

coulee region

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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2023  
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# women

AREA HOME AND LIVING MAGAZINE

## A SENSE OF PURPOSE

WAFER's  
Erin Waldhart was  
meant to serve

Cooking with Bao

From Renovation  
to Conservation

A Nursing Approach  
to Leadership

Connections  
Overcome Addiction

Bonding Across Borders





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Pictured on the cover: Erin Waldhart, executive director of WAFER food pantry. Photos on cover and above left by Apropos Photography. Hair and makeup by Orange Pearl Salon.

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Photo by Diane Raaum Photo

Our inspiration for Coulee Region Women's themes in 2023 has come from a four-part checklist for creating great photos. That checklist says that every photo should have:

- A sense of time
- A sense of place
- A sense of space
- A sense of purpose

The purpose of a photo could be to inform, to entertain, to record history, to inspire or to cause the viewer to ask questions.

But what lies behind the sense of purpose that drives women in our area in their everyday lives?

We wanted to dig into that idea and share the stories of women who exemplify the idea of purpose.

What did our stories uncover as a common denominator among these women?

Their sense of purpose, universally, lies not in personal achievement but in how they can use their lives, their talents and their gifts to benefit others, in a wide range of ways.

This issue also inspired me to do a little thinking myself about what our purpose is as a publication. The mission on our website reads, "The goal is to develop stronger, healthier and happier women, families and community."

That's a tall order for a humble, bimonthly magazine with a small team of writers, sales staff, designers and distributors and an area the size of the Coulee Region to reach and portray.

How can a magazine fulfill a purpose of developing stronger, happier women? How can it improve the health of an entire community?

I believe we achieve that purpose one story and one reader at a time. When we share the story of Sister Circle—a pair of sisters dedicated to mentoring other women entrepreneurs—we may connect an aspiring business owner with the network she needs to get off the ground with a business that fills a downtown space and supports community growth.

When we highlight the myriad of fresh vegetables available from area Hmong farmers, complete with recipes from Bao Xiong and her *Cooking With Bao* video series, we may introduce a family to a new way of eating and connecting with neighbors.

When we detail the path that has led leaders of local nonprofit organizations—such as WAFER, Next Steps for Change and the YWCA—to a life of service, we may inspire others to do what they can to support those efforts: volunteering, donating or sharing the resource with friends or family members in need of the kinds of services available.

When we write about the experiences of traveling to other countries through Rotary International and experiencing the differences and similarities in cultures, we make the world just a little smaller.

Even the story of a simple lakeside cottage renovation reveals a greater purpose in Roz Schnick's dedication to conservation on a local and national scale.

Our purpose at *Coulee Region Women* is to recognize the stories all around us that can change our readers' lives, in even the smallest of ways, and share them through engaging writing, photography and design. Our purpose is to be a vehicle for women to connect—advertisers with customers, readers with stories, neighbors with each other—in ways that benefit everyone involved, even if simply by knowing a little more about the community, understanding a little more about a neighbor, or being inspired to do something a little different, a little bigger, a little more challenging.

Like the women we highlight in this issue, our purpose is not just to strive for our own gain or growth. Our purpose is focused on the entire Coulee Region. And that is good for all of us.

*Shari*

# coulee region women

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# Not Your Average Boutique!

Hello and welcome! My name is Kari Davidson, and I am the owner of Blush Roots Boutique in Westby, WI. I am not new to the Coulee Region, as for 15 years I worked at a law firm in downtown La Crosse. Owning a store was not anything I envisioned for myself, but I have loved all things fashion, makeup, clothing, shoes and bags for as long as I can remember.

After my diagnosis of melanoma, I opened up a spray tanning and makeup salon in 2019 in a remodeled milkhouse next to my house. I slowly added some clothes and accessories, and in 2020 I opened a boutique in downtown Westby on Main Street. Westby is a small, quaint town and needed a fun outlet where women could shop for gifts, accessories and clothing.

On October 1, 2021, we expanded the boutique and moved around the corner to a larger location at 104 W. State Street, and we are celebrating our second year at this location.

We offer women's clothing in sizes S-3X, shoes, accessories and gifts. We are grateful to our customers who make this a destination stop to shop!

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XOXO

Kari

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Matika Wilbur

### WOMEN'S FUND CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

The Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse will mark a quarter-century of philanthropy with its fall luncheon October 26. The event, which begins at 11:30 a.m. in the La Crosse Center South Ballroom, will feature keynote speaker Matika Wilbur. Wilbur is a visual storyteller from the Swinomish and Tulalip peoples of coastal Washington. She is the founder and photographer of Project 562, a documentary project dedicated to changing the way we see Native America.

Tickets for the luncheon are \$55 each and must be purchased by Oct. 12 online at [womensfundlacrosse.org/events/fall-luncheon/](https://www.womensfundlacrosse.org/events/fall-luncheon/).

A second ticketed event that evening will include a book signing with Wilbur, with a cocktail hour, appetizers and cash bar beginning at 5 p.m. Tickets are \$20 each, and books must be purchased in advance.

Those unable to attend can still contribute to the Women's Fund's 2023 drive on the website, with River States Truck and Trailer matching donations up to \$25,000.

Over the last 25 years, the Women's Fund has served the purpose of providing grants and scholarships to local programs that work to build an equitable future for all women and girls. 2023 grants supported 21 organizations. The diverse group of recipients include REAL Girls, a character-building program for 4th and 5th graders at Northside and State Road elementary schools; the New Horizons Shelter and Outreach Centers' survivors fund; and Hope Restores' Women of Melanin group. Grants will also support one-on-one business mentoring through the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation and a childcare conference through The Parenting Place centered on "farm to early child care and education" nutrition topics. Grantees span all ages, also including SPARK!, a cultural program for people with early to mid-stage memory loss and their care partners.

"We are thrilled to support these outstanding organizations that are making a tangible difference in the lives of women and girls in our community," says Nancy Mueller, president of the Women's Fund Board of Directors. "By funding these initiatives, we are working together to create a more equitable society where all women and girls can thrive."



### SPOOKY STORIES AT THE PUMP HOUSE

If Halloween is your favorite holiday and you love a good scare or mind-bending experience, the Pump House Regional Arts Center has you covered this October.

What better night than Friday the 13th for "Tales of the Creepy & Scary"? The Bluff Country Tale Spinners will present a series of frightful tales for teens and adults beginning at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$15 each.

Return later in the month for *The Thin Place*, a play by Lucas Hnath presented by Grey Area Productions. Explore the possibility of communicating across the border between the living and the dead in the story of a medium and a woman seeking answers about life, death and the boundary between one world and the next. Show times are 7:30 p.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, October 19, 20, 21, 26, 27 and 28, and at 2 p.m. Sundays October 22 and 29. The October 19 show is a preview performance with free admission, though donations are appreciated. Regular ticket cost is \$20 for the general public, \$15 for members or \$10 for students and military members.

Learn more about both events, as well as other upcoming performing arts at the Pump House, by visiting <https://www.thepumphouse.org/performing-arts/>.



### RINGING IN THE HOLIDAYS

Small businesses throughout the Coulee Region will be sporting their finest and welcoming holiday shoppers in November with special holiday events and Small Business Saturday.

In La Crosse, the Downtown Holiday Open House features extra open hours 4-8 p.m. Friday, November 10, with local retailers offering refreshments, entertainment and more throughout the area.

Galesville's Downtown Business Association is welcoming shoppers to visit both downtown businesses and a selection of vendors at The Brickstone, 16827 S. Main St., 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, November 18, for a Holiday Walkabout.

And small businesses throughout our area communities, from Winona to Viroqua and La Crescent to Sparta, and all points in between will be rolling out the holiday red carpet for Small Business Saturday, on November 25.

"It is a daylong celebration of shopping local," says Mary Larson, executive director of Downtown Main Street La Crosse.

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# “Where I Am Supposed to Be”

WAFER’s Erin Waldhart finds purpose in feeding and serving the community.

BY JULIE NELSON | PHOTOS BY APROPOS PHOTOGRAPHY

Leading a major remodeling and renovation project, all while maintaining the duties of your current job and taking care of your family, is no easy task, as Erin Waldhart will well attest. The executive director of La Crosse’s largest food pantry says the project, which came on the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic, took a lot longer—and presented several more challenges—than expected. She fully credits Brad Gerdes, the former operations manager who voluntarily took on the role of project manager, for getting them through the roughest spots.

When WAFER opened its new doors in the former Gordy’s Supermarket, she and Gerdes breathed a huge sigh of relief. “The people who came in were telling us how the new space looks just like a grocery store, and I thought, ‘Wow, we did it.’” she says. Waldhart, the staff and the board were committed to creating a space where

people could have as much say as possible about the foods they receive.

“Everyone deserves a place to shop in a dignified way,” says Waldhart. “For people who live in chronic poverty, there are probably very few things they have a say about. We wanted to make sure they had a say about what foods they were taking home to their families.”

### MORE THAN JUST FOOD

Each month, approximately 1,500 families turn to WAFER for supplemental food, but Waldhart says the pantry is about much more than feeding people. When patrons are unfamiliar with sweet potatoes, WAFER brings in nutritionists to talk about the benefits of the vegetables and, in a welcoming new classroom space, show people how to prepare them. When patrons lack the tools to prepare the food they receive, WAFER comes through with can openers and knives.



*A bright, welcoming classroom is one feature of WAFER's new location, providing space to teach clients about cooking and nutrition.*

When older folks, people with disabilities and those with no access to transportation were unable to get to the pantry, WAFER created a mobile pantry and a senior delivery service to get the food to the people.

"If we see a need, we want to do something about it," says Waldhart.

Waldhart is a La Crosse native and Central High School graduate who earned a degree in community health education from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. She first worked at Options in Reproductive Care (now Planned Parenthood), got married and had three children. When her husband got a job in a town 45 minutes away, they decided to move the family to the new town, where she would stay home with the children. Six months after living on a single income, a look in the cabinets told Waldhart their finances were getting a little too tight, and she found a part-time job in the local food pantry. Her first encounter with a patron there changed her forever.

"The woman looked very haggard," Waldhart says in recounting the meeting. "Her fleece coat was covered in cat hair. When I handed her the bag of groceries, I had a surreal moment that told me this is where I was supposed to be." The woman became teary with gratitude over what, to Waldhart, was a small act. "I was profoundly impacted by that moment."

## RAISING A FAMILY TO SERVE

Serving people through food quickly became a family affair; when Waldhart mentioned the need to find childcare before she could start that pantry job, the hiring crew said, "Don't worry about it, just bring your children here!" So she did. The volunteers quickly took the two

non-school-aged Waldharts under their wings, and the youngest, at 18 months, was soon stocking a shelf with macaroni and cheese.

Fast forward about 10 years to when the family moved back to La Crosse, and Waldhart became the executive director of WAFER. The kids continued to help at the pantry as they were able, but it was never a family requirement. Those children are now ages 26, 22 and 18. Waldhart says she only recently learned of the impact the pantry clients had on the youngest when the daughter wrote a college essay on diversity, equity and inclusion. In the essay, she said, "It wasn't until I was in middle school that I recognized some people looked at others differently." The daughter was totally unaware of race or income level; to her, people were people. "As a mom, that was a pretty awesome moment," Waldhart says.

## MEETING NEEDS

Waldhart has been part of one food pantry or the other for more than 20 years. While she acknowledges La Crosse is a highly generous community, she says it will take more than bags of groceries to get people out of poverty. "Unless we have some systemic changes, people with disabilities, people on a fixed income and people with high medical or prescription medical bills will always need food."

Waldhart cites an encounter with a woman from Denmark who was a single mom of three as an example of how a society can be different. That mom said something like WAFER would never happen in Denmark because they didn't need it. The mom received enough money from the government to live reasonably until the children were in school. Health care and education were free, and the family was able to thrive.

"I think there are people in the U.S. who believe those that get food from a pantry are 'using the system,' and that the patrons don't want to change," says Waldhart. "But for most pantry clients, that's not the case. People don't come to WAFER because they want to; they come because they have to."

## SURROUNDED BY SUPPORT

Leading WAFER through the pandemic and the move has been highly stressful for Waldhart. She credits four blessings for keeping her moving forward: her staff ("They have the attitude that we are all in this together and we won't give up"); the board ("They are highly invested, involved and passionate about the cause"); the volunteers ("They show true compassion every day in the way they interact with the people who come for food"); and, finally, her faith. "I believe God has led me to this place for a purpose. If it gets to the point I'm not needed anymore, I believe God will let me know that, too," she says with a smile. **CRW**

*Julie Nelson has worked for several nonprofits that help people access food. She was delighted to get a tour of the new WAFER building and agrees it is something special.*

# Women in Wellness



Left-Right: Sheryl Gora-Bollom, MS, LCSW;  
Melissa Hellwig, MS, LPC; Mary Cortesi, MSW, LCSW

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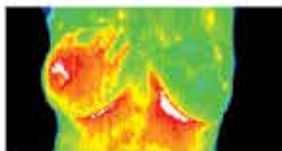


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## An Operating Room Approach to Health Care Leadership

Gundersen's Heather Schimmers brings a nursing perspective to a president's role.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

In the earlier days of her career, Heather Schimmers was a circulating nurse in the operating room, a position that required her to be aware of all that was happening in the room, monitoring the patient and the interactions of the team of specialists performing the surgery. While she had trust in each of the other professionals, her job was to be aware if anything didn't seem right and to be ready to advocate for the patient.

Today, she applies that same approach—see the big picture, trust your team, but be ready to call a pause and evaluate—to a team of 9,000 employees. Gundersen Health System merged with Bellin Health in December 2022, at which time Schimmers was named president of the Gundersen region. She is the first woman and the first nurse to lead the La Crosse-based organization.

### FINDING HER PATH

A native of Mineral Point, Schimmers says health care wasn't on her radar in high school, but after the music therapy program she had enrolled in was canceled a year into her studies, advisors suggested nursing as a perfect way to meld her interests in science and in people.

"I've never looked back a day since," she says, even as her career has led her from a nursing home to the operating room and through a series of leadership roles to where she is today.

When she first earned an associate degree in nursing, Schimmers explored other nursing career options, including nursing homes and clinics before finally landing in the position that cemented her decision.

"The moment I walked into an operating room, my love of science and how the body worked collided," she says. And it was there, as a circulating nurse orchestrating the activities in the room, that she developed the theory of leadership she still follows today.

Today, with an MBA and more than a decade of executive experience on her resume, Schimmers' daily tasks have changed dramatically, but she says she stays grounded to her purpose with a habit her father taught her. "At the end of the day, I ask myself: Have I done my best job for the people entrusted in my care?" she says. While that used to be simply her patients, today her focus is expanded to include employees and the entire community.



## PURPOSE AND KINDNESS

“Along the way I came to believe that you can handle all situations with a sense of purpose and kindness,” she says, which has proven true at Gundersen. She shares an example from when she first joined the system in October 2021 as chief operations officer/chief nursing officer. At the height of the third wave of Covid-19, nurses were leaving the profession, both at Gundersen and nationwide, in unprecedented numbers. “We needed a call to action,” Schimmers says, but the connection had to come from someone nurses already knew and trusted. She enlisted the organization’s existing innovation team to interview nurses asking “what are the pebbles in your shoes?” She wanted to know both the little things and the big things making work harder than it should be for her nurses.

“We got so much honest data back from our workforce,” she says, and began making changes to address that feedback. A turnover rate that had been 20 percent at its peak is now only 7 percent, compared to a national average of 18 percent.

Schimmers says the changes made are an example of what can happen when leaders

pause, assess and surround themselves with the right people, something she continued to do when stepping into her current position a year ago as Gundersen merged with Bellin Health. The changes that merger brought demanded a new way of thinking for the organization, and she created a senior leadership team to follow her pause, assess and adapt model. “We revamped how we met, when and how we get feedback from the front line,” she says. “And then I get the ability to take all this to the larger organization and be sure Gundersen’s voice is heard loud and clear.”

Kindness and compassion are part of Schimmers’ DNA. Often times, female executives can be portrayed in the media as ruthless and uncaring. That description doesn’t work for her. “Stay true to your purpose and you will get the outcomes the organization deserves,” she says.

“Empower your leaders, watch them grow and then get out of the way and let them do what they do,” Schimmers advises. **CRW**

*Shari Hegland is the editor of Coulee Region Women and a firm believer in creating a team you trust, then letting them do what they do best.*

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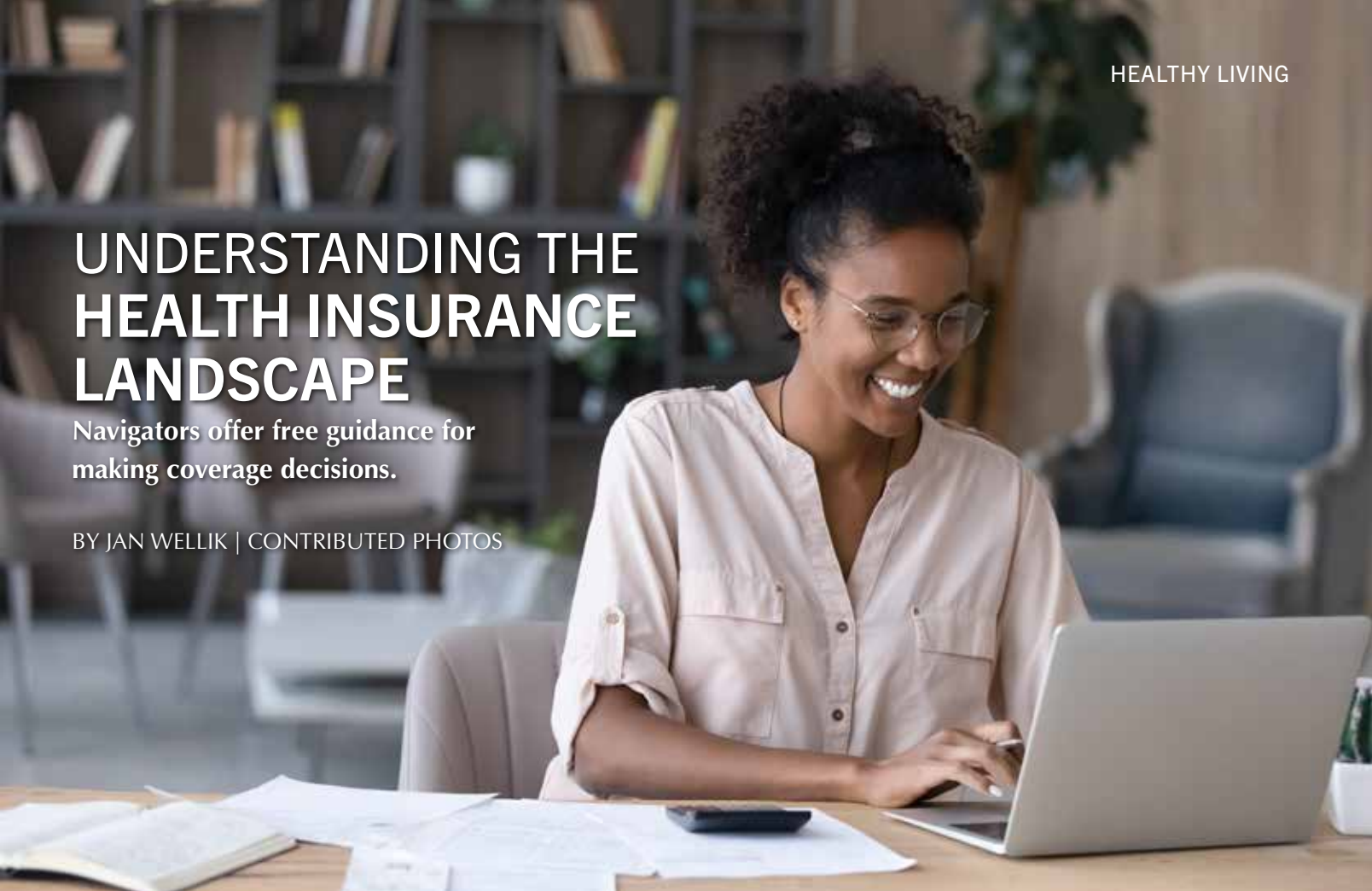
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# UNDERSTANDING THE HEALTH INSURANCE LANDSCAPE

Navigators offer free guidance for making coverage decisions.

BY JAN WELLIK | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



With open enrollment for most health insurance programs coming in November, it's a good time to think about what options are available. Kelly Becker and Wanda Palmer, health insurance navigators at Workforce Connections, help southwest Wisconsin residents make informed decisions for themselves.

Covering Wisconsin is an agency through University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension that funnels federal funding from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to organizations like Workforce Connections to provide navigator services.

## BADGERCARE ELIGIBILITY CHANGES

During the Covid-19 public health emergency, the federal government directed all states to give Medicaid members continuous eligibility; therefore, members already enrolled and those who enrolled during the emergency did not have to renew each year. These special



*Kelly Becker, health insurance navigator with Workforce Connections*

public health emergency rules have ended now, and all members must renew by their assigned renewal date. Between June 2023 and June 2024, it's predicted that 385,000 people will lose their BadgerCare coverage (which is the equivalent of Medicaid) in Wisconsin, which means many will need to review the options through employers or the ACA marketplace.

Becker has been with Workforce Connections one year and previously worked for clinics and with insurance carriers, so she is familiar with the spectrum



*Wanda Palmer, health insurance navigator with Workforce Connections*

of health care. "I have been a patient advocate all my life," she says.

"Our health system is so complex, it's hard for the average person to figure out who to call and how to navigate the paperwork," she explains. "This role is important, and health insurance is really important."

Part of her navigator role is outreach. When someone loses BadgerCare, it is recorded in the ACA insurance marketplace database, and "we can reach out to them and help them choose an alternate insurance," explains Becker.

## OBJECTIVE ADVICE IN CHOOSING OPTIONS

Navigator services are free for all Wisconsin residents and available year-round. Their expertise is available to help individuals and families consider their health insurance options, assist in enrolling them in coverage and help them in using their health insurance (if that help is needed).

"We are not steering people to a particular plan," says Becker. "We show them plans that are available and help them compare."

Not knowing where to look for help is one of the barriers many people run up against when it comes to health insurance, according to Becker.

Becker and Palmer are among the 43 navigators serving residents of Wisconsin. While navigators cover specific counties, any of them

can help any Wisconsinites and residents of neighboring states like Minnesota and Iowa. Assistance can be provided via phone, video chat or in person to guide people needing help.

“We are a neutral third party, not giving opinions about insurance companies,” Palmer explains. They help assist people with information on what plans may fit their needs, she says.

## BEYOND EMPLOYER PLANS

Most people get health insurance coverage through their employers, but folks who do not have an option for an affordable plan or who are retiring but not old enough for Medicare may benefit from help navigating health insurance plans.

## WHAT TO BRING TO AN APPOINTMENT WITH A HEALTH INSURANCE NAVIGATOR

When scheduling an appointment with a health insurance navigator, be prepared with this information:

- Income for everyone in the household
- Your most recent tax return
- Social security numbers for everyone you want covered on the plan, if they have one
- Date of birth for everyone you want covered
- A list of prescriptions and how much you take
- The names of your doctors and clinics
- Your Healthcare.gov log-in information, if you already have an account

If you are losing your current health insurance, bring a letter that shows the date your coverage is ending.

“I’ve always had a number of different hats for the agency,” says Palmer, who has worked for Workforce Connections for 35 years. Along with being a health insurance navigator, Palmer also works with the WISE program (Wisconsin Senior Employment Program) and other special income-related projects.

“Health insurance can be very confusing and overwhelming,” says Palmer. “We help people understand and make better informed decisions.”

In addition to the health insurance navigation services, Workforce Connections helps community members connect with work, training and resources. They offer the following programs: Foodshare Employment & Training, Wisconsin Works, Emergency Assistance, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Wisconsin Senior Employment Program and a Foster Grandparents Program.

## GETTING HELP

If you have lost or will be losing BadgerCare Plus/Medicaid/CHIP due to the recent changes, you are eligible for a special enrollment period through the Health Insurance Marketplace.

For one-on-one assistance with health care insurance, Wisconsin residents can contact Palmer at [palmerw@workforceconnections.org](mailto:palmerw@workforceconnections.org) or by phone at 608-790-8136; Becker at [beckerk@workforceconnections.org](mailto:beckerk@workforceconnections.org) or by phone at 608-386-8629; or visit their office online: [www.workforceconnections.org](http://www.workforceconnections.org). Resources are also available through Covering Wisconsin by phone at 608-261-1455 or 877-942-6837 or online at [www.coveringwi.org](http://www.coveringwi.org). **CRW**

*Jan Wellik is a La Crosse-area writer and educator who is so glad to see these services available in the community.*



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The advertisement features three copies of the '2024 Cover Women Business Resource Directory'. Each directory cover shows a grid of portraits of women. The text 'coulee region women' is prominent on each cover. The background of the advertisement is a light brown color with a white keyboard, a pen holder, and a coffee cup visible in the upper left.

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# Sisters Create a Business Community

Stephanie Ross and Cathryn Howland provide support and coaching to female business owners.

BY TALLITHA REESE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Sisters Stephanie Ross and Cathryn Howland are the founders of Sister Circle, a business mentoring organization and support system for female entrepreneurs in the Coulee Region.



Sister Circle co-founder Stephanie Ross offers coaching and support to Brenda Schafer of Practically Posh (left) and Holly Lambrecht with Boundless Beauty Apparel Co.

Stephanie Ross and Cathryn Howland were born and raised in the Coulee Region of the '90s by parents who owned their own businesses, which instilled an entrepreneurial spirit in the sisters early on.

“We naturally started our own business ventures at a very young age creating concerts, carnivals and fashion shows in our basement,” explains Ross. “It was obvious we were meant to be business owners.”

## ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERIENCE EARLY

Howland (the “C” of Sister Circle) has been self-employed since 19, when she formed a team of 300-plus women in the direct sales industry over five years, then transitioned into a full-time real estate career in 2015. Ross (the “S” of Sister Circle) started her first business while in college: Zen and Pow Studio. After graduating from University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in 2015, she began scaling her business, eventually expanding to two locations, and then pivoted to pursue a career in real estate.

Together, the sisters created Sister Circle in July 2021 as an educational coaching company for women business owners to learn, grow and connect. “Our mission is to guide and provide community, connection and coaching for female small-business owners so that you can build a scalable, sustainable, profitable business that not only ‘looks successful’ but actually feels good for you,” says Ross.

## CREATING A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Sister Circle started as a small group of women small-business owners that the sisters knew from attending socials, a summit conference and pop-up workshops and events. This past January, Ross felt the push to do more.

Having taken the lead in the organization in 2022, she now offers more consistent guidance, community and support through the Sister Circle Monthly Membership.

## MUTUAL BENEFIT

Ross says Sister Circle has also been a positive force behind her own businesses.

“It forces me to practice what I preach and teach our members, to continue to learn, grow and evolve my own businesses,” says Ross. “I honestly feel it is the fact that I am still running two other businesses that gives me the credibility to speak from a place of experience and expertise on what I’m coaching our members on. I’m not just a business coach preaching from the stage; I’m still an active business owner growing my own business along with them!”

“My passion for growing Sister Circle is to serve women like my younger self who were hungry and determined to learn and grow and just needed someone to believe in them and pull them up like my mentor did for me,” says Ross. “Having a community of women that not only can relate to the challenges and emotions you’re feeling as a small business owner, but that will push you to be your best and go for more—that is something special that you don’t come across often.”

New things on the horizon for Sister Circle include the first Sister Circle Mastermind Retreat, scheduled for this fall as well as a celebration gala for members at the end of the year. **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).*





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# FROM A SIMPLE RENOVATION TO OPERATION POLLINATION

Roz Schnick transforms her French Island guesthouse into a destination with a greater purpose.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER | PHOTOS BY FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHY



*In repairing water damage and renovating a French Island guest cottage, Roz Schnick combined original features such as hardwood floors and French doors with an expanded kitchen in The Monarchy, which she plans to use to continue promoting her passion project, Operation Pollination.*



In 1972, Roz Schnick and her husband, Ron, bought a lakeview home on French Island. Feeling bullish about French Island real estate, they then bought the two cottages next door, along with a few plots across the road. “We were just at the right place at the right time!” Schnick declares. They used the cottages to host parties for friends and extended family. Schnick recounts many happy memories of watching guests swim, sail and canoe on Lake Onalaska.

In 1997, to make room for a new home, they decided to tear down the more rustic of the two cottages and move the other across the street to serve as a guesthouse. They painstakingly planned their new home, from the shining Brazilian cherry hardwood floors to his-and-her offices (hers faces the water; then the National Coordinator for Aquaculture New Animal Drug Applications, she needed the river view). It would be another 25 years before Schnick undertook her next significant construction project, this time focused on the little guesthouse across the street.

## TEAMWORK TO THE RESCUE

In March 2022, Schnick was cleaning the guesthouse after a

fundraiser (the years hadn’t dulled her love of hosting) when she discovered a dismaying scene: water everywhere, the result of a burst pipe. Luckily, Schnick knew whom to call: Jon Olson of Jon Olson Construction. The news was grim. There was significant water damage, and mold was everywhere. Schnick decided on a total renovation. Olson was up to the task and connected Schnick with his team of experts—nearly all women.

First, she met with Mary Kay Paul at Gerhard’s Kitchen, Bath & Lighting Store to plan the bathroom, and then Lois Becker at Midwest TV & Appliance to pick the appliances for the kitchen and laundry room. Next, she met with Lori Engelhart at Wisconsin Building Supply to tackle the kitchen. Engelhart recommended removing a window on the north wall to allow for cabinetry throughout. Together they chose simple, Shaker-style cabinets. They also updated the window above the sink to a box window with a view of Schnick’s beloved pollinator gardens. At Engelhart’s recommendation, the construction crew removed the wall between the study and the kitchen to make room for an island. Then, Michelle Prieur at Builders Flooring, Inc. helped select tiles for the kitchen in a beautiful grey with a watery feel.



*The original fireplace, top left, still in working condition, anchors a light and nature-filled living room in Roz Schnick's guest cottage on French Island. Above, the foundation was taking shape in late summer for a glass-enclosed four-season room, which Schnick plans to use to host meetings and events in support of Operation Pollination.*

## A VIEW OF THE LAKE—AND THE FUTURE

As work progressed, the “crew” would joke with Schnick that her house was in the way of the view of the lake from the guesthouse, which sparked an idea: adding a three-seasons room off the back of the guesthouse, angled to take advantage of the water view.

Around that time, Schnick got a frantic call from Tom Schlesinger, co-founder of the Climate Alliance for the Common Good, asking her to host a TV filming of her pollinator gardens.

Schnick was no stranger to requests like this. Following the passing of her beloved husband in 2012, she has dedicated her life to honoring his memory through community service and philanthropy. She's involved in many environmental efforts, including serving as the co-chair of the Rotary Club of La Crosse's Environmental Committee, as a member of the Environmental Sustainability Rotarian Action Group, as the La Crosse County Commissioner for the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission and as an Ambassador for Rotary's “Operation Pollination” effort (Schnick doesn't do anything halfway!).

This request struck a chord, and she decided to expand her renovation project further by adding a spacious four-season room. It would become a headquarters for her volunteer and advocacy efforts: a quiet, comfortable space where her colleagues could meet, strategize and conduct the important business of saving the world from the ravages of climate change.

By late summer, the foundation for the addition had been poured, and work was progressing quickly for a beautiful, glass-encased space with a cheery wood-burning stove from La Crosse Fireplace (recommended by Angela Kupietz).

Throughout it all, Schnick continues her work to restore pollinator habitats through her leadership with various organizations. Meanwhile, the humble lakeview guesthouse—more than a simple abode for family and friends—will live out its purpose as a home for great ideas and positive global change. Its new name? The Monarchy. **CRW**

*Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a writer living in La Crosse with her own pollinator garden inspired by Roz.*

“It was such a joy to work with all these women!” says Schnick.

“I had to make decisions on a countertop, the tile, the grout, the walls and a backsplash ... and then, of course, the color of the house,” she says. Because it's a small place, Schnick's advisors recommended using the same color throughout. “I knew I wanted blue because this was a lakeside cottage,” she notes. They decided on a calming light blue from Sherwin Williams inside, with new LP SmartSide siding in Rapids Blue for the exterior.

## BLENDING OLD AND NEW

Amazingly, the beautiful 1920s maple flooring in the bedroom, study, living room and laundry room was salvageable, and once sanded and refinished, it looks stunning. Two additional original elements that survived are the beautiful French doors opening from the bedroom to the study, and a working fireplace in the living room.

The renovations weren't just cosmetic: the walls were torn down to the studs; the electrical was upgraded; the plumbing, windows and doors were replaced; and the roof was redone. It was a big undertaking, but Schnick says she'd do it all over again. “I have had more fun in this past year than in a long time, just being creative and throwing out ideas,” she says.

She had been making do with a window air-conditioning unit, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to install it each year, so it made sense to upgrade to central air. However, the existing furnace couldn't accommodate the addition of air conditioning, so Absolute Comfort Heating and Air Conditioning replaced the furnace and added air conditioning. Schnick also found lovely folding screens printed with scenes from her favorite painter, Claude Monet, which she uses to hide the mechanical equipment and as decor in the living room.



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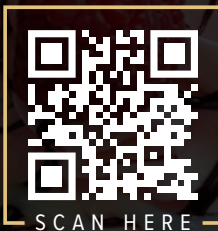
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It takes a village to put on a show: *The Cooking With Bao* crew includes Bao Xiong and co-host Abram Dyke (back), flanked by director Dylan Overhouse (with clipboard) and executive producer Brent Haniff (tasting the freshness of the props). Photo courtesy of For Independent Hmong Farmers Corp.

## Cooking Up Ideas and Harvesting Community

Bao Xiong creates new paths for cultural traditions while raising awareness for local Hmong farmers.

BY DIANE BREESER | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

**B**ao Xiong has expanded cultural traditions far beyond the borders of her native village. She credits the female mentors in her life—her mother, aunts, teachers—for instilling the powers of story and food, both linking people through and across generations.

Born in Thailand, Xiong's family fled their homeland following the Vietnam War and political turbulence. Like thousands of Hmong refugees, her family arrived in the United States in the late 1980s, eventually joining other relatives in La Crosse.

Xiong discovered that there were few resources for the Hmong culture. "If I had to sum up why I started a nonprofit and an indie publishing house, the truth is there were no opportunities, there was no path where we could thrive, so I created one."

### CULTIVATING A PLAN

Xiong began clearing that path during the Covid-19 crisis. Seeing how the pandemic's toll affected everyday livelihoods, Xiong specifically felt it within the community of local Hmong farmers. The result was a nonprofit organization, For Independent Hmong Farmers, created to provide relief aid to a demographic

that makes up 70-80 percent of local farmers market vendors.

"After years of watching this group of people go through hardship after hardship," says Xiong, "I decided to do something. So I started advocating and fundraising for them."

Donations helped farmers with costs such as purchasing seeds and supplies, land rental and maintaining equipment. One hundred percent of all donations went directly to the farmers.

In 2021, donations were coming in, but the pandemic continued its paralyzing effect on everyday lives. Like many of us, Xiong did more cooking at home, then began to share her recipes—which led to the next step in helping Hmong farmers.

### AN IDEA BLOOMS

A network of sharing recipes among friends grew into the idea of making short cooking videos—then Xiong's partner suggested doing a cooking show on YouTube. A partnership with local businesses La Crosse Local, Dylan Overhouse Productions and Mike Makes brought forth *Cooking With Bao*.

The main purpose for the show, Xiong explains, was "to encourage people and engage our community in shopping local



Bao Xiong is host of the *Cooking With Bao* podcast and founder of For Independent Hmong Farmers. Photo courtesy of Bump Opera.

and supporting Hmong farmers at the local farmers markets.” Each episode introduces a recipe and the steps to create it.

Xiong realized that filming a show was a bit like choreography. Learning where to stand, where to step next and which direction to face while chopping onions all suddenly mattered. Though she could rival any host on the Food Network now, Xiong credits all involved for making *Cooking With Bao* a success.

Regularly co-hosting with Xiong is Abram Dyke, a local foodie who serves up thoughts on cooking along with a side dish of sharp wit. Their kitchen chemistry is undeniably entertaining and educational, but guest co-hosts get their spotlights, too. La Crosse Mayor Mitch Reynolds and Driftless Café co-owner Luke Zahm are among those who have put on an apron alongside Xiong.

Initially a limited-run fundraising series highlighting Hmong produce and foods, *Cooking With Bao* flourished due to the variety of produce (asparagus, beets, ginger root, beans and leafy greens, for example), seemingly endless recipes and continued support. The series just wrapped up its third season.

“Season 3 featured Hmong farmers, their land, the produce they grow and which farmers markets they attend. I think it’s important to know where your food comes from, but it’s a treat to know who is growing your food.” says Xiong. The main focus of Season 3 was to help Hmong farmers rebuild following the pandemic, though some donations helped with production costs.

#### RAISING AWARENESS BY DIGGING DEEP

Advocating for Hmong farmers means bridging agricultural traditions, cultural differences and language barriers. Xiong wants the community to understand who the Hmong people are and why farming is so important in their lives.



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“It’s so natural, such a good fit – we raised our kids on a family farm, then quit farming for 10 years. My kids are grown, but they all want to help. Their memories of life on the family farm draw them here, making us so happy.”  
-Amy Forgues

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## Pork and Ginger Stir Fry

*Cooking With Bao*, Season 2, Episode 8

A quick and tasty meal; serves 2-4.

- 1 lb. ground pork
- ¾ cup ginger root, thinly sliced
- 1-2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 6-8 green onions, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1-2 T olive oil
- salt & pepper

Heat olive oil in a wok on medium-high. Stir in garlic and ginger until golden brown. Add in pork and break up slightly.

Turn heat down to medium. Don't mix ingredients too much; let them "do their thing" in the wok. Add a few pinches of salt and pepper to taste.

Add bottom of green onions (the tougher parts); cook 1 minute. Then add the rest of the green onions.

Mix in wok for up to 1 minute. Serve over jasmine or sticky rice.

## Spring Mix and Seared Shrimp with Sweet Vietnamese Sauce

*Cooking With Bao*, Season 3, Episode 5

- Per serving:
- 1½ cups spring mix greens
  - ¼ cup alfalfa sprouts
  - 5-7 pieces shrimp
  - red onion, sliced
  - fresh mint leaves
  - olive oil

Sear shrimp in olive oil over medium-high heat; add salt and pepper.

In individual serving bowls: Place spring mix greens, sprouts and onion. Add shrimp and garnish with mint leaves.

Drizzle with Sweet Vietnamese Sauce.

### Sweet Vietnamese Sauce

- ½ cup warm water
- ½ cup white sugar
- ½ cup fish sauce
- 2 T white vinegar
- 1 T lime juice
- 1 T minced garlic
- ½ tsp. Thai chili pepper, finely chopped

Pour water in a bowl; whisk in sugar and all wet ingredients. Add garlic and chili pepper; whisk until blended.

Serve with egg rolls.

"Hmong farmers genuinely care about the land and the food they grow," she explains. "To some people, growing produce is a hobby, but cultivating is a lifestyle to Hmong farmers.

"The majority of Hmong farmers in our area are veterans and refugees from the Vietnam War, who aided the U.S. in what is known as the Secret War. So, farmers by trade, veterans and refugees, these are the people growing our food at the farmers markets."

The farm-to-table process of independent farming is also part of Xiong's message. Besides markets, much of the produce goes directly to local restaurants, co-ops and food pantries. The For Independent Hmong Farmers Facebook page displays a rainbow of Hmong vendors' produce ready for purchase at local farmer's markets during the season. "Eating well and eating fresh is for everyone," says Xiong.

### PLOWING AHEAD

Another aspect of Xiong's life involves storytelling. An accomplished author, Xiong writes her own folktales or retells the old ones in new ways. After being repeatedly told "there is no audience" for her stories, Xiong took the obvious path—again.

"I started Moth House Press to elevate Hmong and Asian stories, and to write outside of the norm: (creating) heroes that look and sound like me." Simultaneously, Xiong is preserving the Hmong language, disappearing among younger generations.

With a degree in visual communications from Western Technical College, Xiong currently double-majors in English and theater at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. She is definitely not wasting time, which she describes as "the most important thing we have. With time you can learn, do and become whatever and whoever you want to be."

Xiong describes herself as "a work in progress ... building and rebuilding in almost every aspect" of her life. But she sees her own path and will boldly proceed.

"I am an Asian woman living in a white man's world," Xiong states, adding how it affects educational and career paths. Challenges arise throughout society, gender, culture, age and financial realms. "There is an inequality in all those categories. I want change, so I am making that change happen." CRW

*Diane Breeser is a local actor and writer who would love to be a guest on a cooking show. Despite the fact she has few skills in the kitchen, Diane claims to be "an awesome toast chef." To book Diane for your cooking show: dbreeser@gmail.com.*

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# A Bold Mission

YWCA La Crosse marks 120 years of evolving programs to empower women.

BY MARTHA KEEFFE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Children at the YWCA Child Center learned about dental care during National Children's Dental Health Month.



Karen Carter, owner of Twisted Beauty Bar in La Crosse, works on box braids for a participant in the YWCA's back-to-school GET Fresh event.

Over the past 160 years, the YWCA (originally the Young Women's Christian Association) has experienced considerable growth to its programming and services. But despite these changes, the international organization has retained its goal "to advance the physical, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual interest of young women."

Established in England in 1855 to assist women who were seeking independence and financial freedom during the industrial revolution, the YWCA worked to alleviate the poverty many women faced as they migrated to urban areas to find work. From its humble beginnings—which offered prayers and found Christian homes for young women—the YWCA has continued to grow, expanding its scope to not only help women across the globe find secure, safe, affordable and comfortable housing, but provide them with a vast array



Laurie Cooper Stoll,  
executive director of  
YWCA La Crosse

of recreational and educational opportunities. And by keeping current on cultural shifts, the YWCA has been able to address the unique needs of a diverse population even in La Crosse.

## AT THE FOREFRONT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

"The mission of YWCA is to eliminate racism, empower women and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all," says Laurie Cooper Stoll, executive director of YWCA La Crosse. "YWCA has been at the forefront of the most critical social movements for more than 160 years—from women's empowerment and civil rights, to affordable housing and pay equity, to violence prevention and health. YWCA La Crosse has sought to advance this important work in the Coulee Region for the past 120 years."

This is evident in how YWCA La Crosse continues to be committed to serving vulnerable populations while retaining its core values. Through programs that offer supportive housing, such as Ophelia House (which homes women who are serving sentences for nonviolent crimes) and collaborating with REACH Services (a one-stop hub that connects individuals who are experiencing housing instability to essential resources), YWCA La Crosse provides individuals and families with the tools, knowledge and courage they need to lead independent and secure lives.

## GIVING VOICES TO THOSE LACKING REPRESENTATION

In addition, YWCA La Crosse advocates for and strengthens those individuals who might otherwise lack representation. YWCA La Crosse-sponsored justice circles and restorative justice programs teach leadership and conflict management skills to students in local middle schools and high schools. Similarly, YWCA La Crosse trains community volunteers to become court-appointed special advocates via the CASA for Kids program to provide stability, mentorship and a voice for children who are involved in the courts as a result of abuse and neglect. "And next year," says Stoll, "we are bringing back after-school programming for girls focused on media literacy, mental health, positive body image, leadership and activism.

"We are very proud of our program areas," says Stoll, noting that in 2022 YWCA La Crosse served 2,629 people throughout eight program areas. "Guided by a bold mission to eliminate racism and empower women—along with a willingness to partner with others and take on systemic problems—YWCA La Crosse has responded to changing community needs since its inception in 1903." **CRW**

*Martha Keeffe lives and writes in La Crosse. She enjoys connecting readers with notable organizations in our community.*



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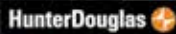
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# Artisan Offerings

La Crescent entrepreneurs connect creators with customers.

BY JANIS JOLLY | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



*Kayla Johnson, left, and Allie Benish are the founders of Great River Makers Market, which will host its next event December 9 at the La Crescent Area Event Center.*

Call it celebrational shopping: one-of-a-kind items made by talented hands, heavenly smells and shoppers engaging with artisans and each other. This is a makers market. And now, thanks to the vision of Kayla Johnson and Allie Benish, this experience is available at the La Crescent Area Event Center on December 9.

These two entrepreneurs are high school friends who engage top-notch artisans and bring them together for shows. It's the only market of its type in La Crescent, and "best of all, it's free for shoppers," says Benish. The holiday show will be the fifth market they have organized.

## BRINGING A MARKET TO THE MINNESOTA SIDE

"We were attending makers markets all over the Wisconsin side of the river," says Benish. "One day, we struck up a conversation about how fun it would be to bring a market to our hometown of La Crescent. We named the market after the Great River Road, which goes right past our event venue."

Their first market in July 2022 was a big hit for shoppers and vendors, so they quickly planned a holiday market for the following December. "After that success, we planned out our 2023 markets,



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### BILLIE'S KITCHEN

You can save time in the kitchen and serve tasty food in minutes thanks to Billie's Kitchen. Billie Erdmann creates a wide variety of dehydrated foods packaged in paper bags decorated by family members. Soups and skillet, cookies and desserts come together with minimal effort in your kitchen. Her products can be picked up at her home or she will deliver (within 30 miles).



### SIMPLY B CANDLES

Becky Kamrowski of Galesville makes candles in an incredible range of scents. Imagine "cedarwood and Madagascar orchid" or "driftwood and sea lily." "I always loved candles," she explains. "During Covid I decided to learn how to make them." Kamrowski uses soy oil wax and essential oils to create inventive scents in small batches.



1924 Custom Soapery is one of the many makers represented at Great Rivers Makers Market.

the last of which is our Holiday Market on December 9,” Benish says.

Both women are talented “makers” themselves. Benish learned to sew as a pastime during the Covid-19 pandemic. She now makes original hair accessories under the brand name A Blonde and a Bobbin and owns a small fashion boutique, Current Clothing Co. Johnson is a self-taught laser engraver, creating and engraving a wide variety of items. In addition, she prints apparel with fun and local designs.

Johnson operates the Johnson Livings storefront on Walnut Street in La Crescent, where she sells her own creations and houses her workshop and the headquarters for the market. The work of many other market participants is displayed and sold on consignment.

## BUILDING BEYOND MARKET DAY

Benish and Johnson are very selective about Great River Makers Market participants. “We choose artisans who are passionate about working their businesses,” Johnson explains. “They sell online or at local markets. They maintain their inventory. They have a website or another easy way to order. We want customers to be able to find them after the market. We want to help them grow their businesses.”

A call for applications goes out months prior to the event. Benish and Johnson value organization and expect vendors to promote the market, participate in the theme of the show (think Applefest or winter holidays) and actively engage with customers. “Creating an exciting and fun shopping atmosphere is our number one priority,” adds Benish.

Prior to market day, they feature each maker on social media through “Makers Moments” posts on Facebook and Instagram and promote with flyers, yard signs and other advertising. “We try to reach as many people as possible,” says Johnson.

So far, they have worked with more than 100 artisans from the area. The approximately 40 vendors at each market are rotated, so you will discover new makers and products every time.

“It’s been so inspiring to see the community rally around shopping local and handmade, so we aren’t stopping,” Benish says.

Swing in to shop for the holidays on December 9, and mark your calendar for 2024 dates: Spring Market on April 20, Applefest Market on September 21, and Holiday Market on December 14, 2024. **CRW**

*Janis Jolly, freelance writer from La Crosse, prefers to shop local and thinks it’s exciting to have a makers market close at hand in La Crescent.*



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O'Brien Physical Therapy and Wellness is excited to announce that Erica Champlin, PT, CSCS, has completed extensive coursework and professional 1:1 mentoring and is offering fascial counterstrain services to the folks of the La Crosse area. FCS is a technique that removes painful trigger points from the body via a gentle hands-on process that involves decompression of dysfunctional structures. Dysfunction may be related to trauma, surgery, postural strain, repetitive motion, illness or autoimmune disease. FCS is often used to prepare your body for surgery and to treat complications related to chronic illness. For more information, email [hello@obrienphysicaltherapy.net](mailto:hello@obrienphysicaltherapy.net).



**LA CROSSE SYMPHONY CELEBRATES 125 YEARS WITH ART**

The La Crosse Symphony Orchestra recently released the winning submissions for its call to create a piece of art commemorating its 125th anniversary. More than 20 local artists answered the call for imagery inspired by the orchestra, the rhythms of music and the La Crosse region. The Judges' Choice, which will be turned into 125 prints available to the public, was created by Jeanne Arenz.

Other artists recognized for their submissions were People's Choice winner Tiana Traffas, Artists' Choice winner Sharyn Richardson and Musicians' Choice winner Lori Ehlke.

Learn more at [www.rivercitygallerylax.com/s/stories/125th-anniversary-la-crosse-symphony-orchestra](http://www.rivercitygallerylax.com/s/stories/125th-anniversary-la-crosse-symphony-orchestra) or see the art at River City Gallery in La Crosse.



**MARY ANN LAUDICINA NAMED ALUMNI TRUSTEE**

The Laudicina Preston Group and the Baird Onalaska location are pleased to congratulate Mary Ann Laudicina on her appointment as alumni trustee for her alma mater, Rockford University. Laudicina has 32 years of industry experience and is passionate about coaching women to confidently manage their financial goals. She remains active within Rockford University as chair of the Addams Circle, a network of alumnae that empowers female students to become architects of their own future. The network strives for equity, diversity and inclusiveness. In addition, she supports Regents First Program, which supports first-generation college students. Congratulations, Mary Ann!



**DRIFTLESS WISCONSIN INTRODUCES NEW DIRECTOR**

Driftless Wisconsin, a nonprofit tourism organization serving multiple counties in southwest Wisconsin, has named Stacy Roo as its executive director.

Roo brings nearly three decades of professional marketing and business knowledge, including 15 years in the Driftless region, to the role. She also owns Driftless Artifacts in Viroqua with her husband, Lou Shields.

"I personally love being located in an area where the locals are involved and proud of where they live. The small business growth, creative art and music scene plus the beauty of the unglaciated surroundings make it the perfect place to play, live, work or visit," Roo says.



**REGINA SIEGEL CROWNED MRS. OKTOBERFEST**

"Be Kind ... Always!" is the theme for Regina Siegel, Mrs. Oktoberfest 2023.

Siegel is Vice President of Organizational Development at Trust Point; prior, she devoted over 20 years to education as a teacher, administrator and adjunct professor. She has served with the Children's Museum, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse and Girl Scouts of Riverland Council. She serves in the Rotary Club of La Crosse and is president of the Rotary Works Foundation.

"It is an honor and privilege," says Siegel. "I have huge shoes to fill, as the women before me have exemplified the morals, values and dedication that have shaped our community into what it is today."



**APRIL WEHLING NAMED DAIRYLAND CFO**

Dairyland Power Cooperative named April Wehling as its executive vice president and chief financial officer following the July retirement of Phil Moilien. Wehling joined Dairyland as controller in October 2016 and held positions of director of the enterprise program management office, assistant vice president for strategy and chief strategy officer. Prior to Dairyland, she spent 21 years working for Ingersoll Rand Inc. She has an MBA from Capella University and is certified both as a Six Sigma Black Belt and Change Management Practitioner.

Headquartered in La Crosse, Dairyland provides the wholesale electrical requirements for 24 distribution cooperatives and 27 municipal utilities.



Jillian Woelfle-Olson and Angie Johnson are co-owners of All Glazed Up, a downtown La Crosse business offering a wide range of art activities to all ages. Photo courtesy of Pete Solberg.

## Creating an Inviting “Art-mosphere”

All Glazed Up brings families and the community together through art.

BY MACKENZIE R. HANSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

With its welcoming walls of blue and green offset by a rainbow and canvases galore, All Glazed Up easily catches the eyes of young and old alike. Lovers of art, co-owners Jillian Woelfle-Olson and Angie Johnson began as employees of the business before taking over and expanding on All Glazed Up’s dream to make art and creative expression accessible to all, especially families. Both women were drawn to the family-friendly atmosphere of All Glazed Up and knew their purpose was to provide the community a place for creativity to thrive.

### CONNECTING THROUGH CREATIVITY

As artists and mothers, Woelfle-Olson and Johnson find joy in All Glazed Up’s ability to bring numerous generations together via their creation opportunities. Woelfle-Olson says, “It’s so good for families to get together, not just for holidays; this is a place where families can come and create and engage together.” Not only are parents able to use art as a tool to forge new memories; children can also expand their fine motor skills and cultivate imaginative problem-solving abilities.

The studio space allows families to spend a day bonding while creating art together and then leave the cleanup behind, which can be especially important for families living in apartments throughout the community. Johnson and Woelfle-Olson note that they have been able to watch many of their customers and regular families grow during their endeavors at All Glazed Up. Appealing to everyone from grandparents and teenagers to new mothers with their babies, a variety of projects will inspire imagination and facilitate conversation. “We have people that come year after year,” Johnson says, noting how exciting it is to be able to watch children grow and families connect with one another.

Hoping to bring together even more families, All Glazed Up plans to begin hosting parent and child art classes after the positive responses they have received following their parent (or grandparent) and child pottery nights, where the child and adult are able to bond while creating art on the pottery wheel.

### BRINGING THE INSPIRATION TO OTHERS

While their studio space is stationed in historic downtown La Crosse, Woelfle-Olson and Johnson are able to bring their “art-mosphere” to budding and seasoned artists within a 50-mile radius via their traveling art van. All Glazed Up has provided artistic entertainment via its traveling art van to events like bachelorette parties and family reunions, as well as birthdays. “We’ll bring the art to your family,” says Woelfle-Olson.

All Glazed Up’s owners are also very passionate about being active participants in the regional community, whether by passing out treats during the downtown Halloween Trick-or-Treat event, getting involved in the annual Artspire event hosted by the Pump House or partnering with local businesses to bring their message of art and togetherness to the community. Being able to provide an artistic hub for the region and seeing the impact they are able to make on patrons inspires Woelfle-Olson and Johnson to create even more opportunities for artistic growth. **CRW**

*MacKenzie R. Hanson is a La Crosse-based freelance writer and artist who fully believes art is one of the greatest ways to bring families together. Contact her at [mackenzierhanson@gmail.com](mailto:mackenzierhanson@gmail.com).*





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# FIGHTING ADDICTION WITH CONNECTIONS

Natalie Morescki and Next Steps for Change offer peer mentoring to meet community needs.

BY RHONDA HESS | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Executive Director of Next Steps for Change Natalie Morescki, center, poses with peer mentor Shane Sherburn and her husband, Brad Morescki, also a founding board member of the organization, at a recent recovery event.

**N**atalie Morescki knows the secret to helping those suffering from substance use disorders.

Her experience and commitment led her to form a nonprofit organization to get that knowledge to the people who need it most. The Onalaska woman is the founder and executive director of Next Steps for Change, a nonprofit peer support network serving Monroe, La Crosse and Vernon counties.

Morescki, who holds a master's degree in psychology and a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, had worked in drug and alcohol prevention for 10 years. During that time, she says, law enforcement officials were constantly coming to her, asking how to get treatment for people.

But she could not help them.

"There are not many options at all in Monroe County," she says, adding that they "just didn't have the manpower."

## OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Morescki says that when discussing possible solutions to the problem with others, her conversations "always came back to peer support."

Then a worldwide pandemic caused a shift in her employment at a time when addiction numbers were on the rise. She discussed her idea about how to fund a peer support organization with her husband, Brad.

"I asked him, am I crazy for wanting to do this? And, he said, 'No, if anyone can do it, you can,'" she says.

The Next Steps for Change coalition was formed, including representatives from law enforcement and others who had powerful, personal reasons for wanting to help those addicted to substances.

They started accepting referrals in February 2021.

## HOLISTIC APPROACH TO RECOVERY

"It is said the opposite of addiction is not sobriety," Morescki says. "The opposite of addiction is connection."

And she wanted to make sure those connections were being made. "I got trained as a recovery coach, and the whole team got training," she says. Now she trains state board trainers and certified peer specialists.

"We support them on their walk, drug court—it's a holistic approach," she says. "We literally hold their hands and say, 'I will take you through this.' We meet them physically and emotionally with what they need."

It's working.

She says one individual came to the program having had 30 contacts with law enforcement in eight months. After support from Next Steps for Change, the number of incidents with law enforcement in eight months was down to zero.

"I have all kinds of stories like that," Morescki says.

The organization has served 380 people in the past year-and-a-half. Organizers hope to expand those numbers and serve an additional two counties by year's end.

Morescki and her husband have adopted two children who were from separate families involved in substance abuse.

"My kids ask a lot of questions (about the organization)," she says. "They have a different level of understanding and compassion."

To find out how to become involved, go to [www.nextstepsforchange.com](http://www.nextstepsforchange.com). **CRW**



Natalie Morescki, Next Steps for Change founder and executive director. Photo courtesy of Just Shoot Me Photography LLC.

*Rhonda Hess is a writer/photographer with a studio in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She considers herself blessed to be able to spread the word about organizations with impact.*

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# Indigo & Rose

This fall, rock autumn fashion favorites in chic crimson and cool denim.

BY ELISE WEINBENDER  
PHOTOS BY DIANE RAAUM PHOTO  
PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE NATURE PLACE IN  
MYRICK PARK



**FALL FEELS** Get cozy but stay elegant in closet staples like a great pair of jeans and denim jacket from **Blush Roots**. A soft rose-colored top adds a pop of warm color, while a bone-white clutch and matching Western-inspired booties give the outfit a natural feel. Modeled by Brontë Bostrack.

Grace denim vintage jacket, \$72; Allie tunic, \$37; Judy Blue jeans, \$67; Joy Susan clutch, \$59; Roan by Bed Stu booties, \$95; Nickel and Suede earrings, \$42.



**THE SEASON OF COLOR** Revamp your fall wardrobe with a trendy color this season—a bold red faux-leather jacket from **Mainstream Boutique**. A blue patterned blouse and dark-wash denim add contrast, and a brown tote completes the autumn color palette. Modeled by Ella Driebel. Clara Sunwoo Liquid Leather jacket, \$189; blouse, \$46; Kut from the Kloth Stella flare jeans, \$114; Jen & Co Lisa braided tassel tote, \$89; necklace, \$39; earrings, \$26.

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An exchange trip to India gave La Crosse area Rotary Club members the opportunity to experience diverse parts of Indian culture, from visiting temples to the sight of cows wandering city and village streets.

Niki Pohnl poses with students from a rural school she visited as part of a Rotary International exchange to India. The school was built and supported by Rotary clubs in the region Pohnl and others from La Crosse visited during the exchange.

## Connecting Cultures

Rotary International exchange trips cross borders with a shared purpose of community service.

BY CHRISTINE HALL | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Ask any traveler why they travel, and they will give you a host of reasons: the food, the sights, the people, the experiences. But most can agree that all those elements are tied up into one huge reason: a sense of purpose. Traveling makes the world seem smaller, causes seem more personal, and the people one meets along the way become brothers and sisters in a way that no other experience allows.

Niki Pohnl of La Crosse can attest to this. Pohnl is the club administrator for the Rotary Club of La Crosse and was a part of the District 6250 Rotary Friendship Exchange. Pohnl and her adult son, Caden, traveled to India in February 2023; since the program is an exchange, Pohnl and other local Rotarians were then hosts in June for the Rotary Club members from India. When asked why she would want to be part of such an exchange, she says, “The main reasons people go on these trips (through Rotary) is to experience the culture, or because it is service related or vocational related. This exchange was to experience the culture.”

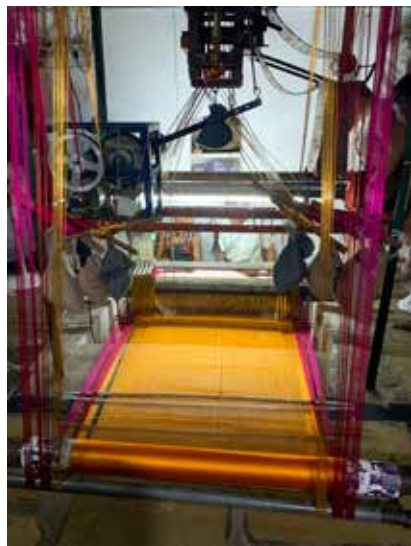
Pohnl enjoyed “meeting like-minded people across the globe who are making a difference in their communities like we try to do in ours.”

### GETTING A TASTE OF THE CULTURE

Twelve members of Pohnl’s delegation arrived in India and were placed in host homes where they stayed with a family or couple before moving on to stay at another host Rotarian’s home. Pohnl says she personally stayed at three different abodes: a mansion (complete with servants), an authentic traditional Indian house and an apartment. During the 10-day trip, they also stayed in a hotel and at a resort.

Staying in a host home was a bonding experience, as the La Crosse Rotarians were treated as honored guests. Because India is mostly a vegetarian country, small meals were served throughout the day rather than three squares. “We felt like we were constantly eating!” Pohnl says. Another cultural aspect that was experienced in an Indian home were the shrines or prayer spaces set up in the home for daily





Pohnl was gifted a sari by one of the three host homes she stayed in.

A sari factory was one of several stops during a 10-day visit to the state of Goa in India.

Pohnl, second from left, along with her husband, Dave, and daughter Caroline served as hosts for Sanjeev and Surekha Deshpande when Rotarians from India visited the Coulee Region.

meditation. Often their hosts were up very early and did their prayers before the day began.

Each day, everyone came together and participated in an activity planned by the Rotary Clubs in India. This included visiting temples, hiking, whitewater rafting, visiting a monastery where they meditated with monks and touring historic sites. They also attended nine different Rotary Club meetings and attended a district conference. This was an opportunity to see how other Rotarians worked in different ways to help the needs of their communities. The group toured several Rotary projects that included hospitals, schools and a sari factory.

### SEEING ALL SIDES

The La Crosse Rotary Friendship Exchange group stayed in the state of Goa, which is in the southwestern part of India. Its coastline stretches along the Arabian Sea, and it is known for its small villages and beautiful stretches of beaches. Pohnl shared that when they were in the cities, it was quite bustling, people were everywhere, construction was going on constantly and driving/riding in a vehicle on the roads was quite harrowing. But the countryside was quite beautiful with fields of sugar cane, mountains and small villages. The small villages, however, often emphasized the level of poverty that presides throughout India.

One thing that surprised Pohnl the first morning was a loudspeaker announcing the call to prayer. She and others wondered at first if it was some sort of warning system, but she came to find out that every morning at 6, this call to prayer was announced over loudspeakers wherever they were, and by the time she left, it had become a very moving experience for her.

The two animals that were foremost in Pohnl's mind when in India were the cow—viewed as sacred to the Hindu religion—and the monkey, which was everywhere. The revered cow would wander out in the daytime, through traffic and on village streets, and always

return to its home by evening. The cows knew just what they were doing and seemed to have a purpose when wandering. The monkey, on the other hand, was a mischievous imp that made itself known everywhere: on windowsills, in trees, wherever it could stir up trouble. Pohnl related that one of the La Crosse Rotarians had a monkey enter their room through a window and rummage through their luggage.

### TWO-WAY CONNECTION

When the Rotary Club members from India came to visit the La Crosse area in June, they were shown the highlights of the Coulee Region, including a river cruise and views from the bluffs. Pohnl was fortunate enough to have a couple whom she had already bonded with in India stay with her and her family. Pohnl said since the exchange, they keep in weekly contact through texts or phone calls.

In addition to the India trip and exchange, the La Crosse Rotary District Friendship Exchange coordinated trips to Poland and Chile this year, with an exchange to Croatia planned this fall. Pohnl is working to help plan possible trips to Alaska and Brazil in the future.

For Pohnl personally, this exchange gave her the opportunity to connect with people from a different culture, make lifelong friends that share the same global cause and to help others. Pohnl's group was able to contribute to a global partnership by helping to purchase six dialysis machines through an exchange of global grants.

Pohnl's advice for anyone traveling with a group or on an exchange such as this is to "trust the process." It should all work out, and you will find the experience rewarding if you just go with the flow. In other words, you will probably feel a sense of purpose. **CRW**

*Christine Hall believes all travel brings a sense of purpose to one's life and knows the world would be a better place if we all reached outside of our comfort zone to understand others.*

# Community Calendar

## ONGOING EVENTS

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

**Cameron Park Farmers Market** Fri. (May-Oct.) 4 p.m.-dusk, Fifth and King streets, La Crosse, www.cameronparkmarket.org.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### NAMI Support Groups

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Women's Alliance of La Crosse (WAL)** 2nd Thurs., noon, The Waterfront Restaurant, www.womensalliancelacrosse.com.

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

## CALENDAR EVENTS

### OCTOBER

**Oct. 5**, Newberry & Verch, 7:30 p.m., The Pump House Regional Arts Center, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

**Oct. 5-7**, Friends of the Onalaska Library Book Sale, Thurs. 12-6 p.m., Fri. 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat. 9 a.m.-12 p.m., Onalaska Library, 741 Oak Ave. S., Onalaska, https://lacrossecounty.org/library/libraries/onalaska/onalaska-friends.



**Oct. 6**, First Friday Downtown Art Walk, 4-7 p.m., various locations in downtown La Crosse, https://www.rivercitygallerylax.com/art-walk.

**Oct. 6-22**, *Fiddler on the Roof*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

**Oct. 7**, Voices from the Past Cemetery Walk: Made in Winona, noon to 5 p.m., Woodlawn Cemetery, http://www.winonahistory.org/cemeterywalk.html.

**Oct. 7**, YWCA Tribute to Outstanding Women, 6-10 p.m., UW-La Crosse Student Union, www.ywcalax.org.

**Oct. 8**, Purdue Varsity Glee Choir, 2:00 p.m., The Heider Center, West Salem, www.heidercenter.org.

**Oct. 11**, League of Women Voters Lunch & Learn, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., The Waterfront Restaurant, La Crosse, www.lwvlacrosse.org.

**Oct. 11**, Women with Purpose featuring Stephanie Hurlburt, "Power of Connection: Learning How to Reconnect After Trauma," 11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center, cr.wwpwi.org.

**Oct. 12-14**, Sandbar Storytelling Festival, Saint Mary's University, https://sandbarstorytellingfestival.org/.

**Oct. 12-15**, *42nd Street*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

**Oct. 13**, Tales of the Creepy & Scary, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Grey Area Productions, The Pump House Regional Arts Center, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

**Oct. 13-22**, *Dr. Faustus*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse, www.uwlax.edu/theatre-arts.

**Oct. 14**, The Civil War Experience reenactment, 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

**Oct. 14**, Cole Swindell, 7 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

**Oct. 16**, "The President's Own" United States Marine Band, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

**Oct. 19**, Finding Home + Hope Restores Halloween Bash, 5-11 p.m., Onalaska Omni Center, https://one.bidpal.net/hoperestoreshalloweenbash/welcome.

**Oct. 19-27**, *Rocky Horror Show LIVE!*, Thurs.-Fri. 7 p.m., Muse Theatre, 1353 Avon St., La Crosse, www.eventbrite.com/rocky-horror-show-live-tickets-713430448677.

**Oct. 19-29**, *The Thin Place*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Grey Area Productions, The Pump House Regional Arts Center, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

**Oct. 21**, Logan High Craft Show, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Logan High School, 1500 Ranger Dr., La Crosse.

**Oct. 21**, Saluting Our Own, 7:30 p.m., La Crosse Symphony Orchestra, www.lacrossesymphony.org.

**Oct. 22**, Alpha Phi's Annual Red Dress Brunch, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., The Waterfront Restaurant, La Crosse, rdb2023.givesmart.com.

**Oct. 26**, Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse Fall Luncheon featuring Matika Wilbur, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.; Book Signing 5-6:30 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.womensfundlacrosse.org.

**Oct. 26**, Ghoulies in the Coulees Family-Friendly Trick-or-Treat, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

**Oct. 27**, Vintage Ghoulies in the Coulees haunted hikes, 5:30-8:30 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

**Oct. 28**, Downtown Trick or Treat, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., downtown La Crosse, www.lacrossedowntown.com/events.

**Oct. 28**, Tig Notaro, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

**Oct. 28**, Ghosts & Toasts Ghoulies in the Coulees, Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

### NOVEMBER



**Nov. 2**, *The Wailin' Jennys*, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

**Nov. 2-4**, *Fuddy Meers*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun, Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse, www.uwlax.edu/theatre-arts.

**Nov. 4**, Veterans Bonanza Expo, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., La Crosse Center.

**Nov. 8**, League of Women Voters Lunch & Learn, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., The Waterfront Restaurant, La Crosse, www.lwvlacrosse.org.

**Nov. 8**, Women with Purpose featuring Leah Myers, "Safety Tips for You," 11:45 a.m.-1 p.m., Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center, cr.wwpwi.org.

**Nov. 10**, Holiday Open House, 4-8 p.m., downtown La Crosse, www.lacrossedowntown.com/events.

**Nov. 11**, Fall Season Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Minnesota Marine Art Museum, https://www.mmam.org/calendar2/2023/08/12/fall-seasonal-saturday2023.

**Nov. 11**, Hollyhock Magic, 7:30 p.m., La Crosse Symphony Orchestra, www.lacrossesymphony.org.

**Nov. 16-19**, Holiday Fair, 12 p.m. Thurs.-Fri., 9 a.m. Sat., 10 a.m. Sun., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

**Nov. 17-19**, *She Kills Monsters*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

**Nov. 18**, Holiday Walkabout, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., The Brickstone, 16827 S. Main St., Galesville.



**Nov. 18**, *B2 Wins*, 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, West Salem, www.heidercenter.org.

**Nov. 21**, Cirque Musica Holiday Wonderland, 7 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

**Nov. 22**, BoDeans, 6:30 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

**Nov. 24-Dec. 16**, *A Nice Family Christmas*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

**Nov. 24**, Rotary Lights Parade and Lighting, 5 p.m., begins at 6th and Main Streets in La Crosse, ends at Riverside Park.

**Nov. 24-Dec.31**, Rotary Holiday Lights, 5-10 p.m., Riverside Park, La Crosse.

**Nov. 25**, Small Business Saturday, downtown La Crosse, www.lacrossedowntown.com.

**Nov. 25**, Autumn All-Star Jam, 7 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.



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