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Pictured on the cover, from left: Sue Peterson, Kaitlyn O'Connor, Corona Woychik and Kira Schaitel of ISG. Photos on cover and at top left by Jordana Snyder Photography.

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Photo by Jordana Snyder Photography

Maybe it is simply having been born an introvert. Maybe it is the product of growing up in a small family in the middle of an extremely rural area where neighbors were miles away over hills with few signs of human influence. Either way, I like my space.

Don't get me wrong—I'm as happy as anyone to spend some time with good friends sharing stories and laughs, and I enjoy meeting new people and learning their stories. That is why journalism has always attracted me. But when the stories have been told and the laughter (or tears) fade away, I'm ready again for space. Sometimes that means simply retreating to my own space in my home, where working from home is a great fit for me—especially when my husband and son are off at their own jobs and school, and it's just me and the cat sleeping in the window.

Other times, I seek out big, empty spaces. The kinds of places that are central to several of the stories in this issue. Having grown up in the Sandhills region of Nebraska, a place where schools could be dozens of miles away, where I would have to drive an hour or two to find a stoplight or McDonald's or movie theater, and where trees were limited to small

clumps of willows or cottonwoods near lakes and old homesteads, I am comfortable in emptiness. I've read the stories of early immigrants who homesteaded on the Great Plains being driven to near madness by the endless miles of wind and grass with nothing breaking the monotony, but for me, it can feel like home.

I also love the woods, and I relate completely to the thoughts shared by Faye Ellis in our Healthy Living story about the forest being a place where she finds "the space to simply be." The trees and grass and deer don't judge us. (That sassy squirrel? He's a different story.)

The stories Linda and RJ Miller shared with me about their months of traveling the western states, visiting some of the most immense vistas and isolated locations left in the lower 48 states, left me longing to hit the road the way they did, taking it all in. In all that space, however, they still found connection, meeting others who love nature and scenery the way they do and developing friendships that have continued across the time and miles.

Our exploration of "A Sense of Space" is as much about connection as it is emptiness. Creating space for people to connect is the driving force behind The Motherhood Collective, developed by Emily Sustar to provide women with support surrounding the birth experience—before, during and after—so they understand that they are not alone in their experience.

Safe Families for Children creates connections between volunteers and families in need to create a space where children can thrive despite challenging circumstances.

Engineers, architects and other professionals profiled in our cover story use what they know about how we, as individuals and as a society, connect to the spaces around us to design the streets, green spaces, schools, businesses and more, seen and unseen, that provide a backdrop to our everyday lives.

As you move in and out of many different spaces each day, I encourage you to find the one that just feels right to you and take time to appreciate it. May it be a space where you can simply *be*.

Shari

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CELEBRATING A SUMMER OF THE ARTS IN WINONA

Four unique opportunities provide arts lovers with a chance to enjoy music, theater and more in Winona this summer.

Join the **Great River Shakespeare Festival** for its 20th anniversary season, with performances, workshops and more extending from June 20 through July 30. The three mainstage plays are *As You Like It*, *A Winter's Tale* and *Imbroglia*. Find times, dates, locations and ticket information at www.grsf.org.

If you're a classical music fan, check the schedule for the **Minnesota Beethoven Festival**, held June 25 through July 16. Performances include soloists on flute, cello and piano, small ensembles and the Minnesota Orchestra. In addition to ticketed events, the Minnesota Orchestra will perform a free pops concert at 8 p.m. Saturday, July 8, at the Lake Park Bandshell. Find details at www.mnbeethovenfestival.org/festival-schedule/.

More free music can be heard 8 to 9 p.m. Wednesday evenings from June 14 to August 16 at the **Winona Municipal Band** concerts. The Lake Park Bandshell has been the home of the municipal band since 1924 and is the oldest continually performing city band west of the Mississippi River. If the weather is questionable call 507-457-8220 to determine if the performance has been canceled.

Finally, combine art with beverages at **Mississippi Sippin'** hosted by the Minnesota Marine Art Museum 5-8 p.m. on Thursday nights July 6 through August 31.

The museum serves a different curated selection of spirited and spirit-free beverages on the riverside patio each week. Food and drink will be available for purchase. In the event of inclement weather, Mississippi Sippin' will be moved inside the atrium of MMAM. There is no fee for Mississippi Sippin', but general admission fees do apply for the galleries. Learn more at www.mmam.org/mississippi-sippin.



CELEBRATE JUNETEENTH

Four local organizations will host La Crosse's annual Juneteenth celebration noon to 7 p.m. Sunday, June 18, in Riverside Park. It is free and open to the public.

The eco-friendly community event creates spaces and activities for the whole community to celebrate, interact and learn together. There will be a Youth Fun Fair from noon to 3 p.m. with games, bounce house, kiddy train rides, prizes and free food. There will also be 40 or more community organizations (with fun educational activities provided at each table), food vendors, and presentation of the Black Youth Juneteenth Court. Entertainment includes the Milwaukee African Drum and Dance show and interactive instructional session, Chris Jones Hypnotist show, Enduring Families Black Historical Trolley Tour, La Crosse Elite Majorettes Dance Team show, a kid's dance contest and other musical events/presentations.

Juneteenth is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the end of slavery in the United States. The local event is hosted by B.L.A.C.K., Hope Restores, Enduring Families Project and Black Student Leaders. More information is at www.juneteenthlaxwi.com.

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF ARTSPIRE

La Crosse will celebrate 10 years of "experiencing community through the arts" June 10 in downtown La Crosse. The 10th annual Artspire will be held from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. with music and performances, a fine art fair and sale, interactive arts, food trucks and beer garden, and great company from community members. Music and dance performances include a range of local groups, including La Crosse Hmong Dancers and Ho-Chunk Singers and Dancers. Interactive arts projects will be presented by more than a dozen local organizations, ranging from creating finger puppets to folding soul boxes. The fine arts fair features dozens of artists selling everything from textiles and ceramics to photography, watercolor and jewelry. Learn more about the day's offerings at <https://artspire.thepumphouse.org/>.



QUILT SHOP HOP AND SHOW

Branches winery and vineyard will be adorned with the works of the Vernon County Piecemakers Quilters Guild Saturday, July 15, from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., with the winery open and serving food until 8 p.m. The display of more than 100 quilts will be the culmination of a three-day, eight-business quilt "shop hop" July 13, 14 and 15. The event is expected to attract quilters from the three-state region to visit the beautiful Driftless Region.

The participating quilt shops are Olive Juice Quilts, Onalaska; River Road Quilts, La Crosse; Quilt Basket 'N Creations, Viroqua; The Quilt Corner, Sparta; The Paisley Star, Boscobel; Quilt Peddler, Fennimore; and Front Porch Quilts and The Pickett Fence, Prairie du Chien.

The Piecemakers Quilters Guild has met for 22 years sharing their enthusiasm, creativity and knowledge of quilting with fellow members and aspiring quilters. The group educates members through programs and workshops and uses their quilting skills to support community service projects. The guild will offer a raffle for a beautiful handmade quilt and chance baskets to support its programs.

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THE WOMEN SHAPING OUR SPACES

Engineers, ecologists and more are among the professionals guiding design decisions at ISG.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER | PHOTOS BY JORDANA SNYDER PHOTOGRAPHY



From left: Kaitlyn O'Connor, Corona Woychik, Sue Peterson and Kira Schaitel (seated) are among the women designing spaces around us with ISG in La Crosse.

Every day, we walk and drive by—or over—structures whose design and planning we seldom think about. But the most recognizable and familiar spaces around us bear the fingerprints of STEM professionals from firms like ISG, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

Four women from the firm share what it is like to work in the engineering, architectural and planning fields that create the world around us.

CORONA WOYCHIK, TRANSPORTATION AND SITE ENGINEER

Corona Woychik, a Holmen native, works in the transportation unit at ISG, focusing on road design and traffic studies. “When I was in school, a lot of people that I really respected always said, ‘Oh, Corona, you’re really good at math and science, you should be an engineer,’” she says. “So I listened to them!” She also credits memorable childhood road trips with her mom for helping drive her interest in transportation design.

Today, having earned her bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from Iowa State University, Woychik is involved in many types of projects. She may be brought in to analyze site designs for schools

or businesses with complicated circulation patterns to determine the most efficient, safest routes for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists. She also works on master-planning community development projects. If you’ve driven down Second Street in front of the La Crosse Center, you’ll see Woychik’s work—she designed the three blocks between State Street and Jay Street.

Woychik is also a proponent of work-life balance. Cradling her newborn daughter during maternity leave, she shares via video call, “Meaningful work looks different to every woman, and it is not the same from one to the next, and it might not look the same from one year to the next.” Having spent several years focusing on her career, she’s now made time to fulfill her dream of being a mom. Her message? You can do both.

KAITLYN O’CONNOR, PLANT ECOLOGIST

Kaitlyn O’Connor is a plant ecologist with ISG, adding a natural resource lens to projects. This ranges from incorporating native biodiversity into the built environment to larger-scale ecological restoration or natural resource strategies, like watershed planning.

O’Connor has always felt a strong connection with nature, and she likes making a difference. “Whenever I walk into a public park that is



Corona Woychik, transportation and site engineer



Sue Peterson, education consultant



Kaitlyn O'Connor, plant ecologist



Kira Schaitel, architectural designer

really well designed or a green space in an urban area, I just feel like, “This is such a gem! Isn’t this a beautiful space to be in?”

She adds that incorporating nature into those spaces isn’t just good for our mental health and well-being, but it’s also better for the environment as a whole. And while she empathizes with the anxiety many feel about the state of the environment and climate change, she also recognizes that there are opportunities to make things better. “You just have to apply these ideas in a setting where you can make a difference, and I feel like ISG has an amazing opportunity to do that in a lot of different projects that we work on,” she says.

KIRA SCHAITEL, ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER

Kira Schaitel works as an architectural designer for ISG, taking the architects’ sketches and putting them into the drawings that buildings will be constructed from. She also works with the architects to flesh out the details of the buildings and coordinates with other disciplines to make sure the mechanical, electrical and plumbing run smoothly throughout the building.

Schaitel especially likes working on commercial buildings, having contributed to projects like the 5th Ward Residences, a 272-unit, two-building apartment complex and activity center in La Crosse, and the Sparta rest area for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

She began her career with ISG just over two years ago, after graduating from the two-year architectural technology program at Western Technical College.

“I love learning,” Schaitel says. Since working at ISG, she’s earned her drone license and is working toward becoming an architect. “I track my hours; I need seven years of working experience, and then on top of that, I need to pass six exams. ISG is super willing to help me learn and study for those exams and provide the materials needed.”

That supportiveness is a core tenet of ISG’s culture. “When I started here, I had an ISG buddy, and she helped me dive into what I was doing,” Schaitel notes. “I felt very comfortable reaching out to

different people for different questions, because I feel like we have such a wide variety of experts, and I just think it’s so cool to be able to go to someone directly and ask them.”

SUE PETERSON, EDUCATION CONSULTANT

Having spent 18 years working in the La Crosse School District, Sue Peterson is the perfect person to serve as an education consultant in ISG’s education business unit, where she facilitates school facility planning and project development strategies. Peterson has a deep understanding of what teachers and curriculum leaders need in their schools to do what’s best for kids. What’s more, she understands the politics and referenda work that often is needed to allow school districts to make significant investments in their buildings. In her role at ISG, she works with architects and planning teams to bring all that together, ensuring kids, teachers and communities get the schools they need.

How does she do it? Peterson is “a girl on the go,” traveling to multiple states, where she engages communities in vital discussions. She prompts educators and communities to think about questions like what their enrollment will look like 5, 10, 20 years from now—rather than focusing just on today’s needs. She’s driven to create a better future for these communities.

“My one thing I tell every community that I’m in is that the kids in your classroom today: they’re the nurses that are going to take care of you in the nursing home at the end of life. Some of them, those are the doctors, those are the future mechanics that are going to be repairing the car that you’re driving ... and so how we invest in and brand our schools and create learning environments to create the best future employees is really important.”

The future is bright with these brilliant, passionate women making the spaces of tomorrow. **CRW**

Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a writer in La Crosse.

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STARS IN HER EYES

A childhood love of nature leads physics professor Shauna Sallmen on a journey through space.

BY DIANE BREESER | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Shauna Sallmen's office includes a collection of modern artifacts—including LEGO and Barbie—featuring women in the field of space and astrophysics.

As a kid, everything about nature fascinated me,” says Shauna Sallmen, Ph.D. “I was always interested in math and science. As I grew older, I definitely didn’t want to dissect anything,” so Sallmen started looking up to the night skies. Although she says she “never had the urge to leave Earth,” her career was about to take off.

Sallmen, a University of Wisconsin-La Crosse physics professor since 2003, ignited her childhood fascination at the University of Toronto, where she became a double specialist in physics and astronomy. She received both her master’s and doctoral degrees in astronomy at University of California-Berkeley.

“I absolutely love astronomy and sharing my excitement about the universe with students. Astronomy these days is really astrophysics: applying physics to what we observe out there beyond Earth,” she says.

THE “DARK” SIDE

Sallmen has seen several advances in astrophysics over the decades. Much professional observing is done remotely today; you can view celestial objects on a radio telescope in West Virginia from anywhere in the world. Astrophysicists are more confident about the existence of dark matter, which is invisible and detected only by its gravitational effects. Discovery that the expansion of the universe is accelerating means there’s something mysterious opposing gravity called dark energy.

“I still find it amazing that we’ve detected gravitational waves and are using them to learn about merging neutron stars and merging black holes,” remarks Sallmen.

While ground-based observing requires dark skies or radio-quiet zones, they are harder to come by with the proliferation of light pollution and cell phone towers. Even professional observatories are affected.

LADIES WHO LAUNCH

The American Institute of Physics reports more women enrolling in astrophysics programs, although in the United States, it’s still a male-dominated field lacking racial diversity. In 2017, women earned 33 percent of bachelor’s degrees and 40 percent of doctorates in astronomy; in physics, the stats are 21 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

Sallmen’s advice for potential students: “Stay curious and practice solving problems. Math is the language of physics. But you don’t need any training to enjoy the night sky or be an amateur astronomer.”

SPACE NOTES

Like many of us, Sallmen grew up with *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, which she thoroughly enjoyed, but adds, “Every depiction of space travel that has us whipping around through the galaxy violates the laws of physics.” Apparently, it would take 40,000 years to get to the nearest star, but Hollywood’s version of the Final Frontier is not totally misguided. “I think there’s almost certainly life out there somewhere,” she muses.

Asked about lesser-known findings, Sallmen mentions a tiny moon called Pan orbiting in Saturn’s rings. “It’s less than 9 miles across, and when the Cassini spacecraft got a close-up, Pan looks just like a piece of ravioli!” Sallmen looks forward to a total solar eclipse over North America in April 2024, when the path of totality will be within a day’s drive of La Crosse.

Answering some questions, Sallmen says, always creates others. “That’s what makes science so amazing to me—it’s an endless puzzle.” **CRW**

Diane Breeser is an actor/freelance writer who appeared on an episode of the 1980s TV show Alf, about an Alien Life Form and always wanted to be Princess Leia. Contact her at dbreeser@gmail.com.

Finding a Space in Flight School

Holmen graduate Samantha Chapman is set to join an elite group of naval aviators.

BY NICOLE CZARNOMSKI | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Midshipman First Class Samantha Chapman proudly serves her country in the United States Navy. In July 2022, Chapman participated in the United States Naval Academy summer training, where she was able to settle into the cockpit of a helicopter in Jacksonville, Florida (pictured at left).

As Samantha Chapman, 22, nears the end of her officer training with the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, she prepares to find her space in flight school. Chapman, a Holmen native, graduated from high school in 2019. She is deeply tied to her family and her hometown and believes it provided stability and inspiration to help her define her dreams and go after them.

EARLY YEARS

Chapman didn't dream of being a Navy pilot; in fact she had no real connection to the military until her older brother joined the Navy a few years before she graduated from high school. During Chapman's younger years, she danced at Misty's Dance Unlimited, a local dance studio.

"I was a girly-girl who grew up on a dance floor performing for others," says Chapman. "It was there that I met Kristina Smaby, who was my role model. She made me want to become a role model for others."

Misty Lown, owner of Misty's Dance Unlimited, says, "Sammie is a model of what we mean when we say Misty's Dance Unlimited is about 'More Than Just Great Dancing.'" She describes Chapman as a well-rounded student, taking pride in her academics and involvement at the studio and in the community. Chapman's dedication and hard work helped her become a senior-level dancer. "Sammie focused on her development and her desire to be a role model to others," Lown says.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

"When it was time for me to graduate from high school, I saw what the Naval Academy had done for my brother and decided I

wanted the same opportunities he had," says Chapman. She believes serving in the Navy offers unlimited opportunities, new challenges and adventures. Ultimately, it is a career where she can serve a higher purpose.

The Navy also provides endless educational opportunities and the chance to meet new people. "The Navy has been an eye-opening experience. Holmen, Wisconsin, is a small town with little diversity, but the Navy has given me the chance to meet people from all 50 states and other countries," says Chapman.

LEAP OF FAITH

Chapman's advice for young people looking toward the future is to pick something difficult and go for it. The more challenging it is, the more rewarding it is. "The military is challenging because our job is to fight for freedom, but we have limited freedom (during training)," she says. She lives in the Navy dorms all year round and couldn't wear civilian clothing until her junior year. "We eat, sleep and breathe Navy," says Chapman.

ON THE HORIZON

In May 2023, Chapman graduated from officer training; in 2024, she'll settle into the cockpit and enter flight school to train as a pilot. The training is rigorous and includes critical thinking skills, dogged determination, perseverance and composure. This is not a position for the faint of heart, but Chapman is ready for the challenge. **CRW**

Nicole L. Czarnomski is a freelance writer living in southeastern Minnesota. She makes it a point to thank active and retired members of the military and the police force.



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A Safe Space for Birth and Motherhood

The Motherhood Collective and local midwives create supportive community for mothers at all stages.

BY TALLITHA REESE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



The Motherhood Collective offers a range of yoga classes for both prenatal and postpartum women, along with support groups to provide mothers with a space to connect.

A protected space where one feels safe, accepted and understood is essential for the journey of preparing for birth and transitioning into parenthood. That is exactly the type of space Emily Sustar has endeavored to create with The Motherhood Collective.

“We firmly believe that we were not meant to muddle through the joys and challenges of the parenthood journey on our own,” explains Sustar. “The Motherhood Collective is designed to be the proverbial ‘village’ we all need to raise our children with community and support.”

The Motherhood Collective, which focuses on the core tenets of community, connection and collaboration to support women, offers a variety of childbirth education classes, lactation support classes, retreats, community events, support groups and prenatal, postpartum and family yoga classes—all with the mission of providing holistic support to women, mothers and caregivers moving through the parenthood transition.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

The benefit of finding that supportive community for expectant or new mothers is recommended by medical providers as well.

“So many patients reach out to some type of support group during pregnancy, and I think this is great,” says Theresa Hagen, certified nurse midwife (CNM) with Mayo Clinic Health System. “Expectant mothers may have feelings or thoughts that they can validate with

other mothers who may feel the same way. It helps mothers feel not so alone—especially in the postpartum period where they may not have the support they had during the pregnancy.”

Sustar believes that everyone deserves to have the birth and postpartum experience they desire and founded The Motherhood Collective to support women in those journeys.

“Our goal is to provide physical, mental and emotional support during ‘matrescence’ (or the process of birthing a mother),” says Sustar, who notes that the earliest seed of an idea for The Motherhood Collective was planted when she had to leave her established community in Colorado, while pregnant with her first child, to move to La Crosse 10 weeks prior to giving birth.

Years later, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and shut down Root Down Yoga Studio, where Sustar had been the family and prenatal program coordinator and taught vinyasa yoga for eight years, that idea began to take root and grow.

“I was struggling with the loss of my yoga community, staying home with my three children and attempting to homeschool,” says Sustar. “I knew that if I was struggling, other moms must be too. So I decided I needed to reach out to my community and be in connection with other mothers even if it meant we couldn’t be together in person at that time. I started The Motherhood Collective with fully virtual classes and events on Zoom in November 2020.”



Theresa Hagen, certified nurse midwife with Mayo Clinic Health System

Classes remained virtual until May 2021, when Sustar began offering classes outdoors, eventually moving into The Motherhood Collective's current studio space on Caledonia Street in September 2021. Currently both in-person classes and live stream virtual classes are available. Sustar is also determined that The Motherhood Collective be accessible to all.

"Since the pandemic was a time of financial hardship for many, and we continue to see the ripple effects of that on our economy, we have offered scholarships since our inception," explains Sustar. "I strongly feel that mothers deserve support regardless of their financial situation."

PREPARING FOR BIRTH AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

While a focus on the physical benefits of yoga through prenatal and postpartum periods is evident in The Motherhood Collective's offerings, support is intended for more than just the body.

"Childbirth is a very exciting, special time in your life. However, it can be rife with anxiety, which can have a profound effect on how your body responds to labor," explains Maggie Clutch, CNM with Gundersen Health System.



Emily Sustar created The Motherhood Collective to provide a community for women as they experience motherhood.

"We know that the demands of pregnancy and postpartum go beyond just the physical demands and that these changes deeply impact the mental and emotional state of the birthing and postpartum person," says Sustar. "We offer support in all of our classes that address the physical, emotional and mental state of the birthing or postpartum person. We also provide evidence-based information around pregnancy, birth and postpartum presented in an empowering way."

For students who want to go more in-depth on what to expect during labor and birth, The Motherhood Collective offers its Empowered Birth Childbirth Preparation Class on a quarterly basis. One topic covered in this class is birth plans, with examples and suggestions provided.

"We also try to manage expectations ... to allow parents to have more realistic expectations for what labor and birth may look and feel like," says Sustar.

Though The Motherhood Collective doesn't currently work directly with medical providers to develop birth plans for their students, Sustar says that they may communicate back and forth on how to best support the birthing person.

"I love when we have a birth plan in place, and I will always do my best to accommodate any request a couple may have," says Katie Duerr, CNM with Winona Health. "The one caveat to that is that I will always hold the health of the baby and the health of the mother as my top priority."

SUPPORT BEYOND BIRTH

The Motherhood Collective also offers the services of Megan Peterson, a full-spectrum doula who also teaches classes alongside Sustar. The Motherhood Collective also partners with other small mama-run businesses. Bethany Tracy of Amaris Healing offers a monthly reiki circle for motherhood, and Erin Edwards, an international board-certified lactation consultant (IBCLC) with Little Bird Lactation, offers a quarterly breastfeeding class.



Katie Duerr, certified nurse midwife with Winona Health

A free Motherhood United support group meets twice a month to support the mental health of mothers and normalize common challenges of the transition into parenthood for both pregnant and postpartum students. Childcare is offered for older children during this support group.

"By far my favorite part of this work is meeting the incredible humans that walk through the studio doors and getting the honor and privilege of playing a part in supporting them as they transition into parenthood," says Sustar.

In the past year, The Motherhood Collective has supported over 300 students through studio classes in addition to holding a retreat at the Franciscan Spirituality Center and a Celebration of Motherhood event in May.

"The Motherhood Collective continues to be a great addition to the area. They are there to help support women prenatally, postpartum and even during the unthinkable. It is a place to find friendship, build friendship and be supported in a variety of ways," says Ashley Woychik, CNM with Gundersen Health System. "When patients ask me about ways to meet new people or other tools to help them in their pregnancy, The Motherhood Collective is something I mention." **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.

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ORA Trails spreads miles of smiles along its trails to health and happiness.

BY MICHELLE BYOM | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Top: Author Michelle Byom, left, and her friend Amy Wink branched out to explore trails in the bluffs above La Crosse this spring. Bottom: Faye Ellis says the forest grounds her when dealing with anxiety and depression.

Sarah Mumaw-Flury and her kids enjoy riding bikes at trails and parks in the Coulee Region.

From outdoor favorites like Perrot State Park and Goose Island to newer spaces like bike pump tracks and expanded trails that are accessible, miles of adventures are calling. Hike, bike, play, recharge, connect with friends or savor a cup of coffee and take in the views.

GOOD FOR THE SOUL

Most agree that physical activity, whether indoors or outside, is good for one's physical well-being. Many people are counting more than just steps, however. Their mental health is positively impacted and uplifted through time enjoyed in nature and the outdoors, so they continue to make it part of their self-care routines.

Outdoor enthusiast Sarah Mumaw-Flury of Holmen is frequently outside solo or in the company of friends and family. For her, the outdoors is a mood enhancer, where fresh air, running water or animal sounds boost her mood. "Being outside brings me a sense of calm," Mumaw-Flury says. "It helps me to disconnect from the distractions

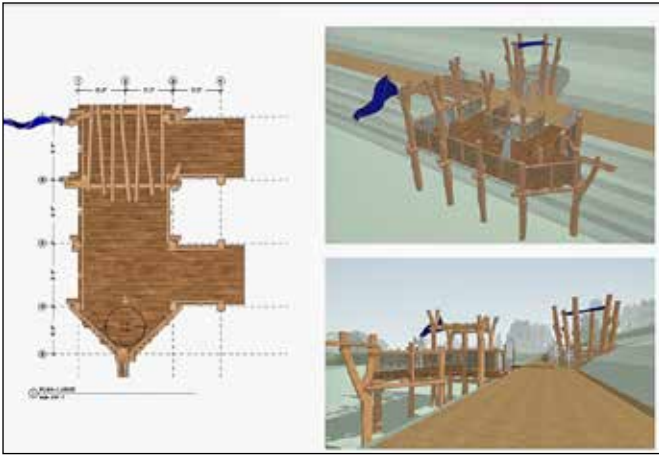
that seem to be ever-present, like technology, projects and housework. When I'm outside, my mind settles and I can take in and enjoy my surroundings."

Faye Ellis, teaching professor at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, shares the importance of the outdoors for her. "I have anxiety and depression, and the trails center and ground me, particularly when the stress of life is heavy," Ellis says. "Nature accepts me as I am in the moment. No judgment. No advice. Simply a calm and quiet presence."

Ellis, a former crew leader for trail work with La Crosse's Outdoor Recreation Alliance (ORA Trails) says she finds the trails are a constant when everything around her changes. "Regardless of where I am mentally, I can walk on the trails, and the trees stand tall, grasses dance in the wind and the forest and prairie provide space to simply be," she concludes.

"I can walk on the trails, and the trees stand tall, grasses dance in the wind and the forest and prairie provide space to simply be."

—Faye Ellis



An accessible treehouse is slated to be completed this summer at Chad Erickson Memorial Park in La Crosse.



A bicycle pump track in Trempealeau has added new outdoor opportunities to the region, with another currently being developed by ORA Trails in West Salem.

ORA TRAILS

Those looking for variety, family-friendly areas or even adrenaline-rushing outdoor adventures can find it on an ORA-maintained trail, pump track, all-abilities treehouse or interactive nature trail. ORA Trails is the nonprofit organization behind the development and maintenance of many miles of trails that stretch from south La Crosse north to Trempealeau, in addition to other projects that provide equitable, sustainable outdoor recreational experiences.

Randi Pueschner, president of the board of directors, explains how ORA Trails partners with the City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry. “Most of our trails are on city land, and ORA Trails maintains them,” she says. Maintenance work includes keeping the trails clear and cutting and removing between 100 and 200 trees a year, among a variety of other projects that require many volunteers.

MAP YOUR TRAILS TO HAPPINESS

“Trails make you happy. Everyone gets along,” Pueschner says. She explains how they have worked hard to change the face of the organization and dispel the stereotype that hikers and mountain bikers can’t get along. “We have room on our trails for all user groups,” she says.

The ORA Trails website, www.oratrails.org, offers trail maps and trail descriptions for the Upper and Lower Hixon Trails as well as the Gateway Trails. The website details the level of difficulty, length of the trail and whether it is a hiking/running, biking or shared use trail. People can check the website for up-to-date reports on trail conditions or to see all of the new projects currently being developed for outdoor recreation.

THE GATEWAY TRAILS

The Gateway Trails on top of Grandad Bluff are a favorite for Pueschner and her family. They can take an easy hike, or her 6-year-old daughter can ride her bike. There are three options to access the Gateway Trails: neighborhood access points at 29th Street and Ebner Coulee Road or driving to the top of the bluff.

A NEW ACCESSIBLE TREEHOUSE

Chad Erickson Memorial Park, 3601 Park Lane Drive in La Crosse, and its community forest with outdoor classroom, paved

path and meditation space, will be home to an all-accessible treehouse expected to be complete in July. Kids with all abilities can feel taller than the trees as they explore and discover within nature.

PEDAL AROUND AT THE BICYCLE PLAYGROUNDS

New bicycle playgrounds and pump tracks at Lewis Point Park in West Salem and in Trempealeau will become great places for kids to practice their skills, Pueschner says. The Trempealeau pump track is finished and accessible, and the West Salem track will be ready sometime this summer. “Scooters, skateboards, balance bikes, it’s a great way to learn new skills and hang out with friends,” Pueschner says. Lewis Point Park boasts a stroll and roll path for pedestrians and balance bike riders and a pump track with features for all skill levels. Trempealeau’s new bike park is located next to the municipal pool. These new facilities are in addition to pump tracks at Leuth Park in La Crosse and in the Upper Hixon mountain bike trails.

BUD HENDRICKSON NATURE TRAIL EXPANDS

The existing Bud Hendrickson trail between Logan High School and the La Crosse industrial park stretches for 1 mile as a paved, accessible path. A new half-mile addition to the north loops through wooded marshland and brings nature closer. This “pocket park” enables area residents to walk, roll or ride and enjoy an interactive experience without traveling far.

BIG MOVEMENT, BIG BENEFIT

The focus on outdoor spaces for children (and maybe the kid in all of us) makes Mumaw-Flury, a behavior interventionist at Holmen’s Sand Lake Elementary School, happy. Her love for the outdoors extends to her work with children and what the outdoors offers them.

“Our outdoor spaces allow for big movements and bigger volumes,” she says. “Climbing, shouting, laughing, running, throwing and splashing are all things that help children regulate. Nature lends itself to inquiry, curiosity and exploration. All of these things help regulate our brains and enhance focus and allow for endorphins to activate.” **CRW**

Writer Michelle Byom and her friend left the monotony of their neighborhood walks behind them to explore the Butterfly Trail. They committed to exploring other trails more frequently.

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Global Inspiration, Local Comfort

Nicole Elliot parks The Damn Tasty on La Crosse's North Side.

BY JULIE NELSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Call it the right space at the right time: Nicole Elliot and her family were packing their renovated school bus and preparing to spend the next few months touring the East Coast, when a friend called. Elliot had an opportunity to see an empty storefront on La Crosse's Caledonia Street. By day's end, she had the keys to the space in hand and was unpacking the bus. The Damn Tasty was about to move from food truck status to a brick-and-mortar location.

Elliot says she knew in an instant the former home of the Uptowne Cafe was the perfect spot for her restaurant. The small size, existing kitchen and location in a neighborhood business district was just what she was looking for. Renovations quickly became a family affair. Her husband used church pews and old tables from the Uptowne to create new benches and seating. He designed and welded new shelves for the dining room and worked with his son and daughter on the rest of the remodeling. While the family was renovating, Elliot took care of the licensing, hiring and other administrative aspects of a new business.

COMFORT WITH A SIDE OF ADVENTURE

The result: a space filled with plants, seating and artwork that invites conversation and just enough space to accommodate a regular breakfast and small lunch crowd. The menu goes well beyond basic fare and includes items such as Turkish eggs, French toast with caramelized

bananas and tuna niçoise. "To me, it's globally inspired food," says Elliot. "We always include something you will be familiar with and then try to add a twist. I love it when I see people trying kimchi toast or something they wouldn't ordinarily order."

In a food truck, customers expect unique and changing items, and Elliot has carried that model through to the restaurant. "Every Saturday we have a different menu; we have four or five items that are super unique and then others people will recognize. We always have some choices that are very 'plain Jane'—especially for kids—and we go out of our way to make something not on the menu to accommodate a gluten or vegan request." Saturdays also feature The Dirty Dozen: donuts made by Josh, one of the staff who is a "damned" good baker, Elliot says. "The baked goods usually sell out by 11 a.m., so if you want some, come early."

FINDING COMMUNITY

Josh is one of five people on her staff (another is her stepdaughter), and Elliot says they are all gems. "I am truly blessed. Having such a competent and reliable staff allows me to step back on occasion and spend time with my family."

Working 80 hours a week has been a career norm for Elliot, who says she has had to stand up for herself in a male-dominated industry.



She's now able to keep that time below 60 hours and is enjoying another perk of her location: nearly all the other business owners on her block are female. "We do a lot of collaborating" she says. "We are talking about holding music events that will benefit the entire community."

Elliot grew up in La Crescent and values the small-town atmosphere of this part of La Crosse. "I feel a connection with the North Side. There is a good mix of people and I like the diversity: from young entrepreneurs to families to retirees. We get lots of return customers, which I love," she says. "I think customers like that, too, coming to a place where they are recognized and feel welcome."

Elliot has spent her entire career learning about cooking and restaurants. When she first struck out on her own with a food truck, she parked The Damn Tasty in the downtown business area to reach the working crowd at lunch. The truck and the food were a hit but two months later, Covid-19 hit.

Elliot survived the pandemic by doing catering gigs and by unplugging from her normally busy life. They sold their family home, renovated the school bus and traveled the West Coast. Though the lure of more family time on the bus and a trip to Maine was tempting, the availability of the perfect space couldn't wait.

Now Elliot says she's right where she wants to be, doing a job she loves, having more time with her family and making plans to create a fun weekend vibe with music, a back deck and more. You might say a once-empty space has become a damn good life change for this Coulee Region woman.

An advertisement for the Coulee Region Women magazine. It features a smartphone on the left and a tablet on the right, both displaying the magazine's website. The website has a clean, modern design with a large central image of a rural landscape with a wooden fence and a cow. The text on the website includes "coulee region women" and "AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE". Below the main image, there are navigation links for "Read", "Our Advertisers", "Specialty", "Calendar", and "About". The magazine cover itself is visible on both devices, showing a woman's portrait and the title "coulee region Women".

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Cheesy Garlic Herb Rolls

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- 8 oz. cream cheese (1 block), room temperature
- 1 large head garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, shredded
- ¼ cup Havarti cheese, shredded
- 1 medium scallion, sliced
- 2 cups spinach
- ½ cup basil, chopped
- ¼ cup parsley, minced
- ¼ cup chives, chopped
- pinch sea salt
- pinch red pepper flakes optional

Mix cream cheese, garlic and olive oil well.

On a lightly floured surface, roll defrosted dough to a 12-by-16-inch rectangle with the long side facing you. Use your hands to press into shape. Spread the cream cheese mixture onto dough and spread evenly, leaving a ¾-inch border along the top edge. Spread cream cheese with shredded cheese, chopped herbs, scallion and spinach. Press filling slightly to adhere.



Carefully roll the dough into a tight cylinder starting with the long edge closest to you. Pinch the dough together to seal and carefully place it seal side down. Gently stretch and smooth the cylinder until it is even throughout before slicing with a sharp serrated knife into 12 even pieces.

Using a light hand arrange the rolls in greased souffle cups. Top with a sprinkle of parmesan cheese and red pepper flakes.

Let rise in a warm place until they have nearly doubled in size and are pressed against each other, approximately 1½ to 2 hours.

Bake rolls in a 350°F preheated oven until golden and puffed, 25 to 30 minutes. Brush with melted garlic butter and sprinkle with sea salt. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

Chewy Ginger Molasses Cookies

- ¾ cup butter, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar, packed
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup fancy molasses
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 T cocoa powder
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. ginger
- ¼ tsp. nutmeg
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ⅛ tsp. cloves
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ cup granulated sugar (for rolling)

Preheat your oven to 350°F (convection if possible) and line two cookie sheets with parchment paper; set aside. In a large bowl, beat together butter, granulated sugar and brown sugar with an electric mixer until pale and fluffy. Beat in eggs, molasses and vanilla until just combined.

In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and salt. Add in three stages to wet ingredients, beating on low until well combined.

Spoon 1 tbsp of dough out onto prepared baking sheets, fitting 12 to a sheet. Roll dough balls in granulated sugar to completely coat and set back on the baking sheet. Bake in preheated oven for 9-11 minutes or until tops are crackly, edges are golden and beginning to firm to the touch. Remove from oven and allow to cool for at least 10 minutes before serving. **CRW**

As the Community School Coordinator for Northside Elementary, Julie Nelson is thrilled to see another good restaurant on the North Side.



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Freeing Up Space

Professional organizers help homeowners to overcome clutter.

BY JAN WELLIK | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

The hardest part (of getting organized) is for people to get started,” says Sara Washburn, professional organizer. “People have to be ready or fed up.

“We help line up all the pieces,” she continues. But professional organizing also takes compassion and patience to help people with really tough decisions.

THE BUSINESS OF ORGANIZING BEGINS AT HOME

Washburn started Peace by Piece Professional Organizing with business partner Lisa Thibodeau in September 2022, serving counties around La Crosse.



Sara Washburn and Lisa Thibodeau of Peace by Piece Professional Organizing

since February 2022, started by working with family members’ homes as well.

During Covid-19, Fellenz decluttered her own home and helped family members organize theirs. “They said, ‘you need to do this for a living!’” she says. She became a certified home organization specialist in 2021.



Erin Fellenz, owner of The Space Between

Often, people “are overwhelmed and don’t know where to start,” says Washburn, who researched organizing, including reading *Behind the Closed Door* by Katie Tracey, which covers key emotional elements people face with decluttering their home: embarrassment, shame, guilt, fear of failure and vulnerability.

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO ITEMS

“People don’t know where to start,” Fellenz says of home organization. “They might feel embarrassed or ashamed, and it continues to spiral and accumulate.”

The main reasons people have a hard time getting rid of items, Washburn says, are

- Sentimentality or grief
- Feeling they may need the item someday
- Generational needs and Depression-era effects
- Feeling they don’t have time, which leads to indecision and procrastination
- Not knowing where to start
- Feeling that they spent a lot of money on the item

It’s important to have an organized home for safety, according to Washburn, and “to not feel entrapped (physically and psychologically), which causes stress. The clutter is the noise and sits there in the back of your mind. You know it’s there, and you know you should do something about it.”

“There’s an emotional attachment to your things,” says Fellenz, “I

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remind (clients) of their goal: to have less things to tidy, to relieve stress or to have more time for hobbies.”

CONVERSATION BEFORE DECLUTTERING

Washburn emphasizes that she and Thibodeau are confidential and judgment-free in their process. “We ask questions and help people feel more comfortable,” she explains. “We first conduct a phone interview to ask what’s bothering them the most about the clutter—to help figure out the root of the problem.”

Peace by Piece schedules an on-site visit and works in 3-hour sessions to avoid “decision fatigue,” she explains.

The process of decluttering involves going through items and making piles of keep, toss and maybe. “We first start with items they are ready to toss,” Washburn says. “Then we set up a keep box.”

Even though people might realize the clutter is causing them stress, they need help with the process of sorting, she says.

The next box is donate. “We want to keep things out of the landfill and recycle as much as possible,” she says. If an item has financial value, a client can list it themselves. “But we decide with them if that is worth their time,” she says.

Peace by Piece helps clients with tasks such as renting a dumpster if needed, arranging pickup of furniture and loading a trailer with donation items. “We take care of those items, so they don’t bring them back in the house,” she says.

Fellenz models her services after *Hot Mess House*, the HGTV show with professional organizer Cassandra Aarsen. She starts a consultation with clients by having them take a quiz to determine their style and how they want to maintain their home.

The next step in her process is to meet at their house and determine what space they want to start in and what they want to get rid of, says Fellenz, who puts together a plan to determine whether it will take a few hours or a couple sessions.

“I help to sort, declutter and categorize everything based on rooms,” she says. “If they want it to look nice and organized, I come back with containers and labels.

“My clients have said how freeing it is to get rid of things they aren’t using,” she says. **CRW**

Jan Wellik is a writer and persistent tidier in her family’s home.

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Creation Space

Explore your creativity and meet makers at the La Crosse Public Library.

BY IVY MILES | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



From sewing machines to crafting supplies to 3D printers, library patrons find inspiration, materials and assistance—all for free—at the Creation Space.

Libraries nationwide are moving beyond books to serve the community in new ways, and the La Crosse Public Library is no exception. In September, under the direction of Access and Engagement Manager Barry McKnight, the library opened the Creation Space, open to all members of the community.

Located on the second floor of the Main Branch library, the Creation Space is a place for people to work together and create. All crafters, regardless of ability and age, can come and sew, scrapbook, knit, make jewelry, do 3D printing and more for free. This space has supplies such as yarn, needles, patterns, instructions, fabric, paper and beads. Many of the supplies are donated or have been purchased with a grant.

There are big tables to work at and many shelves to get supplies from. But there are also many people there to assist you. They could be the crafty workers supervising the area or someone who's also there making their own project. Adult Programming Librarian Kathy Kabat is one of these crafty workers. She continuously greets everyone who comes in and helps them with any questions they may have. "This is a place where people can explore their creativity," she says. "Here, they can try an activity before they invest in their own supplies."

The Creation Space was first intended to be a place for adults to gather and create, but it's also become very popular with families with children. "This is a place for everyone," Kabat says. The 3D printers, for example, appeal to all ages. They range from simpler models that can create a variety of plastic objects like trinkets and cookie cutters via options on an app, to more complex machines that require a user to learn basic CAD and search the internet for project designs.

A COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

The real magic of the Creation Space happens among the makers themselves. This is a space where people are happy to help each other,

whether they are a volunteer or just working on their own project. "We're creating a community of makers within the Creation Space," says Lindsey Walker, a library employee who assists with the space.

One of those people who's there doing her own thing, but willing to help you out, is Pam Squires. She and her husband, Pat, both volunteer for the Creation Space. He helps with the technology like 3D printing, while she helps with sewing and creates kits that anyone can sew. She has even taught a few sewing classes there, including a sixth-grade class from the La Crosse Polytechnic School, and she remembers how rewarding it was to watch the "light go on" for some of them, who later came back on their own to sew. "It's satisfying to teach people, and then see them come back and do more," she says.

A HAPPY VIBE

Anyone is welcome to use the Creation Space during its open hours. The library also plans to expand this idea for a photography room and production room for taking product shots and recording podcasts and videos. But now, the Creation Space workers are gearing up for summer and the additional families who will utilize the space. The staff and volunteers are ready to welcome them. "It's a good place to be," says Walker. "It has such a happy vibe."

Ivy Miles will be a freshman at Logan High School and is excited to use the Creation Space over the summer for sewing her next project.

CREATION SPACE OPEN LAB HOURS

- Tuesday 1-3 p.m.
- Wednesday 5-6:30 p.m.
- Thursday 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
- Saturday 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Practicing “Radical Hospitality”

**Safe Families For Children
connects volunteers to those
who need them.**

BY RHONDA HESS
CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



La Crosse Safe Families For Children’s Developmental Director Tracy Trussoni has fun with Bayleigh and Teigan, two children who have been helped by the organization.

When a single mother from the La Crosse area needed a little extra help with childcare, one organization, and a special couple, were there to help.

Safe Families For Children (SFFC), formed in Chicago in 2003, touts core values that include radical hospitality, disruptive generosity and intentional compassion. It has 70 chapters throughout the United States, including one in La Crosse.

BUILDING A SUPPORT NETWORK

The La Crosse SFFC office’s developmental director, Tracy Trussoni, who was hired in August 2022, says they have built up a base of 86 volunteers since they opened about one year ago and have set a goal to recruit 90 more by year’s end.

Those volunteers are fully vetted and trained to provide support for parents who need help as they go through challenging times, such as needing childcare while they attend school or a second job.

Seed money for the nonprofit organization was provided by the La Crosse Community Foundation, and the organization depends on donations.

SFFC finds many of its volunteers through churches, which Trussoni refers to as “a natural support system, rooted and grounded in biblical hospitality.”

SHARING LOVE

An avid church-going couple, Jeff and Mary Jo Mueller were drawn to help families in this way.

“It’s a way to serve,” Mary Jo says. “God gave us the opportunity to share the love.”

That love was shared, initially, with a toddler named Teigan and her mother.

“I worked full time, so we went into it saying we could help with

groceries or a ride here or there,” Mary Jo says. “We may not be able to take a child for weeks, but we could take meals to them, give (financially) and we could pray for them.”

The couple helped care for Teigan, who was the same age as their youngest granddaughter, for about eight months.

They picked her up one day per week to play in the park, help walk their dog or do some simple art activities. They even kept the child overnight a few days when her mother needed to be hospitalized.

For the Muellers, it all comes down to a matter of faith and a desire to serve.

“We love Jesus, and this is an opportunity to be Jesus to people that have needs,” Mary Jo says. That attitude is common among those who volunteer for the organization, but, Trussoni says, church attendance is not a prerequisite for helping others through SFFC. What volunteers do need is compassion and empathy.

SERVING FAMILIES

Last year, SFFC served 26 families, and Trussoni says this year’s goal is to serve 50 families.

Since opening, the La Crosse office has served 53 families, including 99 children, and an attitude of understanding and patience is encouraged for staff and volunteers.

“We all struggle. Parenting is hard. It’s OK to let the families we’re serving know that,” Trussoni says.

To find out more about donating to SFFC, or to begin a volunteer application, go to www.safefamilieswi.org. **CRW**

Rhonda Hess is a Mauston-based freelance writer for several publications. She has two photography studios in Baraboo, teaches belly dance classes, helps with her two grandchildren and gets very little sleep.



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ACCOMPLISHMENTS



CAROLYN COLLEEN REPRESENTS AT UNITED NATIONS

La Crosse entrepreneur and speaker Carolyn Colleen recently represented the Fyera Foundation as a delegate to the 2023 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Her objective at the conference is to actively participate in discussions and initiatives that promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, contributing to the advancement of women’s rights, addressing gender-based discrimination and working toward global gender equality.

Colleen is the founder of the FIERCE Foundation, author of *F.I.E.R.C.E.: Transform Your Life in the Face of Adversity, 5 Minutes at a Time!*, coauthor of *Academic and Educational Entrepreneurship* and owner of Acton Academy Midwest.



KRISTIN OTTESEN UPHOLSTERY ANNOUNCES NEW LOCATION

After operating out of a temporary location since its establishment in 2015, Kristin Ottesen Upholstery is relocating to her ideal business location at 515 Division Street, a 1930s Cape Cod home on the edge of downtown La Crosse.

Ottesen hopes to open in her renovated location in August, providing a studio worthy of the quality work she does and a designated showroom open by appointment to allow both clients and DIY customers the opportunity to view thousands of fabric samples. Ottesen is looking forward to being more involved in the La Crosse community and to being a positive impact on the neighborhood.



CELEBRATING 9 YEARS OF PRACTICALLY POSH

Brenda Schaefer is inviting the public to join her in celebrating 9 years of home décor gifts and good vibes July 14-16 at her location at 986 12th Ave. S, Onalaska. The event will feature pop-ups by local vendors, giveaways, amazing deals and more!

Schaefer launched the business in July 2014 on La Crosse’s south side before moving to the current location in 2021, where she continues to share both her uplifting outlook and visual imagination with customers through her family-operated business. Practically Posh offers unique home décor ranging from lamps and linens to pillows, vases, florals, art and more.

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Winona Health

WINONA HEALTH EARNS WORKFORCE INNOVATION AWARD

The Winona Health Simulation Lab received the Minnesota Hospital Association’s Pipelines and Partnerships Team Award, one of the association’s new Workforce Innovation Awards. The Winona Health Sim Lab supports ongoing education and development for all caregivers, from students to experienced staff, on the rapid advancements in medicine and technology with the goal of creating a competent and confident workforce, ensuring excellence in patient care and experience.

The Simulation Lab provides dynamic, clinical education for current caregivers, community members, students, EMS and fire department staff. Since opening in September 2022, it has also hosted tours of various community groups.

Accomplishments is a paid section featuring your business or organization. Call 608-783-5395 or e-mail info@crwmagazine.com for more information.

DELIVERING COMMUNITY

Mail carrier Doris Coyle makes her route a friendly, safe space to live and work.

BY HEIDI GRIMINGER BLANKE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



When Doris Coyle was a child, she loved bringing in the mail every day. “I always thought it would be so cool to be the mail lady,” she says. For the last 20 years, that’s exactly who she’s been.

The people at the businesses and in the residences along her route marvel at this neighborhood icon. On her walking route that is primarily between Cass and State streets and 5th and 11th streets in La Crosse, children run to greet her, dogs recognize her and business owners count on her. “Because I have a business route, I’m in and out of every office. I can’t walk in without saying hi,” she says.

CUSTOMER CARE

Joshua Larson, owner of Larson’s General, remarks that words alone don’t do her justice. “Everybody downtown knows Doris. She always has a positive attitude, even when it’s raining sideways. She goes the extra mile and really gets to know the business owner,” he says.

LIKE A FAMILY

One of the residents on her route, Courtney Lokken, is in awe of this mail-toting wonder woman. “Doris just astounds me with her care and concerns. She looks out for us, and she keeps us informed of things going around town.”

Lokken says those on the route often tell Coyle if they will be away for a while, and she is always ready to make adjustments when a different delivery location is needed. The USPS notes that residential customers can use a free Informed Delivery app to request carriers leave packages in a different location if they have concerns about delivery to a mailbox or front door.

However, Coyle is no conversational pushover. “The first time I met Doris, she warned our front steps get slippery, and we should salt,” says Lokken, who acted on that advice. “She’s the type of personality who will tell you if something’s out of order.”

Coyle, as well as most carriers, keeps an eye open for accumulated mail, a sign that something may be amiss and that help should be summoned. “Your route becomes part of your family, and you kind of take accountability for what’s going on. I like helping people,” she says.

NEITHER RAIN NOR SLEET

When the rest of us shelter inside during bad weather, Coyle keeps on going. “It’s a little lonely when it’s 20 below and snowy,” she says. “The nastier the weather, the more challenge it is to get through it by staying warm and staying upright. That’s a part of the job that I like, too.”

Lokken speaks adamantly about the joy Coyle brings to everyone on the route. “She’s the Mr. Rogers dream postal character. I’ve never met someone who seems so committed to her work in such a caring way. It’s just astounding. She breaks all the stereotypes.”

With a role model like Coyle, there’s likely a whole new crop of children who will want to grow up and deliver the mail, just like her. **CRW**

Heidi Griminger Blanke is a La Crosse area freelance writer who also loves taking in the mail, but she is all grown up and settled in her career.

SHE'S HOOKED ON FLY FISHING

Donna and P.J. Smith operate fly fishing classes and a guide service in rural Westby.

BY JOAN KENT | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Donna Smith was the first woman in Illinois to become a certified casting instructor through Fly Fishers International. Today, she operates fly fishing classes and a guide service near Westby with her husband.

Donna Smith opens the box and gently pulls out a brightly colored grasshopper fly, such an intricately perfect replica that you could picture it hopping away.

“These are the bugs that rely on water for their food, which are what trout eat,” she explains, plucking out other aquatic insect flies including mayfly and midge.

Fly fishing is Smith’s passion. She and her husband, P.J., operate a fly fishing guide service from their home in rural Westby, and she was the first woman in Illinois to become a certified casting instructor through Fly Fishers International.

BEAUTY OF THE CAST

She got hooked 28 years ago when she and P.J. took a friend fishing near their home in Naperville, Illinois. “When I saw him fly casting, I thought it was so beautiful,” she says. “I told my husband, ‘I want to learn that.’”

Before that day, her fishing experience had consisted of fishing for sunfish in a park lake near her family’s home as a kid.

“My husband said, ‘I’ll learn and then I’ll teach you,’” Smith recalls, laughing a bit. “But the owner of a fishing shop in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, was really smart and wanted to get me interested, too, so he loaned me a rod to get me started.”

Lured by the hundreds of miles of spring-fed creeks created in the karst topography of the Driftless, she and P.J. bought a property with the remodeled Smith School house near Westby in 2016 and moved here in 2021. Today, they hold classes there and then take the beginning fly fishermen and fisherwomen to practice in the Driftless creeks.

WHY FLY FISHING?

Fly fishing is well suited to women for two reasons, Smith says. “In fly fishing, the line is thicker and has weight, and the rod is longer and more flexible. You don’t have to be strong because the rod is designed to do all the work.

“And women tend to be better listeners. They take in the information. Often men already know how to fish, so they think they know how to fly fish and figure, ‘I can do this.’ But there’s a learning curve. You have to be willing to make bad casts and practice.”

Other anglers sometimes perceive fly fishing as elitist, Smith says, because of the difference in the equipment cost, but it can be economical. “You can get started for less than \$400. You could do it for \$75 but that’s like fishing with a broomstick. You need waders, but here in the summer you can wear boat shoes and wet-wade or fly-fish from a canoe or kayak.”

All anglers have something in common, she says: “I would hope all are concerned about the environment, protecting our water, especially in Wisconsin, where we have so many great resources, so people later have access to what we have now.”

While P.J. is the guide for www.pjguideservice.com, Smith prefers teaching.

“I don’t like the pressure of making sure you get a fish,” she says. “I want to teach you the skills. I love it when the lightbulb goes on, meaning they got it.” **CRW**

Joan Kent is a retired journalist who lives and hikes in the Driftless.

Compose Your Space

Local artists, makers and merchants help you create a space that is all your own.

BY ELISE WEINBENDER | PHOTOS BY DIANE RAAUM PHOTO



Refresh your space—make it feel like you! With the help of Coulee Region art and home décor businesses, curate your home to be a space that fits your unique style.

Gallery 1802 has a breathtaking collection of fine art, ranging from oil paintings to ceramics to woodworking pieces. Find distinctive art that adds character to your space, such as the pictured oil painting by La Crosse native artist Mary Catherine Solberg. Gallery 1802 proudly features a variety of local women artists such as Kathie Wheeler, Mary Pettis and Joni Monroe.

“Fragrant Day,” 48x48 oil painting by Mary Solberg



At Practically Posh, you're sure to find pieces that define your style with an evolving selection of home décor, fashion accessories and artisan jewelry. Find eye-catching art and one-of-a-kind furniture to add personality to your home. This June, Practically Posh is celebrating nine years of excellent customer service, décor advice and good vibes—making it easy to find an interior design style that feels like you!

Vertical Colors painting, \$289.99; Mid-Century Modern dresser, \$369.99; metal stand, \$26.99; metal filigree candle holders, \$24.99-\$49.99; succulent, \$11.99; stripe vase, \$29.99; yellow floral, \$12.99; clock, \$14.99; hobo bag purse, \$64.99; mini clutch, \$49.99; ball vase, \$52.99; fern, \$5.99; white vase, \$39.99; florals, \$14.99; table runner, \$24.99; yellow pillow, \$46.99; patterned pillow, \$39.99; basket, \$29.99; woven lanterns, \$44.99-\$54.99.



Create a relaxing space that brings you peace with Natty West's collection of locally made designs complemented by other small treasures, including their own hand-poured candles, homemade teas and lots of plants. Their featured art and artists include pottery by Johanna Moldenhauer, leather designs by Ruud Ware Co., wood creations by Knotty Willow and Cotton & Roots, vintage rugs curated by Woven Root and other vintage finds from AK Designs—all local makers and curators.

Parota pub table, \$2,990; Woven Root vintage rug, \$140; Ruud Ware Co. clutches, \$45; Terracotta bird planter, \$35; AK Designs vintage candlesticks, \$10-\$18; Johanna Moldenhauer ceramic bowl, \$65; stoneware box, \$9; Cotton & Roots wood designs, \$6 each; white planter, \$45, with *Hoya carnososa*, \$32; Natty West hand-poured candle, \$35; Natty West scented wax melts, \$6; coasters, \$22; *Encamp* book by Jennifer Edewaard, \$19.90; pottery tea mug, \$80; Natty West tea, \$5.95-\$19.

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WIDE-OPEN SPACES

Linda and RJ Miller experience the expanse of the American West while traveling “van life” style—only smaller.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | PHOTOS BY RJ & LINDA MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY



Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada



A typical camp setup for the Millers' home on the road.

From below sea level in Death Valley to high in the Canadian Rockies, one La Crosse couple spent months in 2022 taking in the greatest vistas in North America, much of it while camping in the back of their Toyota 4Runner.

Linda and RJ Miller are no strangers to car camping. It was an economical way to fill their need for adventure in younger years. Having retired from their “day jobs,” it now fills another need: being in the right time and place to create the photographs they envision.

REACHING REMOTE SPACES

Linda says the decision to make an SUV their home on the move during their travels was based on practicality. Hotels are located far from the best sites for photography, and RVs are limited in where they can travel.

“When you travel with a photographer, you need to be where the early light is,” she says, or where you can catch the “golden hour” of sunset. Paying for a hotel room you might only sleep in for a few hours doesn’t make sense.

Seeing a spectacular sunset in a remote area from the sleeping mat in the back of the truck isn’t a bad prospect, either.

FALLING INTO PLACE

In a series of four trips in 2022, the Millers traveled through more than a dozen states and provinces visiting national parks, state parks, Bureau of Land Management areas and more, seeking out the perfect images of fantastic landscapes. While they had ideas in mind for where they wanted to go and what they wanted to see, the itinerary often changed from day to day based on weather or recommendations from those they encountered along the way.

When a dry heat wave hit the Pacific Northwest, they shifted their target from the rain forests in Washington state to the Pacific coast, hiking into Rialto Beach and catching an incredible shot of an orca silhouetted in the light trail of a sunset off the San Juan Islands.

Many nights they pulled into a campground and tucked into the last available spot or were directed by locals or other travelers to places they had no idea existed.

“We were under a rainbow every trip,” RJ says, noting one lucky site in Bryce Canyon National Park that put them directly across from the park’s main overlook. He spent the entire night in the canyon shooting the Milky Way, just yards from their campsite.

In Arches National Park, the rainbow was almost literal: a rare rain set up incredible photo opportunities of blue skies, red rocks, puddles and reflections.

FAVORITE SPACES

In recounting their travels, the Millers recall in detail a range of favorite locations as wide as the skies above them.

In the Southwest are the slot canyons near Kanab, Utah, with otherworldly shapes and layers in the stone, plus the famous views of Bryce Canyon, Arches and the less-known Valley of Fire.

Along the shores of the Pacific Northwest they found puffins, sea stacks and Linda’s favorite: the miles and miles of Long Beach, which you can drive down—one of the few times on their travels she jumped behind the wheel.

At Mt. Ranier, a lucky hint from park staff yielded a fantastic view of the mountain ringed with lenticular clouds.

On a midsummer meetup with friends in the Canadian Rockies, Linda fell in love with the mountaintop tea houses near Lake Louise



Clockwise from top left: Linda and RJ Miller's visit to Arches National Park coincided with rare rains, setting up magical reflections in pools of water. Avid ultra-runners, the Millers took time to run along the route of one of the nation's best-known ultramarathons in Badwater Basin. The view from the "bed" of their Toyota 4Runner, which put them right where the best photos could be found.

in Banff National Park, reached only by foot or helicopter.

Habitual early risers, the Millers took advantage of the morning light not only for photos, but to be the first to dip their toes into icy cold crystal-clear lakes in Canada or steaming hot springs in Idaho.

Idaho also provided fantastic views of the night skies, including an observatory near Stanley, Idaho, equipped with telescopes where they were able to see the rings of Saturn.

In Death Valley, they ran along a stretch of the Badwater Ultramarathon route, a dream experience for two ultra-runners. They also took time in Monument Valley in Utah to replicate the famous scene from *Forrest Gump* in which the title character declares, "I'm pretty tired. I think I'll go home now."

EVERYTHING HAS A SPACE

The Millers admit that traveling the way they do might not be for everyone, and it requires some flexibility. If it is too warm for comfortable sleeping at night, they do find a hotel, though other nights screens over the windows and awnings to keep out the rain suffice.

Fitting everything into the 4Runner also requires forethought and a twice-daily shuffle as the bins of food and camera gear that spend days behind the seats are moved into the front seat to make space for rolling out the sleeping bags in back at night. Sometimes that process can't be completed fast enough.

Linda tells of one nerve-wracking switch after dark in Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota as they set up for the night, listening to the grunts and footsteps of buffalo in rut moving closer

every minute. "You could hear them coming, but couldn't see them," she says. "We were working really fast."

Along with dispersed camping on BLM land and campgrounds in national, state and local parks, the Millers found a surprise gem in occasional nights camping at fairgrounds, which offered an affordable space and showers.

TOGETHERNESS

Forty-five years of marriage have taught the Millers compromise, even when sharing tight spaces for long periods of time. While RJ has the patience of a photographer who can sit in one place for hours waiting for just the right light, they make opportunities for Linda's need for movement—a hike together or a solo run for her as RJ plans his next stop.

Separate sleeping bags are a must for one who runs hot and one who is always cold.

And while Linda denies being a photographer, RJ relies on her eyes for seeing a great shot or spotting wildlife as they drive. "I'm interested in just seeing the places," she says. And, oh, what places they've seen.

The Millers' approach to both life and travel is one of being open to whatever is around the next corner.

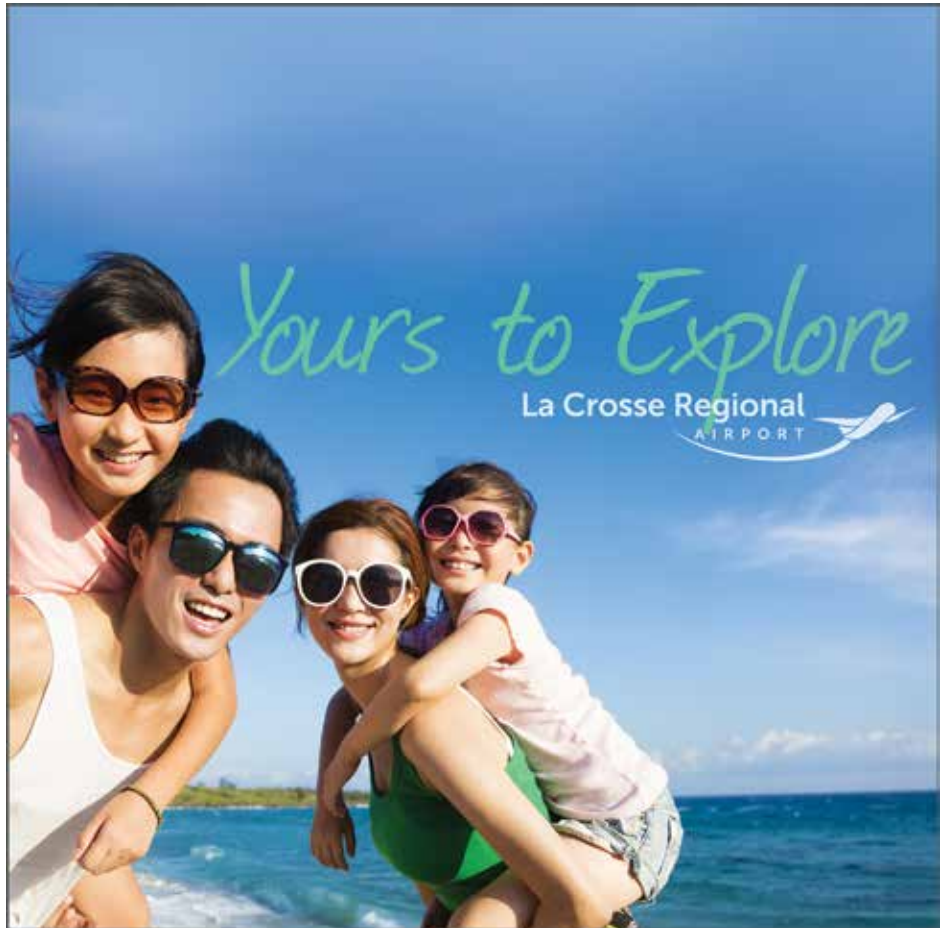
"If you don't expect anything, everything that happens is good," Linda says. **CRW**

Coulee Region Women editor Shari Hegland hopes she can both check off a bucket list and be open to new ideas that lead to the kinds of places RJ and Linda experienced in their travels.



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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 Fridays 4 p.m.-
dusk, May-Oct., Fifth and King Streets, downtown
La Crosse, www.cameronparkmarket.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 Rotary East Mondays 12 p.m.,
Schmidy's Bar & Restaurant, 3119 State Rd., La
Crosse, www.lacrosserotaryeast.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.

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

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

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

JUNE



June 1-30, Downtown Walk Around,
various locations in downtown La
Crosse, Downtown Mainstreet,
www.lacrossedowntown.com/
events.

◀ **June 1, Moon Tunes**, 5:30-8
p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell,
www.moontuneslacrosse.com.

June 2, First Friday Downtown Art Walk, 4-7 p.m.,
various locations in downtown La Crosse, <https://www.rivercitygallerylax.com/art-walk>.

June 2-11, *Dog Sees Dog: Confessions of a Teenage
Blockhead*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse
Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts,
www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

June 3, Coulee Rock Club Show, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Omni
Center, Onalaska.

June 3, Live in Viroqua Summer Music Series, 6-9 p.m.,
Court St., Viroqua.

June 3-4, Winding Roads Art Tour, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., self-
guided tour of local artist studios in and around Viroqua,
www.windingroadsart.com.

June 7, La Crosse Concert Band, "And Now for a Twist,"
7 p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell, rain site Logan High
School auditorium, www.lacrosseconcertband.org.

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

June 9, Viroqua Night Market, 6-9 p.m., Eckhart Park,
Viroqua, www.viroqua-wisconsin.com.

June 10, Artspire, 10 a.m.-10 p.m., Sat., The Pump
House, La Crosse, <https://artspire.thepumphouse.org>.

June 10, Cruise-In Classic Car Show, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.,
downtown La Crosse, Downtown Mainstreet, www.
lacrossedowntown.com/events.

June 10, Second Saturday Art Market, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.,
Main Street Plaza, Main & 2nd Streets, La Crosse,
[https://www.rivercitygallerylax.com/s/stories/saturday-
downtown-art-market](https://www.rivercitygallerylax.com/s/stories/saturday-downtown-art-market).

June 14, La Crosse Concert Band, "Summer Nights in the
Park," 7 p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell, rain site Logan
High School auditorium, www.lacrosseconcertband.org.

June 15, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8 p.m., Riverside Park Band
Shell, www.moontuneslacrosse.com.

June 16-18, *Honk Jr.*, 7:30 p.m. Fri., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun., La
Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing
Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

June 17, Live in Viroqua Summer Music Series, 6-9 p.m.,
Court St., Viroqua.



◀ **June 18, Juneteenth Celebration**,
12-7 p.m., Riverside Park, www.
juneteenthlaxwi.com.

June 20-July 30, Great River
Shakespeare Festival, Winona
State University, www.grsf.org.

June 21, La Crosse Concert Band,
"The Eclectic Bookshelf," 7 p.m.,
Riverside Park Band Shell, rain site Logan
High School auditorium, www.lacrosseconcertband.org.

June 21, Make Music La Crosse, locations throughout
downtown La Crosse, www.makemusicday.org/lacrosse.

June 21, Summer Solstice Labyrinth Walk, 4-7 p.m.,
Franciscan Spirituality Center, register at www.fscenter.org.

June 22, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8 p.m., Riverside Park Band
Shell, www.moontuneslacrosse.com.

June 23-24, *Disney's The Aristocats Kids*, 7 p.m. Fri., 2
p.m. Sat., La Crosse Community Theatre, Logan Middle
School, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

June 23-25, *Cinderella*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sat.-
Sun, Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse,
www.uwlax.edu/theatre-arts.

June 25-July 16, Minnesota Beethoven Festival, St. Mary's
University, Winona, www.mnbeethovenfestival.org.

June 28, La Crosse Concert Band, "America, the Beautiful,"
7 p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell, rain site Logan High
School auditorium, www.lacrosseconcertband.org.
June 30-July 4, Riverfest, Riverside Park, La Crosse, www.
riverfestlacrosse.com.

JULY

July 1, Live in Viroqua Summer Music Series, 6-9 p.m.,
Court St., Viroqua.

July 7, First Friday Downtown Art Walk, 4-7 p.m.,
various locations in downtown La Crosse, <https://www.rivercitygallerylax.com/art-walk>.

July 8, Second Saturday Art Market, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Main
Street Plaza, Main & 2nd Streets, La Crosse, [https://www.rivercitygallerylax.com/s/stories/saturday-downtown-art-
market](https://www.rivercitygallerylax.com/s/stories/saturday-downtown-art-market).

July 9, Jazz in the Park, 7 p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell,
rain site Capella Performing Arts Center, La Crosse Jazz
Orchestra, www.lacrossejazzorchestra.com.

July 12, La Crosse Concert Band, "Choose Joy," 7 p.m.,
Riverside Park Band Shell, rain site Logan High School
auditorium, www.lacrosseconcertband.org.

July 13, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8 p.m., Riverside Park Band
Shell, www.moontuneslacrosse.com.

July 14, Viroqua Night Market, 6-9 p.m., Eckhart Park,
Viroqua, www.viroqua-wisconsin.com.

July 15, Rail Fair, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Copeland Park,
La Crosse, 608-781-9383 or 608-498-9522,
www.4000foundation.org.

July 15, Live in Viroqua Summer Music Series, 6-9 p.m.,
Court St., Viroqua.

July 15, Kids from Wisconsin, 7 p.m., Weber Center for the
Performing Arts, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

July 16, Jazz in the Park, 7 p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell,
rain site Capella Performing Arts Center, La Crosse Jazz
Orchestra, www.lacrossejazzorchestra.com.

July 19, La Crosse Concert Band, "Music in Living Color,"
7 p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell, rain site Logan High
School auditorium, www.lacrosseconcertband.org.

July 20, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8 p.m., Riverside Park Band
Shell, www.moontuneslacrosse.com.

July 21-22, La Crosse Storytelling Festival, The Pump
House, La Crosse, www.lacrossestoryfest.com.

July 22, Paint & Picnic: Family Canvas Painting Event,
10:30 a.m.-12 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, register
at www.fscenter.org.

July 23, St. Elias Mediterranean Festival, 12-5 p.m., St. Elias
Orthodox Church, 716 Copeland Ave., La Crosse.

July 23, Jazz in the Park, 7 p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell,
rain site Capella Performing Arts Center, La Crosse Jazz
Orchestra, www.lacrossejazzorchestra.com.

July 26, La Crosse Concert Band, "Tour de Force," 7 p.m.,
Riverside Park Band Shell, rain site Logan High School
auditorium, www.lacrosseconcertband.org.

July 27, Moon Tunes, 5:30-8 p.m., Riverside Park Band
Shell, www.moontuneslacrosse.com.

July 28-30, *Star Academy Presents Legally Blonde*,
7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community
Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.
lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

July 28, Summer Days, downtown La Crosse, Downtown
Mainstreet, www.lacrossedowntown.com/events.

July 29, AAUW Art Fair on the Green, 10 a.m.-5
p.m., Viterbo University Courtyard, La Crosse, www.
artfaironthegreen.org.

July 30, Jazz in the Park, 7 p.m., Riverside Park Band Shell,
rain site Capella Performing Arts Center, La Crosse Jazz
Orchestra, www.lacrossejazzorchestra.com.

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