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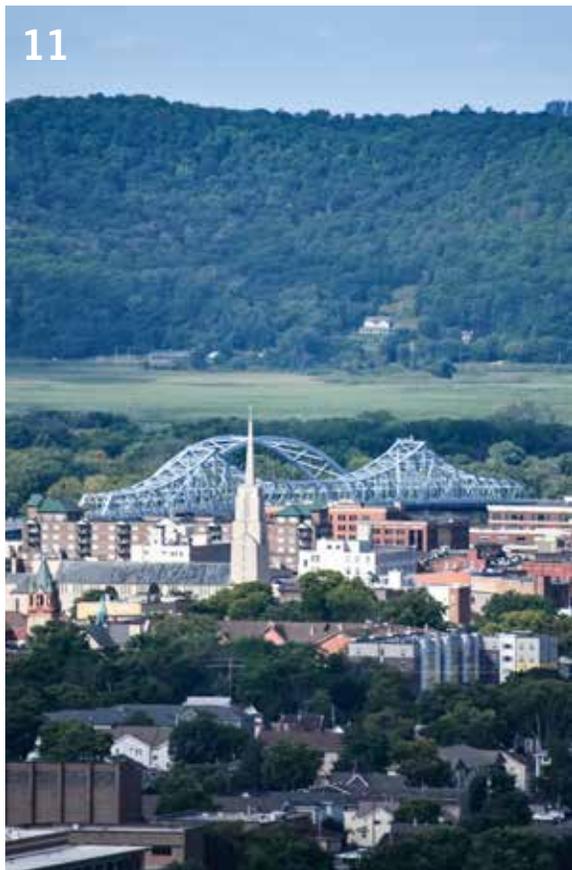
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Pictured on cover (clockwise from top left): Irene Nissalke, volunteer for Great Rivers United Way; Tarah Raaum, architect with HGA, Inc.; Laura Huber, principal of Northside Elementary; Dana Sorenson, Mayo Clinic Health System; Brenda Rooney, Gunderson Health System; January May and daughter Jayda.

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My sister Gwen is a quilter and an elementary music teacher in Michigan. When her school closed in March, she found herself with a fair bit of anxiety and extra time on her hands between recording bi-weekly video lessons for her students. Like many sewers and quilters these last few months, she found solace and a purpose in making masks. She dove into her fabric stash and, after watching a YouTube video or two, assembled six pleated fabric masks with elastic ear loops, which she gifted to a couple of grateful cousins who are nurses. “It’s not bad,” she said of the mask-making process, “but after six, I think I’m done.”

Gwen is very animated, and her video music lessons were quite amusing, so she would send them to my sisters and me for our entertainment. About five videos in, I noticed she had a new backdrop—a beautiful quilt sewn from hundreds of brightly colored fabric strips pieced into blocks. One of us commented on it, and she responded that it was made from the scraps left over from 400 masks—up from six just a few weeks before! She’d been donating them to her local hospital, but they were also available for

purchase, and the proceeds from one mask would fund the making of seven masks to donate. Just recently, I saw in a Facebook post that she is now up to 1,200.

The building-block quilt is a great metaphor for our community, pieced together from hundreds of people, all different, all with different tasks and talents, but all working with the intent of keeping our community strong and healthy for all. The pieces represent not just mask-makers—like our own prolific sewers—but everyone who, in ways big and small, has come together in a very tumultuous time to assemble a safety net—a warm, protective quilt—for our community. I’m talking about not just sewers but doctors and nurses, county health department staff, grocery shelf stockers, restaurant servers and farmers. I’m also talking about people who stand up for the rights of Black and brown people in our community, people who stand up to support our libraries and parks and other public spaces, people who work to ensure our schoolkids, teachers and school staff can gather as safely as possible this fall. I’m talking about anyone who goes out of their way, even a bit, to make others in our community feel respected and protected and safe.

In this issue, we are pleased to honor several women who are doing just that. We feature microbiologists, epidemiologists and even an architect working to confront Covid-19. We celebrate organizations like Great Rivers United Way, Couleecap and Southside Moms United, each of which have established themselves as a building block of our community. We remind you to take steps to build up your own health—physically and mentally—in these tenuous times, and we invite you to create a bit of lasting beauty in the midst of chaos and simply plant a tree.

When we take personally the call to help and lift up one another, we all—as a community—rise. Even when our lives feel most tattered, our world most fragmented, we can gather up the scraps, piece them into building blocks and stitch them together into something beautiful.

Betty

coulee region women

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FIGHTING TOGETHER, STAYING APART

Steppin' Out in Pink has gone virtual in 2020! Join together in the fight against breast cancer while complying with safety measures driven by Covid-19. This annual event invites runners, walkers and cyclists to track their mileage September 1-12 during the 15th celebration of Steppin' Out in Pink.

Complete as many as you're able, but aim for at least 4½ miles, which is the total distance of the traditional event. Let's see how many miles we can conquer together by staying safely apart.

Sport your pink attire and invite your family and friends to join. Make sure to capture your participation and tag @SteppinOutInPink on Facebook. When you're finished, email your tally and photos to steppinout@gundersenhealth.org.

Register online at www.steppinoutinpink.org by September 7 for \$20 for participants 12 and up, \$5 for participants 5-11 and no cost for those 4 and younger. Ages 5 and up will receive a T-shirt.



BEST BUSINESS SUCCESS STORY

Deb Lash-Stangel's Wedding Tree was recently awarded the Wisconsin Main Street Award for Best Business Success Story, a nod to the store's longstanding success, expansion into a venue space and establishment as a leading La Crosse wedding destination. Lash-Stangel bought the Wedding Tree in 1996, when it had just two employees. The Wedding Tree has since grown to a staff of 20, has moved to its current location and has expanded beyond basic bridal to offer prom, formalwear and menswear. An upper floor renovation in 2014 created a new wedding and event venue, The Court Above Main. Additionally, the store's prominence in the industry has attracted other complementary businesses, fostering the annual La Crosse Bridal Expo event.

An ardent supporter of downtown La Crosse, Lash-Stangel also has served on boards and committees for more than eight local organizations over the years.



40 ACRES AND A MULE

Back in 1865, General William Sherman granted African Americans "40 acres and a mule" in a post-slavery reparations order—an opportunity to own land and have a means to prosper.

In a modern twist on this historical concept, local chef Adrian Lipscombe of Uptowne Café has started her own 40 Acres & a Mule Project with the goal of purchasing land to support Black farmers, educate prospective farmers and become a sanctuary to "hold the history, food and stories of Black culture in food and farming," according to Lipscombe. "It is a great chance to be able to control our narrative and provide educational opportunities to understand our story in food and farming techniques within the hospitality and food industry."

The project has garnered national attention and an outpouring of local support; on its GoFundMe site, the project has reached its original goal of \$100,000 and set a new one. For more information, and to donate, go to www.gofundme.com/f/forty-acres-project.

DRIVE-BY AWARDS

In July, the Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse issued its 2020-2021 annual grants to 24 local organizations. Women's Fund board members distributed checks totaling \$71,000 in a drive-by award ceremony, sponsored by Mayo Clinic Health System. Grants issued will benefit a number of local organizations, and will support housing, transportation, education, health and basic needs access for women and girls in the Coulee Region. To view all of the recipients, visit www.womensfundlacrosse.org.

Powered by an endowment and ongoing support from generous individuals, the Women's Fund enriches the lives of women and girls so they can do the same for others. Over its lifetime the Women's Fund has worked through existing social service organizations to deliver nearly \$700,000 in targeted support for women—including more than \$83,000 in 2020. Women's Fund grants range from \$250 to \$10,000 and are proof that sometimes a small amount of assistance can make a powerful difference.

To learn more about the Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse and how you can assist in supporting local organizations that lift up women and girls, go to www.womensfundlacrosse.org.

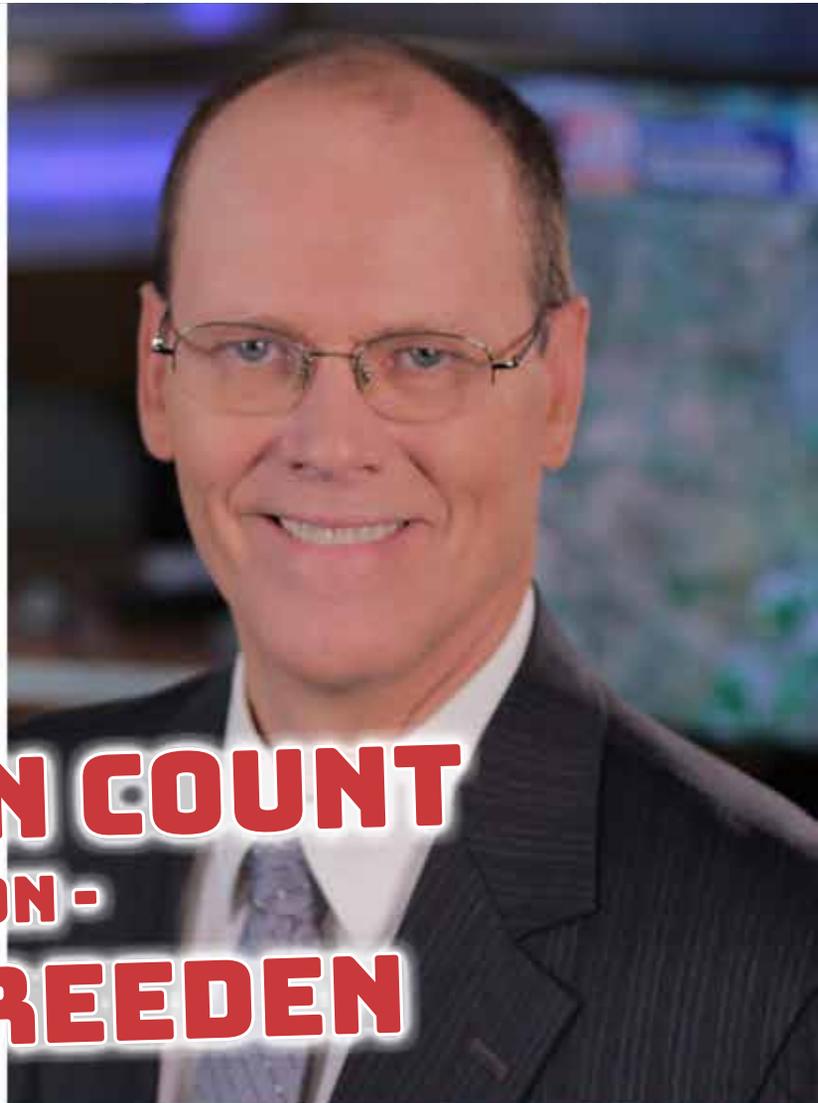
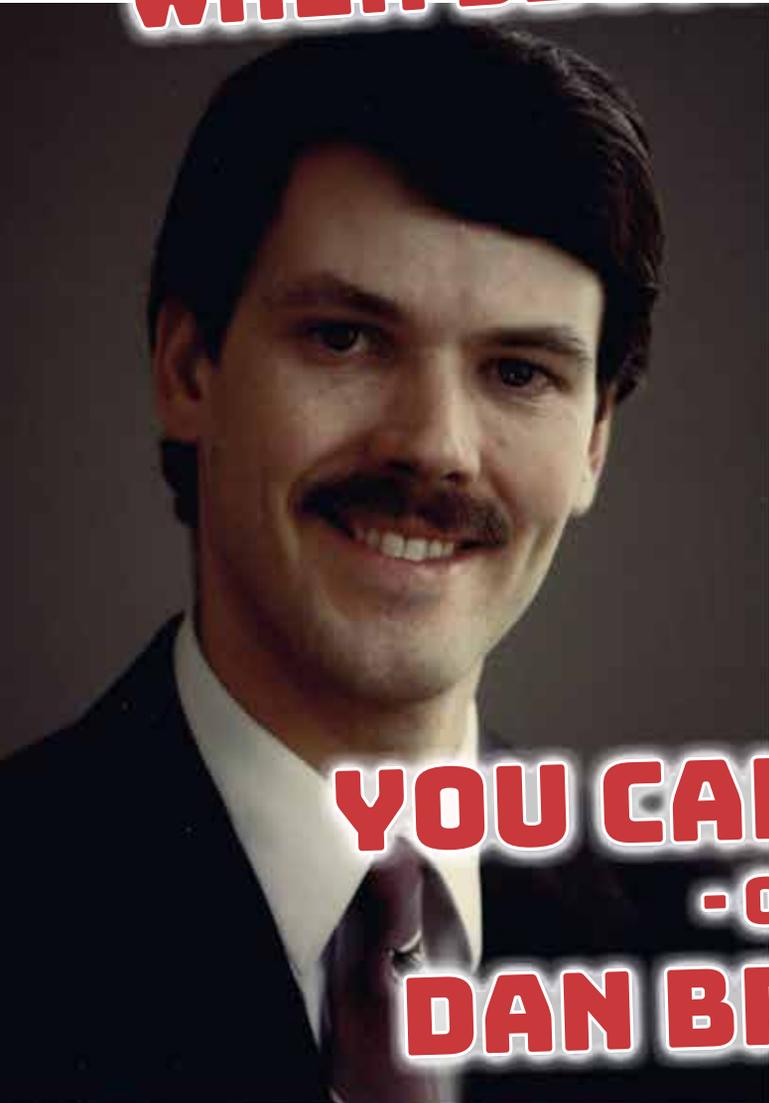


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Building and Rebuilding

Even in chaotic times, we know how to keep our community strong.

BY BETTY CHRISTIANSEN | PHOTO BY DIANE RAAUM PHOTOGRAPHY



Lately, many of us feel like we are halfway across a bridge, coming from a place we knew and loved and heading toward a destination that is uncertain and unpredictable. What we know for certain, though, is that we all are in this together, and we are good at what we do, which is building our community. To open this issue of *Coulee Region Women*, we drew on inspiration we've found these last few months—from friends and experts, from our own insight and from women we have featured in past issues—to assemble a list of the strengths we bring from where we have been and how we can use them to navigate a future. As former cover woman Maureen Freedland reminds us, “You’ll be surprised at how much can be accomplished if we work together.”

SEEK

A great strength of our community has been our ability to find common ground and build on our shared values, not differences. We continue this by seeking the good in everyone—realizing that people can be good even if they don't share our views—and understanding that every person is important in so many ways.

SERVE

“In the end I can't help the world,” former cover woman Nancy Hoff once said. “I just want to make a dent.” But in a community, “dents” add up. Every small effort we make—conducting our work in a respectful manner, thinking about other people, shifting our actions to show care for others—add up to a community spirit with kindness at its core.

LEARN

These past months have revealed how much we don't know—about seventh-grade math, about the reality of other people's lives,

about the future. But it's never too late to learn. Be a student every day. Be willing to change your mind. And be willing to state that your viewpoint has changed. As former cover woman Carolyn Colleen Bostrack has said, “We can only ask ourselves to be better than we were the day before.”

LISTEN

We are stymied, sometimes, by how to begin tough conversations or explore topics that challenge us. What if we say the wrong thing? What if we're embarrassed by what we don't know? Oftentimes, the most important thing we can do is simply listen to the other person's experience. Listening requires us to stop talking, accept another person's differences and perhaps suspend our own opinions. If you don't know how to respond, simply say, “Tell me more.”

LOVE

Though we may have had enough of family closeness by now, appreciate those you hold dear. Love your neighbors, too—the ones who need extra care, the ones who don't look like you or think like you and even the ones you never have met. Simply saying “hi” will begin to build a bridge between you and another.

CELEBRATE

We still have so much to celebrate—the beauty of our area, for one. Outdoors, in open air, is among the safest places to be, and there's no time like late summer to enjoy activity outdoors. And finally, remember that we *already* live in a strong community. We have all—each one of us—had a hand in making it strong. Let's keep it that way! **CRW**

Betty Christiansen is the editor and publisher of Coulee Region Women.

Women in Wellness



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

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TRACKING A PANDEMIC

Local women scientists are critical to coronavirus control.

BY JANIS JOLLY | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Covid-19 has called attention to terms we never used before in daily living—*coronavirus*, *respirator* and *social distancing* among them—and has made us aware of other terms that describe important jobs in the region, like *epidemiologist* and *microbiologist*. Here, we'll explain what those jobs are and introduce you to women who do them.



Brenda Rooney, epidemiologist at Gundersen Health System

THE DATA OF DISEASE

Brenda Rooney is the epidemiologist at the Office of Population Health at Gundersen Health System. She explains that while *epidemiology* is defined as the study of epidemics, the department studies other public health problems as well.

Since most infectious diseases that became epidemics in the past, such as smallpox and measles, have been tamed with vaccines and antibiotics, Rooney and her associates have been looking for trends in the growth of common

chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer and even alcohol and drug abuse.

Epidemiologists collect data about the age, gender and socioeconomic status of people with a certain disease. They also look at health care availability, living conditions, lifestyle and education levels. They try to find trends in who is getting a disease, who is dying from it and who isn't getting it. Instead of focusing on individuals who get sick, they look at the big picture. The data they collect is used by social and medical agencies to try to prevent the spread of the disease.

The advent of Covid-19—an epidemic that rapidly became a pandemic—presented a new challenge to the Office of Population Health. They gathered data within the three-state Gundersen system and began analysis of the demographic criteria to help figure out how the virus is spreading in our communities, who is at risk and when it may spike. Rooney has two primary people working with her: a data scientist from the Gundersen Medical Foundation and a data analyst from Gundersen's Envision. “We are busy modeling data to look for signs of things going the wrong way,” she says.

Science depends on data and numbers. For example, the public may assume that people in their 20s and 30s are getting the virus

because they congregate in groups and are inconsistent about wearing masks. Scientists would not assume. They collect data and analyze it to be sure.

Rooney earned her master's degree in public health and her PhD in epidemiology at the University of Minnesota and has been with Gundersen for 28½ years. The department includes administrative partner Sarah Haven and 11 others who do health and wellness education. In addition to sharing the information with professionals, they present to groups, issue news releases and publish in scientific journals.

THE TEST OF TESTING

Covid-19 came on so fast and so hard that medical systems worldwide were challenged like never before. Here in the Coulee Region,



Dana Sorenson, microbiology lab operations supervisor at Mayo Clinic Health System

Lab Operations Supervisor Dana Sorenson and her co-workers at the Mayo Clinic Health System microbiology lab in La Crosse have had to work just as fast to meet the local need.

Their challenges have included lack of collection devices, testing kits and other testing supplies needed to analyze the samples. As part of the vast Mayo Clinic system, they initially sent the test samples to the Rochester lab, which took one to three days to process. In a very short time, however, the La Crosse lab adapted to accommodate the testing onslaught.

Sorenson says that as of mid-June, the La Crosse lab can process and analyze tests for their local hospital and regional clinics. This saves time and allows them to test more people. In-house processing and analyzing is more immediate—results can be produced in a day—showing how many people have the virus or don't have it in real time. The lab can now process up to 1,000 tests a day.

"The lab receives a swab collected by nurses and places the swab in transport media before transferring the sample into a secondary tube to be placed on the analyzer," Sorenson says. The results then go to the ordering provider

electronically and are made available to patients in Mayo's online portal. The lab is required by law to report positive test results to the state and county governments.

In the lab, Sorenson works with Lab Operations Supervisor Kristin Hagen, Microbiology, and Jeffry Degenhardt, MD, medical director of the La Crosse laboratory.

"I'm proud of our team and our facility for how we've responded," says Sorenson. "Everyone is in this together, and our success depends on our community members helping follow social distancing to help us respond to the pandemic. Our team will continue to work on increasing our testing capacity and build the foundation to advance our testing methods. We know this is a serious time, and we will do our part to serve our patients and the community." **CRW**

Janis Jolly is a La Crosse-based freelance writer.



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BUILD UP YOUR HEALTH

Make these daily habits a way of living, not just a part of your to-do list.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Chances are this is not the first list you've read about things you should do to be healthy, but Dr. Annette Faller says the first step is to stop treating them like a to-do list. When they are just part of a to-do list, they become work.

"I think it's really important to think of taking care of yourself like you would take care of a family member or somebody you love," Dr. Faller says.

And give yourself grace when they don't always happen the way you would like, advises Dr. Jennifer Kleven.

Dr. Faller practices internal and vascular medicine at Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse, and Dr. Kleven is a pediatrician and hospitalist with Gundersen Health System in La Crosse. Both urge patients to build into their lives these daily habits, which can improve health and immunity for whatever life throws at us.

1. GET MOVING

Get moving—preferably outdoors—even for just a few minutes each day or for one longer walk on the weekends. Studies from Japan and China show that getting outside for fresh air increases

your natural killer cell function, Dr. Faller says, increasing your ability to fight off viral infections. There are also signs that it can produce anti-cancer proteins.

The benefits extend beyond just exercise. Dr. Kleven suggests using that outdoor time to unplug. "Try taking your walk without headphones and electronics," she says, noting that fresh air, movement and reduced time on electronics can aid with sleep.

Dr. Faller says that a walk in



Dr. Annette Faller, Mayo Clinic Health System

nature, sans electronic distraction, can also be a way of incorporating the benefits of meditation. Take time during a walk to notice something that catches your attention—a flower, a bird, a sound—and spend some time focusing on that one thing.

Sunshine also plays a role in health and immunity, Dr. Faller points out, as many Americans are deficient in vitamin D. "We spend 87 percent of our time inside four walls, temperature-controlled and light-controlled," which means we miss out on naturally produced vitamin D.

If you still can't get enough from sunlight, which is more difficult for individuals with darker skin, consider adding in a vitamin D supplement of 2,000 IU per day.

2. LOG OFF

Even though it may seem in recent months that electronic devices are the only way to stay connected to each other and the world, both physicians recommend logging off more often, and especially in the hour or so before bedtime. Using electronics just before bedtime decreases the quality of sleep, Dr. Kleven says, and as adults we also need to model this self-care for our kids.

Both also recognize the increased stress that can come from excessive consumption of electronic media, including the news and social media. "It's important to stay up to date," Dr. Kleven says, "but it's also important to turn that off."

Dr. Faller recommends setting a specific time in which you disconnect from electronics, such as having a family policy of all electronics off during dinner. "Pick a time where everyone can be



Dr. Jennifer Kleven, Gundersen Health System



together,” she says. Schedule that time to reconnect.

At the same time, she recognizes that electronic communication may be the key way of connecting for many people during this pandemic. “We’re a really social species, and the unfortunate thing is that we’ve become so isolated,” she says. That means we may need to be more intentional in finding ways to connect safely to maintain those social connections.

3. KEEP DOING THE BASICS

Keep doing what the health community has been telling you to:

- Wash your hands frequently.
- Wear a mask to cover your mouth and nose in public places.
- Maintain a distance between you and others when you can.
- Get enough sleep.
- Incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables into your meals—the farmers markets are in full swing right now.

4. RECOGNIZE THAT IT MAY NOT ALL HAPPEN AT ONCE

Change doesn’t happen overnight. And that’s OK. Just keep taking care of you.

“There has been some research that has shown that people take better care of their pets than they do themselves,” Dr. Fallor points out. Now is the time to try to change that.

“We just have to sit back and appreciate the things we can do,” Dr. Kleven says, telling the story of how her mother, with three young children to care for, told her that some days her biggest accomplishment was just threading the needle on the sewing machine. If that is all we can accomplish today, celebrate it and look forward to accomplishing more, for yourself and your health, tomorrow. **CRW**

Shari Hegland is a Holmen writer, mother and runner who needs to take some of this advice to heart and just step away from the screens a little more often in the evenings.

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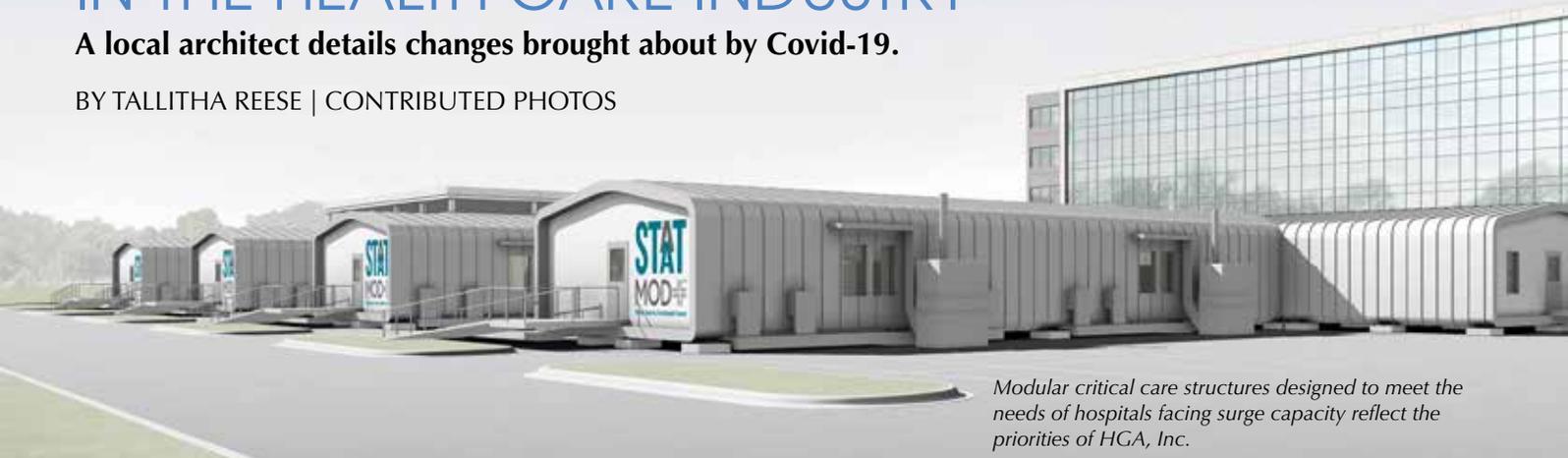


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BUILDING AND REBUILDING IN THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY

A local architect details changes brought about by Covid-19.

BY TALLITHA REESE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Modular critical care structures designed to meet the needs of hospitals facing surge capacity reflect the priorities of HGA, Inc.

Covid-19 has presented a huge challenge to “business as usual” and in many cases has completely changed how individuals, companies and entire industries operate.

For Tarah Raaum, medical planner with HGA, Inc. (a national multidisciplinary design firm rooted in architecture and engineering), this has meant an increase in discussions regarding what health care will look like going forward—and how that will affect renovations to make existing projects safe and how buildings need to change to support providers and staff during this time.

HGA has also been working with clients on surge capacity planning since March, and Raaum has been working on the team that is designing and deploying modular critical care buildings for hospital systems nationwide.

“This team is amazing to be part of—we are all committed to creating safe care environments as fast as possible to help address the bed shortages that areas in our country are facing due to the pandemic,” says Raaum.



Tarah Raaum, medical planner at HGA

DESIGNING HEALTH CARE SPACES

As a medical planner for HGA, Raaum designs the flow and function of hospitals and clinics and specializes in strategic planning and the schematic and detailed design of projects. For the past five years, she has focused on inpatient design and specialty clinics.

“All the health care projects I’ve worked on have an inspirational component to them because of the people involved with the project and the patients that will benefit from the project,” says Raaum. “It is motivating to work in health care because you know it is needed.”

While HGA is a national firm, Raaum practices mostly within Minnesota and Wisconsin. One of the projects she worked on locally—Gundersen St. Joseph’s Hospital in Hillsboro—recently opened their new facility, which Raaum started planning in 2017.

BUILDING A CAREER IN ARCHITECTURE

For Raaum, who grew up in the Viroqua area, the idea of being an architect took root in third grade, when she was constantly drawing and painting. In seventh grade, she job-shadowed a female architect in Madison and realized that the job path might be possible.

As a senior art and art history student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Raaum took an elective on the design and construction of the Overture Center in downtown Madison. A handful of the designers on the project were young, artsy women, and that elective cemented Raaum’s decision to pursue architecture in graduate school, receiving her Master of Architecture degree in 2006 from UW-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning.

In light of current events, Raaum adds that race and gender equity in her profession is a big focus right now. “We have a lot of work to do, and there is a call to action about how we can move faster as a profession,” says Raaum. “There are very few minority architects in practice—I’ve read 2 to 5 percent—and there are less than 20 percent women in practice.”

Raaum works remotely out of HGA’s Milwaukee office and has been with them since 2013. She returned to the Coulee Region in 2015, when she moved to Onalaska, where she lives with her daughter, Julia. **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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Welcome 2020

Welcome to the La Crosse Area Builders

Association Parade of Homes. In this year of change, the Parade committee has spent hours discussing a plan we feel is best for the public, the builders and the homeowners, and we hope you will join us in this new way of doing business!

We are excited to still offer homes for your in-person review! Six homeowners are allowing the public to enter their homes to view their beautiful construction and design. PLUS we are adding a new feature this year: virtual home tours! The virtual tours will go live after the in-person tour and will feature two additional homes—eight homes in total showcased in a virtual self-guided tour. We are excited to offer this virtual review at no charge this year.

For everyone's safety, we will be adhering to CDC guidelines on social distancing, limiting the number of people per home at any given time and requiring use of masks, hand sanitizer and shoe covers. We have extended the hours for the in-person tours so we can accommodate your visit.

We offer the Parade of Homes to the public for several reasons. One, member builders can show off their talent and speak with attendees in person. Two, the public can see what is current in the market for housing and design, showcasing the work of our associate members. Three, we raise money so the association can advocate for the building industry and help our builders offer safe and affordable housing.

Thanks to the committee and LABA staff for their hard work in a year of unprecedented challenges to make this 2020 Parade of Homes come together. We are excited to offer these beautiful homes from our LABA builders to you both in person and virtually!

Sue Weidemann, Chair
 Parade of Homes Committee
 Beaver Builders Supply, Inc.



Parade of Homes®, August 2020

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PARADE OF HOMES 2020 MAP



In-Person Tours

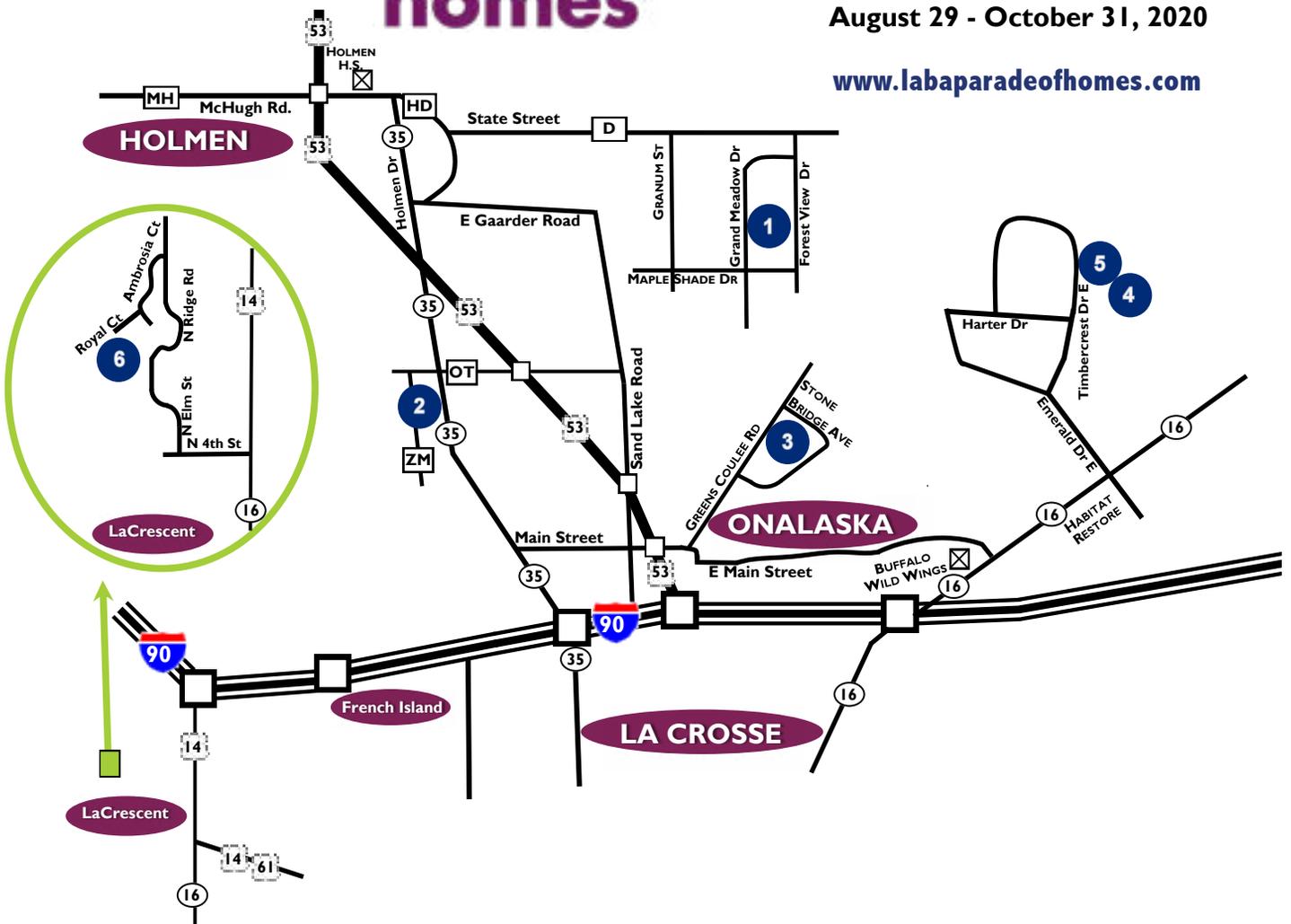
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Virtual Tours

August 29 - October 31, 2020

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MAP IS NOT TO SCALE

PLEASE REFER TO IN-PERSON TOUR GUIDELINES ON P. 25

PARADE HOME LISTINGS

NO	BUILDER	PHONE	ADDRESS	SUBDIVISION	BEDS	BATHS	SQ FT	PAGE
1	T.N. Thompson Enterprises	608-792-8453	609 Grand Meadow Dr., Holmen	Forest View Estates	4	3.5	2,636	9
2	Adamson Construction	608-769-0914	N5553 WI-35, Onalaska	N/A	4	4.5	6,000	12
3	MasterCraft Homes, Inc.	608-781-7200	957 Stonebridge Ave., Onalaska	Savannah Oaks	5	3.5	3,917	15
4	Lautz Lassig Custom Builders	608-786-2535	N4666 Timbercrest Dr. E, Onalaska	N/A	3	3	3,891	16
5	Lautz Lassig Custom Builders	608-786-2535	N4670 Timbercrest Dr. E, Onalaska	N/A	4	3	3,262	19
6	Coleman Custom Homes	507-259-4931	613 Royal Court, La Crescent	Apple Blossom Pointe	3	2	2,060	23
VIRTUAL TOURS ONLY • AUGUST 29-OCTOBER 31, 2020								
A	MasterCraft Homes, Inc.	608-781-7200	www.labaparadeofhomes.com	Forest View Estates	5	3	3,576	11
B	Raven Builders LLC	608-769-2903	www.labaparadeofhomes.com	Ridgeview Heights	3	2	1,800	20



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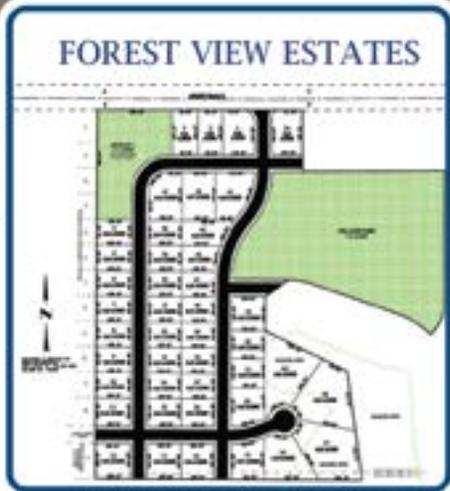


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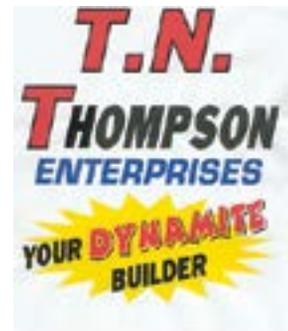
609 Grand Meadow Dr., Holmen - Forest View Estates



T.N. THOMPSON ENTERPRISES

LABA MEMBER SINCE 1989

T.N. Thompson Enterprises' Parade Home for 2020 is a very functional, efficient and attractive two-story home located in one of Holmen's newest subdivisions. Including the fully finished lower level, this home offers four bedrooms and three-and-a-half baths. The master suite includes a ceramic walk-in shower. The spacious kitchen, with more than ample dining area, includes all kitchen appliances. The three-car garage offers a useful direct entrance to the basement. High-efficiency Trane heating and air conditioning and higher levels of insulation will make this beautiful home extra energy efficient. A fully sodded yard, a very large covered front entry area and a nice-sized concrete patio in the backyard give this 2020 Parade Home a lot of curb appeal. For sale and ready to move your family right in.



LABA members used: Advanced Seamless, Inc.; Badger Corrugating Co.; Carpets To Go; E & B Insulation; Fleis Insurance Agency, Inc.; Glass Interiors of La Crosse; Heating & Cooling Specialists; Hilltopper Refuse & Recycling; JBrooke Garage Door LLC; Karl's TV & Appliance, Inc.; Menards; Park Bank; Sherwin-Williams; Waldenberger Inc.; Windows by Pella, Inc.; Wisconsin Building Supply, Inc.; Xcel Energy, Inc.

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Holmen - Forest View Estates

HOME
A

MASTERCRAFT HOMES, INC.

LABA MEMBER SINCE 1986

This ranch-style home is located in the Forest View subdivision in Holmen. Warm gray tones and white trim and doors keep this home bright, while pops of dark cabinetry and built-ins sprinkled throughout create a nice contrast. The open-concept living area allows for plenty of space to entertain friends and family. Just off the master suite is a spacious four-season sunroom with vaulted ceilings and lots of windows. Another bedroom, bathroom and laundry room complete the main level.

Downstairs feels just as open as the main level with 9-foot ceilings and bi-fold windows. Two more bedrooms, an office and a full bath complete the lower level.



LABA members used: ACT Concrete; Advanced Seamless, Inc.; Al's Drywall; Arcade Portables; Bond Drywall; Decker Design; Glass Interiors of La Crosse; Hilltopper Refuse & Recycle; Lifetime Insulation; Maxwell-White Plumbing, Inc.; MJG Excavating; Outdoor Services, Inc. (OSI); Overhead Door Company of the 7 Rivers; Schneider Heating & A/C; Seymour Electric; Sherwin-Williams; Wisconsin Building Supply, Inc.



5 Bedrooms
3 Baths
3,576 Ft²

Jason Etrheim

608-781-7200

jason@mchlax.com

www.mchlax.com



N5553 WI-35, Onalaska (access via Cty. Rd. ZM)

HOME
#2

ADAMSON CONSTRUCTION

LABA MEMBER SINCE 2020

This new-construction single-family home was designed for a working couple with four active children. It was designed to be flexible, with the function and location of spaces designed to evolve or change as the family's needs evolve and change. Its light and airy main level is tailored to advancing contemporary lifestyles and yet is detailed with textures and natural materials to represent the comfort and traditions of home. Designed with the concept of blending interior and exterior living spaces, the home stretches from north to south, opening both visually and physically to take in the expansive prairie views and gorgeous sunsets, which the owners are passionate about. Planning for the Midwest climate, an attached fitness area and gymnasium were custom components added.



LABA members used: Advanced Seamless, Inc.; The Audio Video Pros; Badger Corrugating Co.; Balduzzi Lumber Co., Inc.; Builders Flooring; Earley Drywall & Construction, Inc.; Elegant Stone Products; Gerhards; Glass Interiors of La Crosse; Hallman Lindsay Quality Paints; Hess Excavating; Hidden Valley Designs, Inc; HotSpring Spas & Pools of La Crosse; Kees Architecture LLC; La Crosse Fireplace Company; Lifetime Insulation; Outdoor Services, Inc. (OSI); Overhead Door Company of the 7 Rivers Region, Inc.; Paul's Heating & Air Conditioning, Inc.; Riverland Energy Cooperative; Used Anew LLC; Viking Electric Supply, Inc.; Wisconsin Building Supply, Inc; Xcel Energy, Inc.



4 Bedrooms
4.5 Baths
6,000 Ft²

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957 Stonebridge Ave., Onalaska - Savannah Oaks

HOME
#3

MASTERCRAFT HOMES, INC.

LABA MEMBER SINCE 1986

Located in the Savannah Oaks subdivision in Onalaska, this beautiful ranch-style home is designed and built by MasterCraft Homes, Inc. Lots of natural light and tall ceilings create a bright and open space with views of the marsh and bluffs. The kitchen opens to the breakfast nook and family room—perfect for entertaining family and friends. The master bedroom, complete with walk-in closet and en suite bathroom, is tucked away for privacy. Downstairs you will find a large family room, an exercise room and office space. One of the most enjoyable features of this home is the spa room!



LABA members used: ABC Supply; ACT Concrete; Advanced Seamless, Inc.; Al's Drywall; Arcade Portables; Bond Drywall; Decker Design; Glass Interiors of La Crosse; Hilltopper Refuse & Recycle; Industrial Coatings Co.; La Crosse Fireplace Company; Lifetime Insulation; Maxwell-White Plumbing, Inc.; Midwest TV & Appliance; MJG Excavating; Outdoor Services, Inc. (OSI); Overhead Door Company of the 7 Rivers Region; Schneider Heating & A/C; Seymour Electric; Wisconsin Building Supply, Inc.



5 Bedrooms
3.5 Baths
3,917 Ft²

Jason Etrheim

608-781-7200

jason@mchlax.com

www.mchlax.com



N4666 Timbercrest Dr. E., Onalaska

HOME
#4

LAUTZ LASSIG CUSTOM BUILDERS

LABA MEMBER SINCE 2011

This custom home is nestled on a wooded hillside overlooking a valley. Natural light from full-length windows bathes the entire first floor. This open-concept main level has a beautiful piano room, an expansive living room with a floor-to-ceiling fireplace, formal dining area, elegant master suite and luxury kitchen equipped with high-end appliances and a coffee bar, custom cabinetry, granite countertops and a walk-in pantry. Hickory floors span much of the first floor, and a covered deck off the dining area offers breathtaking views. The master suite includes a large bedroom with a tray ceiling and a spacious bathroom with a tiled walk-in shower, jacuzzi tub, his-and-her vanities and a walk-in closet.

The lower level of this house has a large family room with a stone fireplace, bar area, rec room, two large bedrooms, a full bath and in-floor heat. With a three-car garage, mechanical room and storage room, there is plenty of space for organization.



LABA members used: ACT Concrete, Inc.; Bagniefski Heating & Air Conditioning; Best Kept Portables; Custom Fab and Machine; Elite Electrical Solutions LLC; First American Roofing & Siding; Gerhards; Green Built Insulation LLC; Hallman Lindsay Quality Paints; HDAV; Hidden Valley Designs, Inc; Impact Drywall; Interior Designs, Inc.; JBrooke Garage Door LLC; La Crosse Fireplace Company; Maxwell-White Plumbing, Inc.; Midwest TV & Appliance; Premier Seamless; RiverCity Lawnscape, Inc.; Rybold Excavating & Plumbing Inc.; Wisconsin Building Supply, Inc.; Woodwerks, Inc.; Xcel Energy, Inc.



3 Bedrooms
3 Baths
3,891 Ft²

Kraig Lassig

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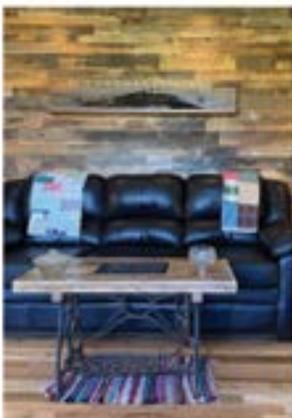
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HOME
#5

LAUTZ LASSIG CUSTOM BUILDERS

LABA MEMBER SINCE 2011

Tucked away in the woods overlooking a valley, this custom home sits on a peaceful piece of property right outside of town. Large windows allow for natural light to accent an airy open-concept layout including a gorgeous kitchen and dining room, a spacious living room with a stone fireplace, a large master suite with his-and-her walk-in closets, a second bedroom and a half bath.

This energy-efficient home has crisp, clean lines, vaulted ceilings throughout the main level and Somerset hickory floors. French doors lead to a bright four-season room with a walk-out deck. Custom iron railings surround a staircase that leads to the lower level of the house. With a walk-out basement, a family room with an intimate fireplace and two additional bedrooms, the lower level of this house is perfect for guests and entertaining. A heated three-car-garage has zero entry to the main-level laundry room and entry to the lower level.



LABA members used: ACT Concrete, Inc.; Altra Federal Credit Union; Bagniefski Heating & Air Conditioning; Best Kept Portables; Carpet One of La Crosse; Custom Fab and Machine; Earley Drywall & Construction, Inc.; Elite Electrical Solutions LLC; First American Roofing & Siding; Gerhards; Glass Interiors of La Crosse; Green Built Insulation LLC; Hallman Lindsay Quality Paints; Home Depot; The Insurance Center; JBrooke Garage Door LLC; Knight Barry Title United LLC; La Crosse Fireplace Company; Maxwell-White Plumbing, Inc.; Midwest TV & Appliance; Premier Seamless; RiverCity Lawnscape, Inc.; Rybold Excavating & Plumbing Inc.; Used Anew; Wisconsin Building Supply, Inc.; Xcel Energy, Inc.



4 Bedrooms
3 Baths
3,262 Ft²

Kraig Lassig

608-786-2535

kraig@lautzlassig.com

www.lautzlassig.com



La Crosse - Ridgeview Heights

HOME
B

RAVEN BUILDERS LLC

LABA MEMBER SINCE 2019

This custom modern farmhouse-style home is all about flow. Working hand in hand with the homeowners, Raven designed this home around their lifestyle. They can enjoy the sunrise in the morning from the front porch and the beautiful ridge sunset at night on the covered back lanai. In between is a spacious open main room, designed to marry the kitchen and living areas. The kitchen features white oak floors with a custom finish, a granite waterfall countertop on the island and a cooking area with space to entertain. The main bedroom features a panoramic view with 45-degree-angle walls. The garage area includes a heated shop and a large RV bay. The exterior blends board-and-batten, lap siding, stone and cedar accents. Simple, clean, modern lines and functionality make this home eye-catching and easy to love!



LABA members used: Advanced Seamless, Inc.; Five Star Concrete LLC; Hallman Lindsay Quality Paints; La Crosse Fireplace Company; Maxwell-White Plumbing, Inc.; MJG Excavating; Paul's Heating & Air Conditioning, Inc.; Town n' Country Title LLC; Wisconsin Building Supply, Inc.



3 Bedrooms
2 Baths
1,800 Ft²

Bill Raven

608-769-2903

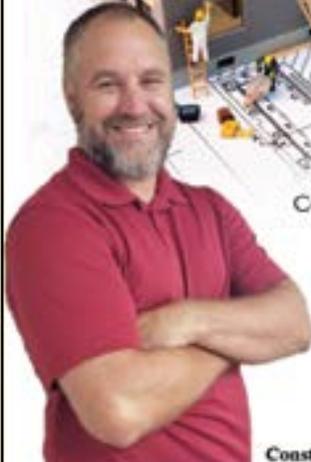
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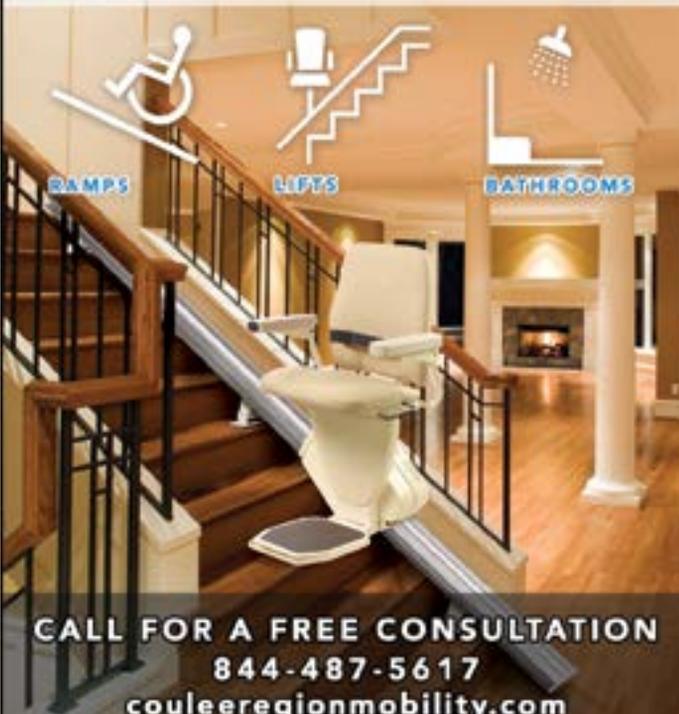


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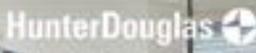


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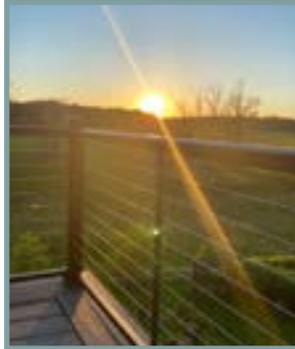


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HOME
#6

COLEMAN CUSTOM HOMES LLC

LABA MEMBER SINCE 2019

Come take a look at this 2,060-square-foot home with an oversized three-car garage. The covered front stoop area features cultured stone, a vaulted ceiling and zero entry into the home. A large living area includes a stone gas fireplace, a coffered ceiling and a patio door opening to a screened-in covered deck. The kitchen has custom cabinets to the ceiling and a huge island. This home has a spacious floor plan with two guest bedrooms, a guest bathroom, and a master bedroom with master bathroom. The master bedroom has a trayed ceiling and separate screen room entry. In the master bathroom is a his-and-her double vanity, a double walk-in shower and a separate toilet room. The master walk-in closet has its own laundry entrance. Additional features include a big mudroom with lockers, a zero-entry garage entrance and LP SmartSide siding on the exterior.



3 Bedrooms
2 Baths
2,060 Ft²



LABA members used: Balduzzi Lumber Co., Inc.; Beaver Builders Supply, Inc.; Bond Drywall; Hallman Lindsay Quality Paints; Hidden Valley Designs; Home Depot; La Crosse Fireplace Company; Menards; Midwest TV & Appliance; River City Ready Mix; Werner Electric Supply; Wesco Home Furnishings; Xcel Energy, Inc.

Dave Coleman

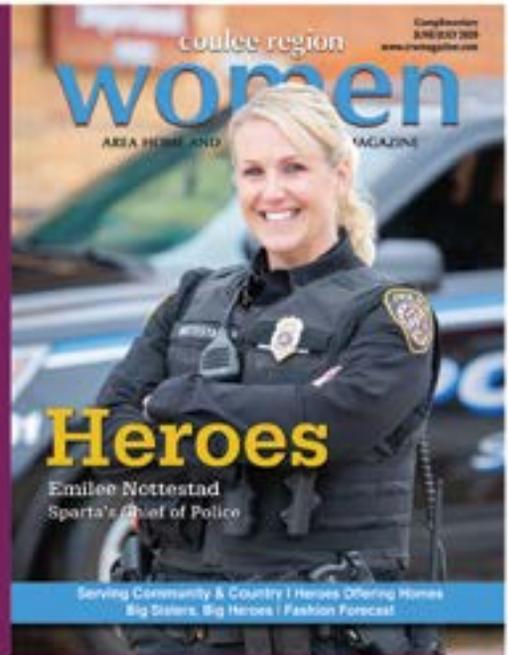
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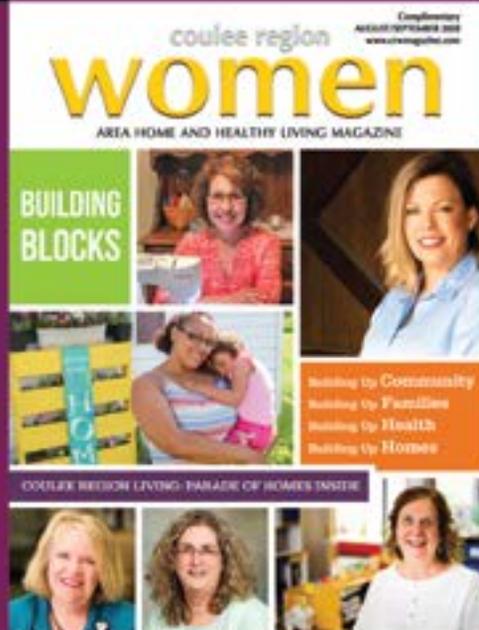
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Parade of Homes 2020 Guidelines for In-Person Tour

Covid-19 hasn't stopped the Parade of Homes, but it has made us approach the in-person tour differently this year. Please be mindful of the following guidelines to ensure a safe and inspiring Parade for all!

- Please remember that families live in these Parade Homes.
- Masks will be required inside the Parade homes.
- Please practice social distancing per CDC guidelines, maintaining 6 ft. of space between attendees when inside homes.
- Please use hand sanitizer (available at each home) when arriving at and leaving each home.
- The number of Parade attendees in each home at one time will be limited, with the number allowed determined by the home's square footage.
- Shoe coverings or socks will be required inside each home. Shoe coverings will be available at each home.
- To reduce touch points, certain areas of each home may be roped off.
- Please refrain from touching surfaces in homes. Volunteers will be conducting frequent disinfection of higher touch points.
- The minimum age of attendees is 16.

LABA strives to meet all CDC guidelines for cleaning, social distancing and other safe practices.

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The Ridge Runner

Peek inside the 2019 Parade of Homes People's Choice Award-winning home.

BY HEIDI OVERSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



The Bertelsen home in Ridgeview Heights, designed with family living in mind, was the Parade of Homes favorite in 2019.



A playful playroom (left) sits just off the large kitchen (center), allowing a parent to keep an eye on the kids while dinner is being prepared. Reclaimed wood lends a rustic yet modern feel throughout.

Winning is most often the result of thoughtful planning, careful decision-making and teamwork. In 2018, Jim and Christina Bertelsen linked arms with Hartland Construction and other La Crosse Area Builders Association (LABA) members to build a home that the public voted the 2019 Parade of Homes champion.

THE BERTELSENS' BRAINCHILD

The Bertelsens' dream house was custom-built in Ridgeview Heights, a housing subdivision near St. Joseph's Ridge outside of La Crosse. The Bertelsens already lived in the subdivision, in a smaller house they had built in 2009.

"That house was more of our starter home," says Christina. "When we lived there, we didn't have any children, and now we have three."

The couple felt the time was right to build their dream home. A South Side La Crosse native with family living close by, Christina says she and Jim wanted to stay in Ridgeview Heights, so they bought a lot just five lots away from their first house. They took two years

to complete the design, making sure the home was everything they wanted it to be and working with Wisconsin Building Supply to draft their plan. They chose Paul and Jennifer Westlie of Hartland Construction in Holmen to build it.

Hartland and the Bertelsens embarked on a journey—a strong working relationship that included ongoing, excellent communication and collaborative discussions.

Construction began in July 2018 and was completed in December 2018. It's simply beautiful—a testament to careful planning and expert craftsmanship.

"We love it. It's exactly what we wanted," says Christina.

THE CROWN ON TOP OF THE RIDGE

The house is 5,014 square feet of comfort and practicality. "We wanted a house that was spacious but helped complement our active lifestyle," says Christina.

Both Christina and Jim work full time, and with three young



An inviting porch, reclaimed-wood paneling and showpieces like a stone fireplace with a log mantel make the Bertelsen home one-of-a-kind.

children, life can get pretty busy. Christina made sure there was a room off the large kitchen that could serve as a playroom. She can cook or do dishes and keep a close eye on the children. The playroom is one of a kind, with colorful walls, lots of storage space for toys and games, and easy-to-clean surfaces.

“It will evolve as the children get older,” says Christina. “We can make it a sitting room or whatever we’d like when that time comes.”

A half bath and pantry by the kitchen were also must-haves; the convenience these rooms offer is immeasurable.

“Did we need a mudroom by the kitchen entrance from the garage? Definitely yes,” Christina laughs. The family added a personal touch by designing the mudroom’s bench and shelf.

MODERN YET RUSTIC

The Craftsman-style house was designed to achieve an easy flow from room to room. The décor is clean and modern yet has rustic charm. The entire home is an ingenious blend of present-day architecture and reminiscent accents, such as the custom-made rolling barn doors. Ceiling beams and wall paneling are made from reclaimed wood.

“We were a bit unsure if working with reclaimed wood would be easy for the accents in this home,” recalls Jennifer Westlie. “We were pleasantly surprised once we started using it.”

The new great room is the family’s favorite because it’s large—388 square feet—yet very cozy. The Andersen windows overlook the yard and trees; in the fall and winter, the

family can look down into a deep valley and sprawling coulees. The ceiling is vaulted with thick beams that lead to a ceiling fan. La Crosse Fireplace helped the Bertelsens choose a gas fireplace that adds coziness. Used Anew topped the fireplace with a log mantel.

Jim and Christina wanted the large kitchen to also have a farmhouse feel. The Westlies and fellow LABA contractors Decker Design, Elevations and Midwest TV & Appliance helped them choose the right flooring, wall tiles, countertops, cabinetry and appliances. A farmhouse-style dining table was custom-made by Painted Porch in downtown La Crosse. The effect is chic simplicity with 100 percent functionality.

Any family would feel lucky to have a large laundry room. The Bertelsens’ features cabinets, a sink, spanning countertops and ample shelf space.

Elsewhere, there are five bedrooms, each with walk-in closets with dressers. The master suite’s bathroom has a walk-in shower with a waterfall shower system. The other bathrooms follow the rest of the house’s simple, rustic theme. Gerhard’s First Supply helped make all of the bathrooms uniquely beautiful.

MORE FUN FEATURES

A very popular room is the theater room in the lower level. “We have movie nights and football game nights,” says Christina. “And for me, there’s nothing like working out in that room with my virtual trainer appearing bigger than life on that massive screen.” It’s even topped off with a wet bar, with cabinetry, counter and sink provided by Elevations by Wisconsin Building Supply and Gerhard’s.

Back upstairs, another favorite place for the family is the heated and air-conditioned sunroom. It has five large windows that are perfect for viewing nature.

The backyard is accessible through the walk-out basement but also via a unique spiral staircase winding down from the deck. “The plan designer, homeowner and we had to collaborate on how to best maximize the backyard views from the basement windows and still have stairs coming down from the deck above,” says Jennifer Westlie. “A spiral staircase was the solution.” Wieser-Doric from La Crescent supplied the staircase.

IF YOU’RE BUILDING SOON . . .

When asked if she would do anything differently, Christina pauses. “I can’t think of anything,” she says. “But I will offer simple advice to those who are going to build their own home: Don’t rush, and do think of the years ahead of you and how your home will work with your family’s stages. Think furniture-wise, as in what size and layout of various rooms will work with the furniture you will bring in. Be ready to work with your team so it comes together with ease.”

Jim and Christina were that well prepared, and with Hartland Construction and other LABA members involved, they created the crème de la crème of the 2019 Parade of Homes. **CRW**

Formerly a Realtor, Heidi Overson enjoys writing about our area’s beautiful homes and the people who own them.

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**Southside Moms United
wields the power of mothers
supporting mothers.**

BY JULIE NELSON
CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Southside Moms United members are activists, advocates and most of all, moms who lift each other up. Front row: Ebony Hyter, Ashley Wire, Toya Reynolds, Rebecca Gnewikow. Back row: Vanessa Schmitz, Bridget Todd-Robbins, Ashanti Southall, Richelle Brun, Disire Burns, Delores Whitman, Jamie Stingl.

Look for a solid building block in any tightly knit community, and chances are you'll find a mom—or, more likely, a group of moms. In La Crosse, a group called Southside Moms United is driving changes in our school systems, pushing for equity in the community and, most important, supporting each other through the thick and thin of parenting.

A PLACE TO UPLIFT EVERYONE

Two years ago, Toya Reynolds, a mother of five, and Bridget Todd-Robbins, a mother of three, were talking about the challenges of raising children of color in a mostly white community. As a youth system care administrator for La Crosse County, Todd-Robbins recognized they weren't alone in their struggles. The two decided to send out some flyers and see if anyone would join them for their first meeting in a neighborhood church. They were more than a little surprised when 15 people showed up. "I was just looking to have a place to uplift everyone, and it ended up being this whole big thing," says Reynolds.

The group now meets once a month, with volunteers providing child care and group members contributing a meal. Rebecca Gnewikow is one of the inaugural members. "I'm a single mom of two," she says. "I came to this group because I wanted to run some of my challenges by them." Ashley Wire, mom to six kids, is another early member of the group. "We were facing some issues with my sons in the school district, and I needed to be around other moms experiencing some of the same things," she says.

HOW TO BUILD A COMMUNITY

The gatherings quickly became popular, and Southside Moms outgrew their space. They moved to the Amie Mathy Center, where staff from the Boys & Girls Clubs provides child care. Sometimes conversation and emotional support is the highlight of the meeting; sometimes it's a speaker with an educational component. And thanks to Todd-Robbins' knowledge of the community, the group members are also becoming activists. They made a pitch to La Crosse SOUP, which offers community-supported microgrants, to purchase hair products specifically designed for kids of color. They wrote and received a grant from the Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse, and they have been part of a focus group for the La Crosse School District, ultimately helping to rewrite the schools' code of conduct.

"These women worked *hard*," Todd-Robbins says of the group. "They formed subcommittees, created goals, got training and gave presentations. We're always tackling larger issues in the community."

Still, the backbone of the group is the relationships. "We have a lot of trust in each other, and we are willing to stand behind each other," says Reynolds. "For me, it's a big support system."

If other neighborhood groups are interested in getting started (a Northside Moms group is currently in the works), Todd-Robbins is more than willing to share her resources—another building block of a strong community. "We are really based on relationships," she says. "That's how you build community." CRW



Toya Reynolds, co-founder of Southside Moms United



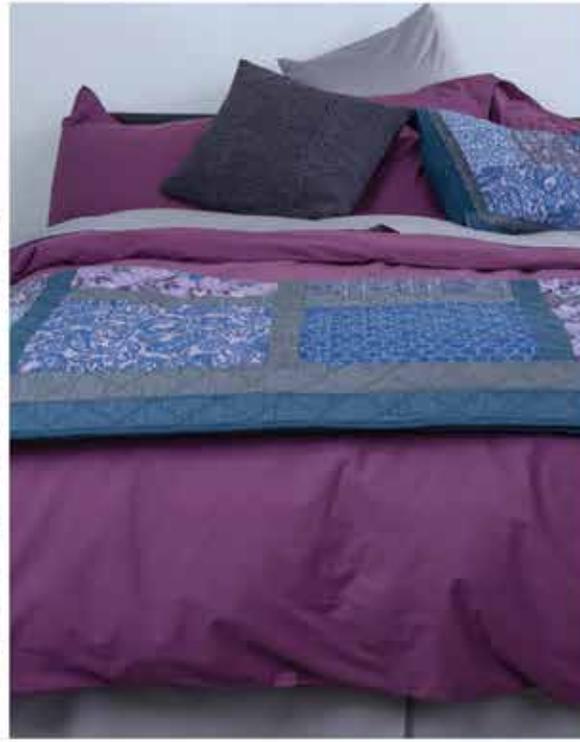
Bridget Todd-Robbins, co-founder of Southside Moms United

Though her kids are now grown, Julie Nelson appreciates the power of a group of mothers.

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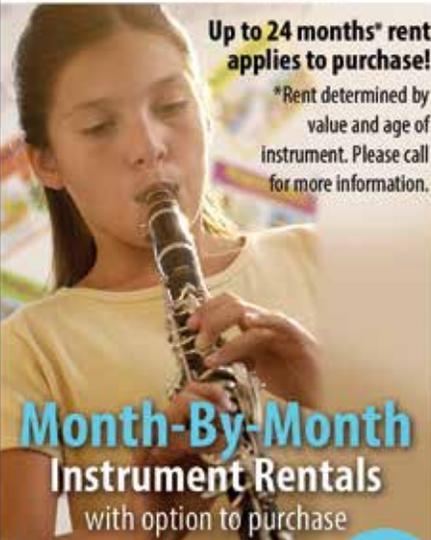
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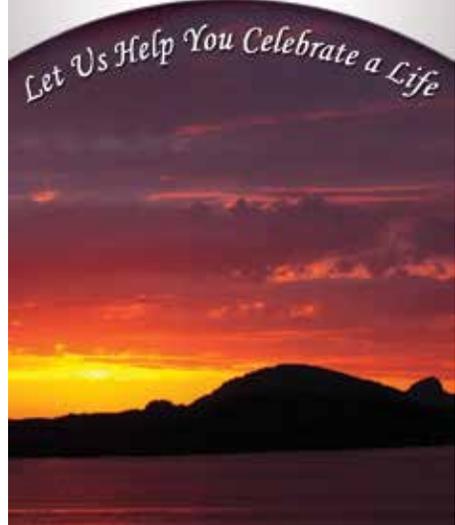
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A COORDINATED EFFORT

Great Rivers United Way
coordinates community
support in the face of Covid-19.

BY JULIE NELSON
CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

When the world as we knew it shifted, the 11-woman team at Great Rivers United Way gathered to brainstorm this question: What is United Way's role in responding to a pandemic? Their answers are helping our community stay strong.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUNDS

A collaboration with the La Crosse Community Foundation led to La Crosse Area Emergency Response Funds, which raised and distributed more than \$1 million to local agencies who in turn were able to put food, diapers, help for the homeless and more into the hands of those who needed it.



Volunteer letter writers warm the hearts of people in nursing homes.

CARDS AND LETTERS

For people living in nursing homes, the problem wasn't money or food; it was isolation. As part of the Ugetconnected team (a citywide website of volunteer opportunities), United Way asked people of all ages to send cards, letters, poems, children's artwork and more to the people who had suddenly been forbidden to see and hug their friends and family. Letters began pouring in to eight area long-term care facilities, sometimes as many as 100 per week.

YOU ARE APPRECIATED

Next, United Way set up email postcards for the public to use to say thanks to the health care workers on the front lines. "Thank you so much for doing this," said C. J. Gianoli, Recreation Therapy Assistant at Onalaska Care Center, after the first batch of emailed cards arrived. "It brought tears to my eyes this morning. The community has really taken hold of both staff and residents, and it means so much to us."



United Way volunteer mask maker Irene Nissalke

MENTAL HEALTH

For GRUW's Better Together campaign, the pandemic presented an opportunity to reduce stigma associated with mental health and to emphasize the coping skills that help us get through uncertain times. "Suddenly, there was a worldwide conversation about stress, anxiety and self-care," says Beth Thier, Better Together project coordinator. "Mental health is how we think, feel and act. We all have mental health, and we encourage people to be brave, emotionally. Name how you are feeling and know that it is okay to not be feeling happy all the time and that taking care of yourself is vital."



United Way volunteer mask maker Kathy Price



MASKS

When the La Crosse County Health Department asked everyone to wear a mask in public, United Way helped make that possible. They quickly recruited volunteers to sew masks, masks and more masks, then distributed them, free of charge, to anyone who asked. The service was a game changer for the senior citizens, pregnant moms, senior-living staff and regular citizens who had been unable to locate a face covering elsewhere.

GREAT RIVERS HUB

While many of us were obsessed with gathering information about Covid-19, community health workers in Great Rivers HUB were working with a low-income, vulnerable population who had little access to news outlets or the internet. They taught their clients about proper hand washing, wearing masks, the signs and symptoms to watch for and how to practice social distancing. Just as important, the HUB staff supported their clients in making those safe choices.

SHOW A LITTLE KINDNESS

While the Great Rivers United Way team members each have unique roles, they've all learned this simple truth: be kind to yourself, be kind to others. It makes a difference. **CRW**

Julie Nelson is the Community Engagement Coordinator at Great Rivers United Way. She is the lucky one who gets to hand out face coverings to those who request them.



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LOOKING FORWARD WITH FOOD

Local food suppliers play a critical role in feeding our communities, now more than ever.

BY SAMANTHA STROOZAS | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Local food co-ops and farmers markets help connect the public with our local food supply, cutting out mainstream distribution systems that can be fragile.

In times of crisis, we rely on our communities—personal, professional and geological. That community comprises our local food growers and producers, always a source of Driftless pride and never more important than now as a reliable food source. The growers and producers supporting us now are deserving of our support as well, now and in the future.

The Coulee Region provides locally grown goods and numerous opportunities for consumers to show their local support, but establishments like the Viroqua Food Co-op, Holmen Meat Locker and Market, the People’s Food Co-op in La Crosse and our local farmers markets work within the community to aid local and independent suppliers.

TRUSTED ESSENTIAL BUSINESSES

The Viroqua Food Co-op started pandemic safety measures early

for the community and quickly became a trusted essential business. Jan Rasikas, the general manager, shared that the co-op has had a pandemic plan in place since H1N1 in 2009.

“Our plan clearly states our top priorities: keeping our staff safe, the safety of our customers, keeping important products on our shelves and maintaining the health of our community-owned business,” she says.

When distribution and product disruption increased during the pandemic, Rasikas knew the “strong and personal” relationships with local producers would keep essential products on the shelves. Products grown or produced in the 100-mile radius around Viroqua account for 30 percent, or \$2.7 million of the co-op’s total annual sales.

At first, the Viroqua Farmer’s Market was postponed due to the pandemic, and the co-op was preparing to bring increased levels of produce from local suppliers to support farmers, but the market has

since opened with reduced capacity. “We stand ready to move greater quantities of local produce if necessary and to support the farmer’s market, like always,” says Rasikas.

THE PATH OF HEALING

Lauri Stettler, owner of Holmen Meat Locker and Market, says the support she felt from community members has been overwhelming.

“We just opened our doors four weeks ago,” she says. “Before that, we were only doing car-side service, which we are still operating, as well as home delivery.”

Stettler says that these consistent changes made customers happy and kept customers and employees safe. The focus of locality is important to her, as all of the meat purchased for Holmen Meat Locker and Market comes from Wisconsin, Minnesota or Iowa.

“I think it is very important for our community to heal as a business community but also healthwise. It is important to shop local because we need to keep these local businesses supported and in business. They are the ones who keep our workforce going,” she says.

Stettler believes that shopping local is “critical” right now and that businesses may or may not have seen the full effect of the pandemic on consumerism. She notes that all local businesses need this, not just hers.

“Shop local, support all of your local businesses; we need you,” she says.

ADAPTING AND SUPPORTING

Jen McCoy, the owner services and outreach manager of the People’s Food Co-op in La Crosse, shared similar sentiments about

adaptations made that furthered community support.

The People’s Food Co-op, an essential business, has been open throughout the pandemic, but changes have been made to ensure a safe environment, such as offering curbside pickup. Shoppers have been asked to adapt their habits by leaving reusable containers and bags at home, wearing masks in the store and maintaining social distance.

“We have gotten an outpouring of support from our owners and shoppers who have shown appreciation for our staff, their continued access to great food, and our efforts to keep people safe,” McCoy says.

McCoy explains that supporting local supplies is an integral part of their business model, and the pandemic has not changed this. The People’s Food Co-op works with over 500 local framers and producers to promote local suppliers.

The nearby Cameron Park Farmers Market, a longstanding vehicle for connecting customers and local food producers, has also maintained their mission. “Our market hosts over 50 small businesses each week throughout the outdoor season,” says manager Linda Vale. “Small farms and businesses have been hit the hardest in this health crisis, and our market provides the opportunity for producers and buyers to come together to help support each other. With every dollar spent at the market, 80 cents goes directly to the farmers—our friends and neighbors—and from that 80 cents, upwards of 70 percent goes back into the local economy. When you can build a relationship between consumer and producer, a lasting trust is made so you can feel good about your purchase’s source, process and quality.”



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The Art and Science of Food and Wine Pairing

Wine and food pairing can be considered an art, but much of it is based on science. For example, a heavy wine like Cabernet Sauvignon would be delicious with a grilled filet mignon, where a lighter-bodied wine, such as Pinot Grigio, would be overwhelmed by the heavy flavor of the beef. A light fare of chicken noodle soup might pair well with a lightly oaked Chardonnay.

Sweetness levels of foods can hint at what wine might pair. With dessert, try matching the sweetness level of the wine. Or try contrasting the wine to the dessert: think Champagne with strawberries.

With appetizers, which can be varied in type and flavor, try a dry rosé. Rosé is a versatile wine that is a combination of red and white, or made from red grapes without much influence of the skin and seeds. Rosé wines are nice as a “go-to” as they have characteristics of both types of wines.

Trying wines with dishes is the best way to know if the food can make the wine “sing.” Practice your pairings before that special dinner, if possible. After you’ve tried a few pairings, you will naturally feel comfortable adventuring on your own!

Lynita Docken-Delaney
Winemaker, Elmaro Vineyard 



Individual Puff Pastry Tarts with Parsley, Tomato and Feta

Viroqua Food Co-op
Serves 4

- 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed in fridge
- ½ cup Italian flat-leaf parsley, packed
- 4 oz. feta cheese, drained well
- 20 small cherry tomatoes, washed and dried
- Flour, for handling the pastry dough

Preheat oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside. Unwrap the thawed puff pastry and take out one sheet. Re-wrap and re-freeze the remaining sheet, if desired.

Lightly flour a counter and place the puff pastry sheet on the flour, carefully unfolding it. Use a rolling pin to roll the rectangle into more of a square shape, and to even out the fold marks. Cut the sheet into four even squares.

Place the squares on the prepared pan, and fold in the corners to make a rounder shape, pressing the dough corners down. Top each with parsley, then feta, then place 5 cherry tomatoes on each one.

Bake for 25 minutes, until the tomatoes are collapsing, and the dough is puffed and golden. Serve hot.



Summer Strawberry Salad with Balsamic Dressing

People's Food Co-op
Serves 1

Salad

- 1 handful of your favorite local greens
- 6 strawberries, sliced
- 1 red onion, sliced
- 1 handful of chopped pecans or almonds
- 2 T blue cheese or feta cheese
- Freshly ground pepper

Balsamic Vinaigrette

- 1 T balsamic vinegar
- 1 T Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp. of maple syrup or honey
- 3 T of olive oil
- Pinch of kosher salt

Wash the greens and thinly slice the red onions and strawberries. If you wish, toast the almonds and pecans for a few minutes until they are golden brown.

For the vinaigrette, whisk together the balsamic vinegar, Dijon mustard, maple syrup and kosher salt. Gradually whisk in the olive oil.

Spread the greens on a plate. Top with strawberries, red onion, almonds/pecans, feta/blue cheese crumbles and vinaigrette. Garnish with freshly ground pepper. **CRW**

Sam Stroozas is a recent University of Wisconsin-La Crosse graduate who values the work community members have done to adapt during this time, foodwise and otherwise.

CORNERSTONES OF THE COMMUNITY

Coulee Region schools build up more than children.

BY HEIDI GRIMINGER BLANKE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Laura Huber, principal of Northside Elementary School in La Crosse, believes that communities build up schools as much as schools build up communities.

Building blocks may be children’s toys, but when used as a metaphor for schools, they become a community foundation. Laura Huber, principal of Northside Elementary School in La Crosse, describes two-way building blocks in which communities “build up” schools as much as schools build up communities. Dr. Keri Holter, former associate principal of Holmen Middle School and current principal of La Crosse’s North Woods International School, points to schools as “a reflection of the very best parts of our communities.” Dr. Wendy Bennett, principal of Sparta Montessori and High Point Charter School, describes schools as building “productive citizenship” in an environment that serves the whole community.

BUILDING UP AND OUT

“Northside Elementary meets the needs of our children by partnering with the community in ways that work to benefit both organizations,” says Huber. For example, a link with Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) means children have foster grandparents who read and do activities with them, creating a strong bond that enhances lives on both sides.



Wendy Bennett, principal of Sparta Montessori and High Point Charter School

Some of what happens inside the school changes as children grow. Middle schoolers, says Holter, “start to think beyond themselves and start grasping their impact on the world. It’s our responsibility to teach them how to use that voice.”

In Sparta, says Bennett, some high schoolers are offered an opportunity to travel outside their geographic community, even internationally, via school programs. At the other end of the spectrum, younger children and their families partake in pizza and game nights, allowing parents to “get familiar with buildings and build relationships with faculty and staff.” She also points to community liaisons addressing vital areas like after-school care, homelessness and special education that allow expansion outside school walls.

BUILDING INSIDE OUT

Covid-19 changed the way the world works and learns, forcing schools to step up their building-block capacity. “We surveyed many of our families by telephone regarding what their needs were as the Covid quarantine began,” says Huber. “With the help of generous

donations from our larger community, we provided groceries, personal care supplies, books, clothing and schoolwork delivered to many of our families. We helped with rent, utility bills and car payments when those stressors threatened to destabilize a family.” The contact is ongoing.

Bernett explains that Covid changed the way Sparta schools approached everything “from academics to students and staff to the way classes look.” She calls it “a lesson in flexibility,” in being forced to look at things differently than the way they’ve been done and to change the ways they build connections. “We found tools we never would have identified.”

Holter notes that education can’t just stop, even though so much can’t be replicated, from the smile or greeting you get in the hallway to the environment of academic curiosity. She and her staff strove to do it in a way that honored differences in families. “Our teachers worked more and in different ways than they have before and worried more than I have ever seen. Everyone has been doing the best they can—our community, families, staff and students. There has been tremendous learning, but it has been painful learning.”



Dr. Keri Holter, principal of North Woods International School in La Crosse

Bernett describes schools as “organic gathering places,” serving as hubs for entertainment, culture and learning, offering everything from sports to craft shows to community education. She notes that education is not all academics and that many important needs “don’t have anything to do with math.”

“The staff has always known that there is no magical ‘one way’ that works for all students, so we have to continually change and adapt,” says Holter. “I hope that the restrictions we had under Safer at Home teach all of us to appreciate our community resources and look after them when they can open once again. I think Covid has helped show people how indispensable and talented our staff are at serving our families and communities.”

“When we pull together as a whole school on behalf of our community,” adds Huber, “there is a significant force for good that is hard to overlook.” **CRW**

Heidi Griminger Blanke, PhD, is a La Crosse freelance writer who has always believed in the power of public schools.

BUILDING ALL AROUND

The community connection goes beyond what happens within the school walls, explains Huber. She describes a window into the community allowing schools “to help our communities by responding to the needs and leveraging the strengths of the school and the community.” For example, some staff volunteer with the Hunger Task Force, and food from that organization is distributed to student families via the school pantry.

BEYOND EDUCATING KIDS, AREA SCHOOLS:

- Link with other community organizations
- Build bonds between school children and community members
- Are a force for good
- Serve as a connection in times of need
- Learn from mistakes and commit to doing better
- Serve as a community hub

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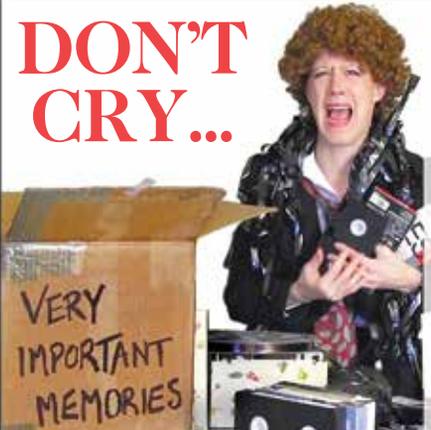
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LIGHT AT END OF TUNNEL

Couleecap's Financial Assistance Program keeps roofs over families' heads.

BY ANASTASIA PENCHI | CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



January May holds her daughter, Jayda, in front of their home in Viola.

January May works at a group home for people with mental and physical disabilities, but her hours got cut when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Although several months have passed since then, she continues to face a reduction in hours because residents still aren't going shopping or out to eat like they did before.

May, who is mother to 14-year-old Devin and 2-year-old Jayda, was concerned she would get behind on her rent and bills, so she applied for Couleecap's Covid-19 Financial Assistance Program offered through Couleecap, a La Crosse- and Westby-based organization committed to fighting poverty in the region. The program was created in March thanks to local fundraising efforts and helped those who lost income stay in their homes.

"They made it feel like there is light at end of tunnel during tough times," May says.

Hetti Brown, Couleecap's executive director, says the agency distributed about \$206,000 to 360 households that had lost income during the first nine weeks after the Safer at Home order was issued. About 65 percent of those requests were for rent or mortgage assistance.

PUTTING HOUSING FIRST

Staff members continue to get calls from people who are scared because they find themselves suddenly and unexpectedly unemployed, Brown says. Many don't know how to apply for benefits, and they are not sure when those benefits will come.

"They're making good financial decisions," Brown says. "They are putting their housing first."

Even those applicants who qualify for unemployment can face delays between application time and receiving funds.

"I have been calling every day for the past week due to an issue they have with my claim," one client reported at the beginning of the pandemic. "I have been unsuccessful at reaching anyone due to the

high number of people trying to contact unemployment."

Just as the agency distributed most of the locally raised funds, Couleecap received another \$974,000 from the state to offer rental assistance through the Wisconsin Rental Assistance Program. The agency had 350 requests for information before it could launch the new program during the second week of June. Staff received 139 applications the first day applications were accepted.

A TRUE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Brown says one benefit to the new funds is that they are coordinated through the state's Energy Assistance program, so applicants apply for both programs at once. Qualifying applicants can receive up to three months' rent or \$3,000. The program ends October 31.

"This is truly meant to be an emergency response program for people behind on rent," Brown says.

Client testimonials being received by staff members tell the story of how Covid-19 has affected low-income populations in the Coulee Region. Recipients speak of the relief they feel when their housing bills are paid and note that their children are happy to be able to stay in their homes, too.

"With your help, I can confidently say I'm going to be okay now," Lorelei Sawyer, a 19-year-old cosmetology student in La Crosse, has told Couleecap. "The work you guys are doing to help people out in this time of need is truly a blessing." **CRW**

Anastasia Penchi supports the good work being done by Couleecap—this area's community action program. She can be reached at callmeloislane@hotmail.com.

For more information on the Wisconsin Rental Assistance Program, go to

<https://www.couleecap.org/wisconsin-rental-assistance-program.html>.

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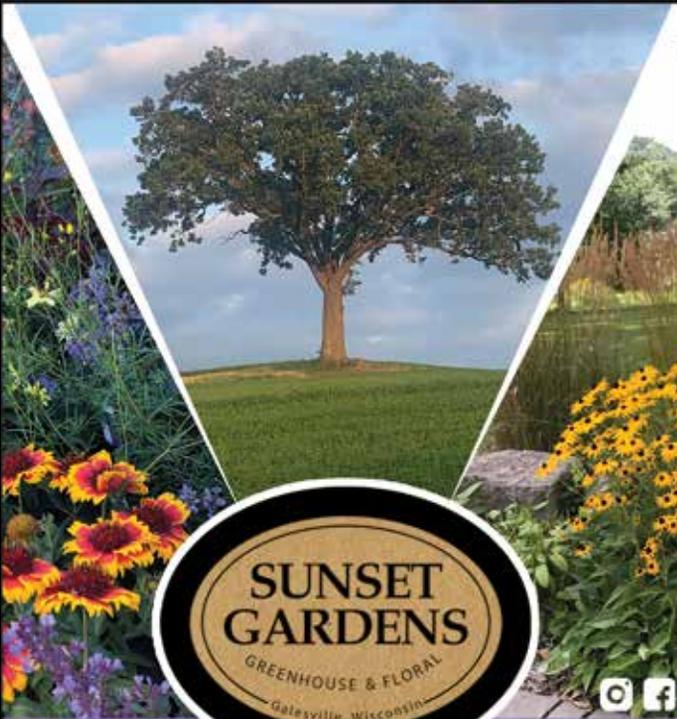

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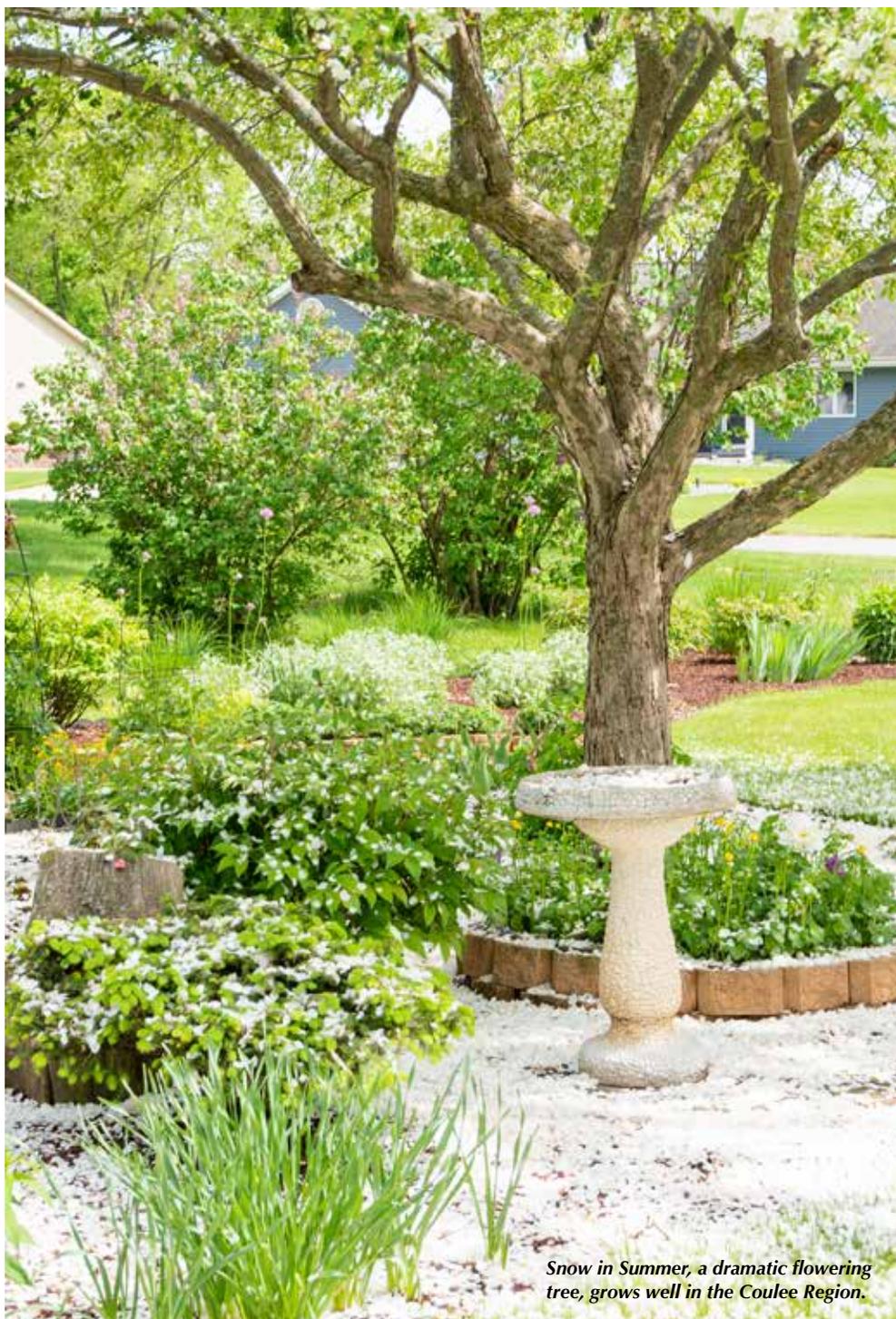
PUT DOWN SOME ROOTS

Plant a tree, begin a story.

PHOTO BY DIANE RAAUM PHOTOGRAPHY

There is a Chinese proverb that says the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago,” says Mary Parish of Sunset Gardens in Galesville. “Every place I have ever lived, I have been thankful that someone who had gone before me had planted a tree.”

When you plant a tree, you begin a story—of your family, of the times in which the tree was planted—and there’s no time like fall to do so. Follow these tree-planting tips from Sunset Gardens, and put down roots in your place and time.



Snow in Summer, a dramatic flowering tree, grows well in the Coulee Region.

- Tree planting can be done as long as a hole can be dug—for us, spring through late fall. If you wait till late fall after leaves drop, watering demands lessen, and the tree roots continue to establish. It is wise to mulch the area around the tree, taking care not to put mulch upon the tree trunk itself.

- Be sure that the tree you want to plant is suited to your site and soils; know especially whether your soil is heavy or light. Your local nursery can help you with choices depending on what you are seeking in a tree—whether a small flowering tree or a large shade tree. Many species of trees have multiple cultivars to choose from. Flowering crabs, for example, can range in height from 8 feet to 25 feet.

- It is important to plant a variety of trees, as issues like Dutch elm disease and emerald ash borers can wipe out an entire species. Good choices for our area include oak, maple, linden, aspen, birch, resistant elm varieties, willow, lionwood, hackberry and ginkgo, plus flowering favorites like locust, linden, catalpa, coffee tree, crabapple, lilac, magnolia and serviceberry. Pictured here is the breathtaking Snow in Summer. **CRW**



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