she says. "It's a quiet place to sit and be still. In society today, silence and stillness are underrated."

## SHE SHED FOR REST & RESPITE

Eight miles outside of Winona, Kristen Piechowski's repurposed playhouse provides the perfect space for respite and a bit of private time.

"It's still a work in progress," she says of her "she shed," which had originally been a playhouse for her now-teenage children. "It was either tear it down or turn it into something."

That something now features a deck on two sides furnished with vintage lawn chairs that had belonged to her mother-in-law, a sliding glass door with a view across the valley and a bench inside completed by her husband and son on Mother's Day, perfect for curling up under a fuzzy blanket with a book and a cup of tea.



Whether it is LaVonne Hundt's library with a wonderful bay window and French doors with family history, a cozy corner in a light-filled room where Ann Kathan can relax, or a repurposed playhouse-turned-she-shed where Kristin Piechowski can enjoy nature and quiet time, area women enjoy spaces designed for their peace and comfort.



"It gets kind of hectic in the house," Piechowski says, with two teenagers and a husband who has a penchant for building things and fixing up old cars. "Just to sit for five minutes out here totally recharges me," she says. In the summer, she enjoys watching hummingbirds flit around a hanging basket on the deck; cooler weather brings out the space heater for a cozy feel. Calming light blue décor includes found items—from Habitat ReStore, yard sales, Goodwill—and sentimental memories like the shells from her other happy place: the beach on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

"When in doubt, if you can't find me, look in my she shed," she says.

When it's time to come inside, Piechowski has another retreat: an oversized tub in the main suite, complete with candles, soft lighting under the hand-built surround and, someday, an electric fireplace.

"I spend a lot of time in here," she says, where she can fully submerge and add Epsom salts and essential oils to soothe sore muscles and her back.

Inside or out, Piechowski savors the quiet places where she can find a bit of peace.

### A PLACE FOR FAMILY CONNECTION

In the 1950s, the original house on County Road OT near Holmen, built by George and Inga Kathan, had just two bedrooms and one bathroom.

Local architect Deb Kees designed a "gorgeous renovation of my grandparents' home," says Ann Kathan, to add space and light.

Kathan grew up next to her grandparents before moving to Washington, D.C., and then Florida, where she worked as a bankruptcy lawyer. She returned home with her twin 13-year-old daughters a couple years ago to help take care of her father, Bob Kathan, before he passed away in August.

Lois Kathan, Ann's 81-year-old mother, lives next door, and was an English and French teacher at Holmen Middle School.

"The whole house is special," beams Ann Kathan. "It's unique—living in a community. There's no way we could replicate this somewhere else."

The 10-acre multigenerational property has three houses, provides plenty of privacy and is close to the girls' school. For the remodel, everything has been opened up and bigger windows added, says Kathan. "It's been a full-time job for the last year and a half."

The living room was kept original except for the lighting. It's here that Kathan enjoys sitting on the couch learning Norwegian on Duolingo.

Several special touches were added to the design: rounded archways, a jigsaw puzzle area, a bar downstairs and a mini fridge with a coffee bar in her main bedroom.

There are reading nooks, a secret mirror door between the girls' bedrooms and steel handrail on the stairs.

"I like pocket doors, steel, windows and Italian tile," says Kathan. "I don't like closets, bathtubs and carpet," so those were all taken out.

Benson Construction did the remodel and worked with an Amish family to make handmade built-in cabinets and woodworking.

Kathan is intentional with the beautifully arranged artwork created by local artists and from her other travels. Her friend and artist Susie Weber is designing mosaic tiles for the upstairs bathrooms.

Light is the main feature, whether it is the natural light through the large windows or positioned ceiling lights focused on artwork. "It feels like a seamless transition into nature, like being a treehouse," she says.

Every inch has been thoughtfully designed. "There's nothing random in this house," Kathan says. "I'm happy to build something beautiful. It's meant to be a legacy for my girls." **CRW**

*Jan Wellik enjoys finding peace and quiet in her home to write, as every woman needs a room of her own.*

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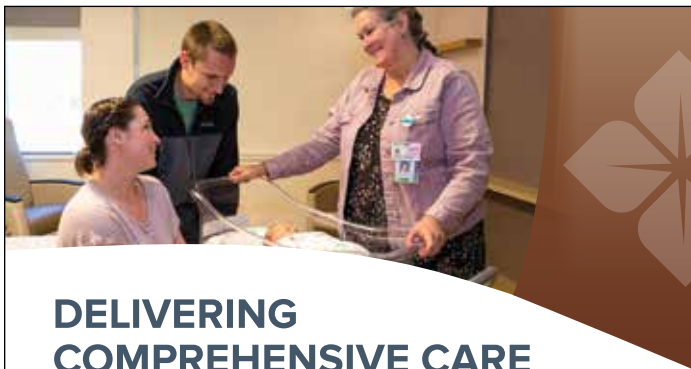
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# Taste of the Holidays

Traditional family recipes link celebrations across the years.

BY COULEE REGION WOMEN STAFF | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

What taste, smell or yellowed recipe card embodies your favorite holiday memories? While each year brings new, trendy ideas for your table, there is comfort in tradition, and honestly, those tried-and-true favorites are constants because they taste as good as they make us feel.

Gather around the holiday table with family favorites from all of us at *Coulee Region Women*.

## Heritage in a Cookie

*Diane Raaum, photo editor*

The list of holiday treats that my Norwegian family enjoys is long: lefse, rosettes, fruit soup and more. But the one constant request is for simple sweet cone-shaped krumkake, a recipe handed down from my Great Aunt Elizabeth—crisp bites of tradition that signal the holidays are here.

### Krumkake

- ½ cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs, unbeaten
- 1 cup milk
- 1½-1¾ cup sifted flour
- Nutmeg
- Vanilla

Melt butter and add sugar. Beat in eggs one at a time. Add milk alternating with flour until smooth. Season with nutmeg and vanilla to taste.

Drop a spoonful of batter on preheated krumkake iron. Bake until golden and lift off with metal spatula or knife. Quickly roll around a krumkake cone and then gently slide cone out. Store in airtight container when cool.

## Black Friday Meant Baking

*Rachel Persson, marketing director*

From the time I was small, the holidays began the day after Thanksgiving with cookie day. My mother, my siblings, my aunt and my grandmother, RuthAnn Rowell, all gathered at our house, where we kids would “help” prepare all the sweets for the whole holiday season. I recall blue frosting for snowflake cookies, cinnamon sugar for snickerdoodles, cashews for brittle, but the singular food without which there would not be a holiday season was my grandma’s fudge.

Every year, there she’d stand, apron on and wooden spoon in hand, constantly stirring the deep, heavy metal pot while absolute chaos reigned around her. By the end of the day there were five sugar-laden children with sticky hands, full tummies and wonderful memories.

### Can’t Fail Fudge

- 4 cups marshmallows
- ⅔ cup evaporated milk
- ¼ cup butter
- 1½ cup sugar
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1 12 oz. package of chocolate chips

Use a large, heavy-bottomed pan that doesn’t get too hot too quickly. Mix milk, butter, sugar and marshmallows in the pan. On medium heat, melt together stirring to mix in the marshmallows. When everything is melted together, begin to boil. Boil 5 minutes (the mixture will turn a brown color) after the syrup boils. Keep stirring constantly 5 more minutes, then remove from heat and quickly stir in the chocolate chips until fully melted. Pour into a 9x13-inch buttered pan. Chill 10 mins or until it sets enough to cut.

## Wreathed in Memories

Heide Harron, *distribution*



When I was in elementary school, my siblings and I eagerly signed up to make these treats for our classroom Christmas parties.

The evening before our party, Mom would be stirring green food coloring into melted butter and marshmallow. As soon as the cornflakes were added, the assembly line began. Mom dropped warm spoonfuls of the cornflake mixture onto waxed paper. We kids buttered our fingers and formed the yummy gooeyness into circles with an open center. Finally, red hot candies were added to complete our beautiful edible wreaths.

### Christmas Wreath Cookie Recipe

- 1 stick butter
- 30 large marshmallows
- 2 tsp. green food color
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 4 cups cornflake cereal
- 3-4 oz. red hot candies

Set one or two sheets of waxed paper on the kitchen counter. Melt the butter in a large saucepan over low heat. Add marshmallows and stir until melted. Remove from the heat, stir in food coloring and vanilla, then stir in cornflakes.

Drop a heaping tablespoonful on waxed paper, lightly grease fingers and quickly form mixture into a wreath shape. Immediately

decorate each cookie with red hot candies. Repeat.

Allow to cool and hold shape before removing from waxed paper, about 1 hour. Store in an airtight container.

## Warmth in a Cup

Betty Christiansen, *publisher*

This recipe was shared with us by Malin, a Swedish woman my husband worked with at the University of Minnesota. Although he and I both have Swedish heritage, neither of our families had ever made glögg, now a Christmas Eve tradition. It is best served hot after a large Christmas dinner, for reasons that become obvious when you consider the amount of alcohol in it. The leftovers keep long after Christmas has ended.



### Swedish Glögg

- 1 bottle vodka (750 ml)—cheap is fine
- 8-9 cinnamon sticks
- 1 handful cloves
- 1 handful cardamom pods
- 1 medium ginger root, roughly chopped
- 2 large bottles red wine (3 liters total)
- 2 cups sugar

Black currant or grape jelly to taste



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Pour off a few ounces of a quart of vodka (more as necessary as the bottle fills up with spices). Stuff the cinnamon sticks, cloves, cardamom pods and chopped ginger root inside. Let this steep about two weeks. Strain the spices out of the vodka.

When ready to serve, dissolve the sugar by heating it in a large pot with enough water to cover it. Add the wine, the jelly and the spiced vodka. Serve hot.

## Toasty Memories

*Shari Hegland, editor*

Each year shortly before the holidays, Mom would clear the table, dig out the yeast and make a sweet, flavorful homemade bread that still means home to me. Infused with orange juice and grated orange peel with a delightful cinnamon swirl, Mom's orange bread begged to be sliced thick, toasted golden and generously buttered.

When I was diagnosed with celiac disease, I almost relegated it to the realm of childhood memory. Still, I wanted to recreate that golden orange goodness, so I tinkered, compromised and came up with a close-enough substitute. It wouldn't be Christmas without it.



### Orange Bread

*Makes 2 large loaves or 3-4 small loaves*

- 2 packages active dry yeast
- ½ cup warm water
- 1½ cups warm orange juice
- 5-6 cups sifted flour (more may be needed)
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 tsp. salt
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ cup grated orange peel

For cinnamon swirl:

- 2 T melted butter
- 3 T sugar
- 1½ tsp. cinnamon

Sprinkle yeast on the warm water in a large bowl and stir to dissolve. Add orange juice and 2 cups flour. Beat at medium speed 2 minutes, scraping the bowl occasionally. Stir in sugar, salt, butter and orange peel. Mix in enough remaining flour to make a dough that leaves the sides of the bowl.

Turn out on lightly floured board and knead until satiny and elastic, 5-8 minutes. Place in a lightly greased bowl. Turn dough over to grease top. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled (about 1½

hours). Punch down, turn onto board and divide in half. Cover and let rest 5 minutes. Roll half of the dough into a rectangle ¼ inch thick, 6 inches wide and 20 inches long. Brush with 1 T of melted butter; mix the sugar and cinnamon and sprinkle evenly over dough, reserving enough for the second loaf and to sprinkle on the top of the loaf.

Roll like a jelly roll, starting at the narrow end. Seal ends and place seam side down in a greased loaf pan. Brush lightly with melted butter and sprinkle with reserved cinnamon/sugar mixture. Cover and let rise until double, about 1 hour. Repeat with the second half of the dough.

Bake at 375° for 45 minutes.

### Shari's GF Orange Bread Adaptation

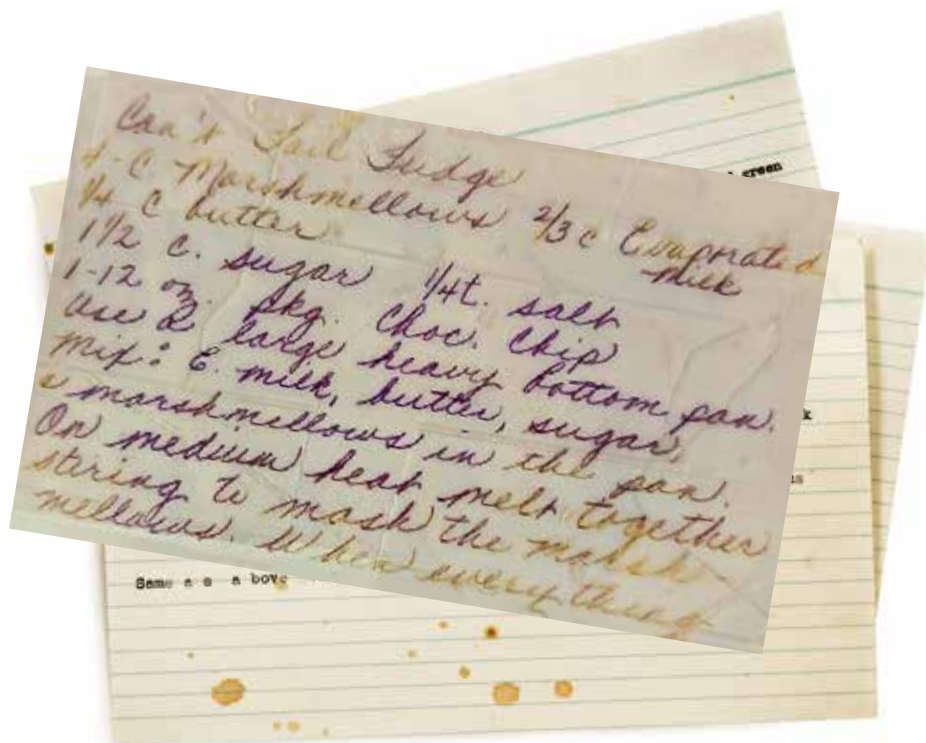
- 1 box King Arthur Gluten-Free Bread/Pizza mix
- 4 T melted butter (divided)
- 1¾ cups lukewarm orange juice
- 3 large eggs at room temperature
- ¼-½ cup grated orange peel

For cinnamon swirl:

- 2 T melted butter
- 3 T sugar
- 1½ tsp. cinnamon

Follow directions on the box, substituting orange juice for milk and stirring the orange peel into the dough. When transferring dough to a bread pan, divide into thirds. After each third, brush on melted butter and sprinkle with cinnamon/sugar blend. Brush butter on the top. Bake as directed.

This makes a very large loaf that will likely overflow the pan—place a baking sheet on the bottom oven rack to catch overflow or split the dough to make two smaller loaves, reducing baking time accordingly. **CRW**





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Clockwise from top left: Shamawyah Curtis and Shy Jackson at Pride Fest hosted by Logan High School. Family Game Night hosted by Hope Restores. Curtis and Jackson meet Mandela Barnes in downtown La Crosse. Hope Restores members attending B.L.A.C.K. (Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge) annual black and gold party. Dala Marie Peterson Hynek, left, teaches a girls group participant how to knit.

# Building Community Through Connection

Hope Restores engages all to create a world as it should be.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

A framed quote by Michelle Obama hangs on the wall of the Hope Restores headquarters. It reads, “You may live in the world as it is, but you can still work to create the world as it should be.” The team at Hope Restores is doing that important work, right here in the Coulee Region.

In the center of the main room sits a long dining room table, extended even further by a second table. Crowded around those tables is a group of about fifteen people. They’re sipping coffee and exchanging stories. There’s a positive energy in the room. It’s “Coffee with Hope Restores,” a bi-monthly meeting, and it’s open to everyone. The purpose: to help foster relationships within the community. Seated among the staff and volunteers from Hope Restores are representatives from other community organizations, churches and individuals who are just interested in learning more about what Hope Restores is doing (and there is a lot!).

## SEARCHING FOR HEALING, FINDING MORE

Tashyra “Shy” Jackson, executive director of operations of Hope Restores, and her best friend since childhood, Shamawyah Curtis, executive director of development, opened Hope Restores African American Resource Center in February 2020 in response to a need in the local African American community: a need for healing. Jackson describes the collective trauma they were living—the pain of each killing, of watching each court case, of children being called names in school and the struggle of ignoring those feelings, pushing them down and yet feeling them build up. She and Curtis decided to do something about it.

They envisioned a place where people could come to talk about those feelings, and through that, begin to experience deep healing. As a result, they started offering culturally specific support groups for the Black community.

## PADDLING FOR HOPE

In May 2022, Hope Restores volunteer Bobbi Rathert set out to kayak the entire length of the Mississippi River—all 2,400 miles of it. Her journey began at Lake Itasca in Minnesota, and she planned to paddle all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. It was to be part inquisitive adventure and part fundraiser.

Visitors to Bobbi's blog, [www.paddlingforhope.com](http://www.paddlingforhope.com), were invited to participate in the Miles Pledge, and all funds raised were used to support Hope Restores. Rathert's regular posts were colorful and informative, including not only her observations, but also area history. The project received international attention with readers writing in from France, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

In July, Bobbi was forced to pivot from her original goal and abandon the river journey due to health concerns. Now, she's working on a book chronicling her experiences, sharing her stories in schools and continuing her work as an ally.

In the beginning, they focused on foundational elements that would make it easier for people to *get to* the support groups. Food is a great connector, so they offered food. They added a giving cabinet so attendees could grab things they might need on their way out. They found a way to provide transportation to the meetings. They added childcare.

And it kept growing.

As they identified barriers, they built programs to address those barriers. When they learned families who had adopted minority children had questions, they formed a support group for them. They built a Gladiator program for allies. They speak at schools and train local businesses and organizations on how to create healthy, inclusive environments.

## EXPERIENCING COMMUNITY

Today, Jackson says she feels hopeful. "One of the big reasons that I feel so hopeful," she says, "is that I've now had the privilege of feeling like I'm a part of a community. And

I'm hopeful that I can continue to share that with other people ... to help them *experience community* in La Crosse versus just *living* in La Crosse."

This idea of being part of a community versus just living in a community is central to Hope Restores' mission.

If this message speaks to you, Jackson passionately encourages *action*. It's not enough just to sit through a DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) presentation or to read a book. Commit to *doing* something with what you've learned. If someone says or does something racist, she says, don't let it go. "One of the reasons that it's hard to correct someone is that people don't feel like they're qualified ... but it *is* okay! You *are* qualified, because you have to live in this world too. You are qualified to want a better place, to want a better community. So, speak up. Speak up because it matters to people." **CRW**

*Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a writer in La Crosse.*



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**HOLLAND NAMED  
OUTSTANDING  
WOMAN OF COLOR  
IN EDUCATION**

Jazzma Holland, interim assistant director for student leadership in the Office of Multicultural Student Services at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, has been named the UW-La Crosse recipient of the UW System Outstanding Women of Color in Education Award. The award is given annually to faculty, staff, students or community members who have helped advance equity and inclusion for people of color in the UW system, as well as in communities throughout the state.

A graduate of UW-La Crosse, Holland has also served as the director of Upward Bound at UW-La Crosse. In her current role, she helps oversee and support eight multicultural student organizations.



**WOMEN'S FUND  
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In 1998, Signe Gundersen Schroeder (1927-2022), along with Roberta Gelatt, initiated a marvelously brazen act. With the bold belief that they could improve the status of women in the Greater La Crosse community, they created Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse.

Signe and Roberta started a movement that is now a force for women's self-sufficiency. In the past 24 years, the Women's Fund has awarded over \$845,000 to programs and organizations dedicated to advancing women and girls. Signe has inspired and empowered countless women to become philanthropists.

Thank you, Signe, for recognizing a need and putting into motion Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse. Your legacy will live on indefinitely.



**HANSEL RECEIVES  
FUNDRAISING  
AWARD**

Mandy Hansel, cofounder of the Winona-based nonprofit trail race company The Storm Trail Race Series, has received the 2022 President's Award from the Upper Mississippi Valley Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. The Storm Trail Race Series celebrates trail running and raises funds for youth mental health organizations in the Winona and La Crosse areas, including Family & Children's Center, Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center and Solomon's Song.

Hansel is also the Executive Vice President of Support Services for RiverSide Integrated Solutions in Lewiston, Minnesota, and the president of Winona Women in Business. She serves on the board of the Upper Midwest Trail Runners Association.

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# Sweater Weather

Show your style in cozy knitwear all winter long.

BY ELISE WEINBENDER

PHOTOS BY FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHY

Sweaters are a staple for the winter season—there's one for every occasion. This winter, stay cozy and comfortable with a great sweater and the perfect outfit to match.



## Winter Charm

Give your look a festive twist with an emerald sweater and chunky gold jewelry from **Mainstream Boutique**. Distressed jeans add a casual element to create a sweet look for any winter outing.

Balloon-sleeve sweater, \$48; Risen distressed jeans, \$64; Julio Designs chunky chain necklace and bracelet, \$56 and \$39.

Modeled by Maria Grater.

# Holiday Glam

Be both comfortable and stylish at holiday parties with this cushy, gold-flecked sweater from **Outrageous Boutique**. Pair with a flowy champagne pant and embellish with a statement necklace and gold heels from **Urban Shoetique** for a cozy yet eye-catching look.

Gigi Moda sweater, \$89; Gigi Moda pants, \$79; Rain hoop earrings, \$15; Teresa Goodall necklace, \$118; Irregular Choice shoes, \$135.

Modeled by Chase Fronk.





# Sweater Season Go-To

The charming “coatigan” (coat + cardigan) from **Urban Shoetique** goes beautifully with a blouse and jeans for a dressed-up, on-the-go look. Accessorize with earrings and matching boots to be ready for anything from Christmas shopping to holiday events.

Liverpool coatigan, \$139; Liverpool top, \$68; Liverpool Lucy Bootcut jean, \$109; Gabor sneaker boot, \$235; Brighton earrings, \$78.

Modeled by Beth Baer.



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# Ride the Rails to Chicago

Enjoy a winter weekend in the Windy City—no driving necessary.

BY CHRIS HALL | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



*Amtrak photo by Marc Magliari*



*Photo by Abel Arcinieago, Choose Chicago*

What if I said, “Let’s go to Chicago for a few days and see the sights? Go holiday shopping? See the seasonal displays? Visit the museums?”

You might shake your head: “No way—there’s all that traffic, those horrendous parking fees, trying to find the way to a hotel—ugh!”

But we have a wonderful opportunity here in the Coulee Region: Amtrak. More specifically, we have the Empire Builder. With daily stops in Winona, La Crosse and Tomah, you can jump right on and be in Chicago in just a few hours.

The Empire Builder runs from Portland/Seattle to Chicago and comes through our region regularly. It also leaves from Chicago back with the same stops in reverse every day.

## AFFORDABLE, COMFORTABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

I first discovered train travel when I was teaching art at a parochial school; we would take an annual spring field trip to visit the Art Institute of Chicago. Our middle school class would board the train in La Crosse for two nights in Chicago—a most economical and delightful way to travel for students and chaperones alike. I have since

traveled back this way numerous times with friends and family for museum visits, dining experiences and shopping.

Ticket costs vary depending on time of year, your age and where you board. Average fare starts at \$84 round trip from La Crosse for coach.

You can choose from a seat on the upper deck (better views) or lower deck (no stairs and more stability.) You can also upgrade to a roomette, which is a small private room with two comfortable seats that transform into beds. This roomette comes with complimentary meals and a car attendant. If there are roomettes available, Amtrak will sometimes put them up for auction, and you can bid on one if you don’t want to pay the full price. If you are the high bidder, the roomette is yours. The last time my husband and I went to Chicago, we did this and were able to get a roomette for a great price on our outgoing ride. Since we traveled over the lunch hour, we were able to enjoy a delicious lunch in the dining car, included in the price.

## ENJOY THE RIDE

The great thing about traveling on a train is that you can get up



Photo by Abel Arcinieago, Choose Chicago



*Why look through a windshield driving to your destination, when you can sit back and relax and watch the countryside roll by from a roomette or the observation car on Amtrak's Empire Builder? Chicago destinations, like the Shedd Aquarium (top) are just a short ride away.*

## REMINDERS OF THE PAST

As the train pulls into Chicago, you will enter the underground terminal of Union Station. Porters direct you toward the main station after you have picked up your luggage from the luggage racks, where you placed it when you first boarded the train. Signs in the station will guide you to taxi stands where you can find a cab to take you to your hotel.

Union Station is located on the west side of The Loop in downtown Chicago, just 11 blocks due west of Grant Park. A short taxi, Uber or Lyft ride is all that is between you and your Chicago getaway. If you have time when arriving in Chicago or before you depart back to the Coulee Region, be sure to make your way upstairs to the original Union Station. This historic building, built in 1925, still displays its grand majesty, and it's easy to imagine ladies and gentlemen of the past scurrying back and forth on their way to catch a steam locomotive.

Once in Chicago, you can be carefree—no worries of parking or traffic. Depending on the location of your hotel, most everything you would want to do is within walking distance or a short ride away.

## SO MUCH TO EXPERIENCE

Need a short holiday break with the kids? A train ride will thrill children of any age (whether they admit it or not, and yes, there *is* wi-fi on board), and the museums and activities in Chicago are endless. These include the Shedd Aquarium's Beluga Encounter, 4-D Experience and Otter Encounter.

The Museum of Science and Industry will pique anybody's curiosity. On exhibit now through January 16, 2023, is the world's largest display of LEGO art, *The Art of the Brick*, with more than 100 sculptures in all. You also can't miss going down in the museum's "coal mine."

And the Field Museum of Natural History: dinosaurs, mummies, fossils and insects! Need I say more?

Other family-friendly activities include Lincoln Park Zoo, Millennium Park, Willis Tower (formerly the Sears Tower), Navy Pier and the Chicago Riverwalk.

And, of course, there's the dining. There are far too many places to even start listing here, but be sure you try Chicago deep dish pizza at least once.

Shopping? Again, too many options to list, but the Magnificent Mile, located on a 13-block stretch of North Michigan Avenue, has more than 460 stores to choose from. You can indulge any shopping passion there.

Before you know it, your time in Chicago will be up, and you'll be headed back to Union Station, where you'll leisurely board the Empire Builder and head back to the Coulee Region. Traffic jam? You don't have to worry about it. Arms full of shopping bags and souvenirs? Packed away with your luggage when you first boarded, and you don't have to deal with them again until you get off the train. You just sit back in the observation car, have a warm drink and watch the magnificent scenery go by, knowing someone else is taking the worry out of your travel woes. Once you've traveled by train to Chicago, I'll bet you do it again. Maybe even to Seattle, or Washington, D.C., or ... ? **CRW**

*Chris Hall loves adventures by train, plane, automobile, bus, horse—anything that gets her on the move. But there's something about the old-fashioned notion of a train that is like no other mode of travel.*

and move around. The train has a wonderful observation car where you can sit at a table or in a comfortable chair and watch the beautiful Wisconsin countryside roll by. There is a snack bar on the lower level, in case you don't bring snacks for yourself, which you are allowed to do. Restrooms are located throughout the train, so there's always one nearby. However, while you can get up and walk around freely, be aware that it is not as smooth as walking on a plane.

The Empire Builder makes a few more stops along the way to Chicago: Wisconsin Dells, Portage, Milwaukee and more. There will be passengers getting off and more getting on, but as all seats are assigned, you don't have to worry about losing your seat.



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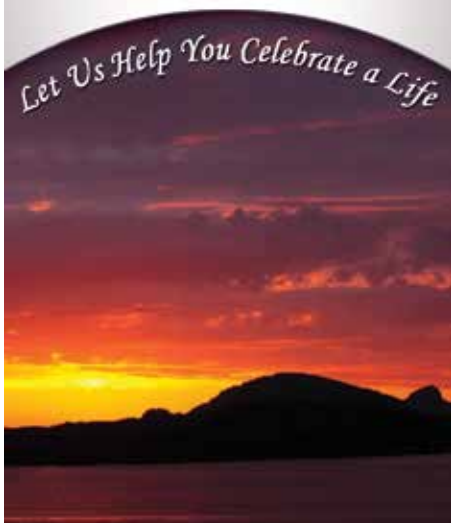
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# Community Calendar

## ONGOING EVENTS

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

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

**Holmen Area Rotary Club**, every Wed. 7 a.m.,  
Holmen Community Center, 600 N. Holmen Dr.,  
holmenrotary@outlook.com.

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

**La Crosse Area Quilters** 4th Tuesday of each  
month, 6:30 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel-  
Conference Center, Onalaska,  
www.lacrossequiltguild.com.

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

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

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

**League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area  
(lwvlacrosse)** Monthly Lunch and Learn from  
Sept.-April. See <http://www.lwvlacrosse.org> for  
details.

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

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

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

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

**Valley View Rotary**, every Wed., 7:30-8:30 a.m., La  
Crosse Famous Dave's, [www.valleyviewrotary.com](http://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 with Purpose**, 2nd Wed. of each month,  
11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel and  
Conference Center, [cr.wppwi.org](http://cr.wppwi.org).

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

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

## CALENDAR EVENTS

### DECEMBER

**Nov. 25-Dec. 17, Scrooge in Rouge: An English Music  
Hall Christmas Carol**, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m.  
Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for  
Performing Arts, [www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org](http://www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org).

**Dec. 1, Meditation for Emotional Health via Zoom**, 6:30-  
7:30 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration  
required, [www.fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**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. 2-11, The Long Christmas Dinner**, 7:30 p.m.  
Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Grey Area Productions, The  
Pump House Regional Arts Center, La Crosse, [www.thepumphouse.org](http://www.thepumphouse.org).

**Dec. 2-11, A Christmas Carol**, 7:30  
p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun, Toland  
Theatre, Center for the Arts,  
UW-La Crosse, [www.uwlax.edu/  
theatre-arts](http://www.uwlax.edu/theatre-arts).

**Dec. 2-18, Beauty and  
the Beast**, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-  
Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse  
Community Theatre, Weber  
Center for Performing Arts, [www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org](http://www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org).

**Dec. 3-4, 100 Miles of Christmas**, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.,  
communities along Great River Road.

**Dec. 3, Old Fashioned Christmas**, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.,  
Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley,  
[www.norskedalen.org](http://www.norskedalen.org).

**Dec. 3, Holiday Happening at the Kickapoo Valley  
Reserve**, 1-6 p.m., S3361 Hwy. 131, La Farge. [www.kvr.  
state.wi.us](http://www.kvr.state.wi.us).

**Dec. 3, Frothbite Beer & Bites Festival**, 2-6 p.m., La  
Crosse Center, [www.lacrossecenter.com](http://www.lacrossecenter.com).

**Dec. 3, Crowns & Capes**, 6-8 p.m., Children's  
Museum of La Crosse, preregistration required,  
[www.funmuseum.org](http://www.funmuseum.org).

**Dec. 4, Holiday House Tour**, Winona County Historical  
Society, 3-8 p.m., various locations, [www.winonahistory.  
org](http://www.winonahistory.org).

**Dec. 4, Cameron Park Winter Market**, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.,  
Radisson Center Ballroom, 2nd and Jay Streets,  
La Crosse.

**Dec. 9-11, La Crosse Dance Centre's 33rd 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](http://www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center).

**Dec. 10, Jingle Bell Walk/Run**, 7 a.m., R.W. Houser  
Family YMCA, Onalaska, [www.laxymca.org](http://www.laxymca.org).

**Dec. 10, Advent Pause**, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Franciscan  
Spirituality Center, preregistration required, [www.  
fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**Dec. 11, Cameron Park Winter Market**, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.,  
Radisson Center Ballroom, 2nd and Jay Streets,  
La Crosse.

**Dec. 13, Home Free Family Christmas**, 7:30 p.m.,  
La Crosse Center, [www.lacrossecenter.com](http://www.lacrossecenter.com).

**Dec. 14, Women with Purpose** featuring Colleen  
Hackworth, "How a Simple YES Can Change  
Everything," 11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel and  
Conference Center, [cr.wppwi.org](http://cr.wppwi.org).

**Dec. 15-16, String Ties Holiday Concert**, 7:30 p.m.,  
The Pump House Regional Arts Center, La Crosse,  
[www.thepumphouse.org](http://www.thepumphouse.org).

**Dec. 16, A Jazzy Little Christmas** with Anna Bartlett, 7:30  
p.m., The Heider Center, [www.heidercenter.org](http://www.heidercenter.org).

**Dec. 16-17, An American Christmas** with Matt Curtis &  
the Coulee Classic Barbershop Quartet, 7:30 p.m.,  
La Crosse Symphony Orchestra,  
[www.lacrossesympphony.org](http://www.lacrossesympphony.org).



**Dec. 17, Advent Light and Collage-Making Retreat**, 9  
a.m.-3 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration  
required, [www.fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**Dec. 17, Silent Night**: An Advent  
Singing Bowls Experience, 6-7:30  
p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center,  
preregistration required, [www.  
fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**Dec. 18, Cameron Park Winter  
Market**, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Radisson  
Center Ballroom, 2nd and Jay Streets,  
La Crosse.

**Dec. 21, Longest Night: An Evening of Prayer and  
Reflection**, 6:30-8 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center,  
preregistration required, [www.fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**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](http://www.varcinc.com/gala).

### JANUARY

**Jan. 5, Women's Christmas: An Epiphany Celebration**,  
5:30-8 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, preregistration  
required, [www.fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**Jan. 11, Women with Purpose** featuring Nina Nesja,  
"Benefits of Community Involvement & Philanthropy,"  
11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference  
Center, [cr.wppwi.org](http://cr.wppwi.org).

**Jan. 13-14, Johnsmith**, 7:30 p.m., The Pump House  
Regional Arts Center, La Crosse, [www.thepumphouse.org](http://www.thepumphouse.org).

**Jan. 14, Give Our Regards: An Evening of Broadway**, 7:30  
p.m., The Heider Center, [www.heidercenter.org](http://www.heidercenter.org).

**Jan. 16, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community  
Celebration**, 7 p.m., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center.

**Jan. 19-21, New Year, New Moon Women's Yoga Retreat**  
with Heather Henry, 3 p.m. Fri.-12 p.m. Sun., Franciscan  
Spirituality Center, preregistration required,  
[www.fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**Jan. 21, Tapestry: The Music of Carole King**, 7:30 p.m.,  
Weber Center for the Performing Arts, La Crosse, [www.  
viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center](http://www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center).

**Jan. 21, Hurry Back Productions Presents Ladies of the  
'80s: Girls Just Wanna Have Fun!** 7-10 p.m., St. Cecilia  
Theatre, 1124 W. Wabasha St., Winona, [www.facebook.  
com/events/2406043079548372](http://www.facebook.com/events/2406043079548372).

**Jan. 28, Great Tri-State Rail Sale**, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., La Crosse  
Center, [www.4000foundation.org](http://www.4000foundation.org).

**Jan. 28, Ray on My Mind: Tribute to Ray Charles**, 7:30  
p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, [www.viterbo.  
edu/fine-arts-center](http://www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center).

**Jan. 31, Pete the Cat's Big Hollywood Adventure**, 10 a.m.  
and 12:45 p.m., The Heider Center, [www.heidercenter.org](http://www.heidercenter.org).

**Jan. 31, Pilobolus—BIG FIVE-OH!**, 7 p.m. Viterbo Fine  
Arts Center Main Theatre, [www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-  
center](http://www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center).

### FEBRUARY

**Feb. 3, Ashlie Amber: Tribute to Whitney Houston**, 7:30  
p.m., The Heider Center, [www.heidercenter.org](http://www.heidercenter.org).

**Feb. 3-4, Journey through Motherhood: Celebrating All  
Phases and Stages with Emily Sustar**,  
7-9 p.m. Fri., 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat.,  
Franciscan Spirituality Center,  
preregistration required, [www.  
fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**Feb. 4-5, Hairspray**, 7:30 p.m.  
Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Viterbo Fine  
Arts Center Main Theatre, [www.  
viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center](http://www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center).



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