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women

AREA HOME AND HEALTH MAGAZINE

**New Hope After
Brain Cancer**

**Turn Trash into
Treasure**

**7 Steps to a
Financial U-Turn**

**Black Forest Flavors
Close to Home**

A woman with short blonde hair and glasses is sitting on a dark tiled floor. She is wearing a black blazer over a light blue t-shirt and blue jeans. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. She has a silver laptop on her lap and is holding a smartphone in her right hand. The background is a dark, textured wall.

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Kayla Wilson: Living Her Best Life



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Pictured on the cover: Kayla Wilson, The Weber Group and Daydream Creative Co. Photo by Jordana Snyder Photography. Makeup by Kandis Haefs, hair by Raul Castro, both of Orange Pearl Salon.

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Photo by Jordana Snyder Photography

As a writer, there is one rule I was taught from the beginning: avoid clichés (like the plague, even). Clichés, we are told, represent lazy writing. Plopping a cliché into a story is the equivalent of a microwave meal when your guests are expecting home-cooked comfort food. It may fill them up, but it doesn't satisfy.

However, as I sank into reading and absorbing the stories in this issue, I couldn't help but feel two often-repeated phrases bubble up time and again. And I have come to believe that in some cases we hear these phrases said, see them in memes and return to them over and over because they are not just clichés. They are truths.

- Everyone has a story.
- Be kind—everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.

The first of these truths is one of the aspects of being a writer and journalist that has drawn me in since I started down this road in high school. I love to hear other people's stories—not only the big, inspiring, amazing stories, but those of everyday life, the nuances and

experiences that make each individual unique but that also provide common ground for conversations and understanding. This same sentiment is echoed by Hmong author Kao Kalia Yang in our Q&A when she says "I believe firmly that the job of the writer is to open up human experience, invite others in and be a friend on a journey."

The second truth is a reminder we hear often, especially in the last two years, as we strive as a society for empathy into the experiences of others.

Many stories in this issue exemplify these truths. As Kayla Wilson rolls around her new hometown of West Salem on a skateboard, soaking in the contentment she has found in the Coulee Region, few would suspect how she turned a tumultuous family life and innate digital savvy into years working in social media for big city names before landing here. Her story is one she hasn't shared much before now, but she believes it can be a tool to help others find the path to living their authentic life, regardless of the past.

We hear often about the struggles of small businesses, especially in the restaurant industry, through the pandemic. It takes a heavy measure of strength to get through, but in the story of Sue Grosz and her Black Forest Bistro, we learn about how she has turned her strength toward overcoming much more than a challenging business environment.

There are the stories of women achieving dreams that have the potential to shift not only their own lives' paths, but their entire families' futures as they complete college degrees that may have seemed out of reach.

The beauty of a local magazine like ours is that we have the opportunity to discover and share the stories our readers live—the stories of our neighbors and yours, of your coworkers and colleagues, of the people you bump into (sometimes literally) in the grocery store and at the park. Everyone you meet has a story. Often that story is one of fighting a battle that may be unseen by many around them and yet turning things around for an unexpected ending.

Cliché or truth? You decide.

Shari

coulee region women

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CELEBRATE WOMEN'S CHRISTMAS



The Franciscan Spirituality Center continues its annual tradition of celebrating Women's Christmas: An Epiphany Celebration for Wise Women with an in-person event from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Thursday, January 6, at 920 Market Street.

Women's Christmas is rooted in a delightful Irish tradition. On the Feast of Epiphany, the celebration of the coming of the Wise Men to the Infant Jesus, Irish women left the care of their households to the men for a few hours so they could enjoy each other's company away from their domestic responsibilities, especially after the busyness of Christmas preparations. The Franciscan Spirituality Center brings together the tradition of Women's Christmas and the Feast of the Epiphany for this special program.

This year's theme is "Warm Heart, Warm Hands," and each guest will receive a pair of fair-trade mittens as a gift. We invite you to gather with other women to rest and reflect on the year that was, enjoy a simple but hearty meal, share our stories and receive a blessing for the new year.

The cost is \$50 per person, which includes the meal and gift. Register at www.fscenter.org or 608-791-5295.



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Communities along the Great River Road are excited to offer a winter adventure in one of nature's most beautiful regions: The Driftless. Explore quaint towns along the Mississippi River Valley in both Minnesota and Wisconsin December 4 and 5, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and take part in classic holiday traditions, events and specials along the way.

Put on by Visit Winona, Visit Red Wing, ALMA Wisconsin and the 100 Mile Garage Sale organizers, this event is open to the public. Stay abreast of details at the 100 Miles of Christmas Facebook page: www.facebook.com/events/4355740537879160/.

CELEBRATING HEROES



Dr. Sylvia Hood Washington

Viterbo University is hosting its annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Celebration, honoring one of our nation's most important figures, on Monday, January 17, at 7 p.m. at the Viterbo University Fine Arts Center. The event, which is free to the public, will feature guest speaker Dr. Sylvia Hood Washington, a well-known speaker on the topics of environmental racism, environmental justice and climate justice. An environmental epidemiologist, engineer and historian, Dr. Washington is the founder and chief environmental research scientist at Environmental Health Research Associates LLC.

Also honored at the event will be the recipient of the 2022 Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Award, which recognizes a community member noteworthy for their leadership in and commitment to building community, enhancing diversity and working for justice. For more details on the event, go to www.viterbo.edu/events/mlk-day-service-and-celebration.

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

NEW HOME, NEW REACH

YWCA La Crosse, long a valued community resource hosting programs that serve girls and women throughout the Coulee Region, is pleased to host its services—and offer new ones—from a new location at 212 11th Street S. in La Crosse. On October 14, YWCA La Crosse celebrated the grand opening of its new collaborative REACH Service and Resource Center.

Now, in collaboration with other community organizations—New Horizons, Couleecap, the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and Independent Living Resources—YWCA La Crosse seeks to serve community members who are homeless by providing them with one stop at which they can connect with a variety of services that can help them secure housing and meet day-to-day needs. Leading this initiative is YWCA La Crosse's new REACH director, Loretta LaPoint.

"This project is an incredible opportunity," says YWCA executive director Lauren Journot. "We received once-in-a-lifetime funding to open an innovative, collaborative resource model and are excited to see the impact it can have on our community. This opportunity is more than just agencies cohabitating together; it is true collaboration and holds immense opportunity for growth and new, innovative ways to serve our whole community.

The REACH Service and Research Center was made possible through supportive community partnerships and a federally funded Covid-19 relief grant. The YWCA's mission is to eliminate racism, empower women and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.



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Women in Wellness



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

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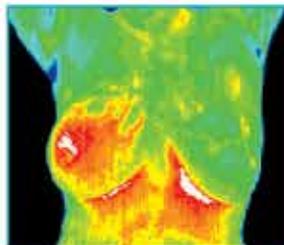


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Writing Her Own Definition of Success

Kayla Wilson moves beyond family trauma and big city expectations to find authenticity in the Coulee Region.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | PHOTOS BY JORDANA SNYDER PHOTOGRAPHY

Kayla Wilson is a natural and professional storyteller, and while she doesn't often share her own story, it is one of an unlikely trajectory, a drive for authenticity exceeding even her own expectations.

Today, she is the senior marketing coordinator for La Crosse's The Weber Group while also growing a reputation for helping small businesses build their digital brand through Daydream Creative Co. It isn't where she would have seen herself as she moved out on her own at age 18 or while rubbing elbows with celebrities in the nonprofit arts world in San Diego, but she says it is where she feels at home.

"If you are living into your integrity and truth, things will fall into place," she says.

EARLY TRAUMA, DASHED DREAMS

Contentment was in short supply in Wilson's early life. Her parents were trapped in a cycle of poverty, addiction and mental illness, which culminated in double tragedies in Wilson's teens and early 20s. Her grandparents attempted to help the family through her mother's deteriorating mental health by moving them from San Diego back to the Coulee Region. As her senior year at Westby High School wound toward the end, Wilson was not safe in her mother's reach, so on her 18th birthday, three weeks short of graduation, she left school and returned to San Diego. A supportive principal ensured she would receive her diploma, but dreams she had from a young age of college as the way to escape family trauma faded away.

While Wilson worked up to four jobs at a time, it seemed that a family heritage stating "people like us don't go to college" would be continued, especially when her mother's suicide meant another short time back in Wisconsin to help her grandparents raise her younger sibling. Tragedy hit again with her father's fatal overdose.

Wilson finally wrote a letter to her dream school asking them to please stop sending her recruitment messages—the cost of that education simply was not a part of the future she could see ahead of her.

CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

The response to her letter was the first of many times Wilson says she was told "yes" when the logical answer would have been "no." The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, which had already accepted her with a merit scholarship, responded by inviting her for a singular opportunity and experience: a trip to New York Fashion Week. The trip culminated in Wilson's entry in a fashion house art contest, with the winner decided through social media, still in its infancy at the time. A digital native, who had already been deeply involved in the now-defunct MySpace and Facebook for years, Wilson had a knack for promotion, and her work "went viral" at a time when that phrase was still largely unknown.

It was her promotion of her work through that contest that caught the eye of a marketing firm in Chicago. "The snowball I created was what they saw," she says.

“I left Wisconsin with a chip on my shoulder. But now just shifting that lens shows I’m not missing out on anything. . . . You don’t have to move to a big city to be successful. Here in the Driftless region you can focus on your health, business and family and truly thrive.”

—Kayla Wilson

Her life was about to make a major change.

Without a college degree, and with little job experience in the field, Wilson progressed from that firm to a similar job at the University of Chicago, and eventually back to San Diego, where she worked with the San Diego Symphony Orchestra from 2012 to 2017 before diving deeper into beginning her own business.

VISUAL STORYTELLER

An artist her entire life, Wilson said she started with a focus on oil painting, but that has evolved into the possibilities and potential of the digital realm. More than creating advertising or promotion, she sees her role as that of a storyteller rooted in authenticity.

With skills that now extend into photography, graphic design and writing, along with an in-depth understanding of the world of social media and digital strategy, Wilson embodies the title of a professional creative.

“It really comes down to communication and visual storytelling,” Wilson says. “Having an artist’s eye really helps. . . . I am so thankful that people trust me to tell not only the serious aspects (of their businesses’ stories) but the fun times as well.”

UNLIKELY RETURN

In 2018, tragedy once more pulled her to southwestern Wisconsin to help a family member who was in a serious accident. But this time, she stayed.

After successful but unsatisfying stints in sales for local organizations, Wilson joined The Weber Group in fall 2019. She says she is thankful that the business, like others before, told her “yes” despite her lack of a formal degree. She treasures the nurturing environment, strong female leadership and opportunity to tell compelling stories through her social media, web design, photography and copywriting.

Her reach into the community extends beyond The Weber Group to working directly with many small businesses through her own agency and volunteer work developing the Check the Spread campaign materials for La Crosse County Public Health early in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Wilson’s dream of college is also back on the table. She is working



Kayla Wilson, of The Weber Group and Daydream Creative Co., is no stranger to adversity, but she has taken advantage of opportunities to turn her life around.

toward a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from Southern New Hampshire University with concentrations in international business and visual arts and communication.

She may not stop there, with visions of a Juris Doctorate in the future, specializing in legal and regulatory advocacy surrounding social media and digital communications. Her special concern is the field of protections for consumers and user-generated content in an environment that currently protects social media platforms and businesses more than the average user.

AUTHENTICITY AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO THRIVE

As she settled into a home in West Salem this fall—literally worlds away from the traffic gridlock and celebrity-soaked atmosphere of southern California—Wilson says she is truly content as she explores her new hometown by skateboard.

“I left Wisconsin with a chip on my shoulder,” she says. “But now, just shifting that lens shows I’m not missing out on anything. . . . You don’t have to move to a big city to be successful. Here in the Driftless region you can focus on your health, business and family and truly thrive.”

“This is the first time I’ve felt settled,” Wilson says. “Here is who I am, and here is what I do.” **CRW**

Shari Hegland is editor of Coulee Region Women and an admirer of those like Kayla who never give up on their dreams.



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Rachel Krueger of Onalaska graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stout in June with a doctoral degree, just four years after undergoing treatment for brain cancer.

A TIME TO RE-EVALUATE PRIORITIES

Rachel Krueger's battle with brain cancer reaffirms focus on family and education.

BY JOAN KENT | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Rachel Krueger remembers looking back at her husband, mom, dad and sister as she was moved into a surgery room at Mayo Clinic in Rochester on January 25, 2017.

"Please God, let me see these faces again," she said before entering the room where a surgeon drilled into her skull, removed a piece and the tumor beneath, and replaced the missing bone with a piece from a cadaver. As she'd been wheeled in, she'd joked, "I'm pretty smart now. Let's keep it that way."

She also recalls how she cried when her dissertation to become a

Doctor of Education in Career and Technical Education Leadership was approved at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, on June 15, 2021, thinking, "How in the hell did I do it?"

FROM NUMBNESS TO ANGER TO ACCEPTANCE

In November 2016, the Onalaska resident had visited Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse, believing she had a sinus infection. An eventual MRI at Mayo-Rochester showed Krueger had a brain tumor. As she hadn't experienced headaches or any other symptoms, doctors

thought it was benign and said she could leave it and have regular checkups. But she decided to go ahead with surgery because she knew she'd worry if she left it.

Not wanting to "affect anyone's holiday cheer," Krueger scheduled surgery the following January. She told her girls, Peyton, then 2, and Layla, then 5, that she had an "owie" in her head and the doctor was going to fix it.

A few days after the surgery, she got the news: The surgeon had been able to remove the entire tumor, but it was cancerous. It was a slow-growing type of cancer, but it could come back, he said. "I just felt numb," Krueger recalls. "You don't feel anything when someone tells you that you have cancer. I was worried about dying because I didn't want to leave my kids and my husband. I kept thinking 'who's going to do their hair in the morning?' My husband is a really good dad, but I was worried because they wouldn't have a mom."

Resentment followed. "I did not understand why I had cancer," she says. "I thought, 'I've done everything I was supposed to do. I went to college. I married and had kids. I've tried to be a good person.'"

Then, finally, acceptance: "I thought, 'This has happened. How can I get through it, and how can I help others through this experience?'"

CHALLENGES BEYOND THE CANCER

Krueger, who has a bachelor's degree in organizational management from Viterbo University and master's degree in business administration from Globe University, was director of admissions at the Globe campus in Onalaska. But just as she learned of her cancer, the campus closing was announced, and her husband, Jared, was laid off from his job as a forklift operator.

"It wasn't easy. We knew we had to have COBRA insurance to make sure the surgery was covered," she says, "I couldn't apply for jobs because I knew I was going to have surgery. But we got through it. My husband was the person I could cry to. My mom,



Rachel Krueger, pictured above with her husband, Jared, and daughter Layla, and below with her daughter Peyton, says that surviving brain cancer refocused her priorities onto family and education, including earning a doctorate degree from University of Wisconsin-Stout. She dedicated her doctoral thesis to the health care workers who cared for her during her medical ordeal and those struggling through the pandemic.



Laurie, who's a social worker, and sister, Julie, and I are 'the three Musketeers.' My dad, Stuart, flew up from Florida to be there for my surgery and support me through my recovery."

Before the surgery, she'd applied to UW-Stout's doctorate program. She learned she'd been accepted a couple months after surgery but didn't know if she was ready.

REAFFIRMED PRIORITIES

She decided to go for it, starting in August 2017. "When you have something major, it makes you re-evaluate your priorities. I realized mine are my family and making a difference through a career in education," Krueger says. "It took me eight years to get my bachelor's. I want to help students find a career that 'feeds' them, where they can make a difference, in a more timely fashion."

Her late mother-in-law, Joy Krueger, had been a nurse, and her husband, now a certified nursing assistant at Onalaska Care Center, will complete his nursing education this December. Krueger chose "Managing the Healthcare Crisis: The Career Narratives of Nurses" for her dissertation and interviewed nurses struggling through the pandemic.

Since June 2017 she has worked remotely as program mentor in Western Governors University College of Business. When she sees that students think she doesn't understand the difficulties they're going through, she shares her story.

She didn't need chemotherapy but underwent MRIs every four months for three years and now goes every six months. "You find the new norm," she says. "It feels surreal, like it never happened. My advice to people who've learned they have cancer? It's OK to cry, to be mad, to be scared. And if there's something you want to do, do it. It may take a while, but it's OK if it takes you longer than someone else." **CRW**

Joan Kent is a retired journalist who lives in La Farge with her husband, Don Foy, and their two kitties, Liza and Misty.



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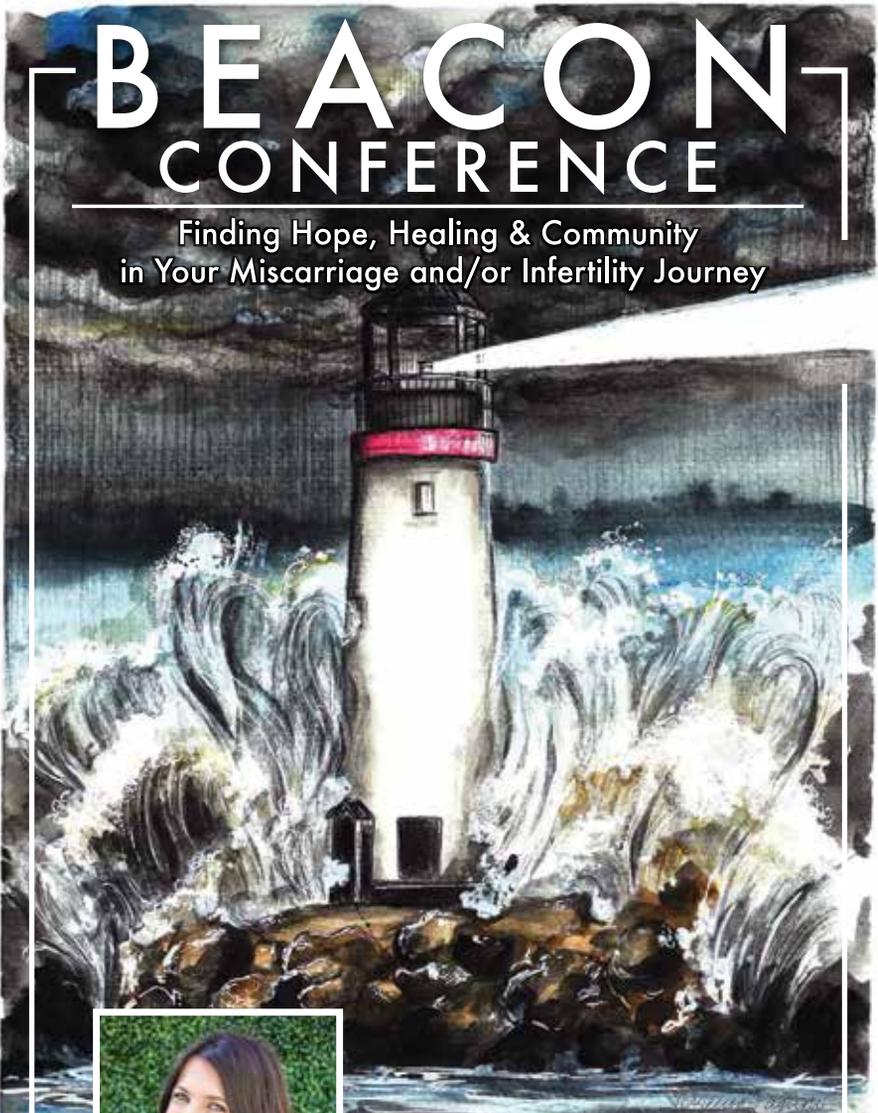
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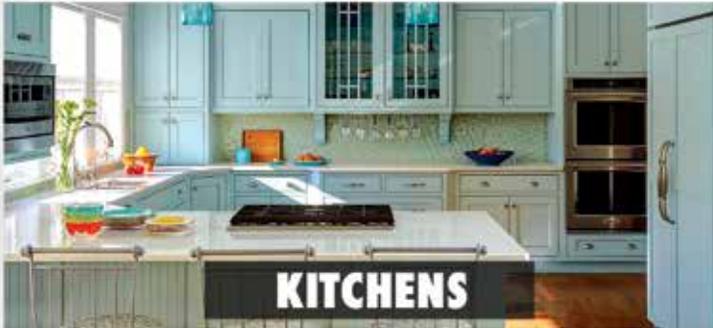
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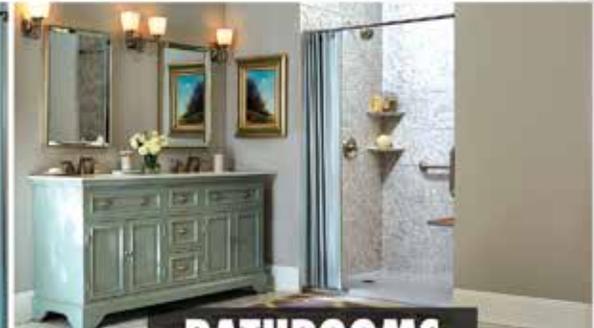
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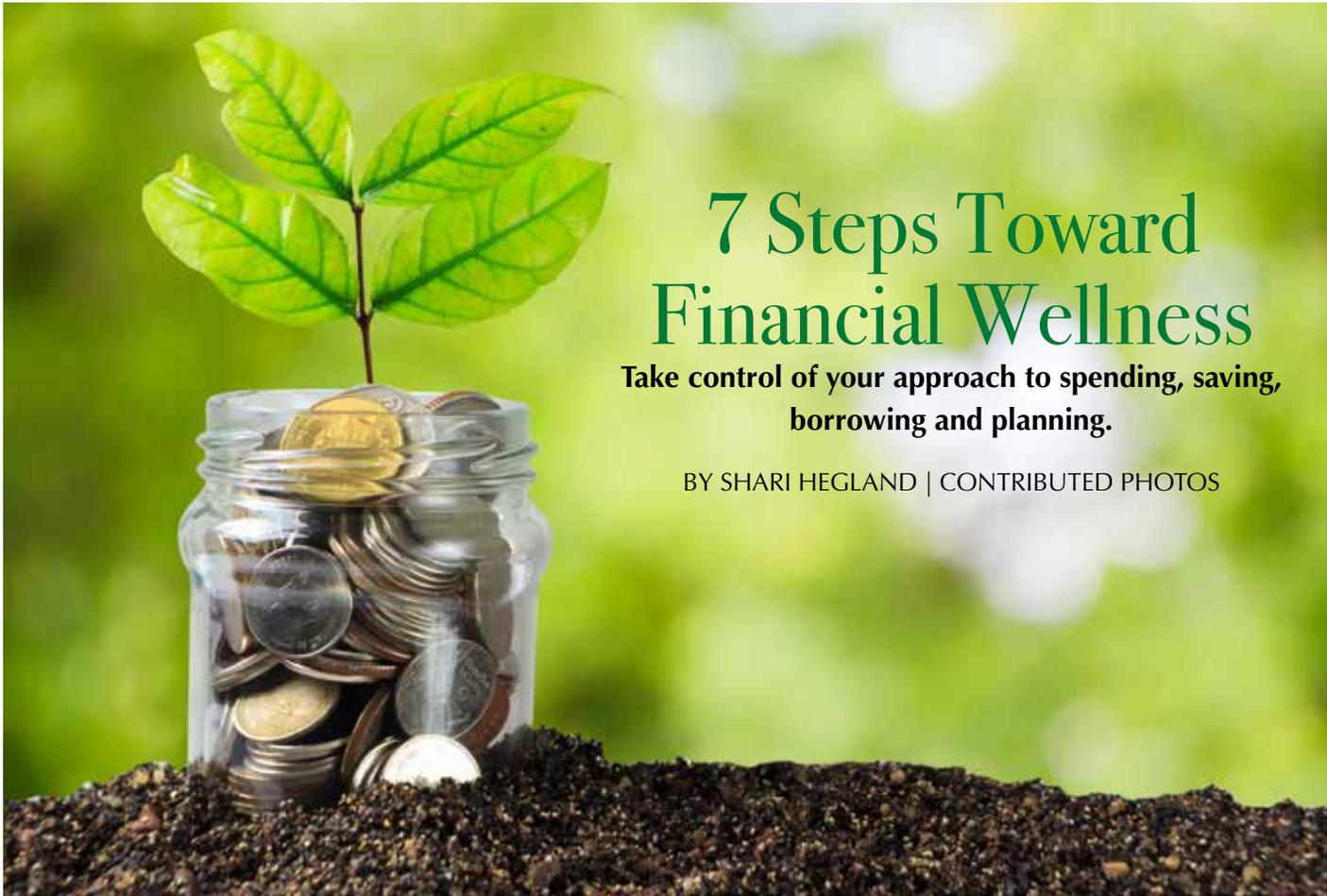
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7 Steps Toward Financial Wellness

Take control of your approach to spending, saving, borrowing and planning.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Is your financial future on the right path? Jackie Urban, credit management supervisor and member education officer at Altra Federal Credit Union, says there are warning signs that should tell us it's time to hit the brakes and consider a new route.

- A sudden change in income—loss of a job, illness, loss of a spouse.
- Living paycheck to paycheck.
- Arguing with a spouse about money.
- Being delinquent in paying bills or making only minimum payments.

Even if none of those fit, it never hurts to double-check where you are on the road to achieving your financial goals.

1.

DISCOVER WHERE YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION FALLS SHORT

A quick two-minute quiz offered on Altra Federal Credit Union's website can be a useful tool to assess where you stand regarding insurance, credit scores, long-term savings, spending vs. income, liquid savings, debt levels and future planning.

2.

CREATE A "STOP BUDGET"

Urban says this is a budget that includes all the things that you can't just stop paying for:

- Things that can be shut off, like utilities.
- Things that can be taken away, like your home.
- Things that protect you, including insurance.
- Gas in the tank.
- Food in the tummy.

3.

PRIORITIZE CREDITORS

Along with the inventory of your "stop budget" obligations, list your creditors and prioritize them in the order of who can harm or help you first.

4.

INCREASE INCOME

Apply any increase to your debts—don't let it encourage you to increase your budget for ongoing expenses. That extra income could be a part-time job, freelance work or even selling unnecessary extravagances such as a boat or bike to get your finances back on track.

5.

ELIMINATE TEMPTATIONS

If you know you spend too much, be aware of your triggers—no wandering the mall if you always come home with something. Shop your pantry before you buy groceries; shop your own closet before buying more clothes.

6.

PREPARE FOR PERIODIC EXPENSES

While your initial budget likely included monthly bills such as mortgage or rent, groceries and gas, don't overlook expenses that come around less often, such as water service or your auto insurance.

"That amount can break a budget because you forget about it," Urban says.



Jackie Urban, credit management supervisor and member education officer at Altra Federal Credit Union

7.

BRING IN OUTSIDE HELP

If your financial situation is too far off track for you to redirect on your own, ask for help.

Often the best place to start, Urban says, is with your own financial institution. "You may be amazed at what they can do if you are willing to approach them and make a plan," Urban says. "Be proactive."

You can also seek out assistance through organizations such as Consumer Credit Counseling Service. Urban says an independent credit counselor is more objective than you will be while in financial distress.

Whether you need just a nudge in the right direction or a complete U-turn on your financial path, Urban says it is always important to have a destination in mind.

"Never lose sight of your goal," she says. "Keep it in front of you." **CRW**

Writer and editor Shari Hegland is more comfortable with words but understands the importance of keeping track of the numbers in the budget and the bank as well.

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FAMILY.

Me walking into literally any gas station besides Kwik Trip:



“See Ya Next Time”

Paige Forde turns Kwik Trip social media into Wisconsin culture icon.

BY SAMANTHA STROOZAS | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Paige Forde graduated from University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in 2019, but she has been working with Kwik Trip’s social media team since college. As a student at UW-La Crosse, she belonged to AMA (American Marketing Association) and took classes on social media, which she says grew her passion and led her to apply as a social media intern with Kwik Trip and now, the social media specialist.

Forde has instituted a new era on Kwik Trip’s social media filled with memes and viral content, but her success does not come without hard work.

Across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok, Forde and her team work to create relatable content that will resonate with their followers and continue to make Kwik Trip the heart of Wisconsin travel.

“My supervisor, intern and I touch base each week for a brainstorm session where we’ll share some of the trending memes, tweets and text formats and go from there to bring these ideas to life on our own platforms,” she says. “My phone is filled with screenshots for inspiration. Even on my personal social feeds, my mind always thinks, “How can we hop on this trend as Kwik Trip?”

Forde’s day-to-day work is always changing. Between checking emails, managing the Kwik Trip brand ambassador program and browsing online for the latest trends, she keeps connected with everyone who shares their love of Glazers and to-go meals. She is

always looking for the next big thing and how to expand Wisconsin’s love of Kwik Trip to all who travel through the state.

“Once we posted a meme on a platform that was historically filled with only promotional material, we saw a remarkable shift in our follower demographic,” Forde says. “We started gaining younger fans who were seeking the humorous content and followed us expecting to see more. This was a slow shift as we began to show the payoff of posting relatable, humorous content. As our impressions grew and we moved up in the algorithms, we then saw more success with promotional content when it was necessary.”

Forde says current students in marketing fields should work to investigate areas of the specialty that interests them the most and make it their own by finding a core focus, such as social media, even though marketing is often a team effort. She gets many ideas from her coworkers and social followers, who share relatable experience that presents content opportunities, such as sharing tweets and adding a witty caption in their own voice.

“Our guests have so much to say, and we love having them be a part of our content in that way,” she says.

You can follow Kwik Trip on social media at @kwiktrip. **CRW**

Sam Stroozas is a freelance journalist located in Chicago. Her favorite item from Kwik Trip is their mac and cheese pizza.



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A Home a Century in the Making

A La Crosse family builds their future while connecting to the past.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER | PHOTOS BY ATYPIK STUDIO



A restored Colonial Revival Foursquare near the heart of La Crosse provides a modern, comfortable home for a young family.

Courtney Lokken and her husband, Lucas Schwaller, moved to La Crosse in January 2015 after the birth of their first child to be closer to family. The house they chose to call home was the very first one their realtor showed them, though they did look at other houses before buying it.

The home is a Colonial Revival Foursquare built in 1920 or 1921 by Ori Sorensen, a builder and architect who also served as La Crosse's mayor. It ticked a lot of boxes: great structure, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a yard in the back. Best of all was its location: situated near downtown La Crosse, it was close to parks, bike trails, the La Crosse Family YMCA, the Children's Museum of La Crosse, shops and restaurants. Having most recently lived in Chicago where walking was part of daily life, "we knew we wanted that walkable lifestyle," Lokken says.

"When we moved here, it wasn't like, 'Oh, let's look for an old house to restore,'" Lokken says. However, her uncles Jay Lokken and Ken Riley had been restoring houses since she was young. "I think in the back of my mind, I always was watching the work that they were doing and appreciating the work that they were doing. I have

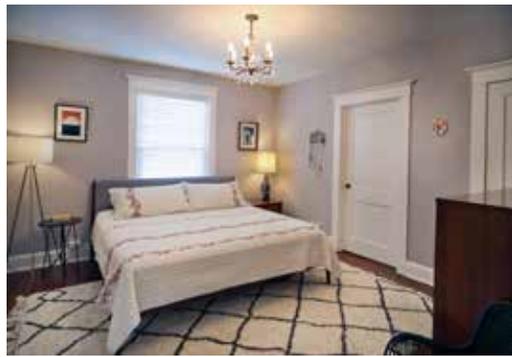
really amazing memories of family Christmases in the old homes that they had restored. So I think they had a pretty big influence, and we definitely tapped into their expertise during the process."

IN NEED OF A LITTLE LOVE

"It was by no means the worst condition house that you could imagine," Lokken says, "but it had chipping paint everywhere. And all the woodwork inside was painted with layers and *layers* and **LAYERS** of paint, and the floors were in bad shape, and all the walls were cracking." Yet, they could see its potential.

The family moved in and began renovating. Courtney and Lucas did much of the demolition themselves but hired experts for nearly everything else. They enlisted the help of a friend and gutted the kitchen and dining room, ripping up tiles and even tearing down walls. "Once we opened it up, we were really able to see the potential for the space," Lokken notes.

At that point they brought in Wisconsin Building Supply to draw up kitchen designs. The end result is beautiful. Warm and inviting, the dining room flows into the kitchen, which has an island at the



center. Tall ceilings give a sense of space and airiness. Glistening white tile and white cabinets, a farmhouse sink, and beautiful Douglas fir floorboards offer an elegant aesthetic, while handmade artwork by the kiddos adorns the walls, giving it a homey feel. Lokken's favorite "reveal" was the kitchen: "It was really a huge transformation to see the kitchen finished."

The entryway is just as striking. The foyer is painted in Hale Navy from Benjamin Moore, a classic, deeply saturated navy blue. "I just had this vision of a dark blue foyer," Lokken says, "and I love it."

The adjacent family room, accessed through graceful French doors, features a nonworking but beautiful fireplace, and large windows let in a lot of light, even on overcast days.

MOVING UPSTAIRS

The staircase leading upstairs needed to be completely rebuilt. The original was slanted, and the railing too low. The new stairway mimics the feel of the original woodwork in the house. A landing halfway up looks out over the upstairs deck before ascending to the home's second story. A large chandelier dangles above the staircase, a clearance find Lokken loves.

The upstairs bathroom also underwent a total transformation. The wall's mauve-pink tiles were swapped for simple white subway tiles, and the flooring was replaced with floor tiles in a classic black and white hexagonal mosaic pattern. Lokken describes picking out the pedestal sink—how its shape, and the lines of the Memoirs toilet from Kohler, match the molding found throughout the house. "It was fun to pick up on some of those details and try to complement it," she says.

A details person, one of Lokken's favorite parts of the project was picking out finishings like faucets and hardware for the doors. In some

cases, she stripped many years of paint off the hardware in order to keep the original; in other cases, she sourced replicas to stay true to the style.

She also enjoyed choosing colors for the home. Her daughter's room is a pale pink, which Lokken customized by having a little bit of gray added. A tiny crayon drawing adorns the doorframe. "That's the thing. When you're a family, you can't go into your renovation expecting your house to look like a magazine when you're done," Lokken says. "It will look nice, but it's got to be livable."

UNEXPECTED FINDS

As with any renovation project, there were some surprises. "We found there was a razor slot in the bathroom mirror," says Lokken. "When you were done shaving, you literally just put your razor blade into the wall. So, when we gutted it, there were razor blades in the wall."

Some surprises, however, were pleasant. "The staircase was wallpapered in this really eccentric green floral, tropical wallpaper," Lokken says, "and I found a little piece of it, hidden behind something in the foyer," which she plans to frame.

Lokken's recommendation for anyone considering renovating an old home? "My number one piece of advice is that it is worth it! There's so much character and, I think, joy that comes from restoring."

"And also," she adds, "it's not for the faint of heart. There's always going to be some sort of surprise along the way. So, you sort of have to go into it expecting that and be as ready as you can be to be flexible. I think whenever you're restoring an old home flexibility is key, to be able to adapt." **CRW**

Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a La Crosse area writer and marketer who loves old houses (except, maybe, the basements).

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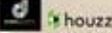
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Acne at Any Age

Put your best face forward with advice for treating clogged pores and blemishes.

BY MARTHA KEEFFE | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



From the occasional pimple to a full-blown breakout, almost every one of us has experienced acne rear its ugly head.

“While 90 percent of teenagers suffer from acne and most can hope to grow out of it, one in three women in their 30s and one in five men in their 30s battle with acne as well,” says Dr. Logan Kolb, DO, a dermatologist with Olmsted Medical Center in Rochester, Minnesota. And although acne can never technically be cured—and can occur at any age—the following advice can help you put your best face forward.

WHAT CAUSES ACNE?

According to Stephanie Andresen-Stevens, licensed aesthetician, certified laser technician, certified acne specialist and owner of Brilliant Bodywork MedSpa in Onalaska, “Acne is typically an inherited disorder that causes the pores to clog with a mixture of dead skin cells and oil. Normal pores shed one to two layers of dead skin cells per day, whereas the acne-prone pores shed up to five layers of dead skin cells per day. When this happens, the body simply can’t keep up, and the pore becomes clogged.”

In addition, Kolb and Andresen-Stevens note that certain triggers may or may not worsen acne. Triggers include

- hormonal or menstrual flares
- psychological stress
- cosmetics
- certain medications or foods
- fragranced laundry products (such as fabric softener or dryer sheets)



Stephanie Andresen-Stevens,
Brilliant Bodywork MedSpa



Dr. Logan Kolb, dermatologist,
Olmsted Medical Center

- sun exposure
- mechanical irritation caused by items such as face masks or chin straps

“As you can see,” says Kolb, “there a lot of factors that play into acne,” and basically anything that stimulates excessive sebum production (an oily substance secreted from the sebaceous glands) and combines with dirt, bacteria or dead skin cells can result in clogged pores.

DON'T DO THAT!

Though your initial impulse might be to squeeze, pop or scrub away blemishes, both Kolb and Andresen-Stevens advise against doing so.

“Exfoliating treatments or aggressively washing one’s face can damage the skin barrier and lead to excessive inflammation, which drives more acne,” says Kolb.

Furthermore, Andresen-Stevens cautions about employing home treatment methods such as rotary brushes, needle rollers and blackhead removing tools to battle breakouts. “Typically, these have no beneficial results and cause more damage and long-term issues that may require professional assistance,” she says. Instead, she suggests soothing your skin with ice for two minutes twice daily to calm inflamed acne blemishes. Don’t be tempted to cover up acne with makeup or an excessive amount of concealer, which only clogs pores and leads to more acne. “If you wear makeup,” says Kolb, “try to wear one that is mineral-based.”

TRY THIS AT HOME

In addition to avoiding triggers that cause breakouts, both Andresen-Stevens and Kolb stress the importance of washing your face twice a day with a gentle cleanser. And as important as it is to wash away the dirt, oil and debris from your face at night, it's just as essential to cleanse your face in the morning.

"In the morning, washing helps to eliminate the cellular turnover that continues to happen while we sleep, as well as removing any oil, dirt, debris, etc. that may have been transferred to the skin from the hair and pillowcases overnight," says Andresen-Stevens.

Kolb also recommends that you apply a moisturizer with a SPF30 or higher to your face and neck every morning whether the sun is shining or not—even in the winter. Not only is SPF one of the best agents for preventing skin cancer, he says, but "acne that is exposed to the sun is also more likely to leave dark marks called 'post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation' or PIH. This PIH is more likely to affect darker skin types."

THERE IS HELP

If at-home remedies are not working, take the time to research your options and schedule an appointment with a licensed skin care professional or board-certified dermatologist.

"There are many excellent treatment options out there," says Kolb, noting that oral contraceptive and antibiotics are very effective at treating acne when prescribed under the care of a dermatologist. Other options range from medicated washes, prescription topical antibiotics or retinoids, LED light therapy to lasers. Patients can even opt to undergo "acne surgery" to have impacted pores physically cleaned



out by a licensed aesthetician—a method that has shown to facilitate clearer skin within weeks when combined with other therapies.

"Therefore, if one (method) doesn't work, another one will," says Kolb, encouraging those suffering with acne to not give up hope. "Be patient and persistent." CRW

Martha Keefe lives and writes in La Crosse and enjoys helping women put their best self forward.



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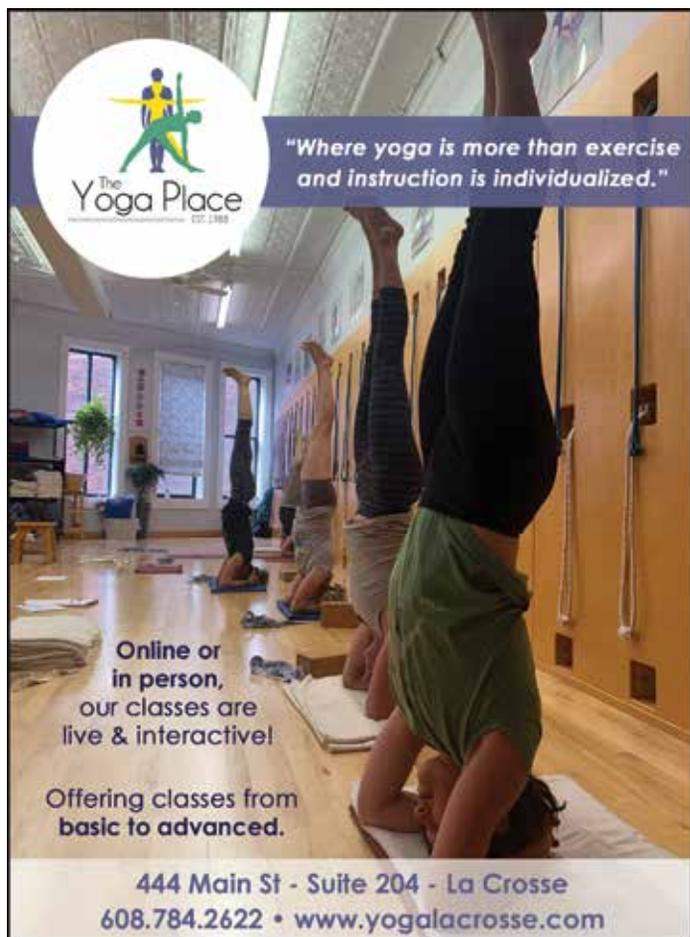
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Bringing Bavarian Flavors to Coulee Region Palates

Sue Grosz perseveres through pandemic and personal tragedies to achieve a bucket list dream.

BY JULIE NELSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

When locals flock to a particular restaurant, it's typically a sign of something special. In the case of the Black Forest Bistro, however, the indicator may be the travelers. Visitors from Minneapolis, Rochester and Eau Claire are stopping in; there's the party from San Francisco that reserved half the restaurant and raved about their evening, and one couple drives to La Crosse *just for the food* because their favorite German restaurant in Chicago has closed. These are the people who have discovered a relatively new restaurant in the Valley View Mall that's worth checking out.

FROM GERMANY TO AMERICA

Sue Grosz is the owner and operator of this authentic destination. Grosz grew up in a rural, low-income area of East Germany where she says her family's life was "close to Amish." Out of necessity, the family grew their own food, butchered and smoked their own meat and cooked their own meals. What was considered a hardship at the time is now an asset for Grosz, who knows her way around fresh food and fresh ingredients. "I shop for produce every day," she says. "You can have a great recipe, but if the ingredients aren't ripe, the dish won't taste as good as it could."

Grosz's on-the-farm experience—and entire life trajectory—took

a dramatic turn when she graduated from high school, coincidentally within weeks of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Eager to distance herself from East Germany and a harsh stepfather, Grosz moved to the West and got a job working at a bier garden in the Alps. Just like in the movies, Grosz could be found carrying as many as 16 steins full of beer at once to a waiting table. But toting beer was only one of the skills she picked up in the Alps; Grosz also learned to cook professionally. "It was the kind of place that had a tank full of fresh-caught trout, and customers could pick out the fish they wanted us to cook for them," she says.

The next step in her career was a Bavarian culinary school, a move her parents discouraged as an impractical choice that would leave her working nights and weekends. But Grosz persisted and soon gained a reputation for her unmatched palate. "The other chefs would call me over and ask me to taste their dish just before it was served," she

says. Grosz has a remarkable ability to discern if a dish needs more or less seasoning, and exactly what that seasoning should be. Culinary school is also where she met her first husband.

After a few of life's twists and turns, a move to the United States and four kids, Grosz was studying for a career in her other passion, nursing, when tragedy struck. An unplanned pregnancy resulted in



Sue Grosz, owner of Black Forest Bistro

the birth of a daughter with a severe rare medical disorder. Grosz basically lived at the hospital as doctors did everything they could for the newborn but would tell her quite frankly it wasn't enough. There was little hope for baby Jenny.

FINDING A NEW WAY

During this time, the marriage fell apart and Grosz was unable to work. As one might imagine, she became seriously depressed. Still, she took another step forward. Grosz used her nursing training to provide a constant stream of brain-stimulating sights and sounds for her daughter. The efforts paid off. Today, 10-year-old Jenny is "a walking miracle," she says. Though Jenny still has both cognitive and physical delays, she has far surpassed what any doctor had predicted.

Once Jenny came home from the hospital, Gosz needed to find a way to make ends meet and came across an opportunity to sell her sourdough bread at the farmers' market in Whitehall. In no time, customers were standing in long lines and quickly buying everything Gosz put out.

She increased her sales by attending two other local farmers' markets and saved every penny she could toward her dream of opening a restaurant. She remarried. She found a place in the Valley View Mall that had good foot traffic, was an easy location to describe and was affordable. She talked a bank into giving her a loan. She was ready to take the plunge.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVE A DREAM

Opening a German restaurant in America, on Thanksgiving Day, during a pandemic, is nobody's idea of a dream date, but for Grosz and her husband, Dale, it had become a financial necessity. Then

tragedy struck again: a week before the opening, Grosz's 28-year-old son, who was living in Germany, passed away. Grosz was in a fog, becoming depressed and ready to give up. But again, she managed to take a step forward and turn her life around, and they opened the restaurant.

"I felt I had to do it," she says. "Opening my own restaurant had been on my bucket list, and I knew it was now or never."

The winter was slow, but as 2021 began to turn the page on the pandemic, the Black Forest Bistro began to pick up as well. Made-from-scratch classics such as schnitzel, jaeger roast and spaetzle are hits with those seeking authentic fare, while pasta dishes (Grosz lived in Italy for a time) and paninis appeal to others. Those who find the sauerkraut they buy in America to be too strong will be delighted with the milder version served at Black Forest and will love the red cabbage that pairs so well with many meats.

Christmastime will come with a special offering of beef rouladan stuffed with pickles and bacon, and Grosz says other treats will be available for special ordering.

Though her life has taken many turns, Grosz seems to be on the path she was destined for. "I always played with food as a kid. When my parents were at work, I would practice cooking. If it didn't turn out, I would throw it away so no one would know I had wasted the ingredients," she says with a laugh. "Cooking is a meditation for me. I cook more by feel and by taste than by following a recipe. I'm a pinch of this and a pinch of that, depending on how the ingredients are coming together. I could talk about food all day. It's a passion for me."



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Kaiserschmarrn (Scrambled Pancake)

Julia Foerster, Plated Cravings, www.platedcravings.com

Rum-soaked raisins:

- 1/3 cup raisins
- 3 T rum or water

Pancake:

- 3 large eggs, divided
- 3 T unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 T granulated sugar
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup milk

To caramelize:

- 2 T unsalted butter
- 2 tsp. granulated sugar

To serve:

- 2 T powdered sugar
- 1 cup applesauce

In a small bowl, combine raisins and rum. If you can't use rum, soak the raisins in water, but you are highly encouraged to use rum because it's essential to the flavor.

Separate the eggs and set the egg yolks aside for a moment. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment add the three egg whites and beat at high speed about 2.5 minutes until stiff peaks form. Don't overbeat the egg whites! Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

Add the three egg yolks, melted butter, vanilla extract, sugar and a pinch of salt to the (now empty) bowl of your stand mixer, still fitted with the whisk attachment. Combine at medium speed about 2-3 minutes. On low speed, alternately add flour and milk, a tablespoon of each at a time, until you have used up the milk and the flour. Don't overmix. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl as needed. Using a metal spoon or rubber spatula, fold in the stiff egg whites until combined and no big egg white lumps remain. You need to be very gentle and light-handed.

Heat 1 T butter in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat. Pour the batter into the skillet and cook for about 6-7 minutes. After 3 minutes sprinkle the drained raisins over the batter. Use a spoon to peek under the pancake to see if it's golden brown underneath. When the pancake is golden brown underneath, sprinkle the top with a little bit of sugar.

Using a spatula, divide the pancake into quarters and turn the pieces. Add a little bit of butter to the pan while turning the pancake. Cook for 3-4 minutes until the quarters are golden brown underneath.

Using two spatulas or forks, tear the pancake into bite-sized pieces. Add 2 T butter and sprinkle 2 T sugar over the pancake pieces. Turn up the heat to medium-high and gently toss the pieces with a spatula for about 3-4 minutes, until the sugar has caramelized. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar and serve in the pan with applesauce on the side.

Zwetschgendatschi (German Plum Sheet Cake)

Allrecipes, www.allrecipes.com

- 4 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 4 tsp. baking powder
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla sugar
- 2 pinches salt
- 1 1/3 cups unsalted butter, room temperature and cut into chunks
- 2 large eggs
- 2 1/4 pounds Italian prune plums, halved and pitted
- 2 T white sugar
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 2 T unsalted butter, room temperature and cut into chunks
- 1 T sliced almonds (optional)

Combine flour and baking powder in a large bowl. Mix in 1 cup sugar, vanilla sugar and salt. Add 1 1/3 cups butter and eggs. Knead everything into a smooth dough. Shape dough into a ball, press flat, cover and chill in the refrigerator 1 hour to overnight.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a baking sheet with butter.

Cut halved plums in half again, without cutting all the way through, so they fan out.

Roll pastry dough out on a lightly floured work surface. Line the bottom and sides of the prepared baking sheet with dough. Mix 2 T sugar and cinnamon together in a bowl.

Arrange plums side by side on the pastry dough; very small plums should overlap. Dot plums with 2 T butter and sprinkle with cinnamon sugar and almonds.

Bake in the preheated oven until pastry crust is lightly browned, 30 to 40 minutes. Remove from oven. Allow plum cake to cool, then cut into squares. Serve lukewarm or at room temperature. **CRW**

Julie Nelson has traveled to Bavaria and is eager to take her family of foodies to Black Forest Bistro and relive some of their fond memories.



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YAMAHA PIANOS

Growing Confidence for Future Generations

Self-Sufficiency Program helps adult students prepare for college and career success.

BY JAN WELLIK | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Self-Sufficiency Program graduate Barb Pollock, left, now assists with the SSP program to help guide current students, along with director Andrea Hansen.



Xia Yang, a 2016 SSP graduate and December 2020 UW-La Crosse graduate with a major in early childhood and elementary education, shares ideas at the whiteboard during an SSP session.

It is not an exaggeration to say SSP changed my life,” says Melissa Baca, 2018 Self-Sufficiency Program (SSP) alumni.

SSP is a free, pre-college program that provides adult participants an opportunity to explore academic interests in a supportive setting at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

OPENING DOORS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

“It’s a program that opens the door to higher education,” says Andrea Hansen, SSP Director since 2011. “It supports people’s desire to achieve their goals for themselves and their families.”

Getting a college degree is not an easy task for most single parents, whom the program is geared to assist. On average, it takes six to seven years for parenting students to graduate with a degree, according to Hansen. About 600 students have attended over the past 30-plus years, she says, and approximately 60 percent complete the program.

SSP started in 1988 and is offered each fall and spring semester as a 10-week class on the UW-La Crosse campus. Free child care and a community dinner are available on-site.

“It’s a family program,” says Hansen. “Most students have an average of two kids (between newborn and older kids) who attend on-site child care while the parent is in the two-hour evening class once a week.

“It’s a safe place to explore what it takes to move in the direction

of your aspirations,” Hansen explains. “It’s a good place to practice college.”

2009 SSP alumni Barb Pollack says the program was “empowering, eye opening, and it gave me a purpose.”

“Being in SSP gave me strength from others in the class, and the courage to move forward,” she says. “It showed me that I could have a career, not just a job. It made me see my life differently. I always settled before. I thought I was going to be that single mother just making it paycheck to paycheck.”

Instead, SSP “gave me the opportunity to see my life in a different lens, and to see what is possible,” Pollack says.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS AND FAMILY

There is also “a second-generation effect when parents go to college,” explains Hansen. “Their kids tend to also go to college. They do SSP for themselves, but also for their children—to achieve their dreams.”

The program reaches a deeper level of access to education. “There’s a real justice component in increasing access to higher education,” explains Hansen.

Pollack, a single mother of three grown children—Matt, 34; Katy, 29; and Scotty, 27—graduated from UW-La Crosse in spring 2015 with a bachelor’s degree in Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies.

I use struggle to transform
the landscape of my journey.



I see beauty and
resilience in every
struggle. My struggles
develop my strength and
provide new opportunities to appreciate
the wonder of life's ebb and flow.



Journaling is part of the learning process utilized by the Self-Sufficiency Program to help students develop not only the academic skills needed for success, but the confidence that they can achieve their goals.

"The career exploration in SSP helped me set personal goals and to set an example for my kids that you don't give up," explains Pollack. "I wanted to show them that I could do it, and they could do it," she says.

Pollack remembers doing SSP homework one day as her daughter studied beside her. Her daughter said how proud she was that they were doing their schoolwork at the same time.

Since graduating, Pollack has worked with the homeless population in outreach and mobile crisis response and now as a case manager for Couleecap. "When opportunities arise, I go where my path leads me," she says.

ACHIEVING LIFE GOALS

SSP helped Baca to achieve her

goal of going to a university as a single mother. "Marginalized mothers are not encouraged to do four-year universities," says Baca. Baca has three teenage daughters: Sydnee, 19, graduated from Logan High School and works at Chileda; Carlee, 18, also graduated from Logan; and Kaelee, 14, is a freshman at Logan.

Through SSP, "I found support and validation," she says.

"It has been the hands that lifted, encouraged and empowered me to successfully complete my bachelor's degree," says Baca, now an independent living specialist for Independent Living Resources, having graduated from UW-La Crosse in December 2020 with a bachelor's degree in Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies.

"Being in SSP gave me strength from others in the class and the courage to move forward. It showed me that I could have a career, not just a job. It made me see my life differently."

—Barb Pollack,
Self-Sufficiency Program alum

"I love my job!" she says of helping people find housing.

"It's a lot of listening, being empathetic and being supportive. I'm helping people navigate these systems that I've navigated and using my lived experience," she explains. "In my previous experiences that was never an asset."

In her senior thesis, Baca wrote about school as a vehicle for self-efficacy and what happens to a person when you are able to take care of your family and move up, she explains.

SSP helped create a family-like structure and offered additional support, Baca says.

Even with transfer credits and a great GPA, she still did not believe she would be able to graduate from college, she says. With the confidence boost of SSP, Baca received SSP scholarships for four semesters and now is enjoying a new beginning.

SCHOLARSHIPS SUPPORT ACADEMIC ENDEAVORS

When participants complete SSP and then go to college, they can apply for an SSP scholarship of \$1,000 each semester for up to four semesters. Graduates of SSP most often attend Western Technical College, Viterbo University and UW-La Crosse locally.

SSP has raised and given \$122,000 in funding since the scholarship started in 2004. SSP and the Locally Grown Scholarship Fund are supported by the Women's Fund of La Crosse and the AAUW- La Crosse Branch.

"When they apply for the SSP scholarship, I notice patterns around confidence and being connected to something larger than themselves—they speak to this about their SSP experience," explains Hansen. "It's a lot of learning about confidence, and that it's your right to claim your education." **CRW**

The Self-Sufficiency Program is near to the writer's heart, as Jan Wellik has been the SSP writing instructor for about 7 years. "It feels like one of the most important programs I have been part of," says Wellik.



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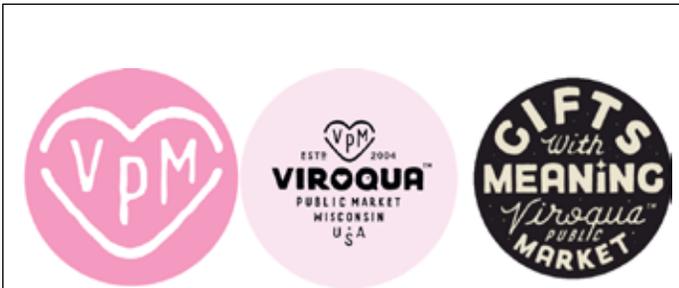


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Building Homes, Reducing Waste

From home repair bargains to creative crafting finds, the ReStore fulfills multiple needs.

BY JANIS JOLLY | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Abbey Hoins, ReStore donations driver, and Michael Rivers, ReStore receiving assistant, unload donated items at the Habitat for Humanity La Crosse Area's retail store on Highway 16.



Ali Brokaw, ReStore Assistant Director

There was a time when much of the inventory now showcased in a retail space on Highway 16 would have ended up in the neighboring La Crosse County Landfill. Today the used doors, windows, furniture, paint, rugs, you name it—all sourced from local donors—make home improvement affordable and accessible as the revenue generated by the ReStore funds Habitat for Humanity La Crosse Area programs.

Kahya Fox, executive director, has overseen all Habitat operations here for five years and is pleased with the growth and popularity of the ReStore. The business has proved true to its mission of preventing waste, controlling costs and getting people into safe, affordable housing. Habitat's vision is to help "create a world in which everyone has a decent place to live." Profits from the ReStore pay for the operating costs of the office and 15-person staff, plus upkeep of the building and utilities. It also generates enough money to pay for one new house being built each year, Fox explained.

This means that any other funds donated to Habitat go directly to purchase new materials for their homes. Habitat builds four to six homes each year in its four-county region of La Crosse, Trempealeau and Vernon counties in Wisconsin and Houston County in Minnesota.



Kahya Fox, executive director, Habitat for Humanity-La Crosse Area

REDUCING WASTE ONE DONATION AT A TIME

Steve Baker has been manager at the Habitat ReStore since 2008. A devotee of the "turn it around" concept, he is proud that in the 15 years the ReStore has been open, it has kept 3,936 tons or 7.8 million pounds of material out of the landfill. In the past year they took in 4,260 donations.

Baker explains each time a person comes with a contribution, it is counted as a donation, regardless of size. Donations have ranged in size from a single lightbulb to one-and-a-half semi-trucks full. While businesses make some donations, 95 percent of the products sold at the ReStore are contributed by individuals in the Coulee Region. The ReStore offers pickup service within the four counties. Merchandise moves through quickly.

VOLUNTEERS KEEP IT GOING

A vital component of the ReStore and Habitat programs is volunteers. Fourteen to sixteen people volunteer regularly at the store. They receive training on the job and often acquire expertise in a particular aspect of the business and are encouraged to do so. Volunteers typically come for a few hours each week.

Chris Malin became familiar with the ReStore concept as a



Volunteers receive, sort and sell a wide range of home and construction materials, from lighting fixtures to light bulbs and furniture to fasteners.

customer of one in Florida. When he moved to La Crosse to take care of a sister, he found a lift chair for her and a couple of Amish bentwood rockers at the ReStore. He likes that the ReStore keeps so much stuff out of the landfill. "Every day I see treasures come through the door, and it makes me happy when they leave with a happy customer," he says.

Richard Cota used to build houses with Habitat but his arthritis made it difficult. Now he separates out metal and sorts it. The copper, brass and other metals are sold for cash. He has learned how to identify metals by using various tests. He's been with Habitat six years and works around eight hours a week.

Lisa Kaya is a rather new volunteer, having started in May; she volunteers about eight hours a week. She is attracted to the mission of Habitat and likes that everything in the ReStore comes from the local area. She likes working in retail, where she sorts and prices items as they come in and arranges them on the shelves and display areas. She appreciates being a part of the mission. "There are so many parts to Habitat," she says.

"Volunteers are the heart of our organization," says Fox. "The success of our mission depends on them."

INSPIRATIONAL INVENTORY

Customers come from many walks of life, looking for materials for a wide variety of purposes. Many are seeking to make home repairs without spending too much money. Good-quality building materials, appliances, tile or paint will cost a third to half of regular retail. All items at ReStore are in usable condition.

Baker said more people are coming to the ReStore looking for items to use in craft projects, inspired by ideas on Pinterest and Etsy. Interesting metal findings, hardware, cabinet doors, dishes and flatware are getting snapped up by creative types.

The stock at ReStore is determined by what people bring in. In general, there is gently used furniture, building materials, hardware, tools, lamps, some dishes and decorative items. Items move through quickly and stock changes often.

Those seeking to apply for a Habitat house or to work on building one can find the information they need at www.habitatlacrosse.org. The ReStore hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. CRW

Janis Jolly has found several amazing and useful objects at Habitat ReStore.

The Power to Offer Belonging

Hmong author Kao Kalia Yang shares insights into the life of an artist and refugee.

BY BETTY CHRISTIANSEN | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Author Kao Kalia Yang

Kao Kalia Yang was born in a Thai refugee camp to a Hmong family who made a harrowing escape from Laos across the Mekong River, spent years in refugee camps and eventually settled in St. Paul, Minnesota. Yang left behind the only world she knew, stark but filled with the love and stories of her extended family, and she carried with her their memories, wise words and hope. She has since written numerous books for children and adults that beautifully detail the experiences of a girl growing up in a strange land and a woman honoring her culture and craft. Here, she shares insights into her journey.

In your memoir *The Latecomer*, you talk about the stories your family told you as a child in the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp in Thailand. What did these stories mean to you as a child—and now, as a writer?

In the life I lived, the stories the adults in my life shared were understood as gifts. They were entertainment in a world without television or books. They spoke of worlds beyond the one I inhabited. They taught me how to connect words to meaning, meaning to moments, moments to lives. Most importantly, they taught me how

to dream. My life in the refugee camp was limited. But in the words of my father, I was not a poor kid because my heart and my mind were rich places. Today, as a writer, I journey back, with the gift of memory, to the stories that were shared in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. I'm swept by a sense of gratitude and humility. How tired their hearts must have been and yet how beautiful and courageous the worlds they brought to life were. Those first stories showed me how through stories children can meet the realities of a bigger world and engage with it honestly, authentically and bravely.

How do you see your role as a writer in terms of opening readers' minds and educating them about the challenges and realities faced by others even in their own community?

I believe firmly that the job of the writer is to open up human experience, invite others in and be a friend on a journey. Yes, it is nice when my readers are learning from the work, but more than the educational piece, I'm dedicated to garnering a deeper understanding of the human experience. Some of the stories I write of, I've never lived; they have been gifted to me. I have a role in ensuring that the stories will live beyond me, that the gift is honorably shared, and that

"In the work of growing ourselves and our communities, we have to understand that it is not about how much we know but how much there is to learn. Study. Talk to people. Try to understand. Let these principles guide, and we'll be all right; we'll have done the best we can by others."

—Kao Kalia Yang

it goes to work on behalf of a greater humanity. Again, in the words of my father, the job of the artist is to harvest from the garden of life.

Your parents and especially your grandmother are important figures in your life. How did they influence you as a writer? How did they encourage you to tell your story?

My grandmother was always a powerful figure in my life—even as I learned how powerless my people have been throughout history. She gave me a model of beauty and strength that offered room for me to grow into myself in the fullest ways. In *The Most Beautiful Thing*, I write of her single tooth and how it taught me what true beauty was, a deeper essence that time cannot take away, money cannot buy, youth has no ownership of.

My mother is very different from my grandmother. She was among the first generation of Hmong women to be literate. She dreamt of a life where she could type with quick fingers, have a job, make a life beyond the fields she grew up on. My mother taught me how to be brave in the pursuit of my dreams; she has enabled so many of them, including this life in the literary arts.

My father, a song poet in the Hmong tradition (the book I've written about him, *The Song Poet*, is currently the One Book/One Minnesota title), showed me how bitter words can be sweetened, how stiff language can be made soft, how through words we can heal what the world has broken.

Each gave me a powerful pathway into seeing how I might become someone worthy and true, pursue work that is noble and just. They raised a high standard for the quality of the work I do as a writer and showed me through their personhood that all I needed to do was try and try again. The art of telling one's story is continuous, the story changes as I change, the story changes as the world changes, and these changes will make me more of who I'm meant to be, not less—a critical lesson in owning a story and giving it to the world.

Through your writing, you give us keen and tender insight into the life of a refugee. How can we become more welcoming to and understanding of refugees?

It's important to remember here the wisdom of my grandmother, who was a respected shaman, medicine woman and healer: Every time we have the ability to help someone, we have the power to hurt them. It's also critical that we remember: Each and every single one of us has the power to offer another belonging. In the work of growing ourselves and our communities, we have to understand that it is not about how much we know but how much there is to learn. Study. Talk to people. Try to understand. Let these principles guide, and we'll be all right; we'll have done the best we can by others. **CRW**

Betty Christiansen is publisher of Coulee Region Women.



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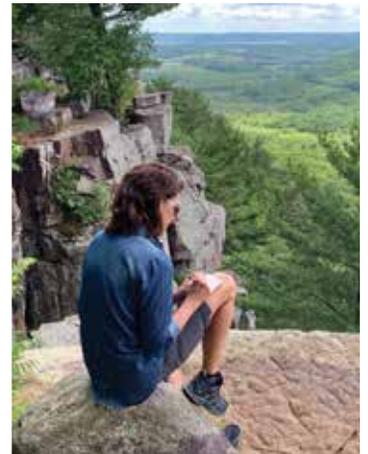
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Hair Care with Heart

Salon owner Amy Anderson is making a positive impact on her community, one hair appointment at a time.

BY JESSICA ZEN | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Stylists offer services to help women get back on their feet through a community event at Amy Elizabeth Hair Design.

The art of a good hair appointment is so much more than just the cut itself. Amy Anderson of Amy Elizabeth Hair Design is taking hair care to the next level by not only providing services that build women's confidence from the inside out, but also helping community members get back on their feet.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Anderson has been giving her clients beautiful hair since 2002, but she just recently opened her organic salon in Onalaska. In December 2020, Anderson hosted her first "Get On Your Feet" event, focused on helping women living in local shelters get back into the workforce. She notes that when she was younger, she didn't have a lot of maternal influence and wanted to give back to others who are struggling.

Anderson partnered with New Horizons to find the best candidates. "For me, it was about helping the women in the community, but I also got just as much out of the other professionals working with me serving the community," says Anderson.

Complimentary hair, makeup, résumé assistance, professional photos and a professional outfit for the interview process were all part of the event.

"When Amy inquired if MBSK could be a part of her first 'Get On Your Feet' event, there was absolutely no question," says Sarah Koblitz, owner of Makeup by Sarah Koblitz, who volunteered her services as a makeup consultant. "When a woman feels worthy, confident and truly beautiful from the inside out, she is unstoppable. That day, I believe Amy's event truly changed the attendee's life. She left with a courage, excitement and appreciation in her eyes she hadn't felt in quite a while."

Heidi Svec, program coordinator at New Horizons, agrees that regaining confidence helps survivors in their program move forward.

"Often when a survivor of abuse comes through the doors of New Horizons, their self-esteem has been completely worn down," Svec says. "Advocates work with survivors to rebuild their confidence and re-establish a sense of control in their lives. Centering safety, well-being, autonomy and humanity are key to the survivor-driven supports

offered by New Horizons. Partnerships with community members and businesses allow for holistic support of survivors as they proceed on their journey to a life free of abuse."

Anderson is diligently working on organizing the next event for December 2021.

TURNING IT AROUND

Hosting this event is just the beginning. Anderson hopes to also host a class for single dads who need help learning how to do their daughters' hair, as well as assisting mothers of biracial kids who struggle with maintaining their curls.

"This was my struggle raising my three daughters," Anderson says, and she knows how difficult it can be to learn. She is also working on a cold weather clothing drive for recent refugees from Afghanistan. To top it all off, Anderson plans to pursue a certificate in trichology, as helping clients with hair-thinning issues is another one of her passions. She offers a scalp analysis, followed by balancing PH to combat hair loss, then stimulates hair growth and eliminates bacteria using a high-frequency comb. The service ends with dry brushing and a massage to assist with exfoliation.

From assisting people with thinning hair to organizing clothing drives, Anderson is giving of herself to help members in her community "turn it around." Her goal is to create a health movement in the Onalaska community and do her part to impact more people through the salon industry. **CRW**

Jessica Zen is a freelance writer in the La Crosse area and loves a good salon appointment. Nothing quite boosts confidence like a fresh new hairstyle!

"GET ON YOUR FEET" PARTNERS

Hair & Wardrobe: Amy Elizabeth Hair Design

Makeup: Makeup by Sarah Koblitz

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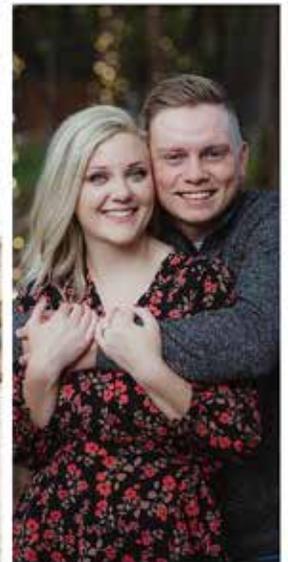
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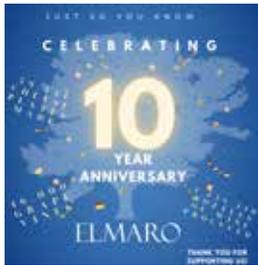
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Award-winning Elmaro Vineyard, located in Trempealeau and a favorite site for wine tastings, wine purchases and vineyard picnics, is celebrating its 10-year anniversary. That's 1,258,410 bottles of wine produced, 59,541 cheese plates made and 16,000 grapevines, all from a small family-run winery. And that's not counting the musical performances, yoga classes and other special events that make a trip to Elmaro Vineyard unique and memorable. To plan your visit to Elmaro, located at N14756 Delaney Road in Trempealeau, check www.elmarovineyard.com or www.facebook.com/ElmaroVineyard to find current hours.

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ALTRA CELEBRATES 90 YEARS

In celebration of Altra's 90-year anniversary, La Crosse Mayor Mitch Reynolds proclaimed October 19, 2021, Altra Federal Credit Union Recognition Day. Altra began as Trane Employees Credit Union on October 19, 1931, changing its name to Altra in 2005.

Today, Altra serves members at 16 locations nationwide including Wisconsin, Minnesota, Tennessee and Texas, as well as inside Trane plants in New Jersey and Colorado. Not-for-profit and member owned, Altra's mission is to create member loyalty by providing products, services and guidance that enable its members, staff and communities to prosper. Altra also offers a full range of financial services, from personal and business to lending and investments.



HABITAT EXPANDS TO TREMPLEALEAU COUNTY

Habitat for Humanity La Crosse Area is planning to build its first home in Trempealeau County. Partnering with the City of Arcadia, Habitat for Humanity purchased a vacant lot on Wilson Avenue. Plans for the home are under development and construction will begin in spring 2022.

"It's amazing to begin connecting with a new community," says Executive Director Kahya Fox. "We have a dedicated group of citizens who will be instrumental in constructing the first Habitat home in Trempealeau County."

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit organization that partners with homeowners and the community to build simple, decent and affordable housing. For more information, visit www.habitatlacrosse.org or call 608-785-2373.



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**FIRST ALERT
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Turning the Tables on “Toss It” Culture

Online groups link no-longer-needed items with new homes.

BY ANASTASIA PENCHI | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Online groups dedicated to concepts such as “buy nothing” connect individuals with items to donate with those who can give them a new life. Some, such as Everyone Needs A Helping Hand—La Crosse Area, go even farther, collecting items such as fans (left) for households without air conditioning and providing look-alike “loveys” for a little girl who had lost her special stuffed friend.

Alma lost her stuffed kitty. The kitten she’d had since birth went to school with Alma because it helped with her adjustment. But one day, late in September, Alma came home without Lovey.

Tears were shed, and Alma told her mother she didn’t want to live without Lovey. After much hysteria and a search of the school, Alma’s mother reached out to members of the Facebook group Everyone Needs A Helping Hand—La Crosse Area. Maybe someone had seen Lovey or had a replacement they’d be willing to donate? Payday was a long way away.

Lorie Theisen of La Crosse was amazed at the response. Not only did group members offer stuffed kittens from their own homes, a couple of people also offered to buy her daughter the exact replacement. Within two days Alma had two new stuffed kittens: Lovey and Little Lovey.

“When you are ‘special needs,’ that special baby is everything,” Theisen says. “It reminds you of the goodness in people,” she adds. “It makes my heart melt.”

HELPING NEIGHBORS AND THE EARTH

Facebook groups like Everyone Needs A Helping Hand—La Crosse Area, Buy Nothing Onalaska, WI and Viroqua Area Online Free Store connect people who have things to donate with people who could use those donated items. Not only do these groups promote the reuse and recycling of clothing, furniture and other legal consumables, it also lessens the financial burden on households.

“We have all this stuff, and it’s not bad enough to throw away,” says Brooke Hardison, one of four administrators of Everyone Needs A Helping Hand—La Crosse Area.

That group started five years ago. Founders were concerned members wouldn’t want to help once the Covid-19 pandemic started,

but the opposite has been true. Hardison said the size of the group more than doubled to 7,100 people during the last two years.

And that’s a national trend: 1.5 million people joined the Buy Nothing Project, a similar Facebook group, between March 2020 and January 2021, according to a July 30, 2021, Fortune.com article. At Freecycle.org, posts by users looking to give away stuff on its sites doubled.

NEW WAYS TO GIVE BACK

The sites do more than keep couches out of the landfill, founders say, as a sense of community forms between members. Hardison’s group does additional fundraising and giveaways: food boxes go out at Thanksgiving and gifts are given to kids at Christmas.

“It’s turned into something that’s a lot bigger,” Hardison added. “We’re always looking for new ways to give back.”

Tracy Joholski of Viola created the Viroqua Area Online Free Store four years ago with the help of someone she met online. She said the most common items people donate are “things that would normally be tossed” like beds, other furniture, pet items and household décor.

“Needs are being met,” she said. “There is no money attached—everything is upcycled, recycled.”

Joholski said she’s seen amazing things happen in her group. Members rallied to help furnish a home for a victim of domestic violence. Kitchen cabinets, countertops and flooring have been donated. One member even gave away a vehicle to someone in need.

“It’s the ‘asks’ for needs that are the most heartwarming ones,” Joholski adds. **CRW**

Anastasia Penchi appreciates the ease of donating items through Facebook groups and even found someone who wanted her garden’s green tomatoes. She can be reached at callmeloislane@hotmail.com.

Community Calendar

ONGOING EVENTS

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

Coulee Region Professional Women (CRPW) 4th Tues. of each month, www.crpwomen.org.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Valley View Rotary, every Wed., 7:30-8:30 a.m., La Crosse Famous Dave's, www.valleyviewrotary.com.

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

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

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

Please contact each group to confirm meeting status and location.

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

CALENDAR EVENTS

DECEMBER

Dec. 1-31, Rotary Holiday Lights, open daily 5-10 p.m., Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 5-9 p.m., Riverside Park, La Crosse.

Dec. 3-4, Kriskindlmarkt, 4-8 p.m. Fri., 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Sat., 120 N. Water St., Sparta, www.facebook.com/SpartaKriskindlmarkt.

Dec. 3-18, *Who's Holiday*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.



Dec. 3-19, *The Sound of Music*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Dec. 3-12, *The Revolutionists*, 7:30 p.m. Wed.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun, Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse, www.uwlax.edu.

Dec. 3, Winona Outdoor Collaborative Monthly Meet Up: Curling, 4-8 p.m., Centerville Curling Club, Galesville, register at www.winonaoutdoorcollaborative.com.

Dec. 4-5, A Viterbo Christmas, 7:30 p.m. Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Dec. 4-5, 100 Miles of Christmas, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., communities along Great River Road, www.facebook.com/events/4355740537879160/.



Dec. 4, *Old Fashioned Christmas*, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

Dec. 4, Kickapoo Valley Reserve Friends Cookie Sale, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center, S3661 State Hwy. 131, La Farge, 773-512-6941.

Dec. 5-19, Julefest, 9 a.m., Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskedalen.org.

Dec. 5, Winter Market, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Radisson Event Center, 2nd and Jay Streets, La Crosse, www.cameronparkmarket.org.

Dec. 8, Jingle Bell Brunch, 9 a.m.-12 p.m., Cargill Room, Waterfront Restaurant, 608-784-0440.

Dec. 10-11, Kriskindlmarkt, 4-8 p.m. Fri., 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Sat., 120 N. Water St., Sparta, www.facebook.com/SpartaKriskindlmarkt.

Dec. 10-12, La Crosse Dance Centre's 32nd Annual Nutcracker Ballet, 7:30 p.m. Fri., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Dec. 11, Jingle Bell Walk/Run, YMCA-North, Onalaska, register at www.laxymca.org.

Dec. 12, Winter Market, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Radisson Event Center, 2nd and Jay Streets, La Crosse, www.cameronparkmarket.org.

Dec. 15, Kat Perkins "Rockin' Holidays," 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

Dec. 17-18, Kriskindlmarkt, 4-8 p.m. Fri., 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Sat., 120 N. Water St., Sparta, www.facebook.com/SpartaKriskindlmarkt.

Dec. 17, An Old World Holiday, 7:30 p.m., La Crosse Symphony, www.lacrossesymphony.org.

Dec. 19, Winter Market, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Radisson Event Center, 2nd and Jay Streets, La Crosse, www.cameronparkmarket.org.

Dec. 23, Christmas with Lorie Line, 3 p.m., Weber Center for the Performing Arts, www.webercenterarts.org.

JANUARY



Jan. 6, *Women's Christmas: An Epiphany Celebration for Wise Women*, 5:30-8 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Jan. 6, Meditation for Emotional Health, 6:30 p.m., preregistration required, www.fscenter.org.

Jan. 8, The Magic of Isaiah: Magic Mystery Matinee, 2 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Jan. 9, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, 11 a.m., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Jan. 14-15, Johnsmith, 7:30 p.m., The Pump House, La Crosse, www.thepumphouse.org.

Jan. 15, Vision Board Retreat, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Jan. 17, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Celebration, 7 p.m., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center.



Jan. 20, *The Looney Lutherans*, 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.

Jan. 22, Beacon Conference: Finding Hope, Healing & Community in Your Miscarriage and/or Infertility Journey, 8 a.m.-2 p.m., First Free Church, Onalaska, www.firstfree.org.

Jan. 28-29, 24-Hour Theatre: No Script, No Sleep, No Problem, performance 7 p.m. Sat., Dufresne Performing Arts Center, Winona State University, www.winona.edu.

Jan. 28-Feb. 13, *The Mountaintop*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for Performing Arts, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.

Jan. 28-Feb. 5, *Everybody*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

Jan. 29, Great Tri-State Rail Sale, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.4000foundation.org.

FEBRUARY

Feb. 3, Mads Tolling and the Mads Men, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center, www.viterbo.edu/fine-arts-center.

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