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Adventure
Karen Mischel Takes the Wheel in Viroqua



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Pictured on cover and above: Karen Mischel, mayor of Viroqua. Photos by Stephanie Neprud Photography.

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Ladies, let's talk about uterine fibroids

Many women believe painful periods and heavy bleeding are part of life. But, that's not always the case. Uterine fibroids, most common in women ages 30-40 through menopause, can sometimes result in painful, heavy bleeding and other hard-to-tolerate symptoms.

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Atop a castle tower in Assisi, Italy.

When I was 27, I went on the adventure of a lifetime. I saved my vacation time and saved my money, bought a backpack and a Eurail pass, and spent a whole month exploring Europe—by myself.

I was enabled by my coworkers at the time, several of whom had taken the same trip in their younger years. From them, I learned to choose a guidebook and pick an itinerary. I learned how to board overnight trains and find a hostel upon arrival in a new city in the morning. I learned how to pack a month's worth of necessities in one not-so-big backpack.

I knew I had much more to learn about traveling like this, but they all assured me I'd be fine. Trust yourself, they said. Trust the kindness of strangers. Trust that there is a benevolent force that will keep you from harm. And so, I went.

I expected the trip's milestones would be marked by my destinations: Copenhagen, Paris, Rome, Assisi, Venice, Barcelona. But as I went about my adventure, I learned the trip was about much more than that.

I learned, first of all, just how little I needed. The contents of my backpack, fastened to me like a turtle's shell, were enough: a few changes of clothes, my guidebook, my passport, my credit card. My apartment, my car, my possessions back home all were luxuries, maybe even burdens.

I learned how to say "excuse me" in five languages and "thank you" in seven. I learned how not to catch the correct overnight train,

and subsequently, I learned what it was like to be homeless. I learned that somehow, I would always get what I needed when I needed it most: free coffee, a companion, a sunflower on a low day. I learned that loneliness could be transformative.

I learned that sometimes you have to take the wrong path to find the right path (especially true in Venice). I learned that getting lost is the first step in finding yourself.

I learned the magic of the spaces in between—the train rides, the pauses in cafes, the wanderings down sunlit streets, the climbs up castle towers. The beauty, I discovered, was not in getting to what was coming next, but savoring where you were. I learned that my favorite moments of traveling were those right after I got off a train in a new city, walking up the platform with my home on my back and wondering what adventure awaited.

What you learn on your adventures, you take with you through life, and no one embodies that like the women featured in our "Adventure" issue of *Coulee Region Women*. Karen Mischel has traded a life of worldwide travel for the adventure of leading her hometown, Viroqua, as the region's first woman mayor. A number of local young women are rising to the challenge of entrepreneurship, among them Cheryl Killilea, who has made a business of helping others "change lanes," and Francia, who demonstrates the art inherent in the human body. Culinary adventure awaits you at Lovechild, the great outdoors beckons you to camp and hike, and photographer Dahli Durley expresses another thing we learn through our adventures: that for all our differences the world around, we humans are more alike than not.

We may think adventure is about discovering a place, but really, what we discover is ourselves. We are braver than we realize. We need less than we think. We may have to take the wrong path to find the right path. And even when our destination seems so very far away, we are always making progress toward it, often in ways we can't see yet. We just have to trust and savor the beauty of the spaces in between.

Betty

coulee region women

AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE

ISSUE 98, VOLUME 17, NUMBER 2

JUNE/JULY 2018

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DISTRIBUTION
Citywide Marketing Services, L.L.C.
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Coulee Region Women is published six times per year by Coulee Region Communications, L.L.C. 816 2nd Avenue S., Suite 300, Onalaska, WI 54650. Subscriptions available for \$24.95 per year (six issues).

Send check to the address above.

All unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Coulee Region Women assumes no responsibility for unsolicited materials.

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Printed at Crescent Printing Company, Onalaska, WI. Printed in the U.S.A.

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Dr. Gregory Cochrane

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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Celebrate some of Shakespeare's most-loved plays this summer at the Great River Shakespeare Festival in Winona. The 15th season of this annual festival runs June 22 through August 5 on the Winona State University Campus, 450 Johnson St. Featured plays this year include *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *The Merchant of Venice* as well as *Shakespeare in Love*, based on the screenplay by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard, and *Venus in Fur* by David Ives. Rounding out the festival are special events and symposiums offering insight into Shakespeare's productions, as well as pre-show conversations, musical performances and food trucks on the Winona State University Green. To learn more and view a schedule of all plays, go to www.grsf.org.



offering insight into Shakespeare's productions, as well as pre-show conversations, musical performances and food trucks on the Winona State University Green. To learn more and view a schedule of all plays, go to www.grsf.org.

VERNON COUNTY READS

The Driftless Writing Center is partnering with seven libraries in Vernon County for the third annual Vernon County Reads adult summer reading program. Residents are encouraged to check out the book *The Excellent Lombards* by Wisconsin author Jane Hamilton; then, beginning June 1, the libraries will host free weekly book discussions open to all. The event concludes with a presentation by Hamilton Thursday, August 2, at 7 p.m. at the Westby Area Performing Arts Center. For more information, contact the McIntosh Memorial Library at 608-637-7151, "like" the Viroqua library Facebook page or visit www.mcintoshmemoriallibrary.org.



Jane Hamilton

For local writers, the Driftless Writing Center will present a craft talk by Hamilton Friday, August 3, at 7 p.m. at Encore, 114 S. Main St., Viroqua. This limited-admission event (\$20 per ticket) will include a presentation geared toward writers of all levels and genres, a Q&A and a book signing. For more information, go to www.driftlesswritingcenter.org or email driftlesswritingcenter@gmail.com.

Jane Hamilton is the author of the best-selling novels *The Book of Ruth* and *A Map of the World*. *The Excellent Lombards* is a coming-of-age story based in Wisconsin in which a young girl's love of land and family are impacted by change and the need to be true to oneself.



YOU BELONG AT ARTSPIRE

The La Crosse summer festival season begins with Artspire—the fifth annual downtown outdoor art event taking place June 8-9. Artspire highlights the area's rich history and growing reputation as a creative community while attracting and engaging diverse audiences and artists. The event will be held in and around the Pump House Regional Arts Center and throughout downtown.

Artspire begins 5 p.m. on Friday, June 8, with Ho-Chunk performers presenting a Woodland Dance, Hmong dancers and a concert by Cloud Cult, in addition to food vendors and a beer garden featuring Pearl Street Brewery. Saturday brings the Artspire Art Fair and Sale from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., featuring more than 50 visual artists. Guests are encouraged to explore downtown La Crosse afterward and return for more live music by The People Brothers Band at 8 p.m. Admission to this event is free. Find out more at artspire.thepumphouse.org.



PADDLES UP!

Spend a summer day on the river, dragon boat style! The Big Blue Dragon Boat Festival, held Saturday, July 21, will celebrate its sixth year of paddling and support for breast cancer efforts. Cheer on the 50-plus teams racing in Hong Kong-style dragon boats on the Black River at Copeland Park while enjoying music, food, and free family activities including games and inflatables, face painting and more. Funds raised will support the Mayo Clinic Health System-Franciscan Healthcare Center for Breast Care and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse.

The Big Blue Dragon Boat Festival promotes fitness and teamwork while raising funds for breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. Admission is free. Racing begins 8 a.m. Saturday and wraps up about 4 p.m. A breast cancer survivor recognition ceremony is held Saturday at 1 p.m. For more information, go to mayoclinichealthsystem.org/bigbluedragon or contact labigbluedragon@mayo.edu.



OUTSTANDING WOMEN

Nominations for YWCA La Crosse's annual Tribute to Outstanding Women, sponsored by Mayo Clinic Health System, are now being accepted. Awards are given in recognition of an individual's sense of YWCA La Crosse's mission, high level of personal and professional accomplishment, and positive contributions to the improved quality of life within the Coulee Region community. Anyone in the community can nominate an outstanding woman for this award.

The Tribute to Outstanding Women awards will be given out at a ceremony and dinner beginning at 5 p.m. on Thursday, November 8, at the La Crosse Center.

The nomination form deadline is Thursday, August 16, at 4 p.m. The nomination form can be found at www.ywcalax.org. For more information, please contact YWCA La Crosse at 608-781-2783.



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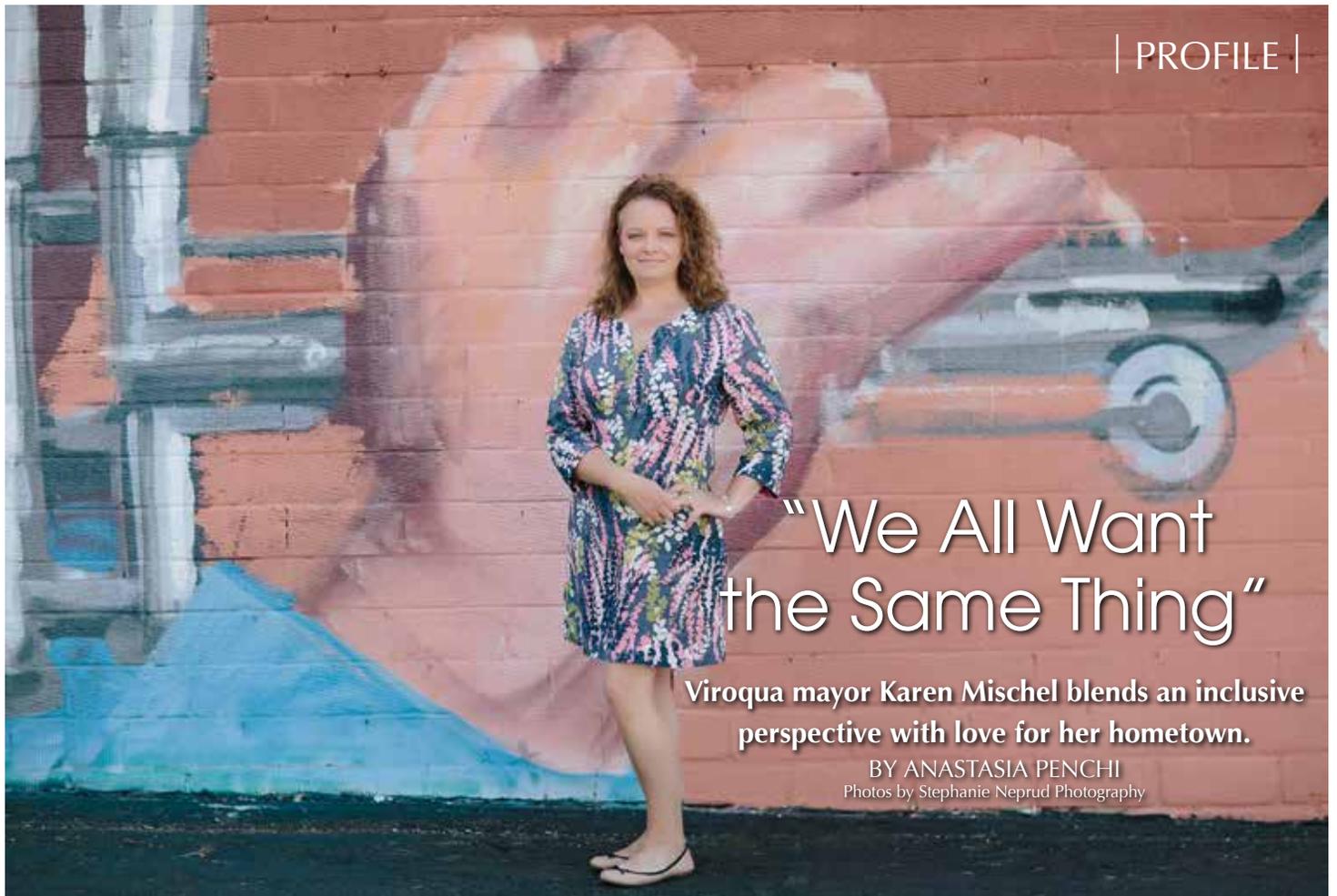
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“We All Want the Same Thing”

Viroqua mayor Karen Mischel blends an inclusive perspective with love for her hometown.

BY ANASTASIA PENCHI
Photos by Stephanie Neprud Photography

Viroqua is a town with a lot going on. Its arts scene is exploding, its downtown is thriving and it’s gained national attention for its culinary offerings. It takes all kinds of people to create a town like this, from the long-established farm families whose ancestors settled this place to the progressive and artistic folks who lend Viroqua its modern and quirky appeal.

It will take a distinct person to serve such a wide variety of people. Enter Viroqua’s new mayor, Karen Mischel.

Born in Boscobel, Mischel spent much of her childhood on dairy farms, working at her grandparents’ farm in Seneca and later with her father, who also worked on a farm near Rising Sun. Today she is an organic farm inspector.

As a youth, something inside Mischel longed for adventure, which led to a move to California after high school. But adventure kept calling, and she answered by spending 17 years traveling the world with the Merchant Marines, the quasi-military marine shipping industry that supports everything from the transportation of commercial goods, to research, to military enterprises.

Mischel’s next chapter will involve melding the distinct personalities that make up her hometown. “I don’t want us to lose our ancestry—our history in Viroqua,” Mischel says. “Change is good, but we also need to hold on to our roots.”

A love of adventure

After graduating from Viroqua High School in 1992, Mischel took

a job as a nanny in San Francisco for six years. During that time, she attended a California community college, pursuing a double major in sign language and education, as she wanted to teach deaf children.

Soon she was working on private yachts in the San Francisco Bay to earn more money. Next, she worked at a catering business with the personal chef to the admiral of the U.S. Coast Guard base in Alameda, California. Then came a job opportunity that required a decision to see the world or finish college.

She decided she could always go back to college.

As a chief steward in the Merchant Marines, Mischel was in charge of the department that handled food and sanitation on the ship. She would be gone for months at a time, then home for a month or two. A big portion of her time was spent on U.S. Navy ships, but she served on other vessels, too, including an ocean dredge. She spent lots of time in the Persian Gulf, and yes, there were occasions when diversion tactics were used to avoid pirates.

“I was either the most loved or most hated person on the ship—other than the captain,” she says.

Emily Rozeske, who was executive director of Viroqua Chamber Main Street when she met Mischel in 2010, says she always envied Mischel when she’d come back to Viroqua and tell her stories.

“She would remind me that the hours out at sea were long and the months away from home were hard, but the experiences were priceless,” Rozeske says. “It allowed her to see different cultures, beautiful landscapes, and keep at the forefront a perspective of



Mischel runs City Hall with a team of women (and one brave man). From left: Sarah Grainger, Lori Polhamus, Karen Mischel, Jodie Oliver and Cheryl Purvis. Missing are Kathy Volden and John Severson.



A historic town with modern appeal and so much going on, Viroqua is home to long-established and pop-up shops, nationally acclaimed dining and art.

inclusivity and unity among people.”

Mischel rode a camel amid the pyramids in Cairo; she crouched alongside women in a Korean market; and she joined three elderly men on a bench to watch a sunset above a beach filled with sea glass in Sicily.

“I was meeting people around the world and realizing we are all the same,” Mischel says.

A love of Viroqua

Still, Viroqua called. Mischel moved back once when she bought her grandmother’s house in Seneca in 2001. She tried working and living in Viroqua again, but eventually headed back out to sea.

She sold her grandmother’s house in 2009 and was living in Maryland when a random encounter with a rude person made her miss home again. In 2012, she bought a house in Viroqua that she used to walk past as a little girl without ever walking inside. She still lives there.

Mischel met her husband, David Higgins (they married in May), at a festival during one of her visits home. He left his job with the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis to move to the area, as she told him she wouldn’t leave.

Mischel retired from the Merchant Marines in early 2016, and by October of that year was engaged. She ran for a seat on the Viroqua Food Co-op Board of Directors and won. She helped oversee its current expansion project (doubling the size of the building) and is now vice president of the board.

Mischel needed new employment after leaving sea life and decided to become an organic farm inspector. She contacted both Viroqua-based certification businesses and started work in April 2016 at Nature’s International Certification Services.

She was also appointed to fill an empty spot on the Vernon County Board of Supervisors. While she agreed to finish the term, she knew she wanted to run for mayor next.

“Politics is a very big thing in my family,” she says. “It’s just kind of ingrained in us to make a difference.”

Amy Kleiber, who has known Mischel since they attended Seneca Elementary School together, says her friend has always been a pleasant, friendly and kind person. Mischel’s worldly experience and perspective will surely benefit Viroqua, she adds. “I am certain that in her new

role, Karen will be kind, fair and honest in her communications with the community.”

Combining both loves

As the first female mayor of Viroqua, Mischel didn’t engage in “dirty politics” during her campaign, but that doesn’t mean she could ignore all the false rumors.

No, she assured residents, she wouldn’t let chickens run free in the city. She does not have ties to terrorism—she just knows people all over the world. And she will not be changing the city’s name to “Driftless.”

As mayor, Mischel wants a thriving downtown with successful businesses and constituents who feel free to give input. She wants a community that is more inclusive and celebrates diversity. Transparency is key, she says, and a radio show might help provide that.

Mischel wants Viroqua to be a place where everyone feels safe and valued, and she says she will be a proactive mayor instead of reactive. She knows there will be pushback to some of her ideas, but “it’s important to do that whether there’s pushback or not.”

Longtime residents should be proud they helped make Viroqua an attractive place where other people want to live. She says it’s the ultimate compliment that new people won’t stop coming.

Viroqua is already under transformation; City Hall is almost exclusively women. The Chamber of Commerce is led by executive director Nora Roughen-Schmidt. Sue Noble leads the Vernon County Economic Development Association.

And lots of young girls in Viroqua tell Mischel they are excited to have a female mayor.

Mischel’s new job probably won’t be too different from her old one: mariner tours start with tension because some people don’t like change, but by the end of the tour, everyone walks down the gangway together.

“I love Viroqua,” she says. “My goal in the next two years is to work to show people we all want the same thing.” [\(crw\)](#)

Anastasia Penchi is a Vernon County resident with an optimistic view of Viroqua’s future. She can be reached at callmeloislane@hotmail.com.



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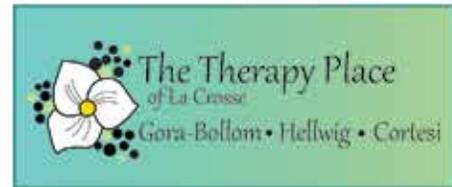


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ADVENTURES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Local women motivated by their passions start their own businesses.

BY SAMANTHA STETZER
Contributed photos



Kat Soper (far right) has brought a new flavor of yoga to La Crosse with PALM + PINE.



Amber Ruebel brings organic skin care products and services to La Crosse with Ophelia's Green Spa.

Kat Soper was working for the University of Minnesota shortly after earning a degree in public relations at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire when she discovered her passion.

For the Peterslie sisters—Azia, Tara and Dani—the drive had always been there, right in the shops they grew up in.

Amber Rubel assisted and partnered with others before venturing on her own with refined skills.

With their different backgrounds, diverse sets of skills and variety of passions, these five women are still taking a very similar path: Each has started her own small business in La Crosse, managing it day and night while navigating the adventure of small-business ownership.

Peterslie partners

If anyone was prepared for the day-to-day battles of owning and managing a business, it would be the Peterslie sisters.

The west end of Pearl Street in La Crosse has long been dominated by their parents' businesses, such as The Pearl Ice Cream Parlor and The Pearl Coffee House, but Dani, 29; Azia, 24; and Tara, 20, are hoping to leave their own mark.

The three sisters already help their parents with different tasks in the family businesses—Azia assists with bookkeeping, Dani manages teams of workers and Tara lends her culinary talents—but in 2017, the women started their own shop, Drift Mercantile, right in the heart of their family's Pearl Street complex.

The shop features locally made gifts and crafts, such as specialty

foods, apparel and gifts, travel essentials, artwork, music and jewelry. Drift Mercantile is designed to feature pieces that showcase the Driftless Area.

"We did a lot of traveling to other cities and saw all these cool local stores," Tara says. Likewise, travelers to La Crosse were making downtown a destination, hoping to find local stores there, too.

The sisters have picked up their parents' business model of turning downtown La Crosse into a destination, Dani says, understanding the hard work and dedication it takes.

"We definitely were prepared in the sense that we knew how much work it was going to be. When you leave, you never actually leave," Azia says.

"It's constantly with you," Dani adds.

While getting started was a natural extension of their lives as Peterslies, they caution others to recognize the amount of work owning a business takes before jumping in.

"A lot of people think owning a business means freedom and creating your own rules," Tara says. "(It's) sacrificing yourself for something that you should be really passionate about."

The sisters are doing just that: creating a space that exemplifies the community of La Crosse while keeping their family traditions alive.

Organically her own

Amber Rubel, 36, has been the support for other start-ups. In 2010, she began renting her services as an aesthetician, eventually



The Peterslie sisters—Azia, Tara and Dani—run Drift Mercantile, a source for local gifts and products on Pearl Street in La Crosse.

partnering with another woman who started her own business.

In December 2016, she decided it was time to leap on her own.

Rubel is the owner of Ophelia's Green Spa, which specializes in organic, natural skin-care regimens and products. The spa also offers nail care, facials and waxing.

Rubel was motivated by Eminence Organic Skin Care, which maintains an eco-friendly, natural and fresh vibe with all its products. Rubel offers the product line in her shop in La Crosse's Jackson Plaza, and she also partners with Urban Organics, a local beauty product company. In addition, Rubel donates her services to Ophelia's House, which offers transitional housing for women through the YWCA.

A typical day for Rubel involves consultations and facials, which feature skin care tailored to each client combined with Rubel's own tested methods and knowledge. Rubel is dedicated to helping her clients find the right care for their skin and maintaining a healthy, earth-friendly practice.

Having gained her skills, education and background within the spa profession, Rubel says she learned strategies for marketing and networking from her work with Eminence. Rubel also had much to learn about the ins and outs of finding her own space, understanding business financials and building a studio.

"It's just the balance of all different aspects," she says. "Not only are you treating the client, but you're also behind the scenes doing marketing and taxes."

It's a process that has shown Rubel her own inner strength and given her an appreciation for those who played the same supportive role she once did for others.

"Have a little faith in yourself and definitely make sure you have the income or a loan or someone there to help you through the process of it," Rubel says.

Peace, PALM + PINE

Just a few months after being introduced to core yoga, Kat Soper wanted more, so she began yoga teacher training and was certified in 2012. She and her husband, Luke, then ventured to San Diego, where Soper furthered her yoga education.

Just over two years ago, the Sopers moved to the La Crosse area,

and Soper began another adventure: creating her own studio, PALM + PINE.

Soper says the business adds another "flavor" of yoga to the area. PALM + PINE offers Vinyasa-style yoga, which guides participants through the transitions of yoga through breathing and movement in a "skillful way," she says.

Soper has experienced her own skillful transitions as she has established the studio. When she first began the PALM + PINE brand, she had a business partner. But when Soper became pregnant around the time they were set to open a studio, there was some hesitancy within the group. Soper and her husband decided to continue, parting with Soper's partner to pursue what was right for their family and what was needed in the community. PALM + PINE was going to open, baby and all.

"It's been a real testament," Soper reflects. "When you take the time to align with your highest self, being of service to something bigger and staying with that, the flow follows."

PALM + PINE is located in Jackson Plaza and offers a variety of classes. The practice is where Soper finds her strength, and the support of family and friends has allowed her to keep pursuing her goal. "Your willingness to succeed and share whatever your business may be has to be stronger than your willingness to fail," she adds.

Since the arrival of her first child, Lawson, four months ago, Soper says she has seen the need to set boundaries for personal and professional life. The desire to commit to a business 24/7 is there, but Soper says she has extended trust to the teachers she employs through PALM + PINE so she can spend more time with family.

As she moves through her own poses of entrepreneurship, Soper says she is beginning to understand the passion and motivations of empowerment, especially for women starting their own businesses.

"Individuals, especially women, can have a business and a family," Soper says. "It doesn't have to be one or the other. (It) requires you to have support and willingness to ask for help." 

Samantha Stetzer is a freelance writer and reporter within the Coulee Region. She is a local high school and college graduate who is addicted to peppermint tea, beagles and a good story.

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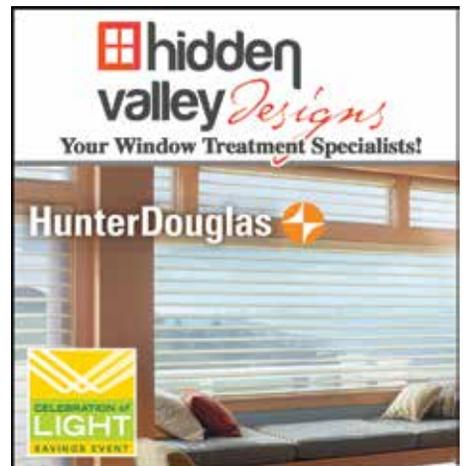
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Changing Lanes, Changing Lives

Cheryl Killilea has overcome challenges to help others do the same.

BY TALLITHA REESE
Contributed photo

Cheryl Killilea has embraced change as a path to something better throughout her life. In her new fitness and nutrition studio in Onalaska, Changing Lanes, she helps others change their own lives.

Breaking the cycle

Killilea moved to the Adams-Friendship area of Wisconsin from the Chicago suburbs when she was 12, after her mother left behind an alcoholic and abusive husband. “I turned to food as a way of comforting myself and dealing with my parents’ split,” explains Killilea. “When the food wasn’t enough, I turned to alcohol and got into some trouble in my teenage years.”

Killilea eventually dropped out of school her senior year to be with her boyfriend at the time, and at 19 she became pregnant.

“He was an alcoholic, into drugs, couldn’t keep a job, but I was in love—or so I thought,” says Killilea. “Once I found out I was pregnant, I knew I had to do something different.”

Facing change and challenges

When Killilea had her daughter, Skyla, she wanted to provide her the best life possible, which involved leaving her boyfriend. She received her GED and decided to continue her education.

“I looked at being a paralegal and found three schools in the state that offered the program, and one of them was in La Crosse,” she explains. “My daughter was 2½, and we packed up and left the safety of my mom and my friends to build a new life.

“We were on food stamps, we were on WIC ... it was nights of never-ending macaroni and cheese or ramen noodles to feed my daughter,” says Killilea. “But I knew that if I went to school and worked hard, I would give her a better life.”

After switching from paralegal studies to marketing, Killilea graduated with honors from Western Technical College, began a successful career in sales and earned a business degree from Viterbo. She also eventually met Jim, who became her husband and Skyla’s adoptive father. Together, they have a son, Isaac, now 15.

Killilea says the Family and Children’s Center Healthy Families program was a huge help during that time. From connecting her with other resources to helping her as a single parent, the center provided support and encouragement.

During those years, Killilea also began working out and researching nutrition and exercise, having struggled with her weight since her teen years. “I was learning how (exercise) can really help with sadness, stress and anxiety,” she says. “My daughter would work out with me, and I knew that was a big piece of being a good role model.”

Implementing change for others

Killilea was laid off from her corporate sales job in 2012, which led to a new career focus. She got her personal training and fitness instructor certifications and began working at the La Crosse Area YMCA.

About three years ago, she started doing training on the side under the business name Changing Lanes. She worked with clients in their homes with the goal of having a designated place where people could comfortably talk about weight and nutrition.

While attending a conference last fall, Killilea was asked why she hadn’t opened her own studio. Struck by the idea, she feverishly made plans on the plane home. On December 1, 2017, she officially opened Changing Lanes Fitness & Nutrition.

Since then, she’s left her job at the YMCA and is focusing on her business full time while looking at how she can help more people in new and different avenues, such as corporate wellness coaching. She also hopes that by continuing to share her story, she can reach young, single mothers and let them know there are resources out there to help. 

Tallitha Reese is a freelance writer and content manager based in Cashton. She owns Words By Reese, www.wordsbyreese.com.



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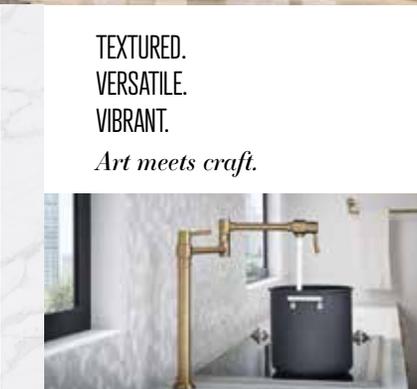

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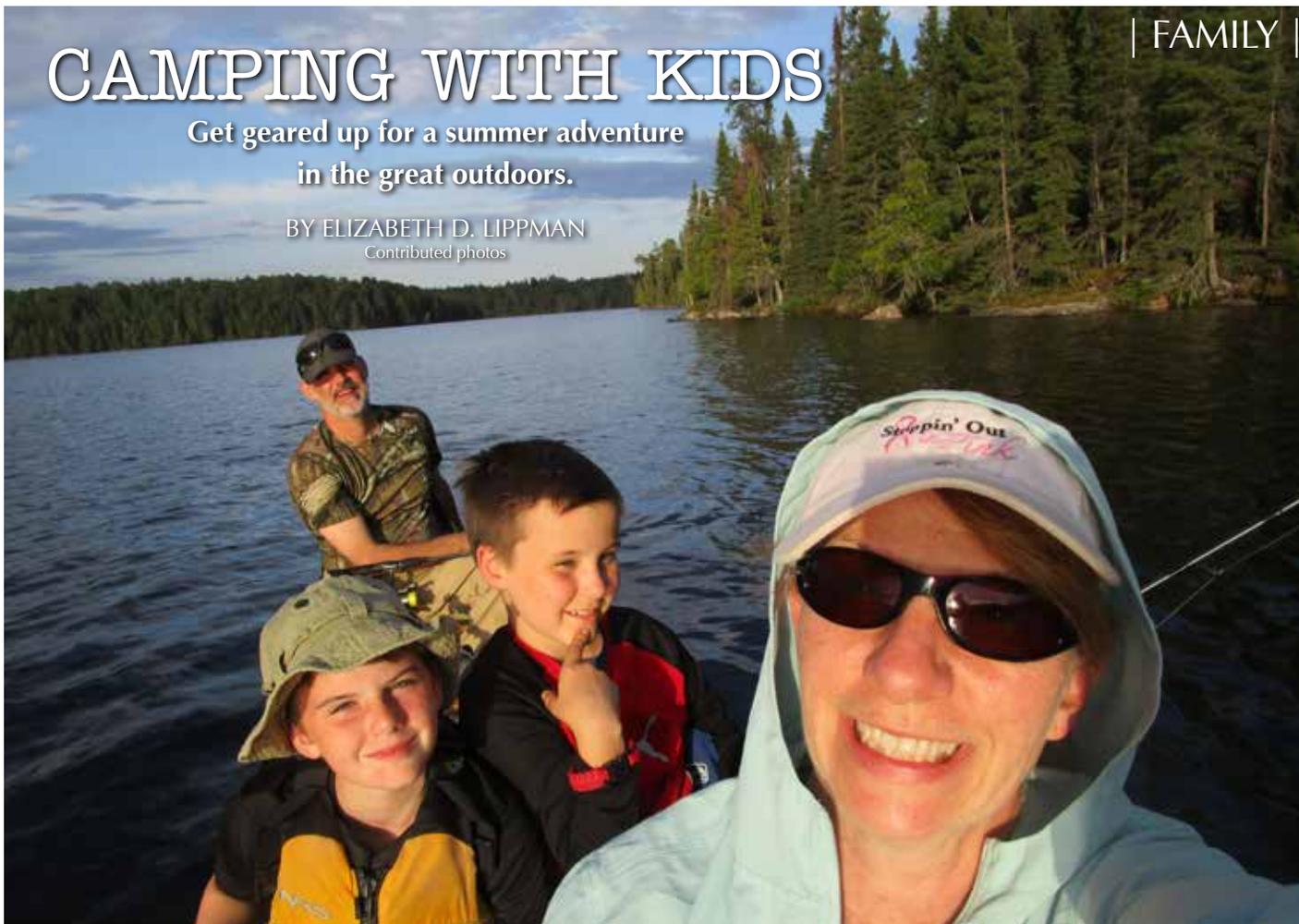
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CAMPING WITH KIDS

Get geared up for a summer adventure
in the great outdoors.

BY ELIZABETH D. LIPPMAN
Contributed photos



Joanne Mihm (front) and her family explore the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

Summer in the Coulee Region provides opportunities for family camping experiences as diverse as the Driftless Area landscape itself. The region's unique ecology and topography—defined by karst terrain, marshland, bluffs, forests and prairies—offer challenges that satisfy groups looking for action-adventure as much as they provide simple peace and quiet. The key, says area mom Joanne Mihm, is to “be brave.”

Planning and preparing

For families unaccustomed to managing the logistics of extended outdoor time, Mihm admits that the idea can be daunting.

When her kids (now 11 and 12) were younger, “we put up a tent in the backyard and had the kids camp out there,” she says. “They tried it alone and did end up coming back inside.” But she believes such activities are valuable and help transfer important skills that can later be applied to camping in the wilder outdoors. “Try a campground near your house,” she recommends. “We have lots near here.”

Regional offerings include state parks and reserves, as well as private and municipal campgrounds. A Google search is often all that's needed to develop a sense of what is available and where. But Mihm stresses the importance of planning ahead. Spring is best for making reservations, if needed, because holidays and popular vacation periods can create scheduling limitations.

Mihm has taken her kids camping since they were babies. They've done car camping with a tent as well as camping trips in northern Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area that required ultralight packing and moving from portage to portage—and canoeing between portages.

“We prepared them,” Mihm says of her boys on that trip, “but they're still little. They were carrying packs. They helped paddle. It was hard.” But once they got to the campsite, her boys began to enjoy the time, especially fishing. Mihm and her family stay anywhere from a full weekend to more than a week, depending on the particular camping adventure.

For families with a variety of ages of kids, she says, the older ones can help with the younger. That can be a real advantage.

Some campsites feature swimming holes and pools, and even go-carts and other kid-friendly activities. Such spaces are worth considering for groups with young ones who might not endure the challenges of more primitive camping willingly. But the entertainment-oriented camping sites might make for more crowded camping, too. The desired camping experience depends upon each particular family and their values.

“We try to balance some of the active, crowded camping with Boundary Waters,” Mihm says. And the lack of technology at some camping sites, she says, “is honestly one of the best parts. They grumble a little bit about it, but once we get there, they have a good time and are able to entertain themselves.”



Packing light is a consideration when a camping trip includes canoeing and portaging.



The Mihm family and friends enjoy low-tech entertainment in the great outdoors.

Gearing up

Local businesses like Sole Sport in Winona can offer great tips on outfitting a family. “Looking at outdoor gear focused on family camping, there have been amazing advancements over the past 10 years, including the availability of gear that will last more than a season,” says Justin Stout, Sole Sport store manager and buyer.

“When looking at good tents for family camping, there are a few large quality assurance pieces to take note of,” he adds. “These include anodized aluminum poles, more durable fabric and, most importantly, the ability to send it in to the factory to make repairs for extremely reasonable prices. The big thing to look at when investing in family camping gear is you truly get what you pay for. When you buy lower-quality gear, you will most likely have to buy the same gear five times over. If you spend a small amount more and invest in quality gear, you have the benefit of a piece that will last for years to come.”

Sole Sport and other local outdoor supply companies carry bags from Big Agnes and The North Face in a range of temperature ratings. “Big Agnes sleeping bags offer an integrated sleeping pad sleeve to replace your traditional air mattress sleep system,” Stout says. “This integration assures you will not slide off the air pad through the night. The pads that we carry also have the higher-quality aspect that will keep them going for years to come.”

Stout recommends durable backpacks, such as Osprey packs, which come in varieties such as weekend, day and weeklong packs designed for outdoor trekking and backpacking, as well as many urban travel models.

“We also carry a large line of Insect Shield clothing,” he continues, “that repels bugs through the use of permethrin woven into the fabric. This technology has the ability to repel ticks, mosquitoes and many other pests.”

Packing for the journey

Mihm definitely recommends that families pack as lightly as possible, no matter what their destination. “My husband has done a ton of research on ultralight camping,” she continues. “Two pairs of shorts, long pants, two T-shirts, swimsuit, rain jacket, sweatshirt. Small towels—the chamois type. Pack cards,” she adds, remembering time spent playing games with her family. “Don’t pack a board game or anything like that.”

Mihm says she goes all-out in terms of food. She chops up veggies and puts them in a large cooler with beverages. “Sometimes we cook steaks over the campfire,” she says. “A lot of times it’s hot dogs on a stick.”

She also recommends freeze-dried meals available in local stores or online. “My husband will buy a whole can of freeze-dried food, and we’ll put it in baggies and measure it out,” she says. “We do like to catch fish and eat them if they’re the right kind.”

“It is always important to keep hydration at the forefront of your mind,” Stout adds. “Sole Sport carries a full line of Hydro Flask products. These have the ability to keep water ice-cold while sitting in the beating sun for a full 24 hours.”

Armed with a few tips and resources, any family can partake in the bonding and nature-filled experience camping provides. “One of the best parts of the area we live in is the endless possibilities for getting you and your family in the great outdoors,” Stout says. “Some local favorites for family camping include Whitewater State Park in Elba, Minnesota, and Perrot State Park in Trempealeau. The state parks not only offer great family campsites, but plenty of beginner-friendly hiking trails and family-friendly programs to attend.” [\(crw\)](#)

Elizabeth Lippman is a school librarian and freelance editor based in Winona. She holds a master of liberal studies degree in literary nonfiction and Appalachian studies.

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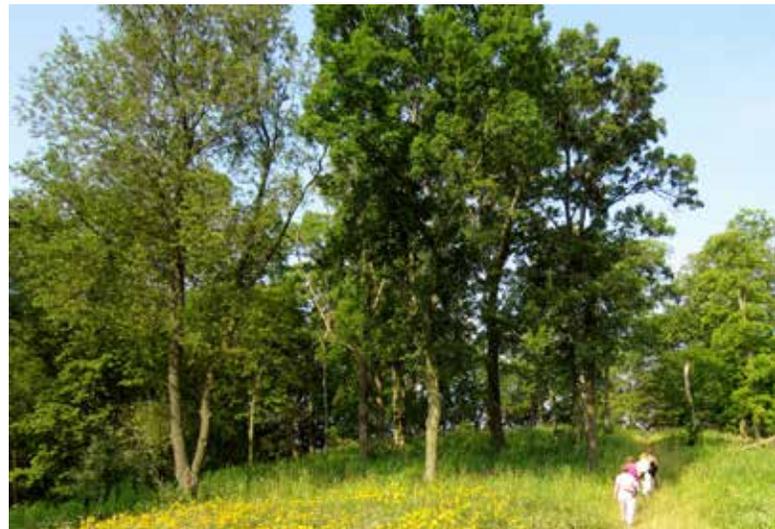
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Area hikers enjoy trails located on land preserved by the Mississippi Valley Conservancy.

Walking a Path to Wellness

MVC's hiking programs invite you to find outdoor adventure right here.

BY DOREEN PFOST
Contributed photos

Wouldn't it be wonderful to live in a place where you could roam at will over thousands of acres, through prairies blooming with wildflowers, along winding streams and up rugged trails to scenic lookouts? That place is right here in southwestern Wisconsin, thanks in part to the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, which in its first 20 years has protected nearly 20,000 acres of land from development and made much of that land available for the public—all of us—to enjoy while we reap the benefits of being outdoors.



Kathy Frise Groth



Carol Abrahamzon

dozen sites belong to the conservancy or have, through its help, become publicly owned. And the conservancy does not simply *allow* people to visit these places; they *want* us to get out and explore the land they've conserved. "Part of our mission is to get people out on the land and to provide environmental education," says executive director Carol Abrahamzon.

Get out and explore

The conservancy, an accredited land trust, protects wildlife habitat, scenic beauty and other rural values of lands in the Coulee Region. While some of the protected lands are privately owned, nearly two

To that end, the conservancy's website provides maps and overviews of its nature preserves, plus detailed driving directions. But sometimes we need a little encouragement to explore an unfamiliar place, and the conservancy helps with that as well, by offering two types of organized hikes, sponsored by local health care organizations. Linked to the Land is a series of monthly hikes and programs sponsored by Mayo Clinic Health System—Franciscan Healthcare. The quarterly Seasons in the

Coulee Region series is sponsored by Gundersen Health System.

Linked to the Land hikes include an educational element, so that participants learn something new with each outing, from wildflower identification to gardening for pollinators to the role of goats in habitat restoration.

Seasons in the Coulee Region hikes promote year-round recreation, whatever the weather. "We have four very distinct seasons in Wisconsin," says the conservancy's outreach coordinator, Kathy Frise Groth. "You can—and should—embrace each season and find things to do." For example, snowshoe hikes are popular in winter, while in the heat of the summer, the hikes explore cool, shady woodlands.

The next guided hike, on June 23, is at Wilton Hemlocks, a mosaic of sedge meadows and woodlands along the Kickapoo River in Monroe County. All guided hikes are open to the public and, through sponsorship by the two health care organizations, free of charge.

Healthy living made easy

Groth notes that, in addition to the benefits of physical activity, new research suggests that simply being outside is good for us. "Even spending a couple of minutes in nature reduces stress. The blood pressure drops." Youngsters, she's observed, become visibly calmer after sitting quietly outdoors for just a few minutes, perhaps with a brief spell of meditation.

Besides the guided hikes, the conservancy also promotes Hike to Wellness. Gundersen Health System employees participate, and Groth is looking to involve additional companies as well in this health and fitness program that encourages employees to hike on their own

at selected conservancy trails and to track their progress. "As health care costs keep going up, employers are looking for ways to help keep their employees healthy," she says. While exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle, "you have to make it easy." And what could be easier than stepping out the door for a walk?

One of the best benefits of a conservancy hike, says Groth, is "taking advantage of these beautiful places that are permanently protected and are there for everybody." She recalls a tour on which she took a group to Miller Bluff for a yoga class. "We were up there with a spectacular overlook of the river valley," she says. But in the midst of their standing poses and deep breathing, many of the participants acknowledged that had never known the bluff existed or that it was open to the public. Now they know what the conservancy does and about the land it protects. "My goal," says Groth, "is to get people to love what we do and to support us."

Abrahamson agrees, noting that many conservancy properties were donated by landowners or were purchased through donations from people who wanted to ensure that these lands would be part of our healthy landscape far into the future. "We want people to know these properties are there for them to use—and to realize what a gift each one is to the community."

Information about the Mississippi Valley Conservancy's land protection, as well as upcoming hikes and other events, is at www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org. 

Nature writer Doreen Pfost of Elroy is author of This River Beneath the Sky: A Year on the Platte. Hiking beside a river is her favorite form of recreation.

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UP IN A TREE

The Rustic River Shack is famous in Trempealeau and far beyond.

BY JULIE NELSON

Photos by Pete Nelson, *Treehouse Masters*



Tim and Samantha Leighty, with Pete Nelson of *Treehouse Masters* (center), crafted a one-of-a-kind backyard retreat.

“Maybe we could build a treehouse.” It was a casual comment made by Tim Leighty to his wife, Samantha, who had just noted the lack of yard space in their new home in Trempealeau. Tim’s offhand remark led to one thing, and then another, and before they knew it, the Leightys were searching for donated materials, being interviewed for a national television show and, finally, relaxing with adult beverages 16 feet above the ground.

Plans get off the ground

A few days after Tim made his backyard comment, Sam was talking with one of her coworkers at Gunderson Health System, who mentioned the Animal Planet show *Treehouse Masters* was looking to do a segment in this area. With some skepticism, Sam and Tim applied. Three days later, they got their answer: A contract to be a part of the television show was in the mail.

Soon the Leightys were meeting with the show’s host, Pete Nelson, and planning out the 10 days it would take the crew to complete their treehouse. If you’ve watched *Treehouse Masters* over the years, you know the structures have become more and more elaborate.

While the finished products make great TV, they also are logistically difficult to complete in time for all of the episodes of the season. So on season 10, *Treehouse Masters* worked with a different concept: Do one elaborate treehouse and another basic one in the same area at the same time. As fate would have it, an elaborate treehouse was being built in De Soto, and Trempealeau was just the right distance to make the two-for-one concept work.

Since Sam and Tim hadn’t thought enough about a treehouse to have many of their own ideas yet, they gave *Treehouse Masters* complete freedom to do whatever they wanted. “The crew loved it,” says Sam. “They told us the show started with small backyard treehouses and that this is the type of project they enjoy the most. While *Treehouse Masters* primarily designs and builds treehouses for adults, we have three daughters (8, 6 and 3) who will inevitably use the treehouse, too, so we needed to keep that in mind.”

Used Anew to the rescue

The first call *Treehouse Masters* made was to Used Anew in Sparta, a place that specializes in tearing down old barns and repurposing the



Entertaining is even better 16 feet off the ground at a unique bar built around a tree.



No treehouse would be complete without a rustic but functional kitchen.



The Rustic River Shack offers a lofty place to relax and enjoy the view.

lumber. Larry and Lu Ann Hutson were happy to work with the show and contributed the materials that allowed the show to build a space “way cooler” than what Sam had imagined: weathered barn siding, rusty corrugated steel, a cupola-style vent, pressed tin and old wooden pulleys. “We had most of the material Pete and the crew needed for the treehouse and were able to source a few additional items for them,” says Larry Hutson. “We were super pleased that Pete Nelson called us a ‘one-stop shop’ for all things reclaimed or repurposed, as that’s what we aspire to be for our customers.”

The theme of the treehouse is “Rustic River Shack,” appropriate for its location less than a mile from the Mississippi River. Friends donated old fishing nets, large pinewood boards, insulation and some poplar wood, and the show was able to repurpose fenceposts removed from the site in De Soto. The result is a comfortable multilevel space that looks weatherworn but is actually very rugged.

A climb up a steep but sturdy ladder takes you to the first level, where you enter the main room of the treehouse. The approximately 10-foot by 10-foot space is designed for a handful of adults to hang out after a day on the river, sip a few beverages and enjoy the evening. The door to the refrigerator (yes, there is electricity) looks vintage, but the unit is actually brand new. There’s a working sink, and the insulated living space (thanks to Used Anew) has four large windows that are totally removable in the summer.

A space for all ages

While this space was designed with adults in mind, show host Pete

Nelson knows what kids like and included a small loft in the room. Sam says they’ve already had as many as six kids in that cozy space, happily playing board games. The loft is held in place with metal braces and metal chain and can easily support more than those six little kids.

On the deck of that level is a bar built around one of the tree’s huge branches. This unique showpiece of the treehouse does present one of the challenges of building in a living tree: A tree grows, resulting in the addition of branch trimming to the list of ongoing maintenance in years to come.

Up a *really* steep ladder to the next level is the Eagle’s Nest, a 5-foot by 8-foot platform with a view of the river and the peaks in Perrot State Park. Fresh air and birdsong give the feeling of getting away from it all. A dumbwaiter, complete with pulleys reminiscent of an old commercial fishing boat, make it easier to get binoculars or some other forgotten item to the top.

The treehouse draws a lot of attention in the small town of Trempealeau, and the Leightys have enjoyed having friends over to share in the fun. If you missed the January 19 episode of *Treehouse Masters* on the Animal Planet network, you can catch it online at www.animalplanet.com/tv-shows/treehouse-masters, with more photos and information at www.nelsontreehouse.com. The show will make you remember how much fun it is to be up in a tree. 

Julie Nelson never wished for a pony as a kid, but a treehouse was a whole other matter ...

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All the Things We Love

Lovechild is more than a restaurant; it's a lifestyle.

BY JESSIE FOSS
Contributed photos



Sophisticated comfort food combines with a romantic and cozy atmosphere to create the lifestyle that is Lovechild.



Joan Ferris, restaurant manager, and Jay Sparks, chef, are the heart and soul of Lovechild.

To many, a restaurant may just be a place to grab a bite to eat. A convenience. Somewhere to celebrate.

A restaurant can be all this and more. It can also be the way in which one lives: a lifestyle. Such is the case for Lovechild, located in downtown La Crosse.

Lovechild was born of the shared passions of owners Joan Ferris and Jay Sparks. The duo have worked for more than 25 years together at D'Amico and Partners, which develops and operates restaurants in the Twin Cities and Naples, Florida. Sparks operated the back of the house as executive chef, and Ferris cared for the front of the house as managing director.

The two knew they would open a restaurant together one day and assumed it would be in the Twin Cities. However, when the time seemed right to pursue opening a restaurant, the perfect space happened to be in La Crosse.

Ferris grew up in the Coulee Region; her father owned a shoe repair shop on Main Street in La Crosse, and she and her siblings worked there. But working in local restaurants became Ferris's passion and an escape from the shoe repair shop.

Years later, in 2016, Ferris found herself again in La Crosse, this time on Third Street in a building formerly occupied by a Hooters chain restaurant. In creating Lovechild, Ferris and Sparks transformed the space. Their restaurant features large windows, exposed brick, heavy red velvet curtains and gold velvet booths. Ferris wanted every seat to feel like the best in the house.

It was important to Ferris and Sparks that the lines between work and play be blurred at Lovechild. They wanted the restaurant to be more about life and less about work. That was the idea behind the open kitchen, which allows the couple to interact throughout the evening and for Sparks to see diners enjoying his cooking.

A dinner party every night

"Sophisticated comfort food" is how Lovechild's fare is described on its menu. When coming up with this concept, Ferris says she and Sparks wanted Lovechild to be all about their favorites.

"We thought, let's have the theme of the restaurant be all the things we love," she says. "We only want to serve food we crave for dinner. Foodies will appreciate and love it, but maybe those who aren't as adventurous will try different things, too."

The menu features several pasta dishes, meat entrees, desserts, wine, beer and a happy hour menu. Sparks aims to use locally sourced ingredients whenever possible and partners with nearly a dozen local vendors.

Ferris and Sparks have been overjoyed by the reception Lovechild has received since opening in December 2016. While it may have the

reputation of being a romantic destination, Ferris says Lovechild is perfect for any dinner out, including family dinners, and the staff is charmed when kids choose the restaurant for their birthday dinners. Lovechild even offers a kids' menu.

Besides patrons' love of the restaurant, other accolades continue to pour in for Lovechild. *Food and Wine* named the restaurant Wisconsin's most romantic, and Sparks was named a 2018 semifinalist for the Best Chef in the Midwest Award. The award is part of the James Beard Awards, which celebrate excellence in cuisine throughout the United States.

It is those who have become regulars at the restaurant that continue to delight Ferris and Sparks. She describes the La Crosse community as friendly and welcoming.

"It now feels like friends coming in," Ferris says. "Every night feels like a dinner party, and I don't have to do the dishes."

Lovechild is located at 300 Third Street South in La Crosse and is open from 5 to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 5 to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

RICOTTA GNOCCHI WITH TOMATO AND BASIL SAUCE

Gnocchi

- 1 lb. fresh ricotta
- 4.5 oz. all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 egg
- Semolina flour

Combine all ingredients but the semolina flour. Prepare a sheet pan with a generous amount of semolina flour. Roll a chunk of dough into a ½-in.-thick log on a lightly floured surface. Place the log onto the prepared sheet pan and roll it in the semolina, completely coating the log. Repeat with remaining dough.

Line up several logs and cut them into ½-in. pieces. Place the pieces on a separate sheet pan lined with parchment and sprinkled with semolina.

Bring salted water to a rolling boil, add gnocchi and cook until they float to the surface; strain and remove to tomato and basil sauce (see below). Cook in the sauce for another 2 minutes. Serve immediately with grated cheese and freshly ground black pepper.

Tomato and Basil Sauce

(Yields 3-4 cups)

- 2 28-oz. cans Muir Glen whole, peeled tomatoes
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 8 garlic cloves, smashed
- ½ oz. fresh basil, stems included
- 1 serrano pepper, seeds intact (you can substitute 2 tsp. chili flakes)
- 1 tsp. kosher salt

In a medium-size pot, add whole tomatoes and their juices, making sure to crush the tomatoes by hand or with a potato masher. Place over medium-high heat and cook until tomatoes have reduced by a third and the sauce begins to thicken. Stir occasionally.

In a smaller pot, add olive oil, garlic, fresh basil and serrano peppers. Place over low heat and cook until the basil begins to crackle and change color. This should take 15-20 minutes. Remove pan from heat and set aside to cool, allowing the flavors to infuse the oil.

Once the tomatoes have sufficiently thickened, pass them through a food mill if you want a smoother texture; otherwise you can leave it as is. Strain the infused oil into the sauce. Add the kosher salt, return to low heat and simmer 15-20 minutes. Check seasoning.

TORTELLI WITH ASPARAGUS, CHIVE OIL AND PARMESAN

Tortelli

(Yields 75 pieces)

- 8 oz. ricotta cheese
- 2 oz. asparagus, blanched 2-3 minutes, shocked in ice and cut into small segments
- 2 T Parmesan cheese, grated
- ½ tsp. salt
- 75 pieces fresh pasta, cut into 3-in. circles

Combine all ingredients but pasta in a food processor and process for 2 minutes. Taste for seasoning.

Fill a pastry bag with the filling and pipe out 1 tsp. of filling just below the center of a pasta circle. Using a brush, sprayer or fingertip, lightly moisten the top of the circle with water. Fold over and press together to form a half-moon shape. Place on semolina-dusted parchment and continue to finish tortelli.

Sauce

(Serves 4 at 6-8 pieces per serving)

- 2 oz. Westby salted butter
- 12 asparagus stalks, blanched and cut into ¼-in. or smaller segments
- 2-3 T pasta water (from cooking tortelli)
- 4 tsp. green onion/chive oil (see right)
- 2-3 T Parmesan cheese, grated
- Freshly grated black pepper
- Squeeze of fresh lemon juice

Green Onion/Chive Oil

- 1 oz. chives, cut into fine rings
- 1.5 oz. green onion, cut into fine rings (mostly green top)
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. lemon juice

Combine the chives and green onions with olive oil, salt and lemon juice. Set aside.

Bring salted pasta water to boil, drop in tortelli and cook for 3-4 minutes, until edges are fairly tender.

Place butter in large sauté pan and heat over medium flame; add asparagus pieces and warm.

Drain pasta, reserving some of the pasta water, and add to the sauce. Carefully toss tortelli with melted butter and asparagus. Add a couple of spoons of grated Parmesan and continue to toss. If pasta starts to get a little dry, add a bit more pasta water.

Divide between four bowls or serve on a platter. Spoon chive oil mixture over the top and squeeze a few drops of lemon juice. Add a little more grated cheese if you like and a few cracks of freshly ground pepper. (crw)

Jessie Foss is a freelance writer who lives in La Crosse. She enjoyed learning about one of La Crosse's most talked-about restaurants and looks forward to dining at Lovechild.

Remember Rosé

Your phone pings: It's a text from your best friend from college, and she's dropping by this afternoon. The decision about what to serve is important and immediate: Hmm ... summer ... light ... cool ... rosé.

Whether dry, semisweet or sweet, a rosé wine is a great summer afternoon refresher, served with a light appetizer or chips.

Rosés are made using two different processes. One involves quickly pressing recently harvested red grapes, and the other involves blending white and red juice or wine. A winemaker then chooses the sweetness level of the finished wine based on the acidity and strength of flavor.

Whatever the process or sweetness level you prefer, this summer, remember rosé!

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Throughout all four seasons, and in each month of the year, Patricia and Morgan Paulson rose to their personal kayak challenge.

| WOMEN IN THE REGION |

TAKE ME TO THE RIVER

A mother-daughter team kayak the Root River—in every season.

BY JUDITH MUNSON
Contributed photos

“What? You’re crazy!” was the common refrain heard by Patricia and Morgan Paulson upon their return from a kayaking trip early one frigid morning last December.

But they’d been out there: mom, daughter and Buddy the bichon poodle, all adorned with Santa hats and staying true to their resolution to kayak the Root River every month of 2017.

Morgan graduated from college in December 2016 and returned home to Houston, Minnesota, where her mom, Patricia, had just read about two men from Filmore County who kayaked the Root River every month that year.

“We just bought kayaks on Black Friday, and I said to her, ‘We should do this challenge for 2017,’” says Patricia. “We shook on it and started the next month.”

“We just kept going”

The Paulsons live a quarter mile from a point where they can enter the river at Mound Prairie. Longtime canoers, they enjoyed the ease of transporting the much lighter-weight kayaks. They planned to be out two to three hours in warmer months, but just an hour in winter.

“It was a lot of fun,” says Patricia. “We’d go downriver to Bush Valley by Bush Creek, and if it was really cold, we’d just layer up. Even Buddy. He got on his sweater and off we’d go. Every month, he was our scout. December, our last month, was so cold, we were only out about 20 minutes, but we made it.”

Mishaps happened, such as when the mother-daughter duo set out on Valentine’s Day, when ice was starting to form along the river’s

edge. “I went to push off the ice, the kayak got stuck, and I fell over, ending up partway in the water. We had extra sweatshirts along, so we just kept going.”

Buddy, too, went for a slight polar plunge inadvertently. “We came up to a sand bar Buddy was familiar with, and he thought he could jump onto it, but it was covered in ice,” says Patricia. “Buddy couldn’t get a grip and slid down the sand bar, so we grabbed him by the collar, pulled him back up, wrapped him in our towel and he sat in our laps the rest of the way.”

Seasons and scenery

“It’s just the most beautiful river,” Patricia continues. “To see the change of scenery from brown and snowy when we began to the green pastureland of spring. We happened to be out on the most beautiful day in October, and by the time we finished, the sun was setting against the colors. It was just gorgeous.”

Patricia and Morgan have always been close, living in the country with horses and taking Buddy out on just about every adventure they’ve had, and this mission brought them even closer, says Patricia. “We’re a good little team. It’s been fun to have (Morgan) home.”

At the end of 2017, they both wondered, “Now what are we going to do?” With both of them working, time is more elusive, but they hope to follow the same routine another year, except on horseback. [\(crw\)](#)

Judith Munson is a freelance journalist and memoir writer living in western Wisconsin.

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Aerial artist, teacher and entrepreneur Francia demonstrates the possibilities inherent in ropes and one's own body.

Welcome to the Cirkus!

Life is a circus for Viroqua aerial arts trainer Francia.

BY LEAH CALL
Contributed photos

Did you ever want to run away and join the circus? Do you imagine flying through the air with the greatest of ease, hanging high above the ground from ropes or brightly colored silks, tumbling, juggling, walking on stilts? Well, you're in luck. Bricolage Cirkus in Viroqua offers beginner and intermediate classes for those adventurous enough to try something new.

"Anyone can try circus arts. It is not just reserved for the young," says Bricolage owner and circus arts teacher Francia, who prefers to go by only her first name. "If you are older, you have to be a bit more patient with yourself, but it is not a competition. We don't compete, we perform."

Athleticism and art

A triathlete and marathon runner, Francia was first introduced to aerial and circus arts at a festival in California. As she watched the skilled performers combine fitness with artistry, she knew she had to try it. "When I went back to San Francisco, which is where I grew up, I enrolled myself in the San Francisco Circus Center," recalls Francia. "It all started as just a hobby."

At that time, Francia worked full time as a scientist involved in cancer research, but her love for her hobby grew into a calling. She was intrigued by the physical demands as well as the beauty of aerial arts. "It is an art in itself," she says. "It's combining athleticism and art. I had to work on my flexibility. I had to work on my creativity. All these new challenges were really attractive to me."

Three years later, Francia moved to Eugene, Oregon, where she gave up her day job to teach circus arts full time at Bounce Gymnastics and Circus Art Center. Since then, she has traveled the world learning and teaching circus arts. "I taught mostly in Germany, Estonia and France. I've also taught in Spain and Finland, and taken lessons from specific instructors."

As a performer and teacher, Francia is multidisciplined in the circus arts. "I do everything: ropes, silks, trapeze and a lot of ground work, floor acrobatics," she says.

Come one, come all

Two years ago, Francia founded the area's first circus arts gym in Viroqua. She currently teaches classes in aerial silks, trapeze, corde lisse



(aerial rope) and acrobatics to adults and children ages 6½ and up. The classes run as seven-week sessions, but students can start midsession for a prorated fee.

Circus training enhances balance, muscle control and strength. “You don’t need to have any previous experience. That is where aerial arts are going more mainstream. It’s like a gym membership. You are climbing, you’re stretching. It’s like swimming but in the air. Every muscle is being used, including your mind.”

After teaching aerial arts for nearly a decade, Francia now feels success in the accomplishments of her students. Two past students are pursuing professional careers in circus arts, and another is headed to École nationale de cirque, known as National Circus School, in Montreal, Canada, where many Cirque du Soleil performers train. “It’s a lot of work, but they can achieve it,” says Francia.

Youth and adults interested in trying this unique physical art form can find the class schedule on the Bricolage Cirkus website, www.bricolagecirkus.com. Classes currently take place at the Ark in Viroqua, but renovation has begun on the former Viroqua public library building, which will become a dedicated circus arts gym. Francia expects to be teaching in the new facility by late 2018 or early 2019.

Her vision for expanding circus arts in the Coulee Region doesn’t stop there. “I’m hoping to bring in a lot of my circus professional friends to come here and teach. I’d also like to have a contemporary circus festival someday. In America, circus has always been kind of kitschy. That is not the style I promote. There is more to it, more theater and emotion, more avant-garde.”

Francia enjoys watching the change in her students as they master the skills. “You gain a lot of confidence in yourself. You learn to trust yourself in really uncomfortable situations, uncomfortable positions, and you’re still having fun. I can only guide and teach; all the work is done by them.” *(crw)*

Westby-based freelance writer Leah Call admires Francia’s skills and adventurous spirit.

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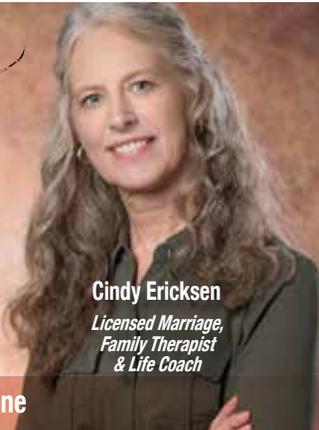
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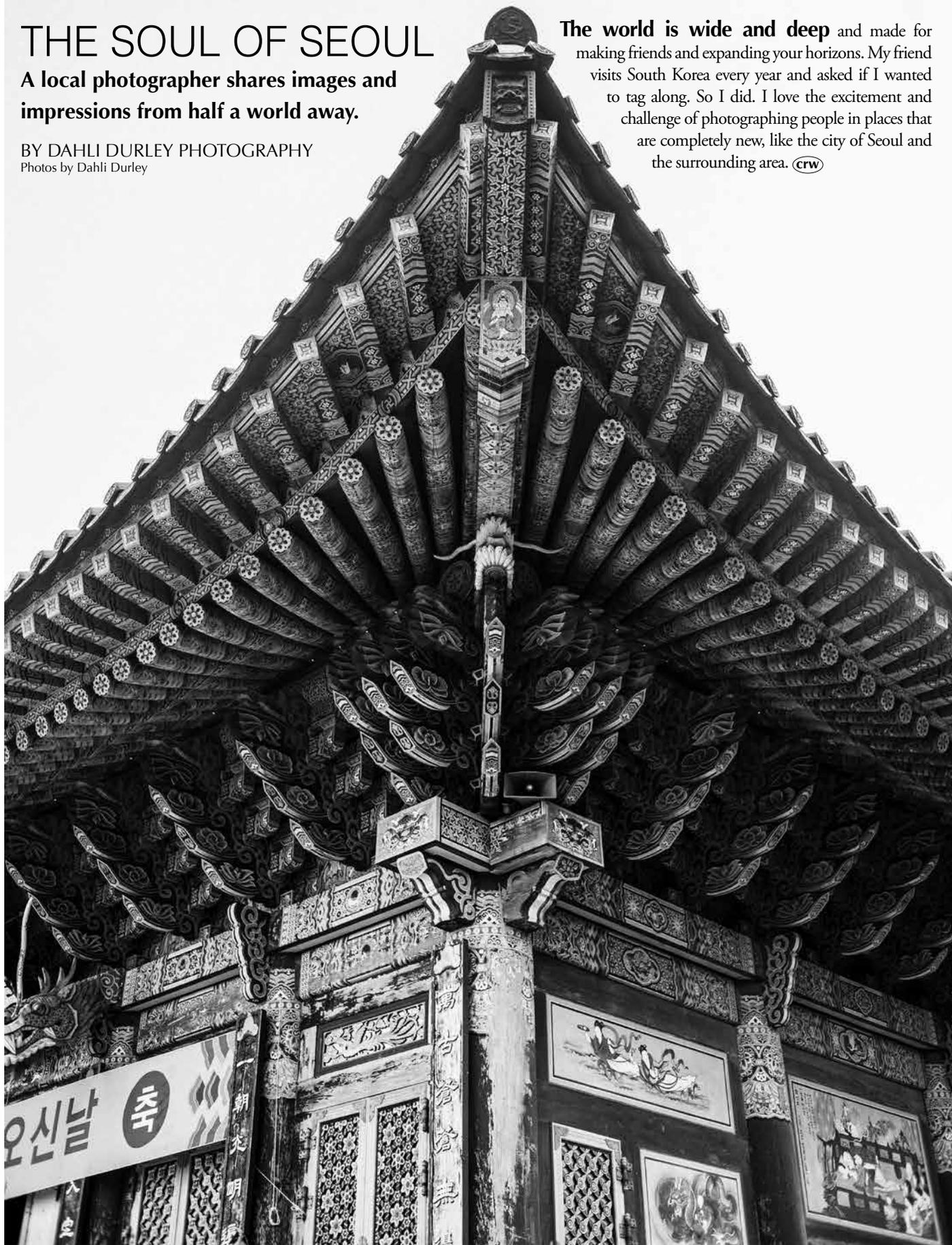


THE SOUL OF SEOUL

A local photographer shares images and impressions from half a world away.

BY DAHLI DURLEY PHOTOGRAPHY
Photos by Dahli Durley

The world is wide and deep and made for making friends and expanding your horizons. My friend visits South Korea every year and asked if I wanted to tag along. So I did. I love the excitement and challenge of photographing people in places that are completely new, like the city of Seoul and the surrounding area. 



A happy couple takes a break from making Kkultarae, a dessert made of honey.



A shop owner waits for tourists to purchase souvenirs.



Haedong Yonggungsa Buddhist Temple rests on the seaside of Busan, South Korea.



A grandfather bikes his granddaughter to school through the streets of Seoul. Her facemask filters the air pollution that blows over the sea from China.



Locals shop for everyday goods at a busy street market.



Some things never change from culture to culture, like children cuddling close to their moms.



Dragons guard the temple grounds.

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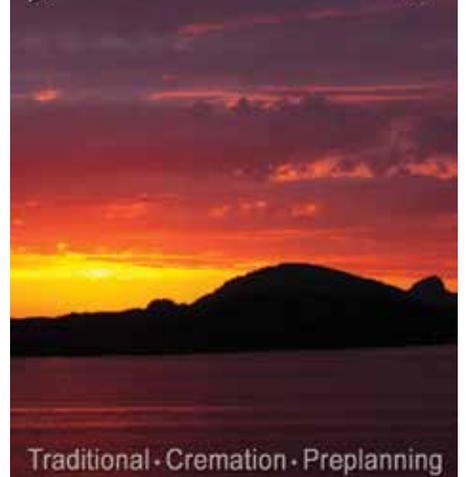
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Dolores Spies is the force behind many new homes in a revitalized Washburn neighborhood—the one in which she grew up.

BUILDING ON A PROMISE

Delores Spies takes joy in revitalizing city neighborhoods.

BY MARTHA KEEFFE

Contributed photos

Delores Spies, who owns Spies Construction LLC with her husband and three sons, likes what she does. “Well, I’m kind of ... what am I?” laughs Spies when asked what she likes best about working in construction. “I’m the public relations person, the designer and the coordinator. I’m even the lunch wagon!” But it’s more than the hands-on work of choosing cabinets, lighting fixtures and paint colors and providing the occasional lunch for the crew that keeps her motivated after nearly 40 years on the job. “I really like to show properties and visit with the new owners. I like to see them happy, and it’s nice to know that we’re playing a part in revitalizing the city.”

Born and raised in La Crosse, Spies worked as a secretary at the former Heileman Brewery for six years before joining forces with her husband in his construction company. “In the beginning, my husband built a lot of agricultural buildings. Then we bought some foreclosures, and I did all the repainting. While I was helping out with the foreclosures, I realized how much I liked doing that type of work.”

A city partnership

During the 1990s, the Spieses began building spec and presold homes throughout the Coulee Region. By chance, they fell into an opportunity that ushered them into the business of neighborhood revitalization. “I just happened to be down at City Hall one day in 2014 and was asked if we were interested in buying a lot from the city,” says Spies, explaining that the city had already torn down the house that sat on it. “We proceeded with the purchase, which made us the first private contractor to partner with the city on buying and building on their lots.”

As it happened, the lot was located in the same neighborhood where Spies grew up.

The Spieses decided to use that site to build on spec and were encouraged when the property sold before the house was even built. “There have been a lot of changes in these neighborhoods since I lived there,” says Spies, noting that some of the areas that were affected by neglect are beginning to experience a positive transformation. “I think more and more people want to move into La Crosse. It’s close to downtown, and people like the feeling of being in a neighborhood.”

A city promise

Since then, the Spieses have built on eight core city lots, some of which have been connected to the La Crosse Promise program. According to its website, La Crosse Promise works to economically transform the city of La Crosse through a strong commitment to education and urban transformation by offering economic incentives through scholarships to individuals or families who build a new home or renovate a home in selected neighborhoods. The first La Crosse Promise home was built by Spies Construction and was completed in the fall of 2016—a project that Spies believes contributes greatly to the city’s increased vitality. “La Crosse Promise offers a lot of incentives for people to move into the area, and I think that encourages city living,” says Spies. “Once people in the neighborhood see an attractive new home go up, they become motivated to make upgrades to their properties, too.”

“When people are hesitant about the area,” Spies continues, “I tell them to give the city five to 10 years. This will be like a new part of the city. Change doesn’t happen overnight.”



"My motto is 'be positive,'" says Spies.

Making a positive impact

Always on the lookout for city lots, the Spieses have secured contracts to build a "twindo" and to do extensive remodeling on other properties. But most notable are their plans to build 10 single-family homes on one-and-a-half acres at the former naval reserve center located at 2226 Green Bay Street. "I envision manageable one-, one-and-a-half- and two-story cottage-style homes that work well for people who are looking to downsize," says Spies.

Projected to take approximately five years to complete, the project is one Spies is eager to get started. "It's in a great location with a lot of visibility," she says. "And it's another great example of what's being done to revitalize the city."

Considering how excited she is about making a positive impact on the city's neighborhoods, it comes as no surprise that Spies plans to continue working in the construction business. And while she reiterates that it's her fondness for her work that keeps her going, being able to work with her family makes it fun. "It's amazing that we can all work so well together. And working with my husband is great," she says, while jokingly adding one caveat about loving her job. "He doesn't get why I always have to bring my work with me when we go on vacation." **(crw)**

Martha Keefe lives and writes in the neighborhoods of La Crosse. She looks forward to the continued revitalization of the city.

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| ACCOMPLISHMENTS |



New Opportunities at NUW

Danica Hengel has been promoted to office manager/PEMF technician at Naturally Unbridled Wellness. Hengel joined NUW nearly two years ago and has mastered running the office at the ever-expanding holistic therapies center. Angie Klaeser steps into the role of receptionist after a long career at Mayo. Naturally Unbridled Wellness continues to expand its services, now including Pulsed Electromagnetic Field Therapy, a NASA-utilized therapy that supports cellular healing and function. NUW is offering PEMF test-drive packages of three one-hour sessions for just \$99. Learn more at www.naturallyunbridled.com. Naturally Unbridled Wellness is located in Onalaska.



Women's Fund Welcomes New Executive Director

The Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse is pleased to introduce new Executive Director Kaycie Green. Green brings enthusiasm and experience with nonprofits, including Main Street Alliance of Vermont and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, to the Women's Fund. With a degree in public relations from Syracuse University, Green is looking forward to telling women's stories. She is committed to making a difference for women in our community because she has seen in her own family the impact it can have. Meet Green and the other remarkable women behind the Women's Fund at the Fall Luncheon on Thursday, October 18.



Attorney Dawn Marie Harris Celebrates 25 Years of Practicing Law

Dawn Harris has achieved 25 years of legal practice, all within the La Crosse community. Her independent client base and successful business practices allowed her to open her own law firm, D.M. Harris Law LLC, in 2008. Her boutique law firm, located at 201 Main St., Suite 620, La Crosse, focuses on employment, labor, family, divorce and general litigation matters in a client-focused, compassionate and responsive manner. She has won a \$1.3 million jury verdict (April 2011) and argued before the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Harris participates in joint representation with her clients every step of the way. For more information, visit www.dmharrislaw.com.

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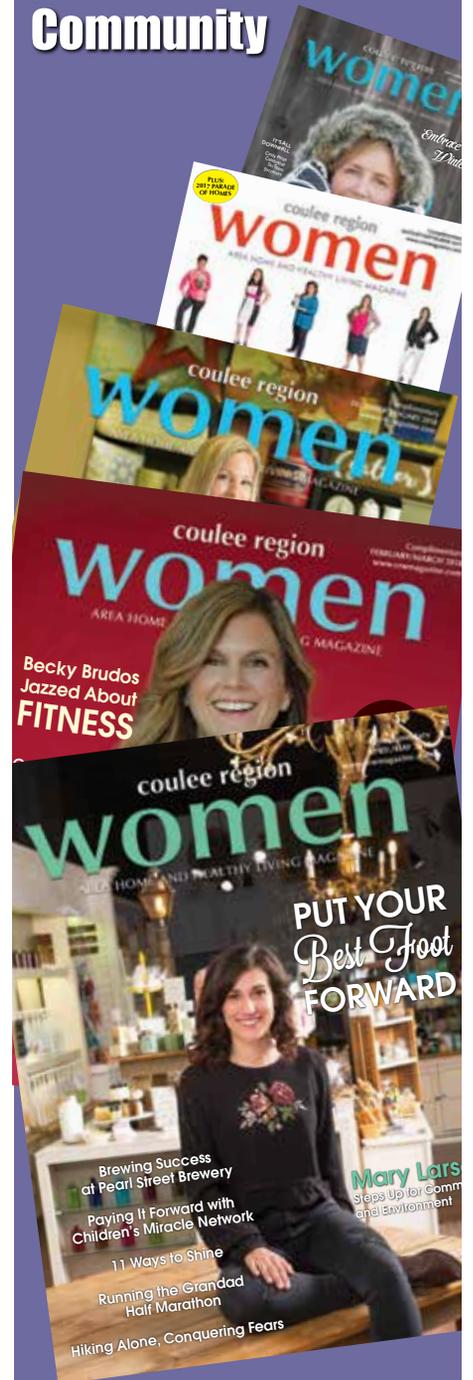
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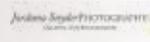
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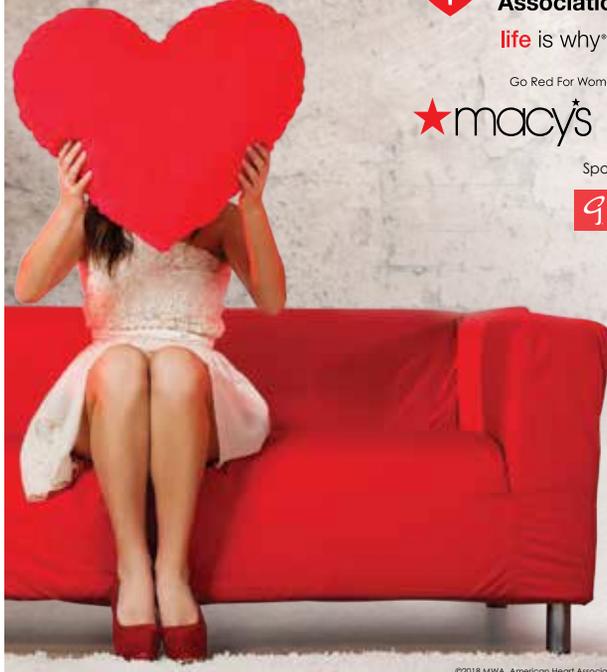
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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

ONGOING EVENTS

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

Business Over Breakfast La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce, 4th Wed. every month, 7:30-8:45 a.m. Preregister 608-784-4807, lacrossechamber.com.

Coulee Region Professional Women (CRPW) 4th Tues. of each month, Shelli Kult, crpwomen@gmail.com.

La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce monthly breakfast meeting, 2nd Mon. of each month, 7 a.m., Radisson. Admission is \$5 and includes breakfast. lacrossechamber.com.

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

La Crosse Toastmasters Club 2nd and 4th Tues. of each month, 7 p.m., Gundersen Health System Urgent Care Bldg., Basement, 1830 S. Ave., La Crosse.

League of Women Voters 2nd Tues. of each month, noon, Radisson Hotel, Nancy Hill, 608-782-1753, nfill@centurytel.net.

NAMI Family Support Group 2nd Mon. of each month, 6:30 p.m., South Side Neighborhood Center, 1300 S. 6th St., La Crosse.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Women's Alliance of La Crosse (WAL) 2nd Thurs. of each month, noon, The Waterfront Restaurant, Kasey Heikel 608-519-8080, drkasey@naturallyalignedchiro.com.

CALENDAR EVENTS

June 2, Holmen Area Aquatic Center Opening Day, 12-8 p.m., Holmen.

June 2, June Dairy Days Parade, noon, West Salem.

June 2, Superhero Saturday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Valley View Mall, www.myvalleyview.com.

June 2, Tomah Kite Fest, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Tomah High School Varsity Soccer Fields, Tomah.

June 2, Winona Farmers' Market, 7:30 a.m.-12 p.m., Midtown Foods, Winona.

June 2, Caledonia Street Block Party, 2-9 p.m., 1214 Caledonia St., rain site Pearl Street Brewery.

June 2-9, PFC Bike Week La Crosse, People's Food Co-op, La Crosse, www.pfc.coop.

June 7, Beach Boys, La Crosse Center, www.lacrossecenter.com.

June 7, YWCA Taste of the Coulee Region, 5:30-8 p.m., Celebrations on the River, www.ywcalax.org.

June 8-9, Artspire Festival, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Downtown La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org/artspire.

June 8-10, Gathering's Pet Expo, Valley View Mall, www.myvalleyview.com.

June 8-17, *Ramona Quimby*, 7 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

June 10, Mayo's Best Baby Shower in Town, 12-3 p.m., Children's Museum of La Crosse, www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org.

June 12-13, Environmental Explorers, Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center-USGS, La Crosse, 608-785-6500.

June 13, Clown Camp, 6-8 p.m., Children's Museum of La Crosse, pre-registration required, www.funmuseum.org.

June 15, Red Cross Blood Drive, 12:30-5 p.m., Valley View Mall, www.myvalleyview.com.

June 15-16, Onalaska Community Days, American Legion, Onalaska, www.onalaskacommunitydays.com.

June 16, La Crosse County Dairy Breakfast, 6-11 a.m., Creamery Creek Holsteins.

June 16, Midsummer Fest, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

June 22-24, Rotary Rock-N-Ribs, all day, Valley View Mall, www.rotaryrocknribs.com.

June 22-July 1, *Hair*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun, Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse.

June 22-July 30, Great River Shakespeare Festival, Winona State University, www.grsf.org.

June 23, AAMAN's Juneteenth African American Historical Living Tour, tours begin 11:30 a.m., Poage Park, pre-registration required, http://aaman.us/Tour.html.

June 27, La Crosse Area Day, Miller Park, www.explorelacrosse.com/lacrosseareaday.

June 30, Dixieland Jazz Festival, 12-7 p.m., Winona State University, www.visitwinona.com.

July 2-22, Minnesota Beethoven Festival, Winona State University, www.mnbeethovenfestival.org.

July 4, Kwik Trip Fireworks Extravaganza, 10 p.m., Riverside Park.

July 4-7, Riverfest, Riverside Park, www.riverfestlacrosse.com.

July 6, Gathering's Red Friday: Christmas in July Show, Valley View Mall, www.myvalleyview.com.

July 7, Summer High Ropes, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center, www.eagle-bluff.org.

July 8, Art Fair on the Farm, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

July 11, Make Organic Chocolates with Amy, 6-8 p.m., People's Food Co-op, La Crosse, www.pfc.coop.

July 12, Historic Trolley Tour, 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m., La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Riverside Park.

July 13-14, Country Boom Festival, all day, Maple Grove, West Salem.

July 14, Folk Life La Crosse, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Historic Hixon House, www.lchshistory.org.

July 14, Kids Tri, 7 a.m.-12 p.m., R.W. Houser Family YMCA, www.laxymca.org.

July 14, Youth Outdoor Fest, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Veterans Freedom Park, www.cplclax.com.

July 21, Big Blue Dragon Boat Festival, Copeland Park, La Crosse, www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/bigbluedragon.

July 26-28, Summer Days Sidewalk Sale and Street Dance, all day, Downtown La Crosse, www.lacrossedowntown.com.

July 28, Annual Rail Fair, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Copeland Park, La Crosse, 608-781-9383.

July 28, Miss RemarkAble Pageant, 3 p.m., Lyche Theatre, Weber Center for the Performing Arts, www.aptiv.org/events/miss-remarkable-pageant.

July 28, Summer Dance Intensive Showcase (free), 7 p.m., Saint Mary's Page Theatre, mca.smunm.edu.

July 28-29, AAUW Art Fair on the Green, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat., 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sun., UW-La Crosse Campus.

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