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Pictured on cover and above: Becky Brudos, physical education teacher at Holmen High School and Jazzercise instructor. Photos by Jen Towner Photography. Hair and makeup by Paige Van Vleet at Moxy Salon and Spa, Holmen.

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On all those Facebook lists of “How to be happy” that you reflexively click on, hoping to spy a magic tip, there includes some version of “avoid negative people.” In the spirit of being happier, I prefer a more optimistic spin. Let’s try this instead: “seek out positive people.”

Who are these people? It’s easy to come up with a close friend or two, a sister who makes you laugh or the women you have a glass of wine with once a month. But I’m struck more by the unexpected encounters with everyday people who surprise me with their positive energy. For example, there’s the mom I met when our sons became friends in second grade. When we evolved to play dates, I’d race to drop my son off at her house, greedy for some precious free time—and then spend most of that time talking with her in her kitchen. It was wonderful. She was so positive, with such a genuine good nature, that I wanted to stay and soak her energy up.

It’s a little ironic that I’m writing a letter about energy at the end of a week that’s left me feeling drained from meeting deadlines and shuttling kids. But when I look back on

it, I see it was also filled with encounters that took me by surprise and surrounded me, if only for a few minutes at a time, with positive people and good energy.

There was, for example, the last-minute interview that turned out to be so inspiring and delightful that I felt energized for the rest of the day. Popping in to a business to grab a quick photo led to a sweet discussion about community and children with the proprietor. Colleagues who said kind and affirming things to me, a surprise gift from a business owner, a friend who greeted me with a bear hug—my week, for all its demands, was actually packed with energizing moments. I only had to see them as such and slow down enough to soak up the positive.

This issue of *Coulee Region Women* is about adding that positive energy to your life. We’ve created this issue by seeking out positive people who, we hope, will energize and inspire you, too.

We begin with Becky Brudos, one of the most energizing women we know, on a quest to spread a love of fitness across generations. There’s Vickie Stevenson, a local business owner who shows what the energy of a supportive family can do. There’s our newest Coulee Region celebrity, Jen Barney, positively brimming with energy for the future of Meringue Bakery. We’ll show you what’s new in downtown revitalization and discover what happens when a teacher takes a class of curious kids outdoors. We’ll energize you with coffee and community, the healing power of reiki, a trip to wine country and more.

And as you absorb the positive energy we hope you find in these pages, we want to remind you of one more thing: *you* are a positive person, too. You might be the one who brightens a stranger’s day, who radiates the kindness we are craving, who says just the right thing or who gives a much-needed bear hug. Start seeing yourself that way, and believing it, and you won’t have to look far for happiness.

Betty

coulee region women

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Dr. Julie Moseng

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CELEBRATING HER HEART HEALTH

February is all about hearts; why not also use it to celebrate heart health? Join women around the region as they celebrate women's heart health at a new event sponsored by Gundersen Health System and Mayo Clinic Health System, held at the Cargill Room at Riverside Center South on February 23 at 11 a.m.

Celebrating Her Heart Health is an educational luncheon featuring Dr. Yader B. Sandoval Pichardo of Mayo Clinic Health System as a guest speaker. Free health screenings, exhibits and more round out the event. Tickets are \$25 and are available in advance at www.celebratingherhearthealth.com in advance or at the door on the day of the event.



MASQUERADE!

Celebrate Valentine's Day with elegance and romance at the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra's annual Valentine Ball, held this year on February 10 at 5:30 p.m. in the Cargill Room at Riverside Center South. Themed as a Black & White Masquerade Ball, this orchestra fundraiser invites you and your sweetheart to indulge in masks and merriment for an evening of music, mystery and much fun. Incognito, a popular nine-piece band from Rochester, will play a great mix of musical styles for your listening and dancing pleasure; you're also invited to bid on a number of amazing items at the auction.

Tickets are \$115 per person and are available from www.lacrossesymphony.org or 608-783-2121. Follow the event on Facebook at facebook.com/groups/lsovalentineball.



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"When life gives you disco balls, boogie"—that's the irresistible invitation extended to you for the annual Murder Mystery Theatre offered by the Local Lupus Alliance. Naturally, the evening would not be complete without a murder most foul, and the only way to track down the culprit is to put on your best attire from the '70s and '80s and get down at the Cargill Room at Riverside Center South on March 3 at 5:30 p.m.

Think flower power and bell bottoms, silk shirts and polyester suits, then slip on your tallest platform shoes and groove on over for '70s eats and a cash bar, raffle, and silent and live auctions. Tickets are \$75 each, and all proceeds stay in our community to support patients and their families in their fight against lupus. Tickets and more information are available from www.localupus.org.

A GOOD FILM

On a cold winter day, there's nothing better than curling up with a good film. And Winona's Frozen River Film Festival offers you not just one, but several days' worth of films that will educate you, challenge you and get you thinking about something beyond the cold.

Held February 7-11 in venues across Winona (see www.frff.org for a schedule of films and locations), FRFF will lure you out of your armchair by the fire to experience extreme rock climbing, community-building NYC style, diving with orcas and fire dancing. You'll explore climate change in Bangladesh; regeneration in Flint, Michigan; life along the Mexican border wall; survival of Rwandan genocide; and the world of Julian Assange.

FRFF has long sought to expose its viewers to people and cultures they might otherwise never encounter and issues they have yet to consider, then provide opportunities for debate and discussion—but also to take action on the social issues they're exposed to. All in all, FRFF is an excellent way to warm the soul, stimulate the mind and engage in community in the depths of winter. For a complete schedule and details, visit www.frff.org.



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The Energizer

Among her students, Becky Brudos' passion for fitness is contagious.

BY MARTHA KEEFFE
Photos by Jen Towner Photography



To say that Becky Brudos is passionate about what she does is an understatement. And as a physical education teacher for Holmen High School and a Jazzercise instructor in La Crosse, what she does is move—a lot. “Movement is fuel for me,” says Brudos, who jokes that her husband likes to tell her to “take a Jazzercise class” when she’s feeling irritable. “Exercise is where I find my motivation.”

A lifelong athlete, Brudos played high school volleyball, basketball and softball in her hometown of Westby. Inspired by the commitment and dedication shown to her and her classmates by many of her coaches and teachers, Brudos decided to pursue a career in physical education with the hope that she could someday influence students in the same way. “I loved everything about being in high school,” says Brudos. “I loved the atmosphere, the friends and support I received from the staff. I wanted students to experience that same type of enthusiasm.”

Igniting a love of fitness

After completing her master’s degree in education at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Brudos taught elementary-school-level PE in the Holmen School District for 15 years. Though she enjoyed teaching younger students, she found she relates best to the older students with whom she can build a relationship and whose fitness challenges and exercise preferences she can better understand. “I’m motivated and

excited to teach them,” says Brudos of her high school students, who participate in a broad spectrum of activities from conventional team sports to indoor and outdoor adventure programs to target games like archery. “I like the challenge of finding something that they really enjoy doing and that they can continue doing once they graduate from high school.”

To expose her students to an even wider variety of fitness options, Brudos encourages the older students who enroll in her Fit Balance class to embrace an attitude of open-mindedness toward fitness. Whether that opportunity presents itself in the form of yoga, Zumba dance workouts—which her students love—or spinning classes, Brudos is enthusiastic about exploring those opportunities with her students. In fact, to create a more dynamic, interesting PE format, Brudos has introduced alternatives to traditional exercise such as the Eupraxia fitness program, high-intensity drumming and pounding classes, swing dancing and even Jazzercise. “It’s not what you think,” says Brudos of the 40-year-old fitness class franchise that conjures up images of middle-aged women with big hair doing jazz hands. “Jazzercise remains relevant by continually evolving and transforming itself to keep current. And though the foundation of Jazzercise is based on dance fitness, it now incorporates elements of yoga, Pilates and strength training. That’s one of the reasons I love it!”



No jazz hands here

Eager to share her enthusiasm for Jazzercise, Brudos, who teaches three to four classes a week, invited my friend and I to try it out. As someone who prefers the rigors of mountain biking and trail running to a studio workout, I was skeptical as to whether I would actually break a sweat, especially if the class simply required an hour of dancing.

Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised when we were greeted by a very fit, very energetic Brudos who, from what I could tell, had probably never worn a pair of leg warmers in her entire life. As we talked, about two dozen women, from college age on up, bounded into the building and hurried to gather arm weights and yoga mats before stretching their muscles in preparation for class. Brudos explained that people often expect a low-aerobic, low-impact workout, but are surprised to find just the opposite. “Fifteen years ago, my mom asked me to take a Jazzercise class with her, and I said no for those same reasons,” says Brudos. “But now if I could, I’d teach four Jazzercise classes a day.”

“And don’t worry about not being able to follow along; pretty much everyone thinks that they won’t know the moves,” chimed in a fellow classmate who also felt intimidated the first few times she tried Jazzercise. “But Becky does a great job of talking us through the routines, and really, she just wants to keep you moving and having fun.”

Having said that, the music started and Brudos hopped up onto the stage, ready to go. After Brudos coached us through a series of warm-up moves, we took a short break before moving into the first of four cardio sets. With a quick reminder to modify the exercises and

move at our own pace (which I appreciated), Brudos led us through a power-packed routine where we punched, kicked, jogged and high-stepped ourselves into a healthy sweat before picking up our weights and progressing into muscle toning, abdominal work and stabilization exercises. Thankful for her boundless amounts of energy, upbeat music and shouts of “You’ve got this!” we knew it didn’t matter if our moves were spot-on—we just felt encouraged to keep improving. “That’s how Jazzercise is designed,” explained Brudos after the class. “Each cardio and toning sequence is choreographed to a specific song to keep you working hard. And since the music and routines are constantly changing, I like to choose the ones that I know will keep the class interesting.”

Her enthusiasm is contagious

However, it’s not merely Brudos’ attention to challenging routines, inspiring music and variety that makes you want to get up and move, but her sincere desire to model healthy behaviors to others. “For example, I don’t force my girls to exercise, but instead I do activities with them that they enjoy, like skiing or just playing outside,” Brudos says. And apparently this tactic works for her students as well. “I love her; she’s awesome,” says a Holmen High School sophomore about Brudos. “She’s always finding something new for us to do, and that makes class fun.” **(crw)**

Martha Keefe lives and writes in La Crosse. Despite her skepticism, she and her friend found Jazzercise to be quite a challenge!



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CAFFEINATING A COMMUNITY

Women-owned coffee shops provide community and revitalization.

BY JULIE NELSON
Contributed photos

Laurie Miller, co-owner of Cool Beans, La Crosse, has transformed an eyesore building near UW-La Crosse into a warm gathering place.

While Laurie Miller drinks a lot of caffeine, she believes going to a coffee shop is about much more than just getting a hot cup of java. Miller, her husband, Steve, and their friend George will hang out for hours in a place they enjoy. “We are all big coffee shop aficionados,” says Miller. “That’s actually where I met George, in a coffee shop. We figured if we were going to spend a lot of time consuming coffee in La Crosse, we should open a shop ourselves.” And that’s how Cool Beans, one of La Crosse’s newest coffee shops, came to be.

A community place

Coffee shops have long filled the human need for a “third place”—not home, not work, but a social setting where community and connection can be found. After logging all those hours in coffee shops, Miller and crew had a good idea of what they wanted in such a place, from the big things like coffee and food to the little things that add to the overall enjoyment of the experience. “We make sure the bathrooms are clean, the tables aren’t too close together and none of the tables wobble,” she says, grabbing the one she’s seated at by the sides and attempting, unsuccessfully, to make it teeter.

The tables are more than sturdy; they are part of Cool Beans’ commitment to using local products. Miller says the tables are repurposed from the Habitat ReStore, the Kickapoo Coffee beans they use come from Viroqua, the artwork on the walls is done by lesser-known local artists and the food comes from local vendors,

including one entrepreneur who walked in one day, wowed them with her baked goods and offered her services. Currently in the works is a connection with Pearl Street Brewery. “I love local business,” says Miller, “so whatever we can do to help, I’m glad to be able to do it.”

Miller, an economics professor at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and a member of the La Crosse Economic Development Board, is passionate about community. “I love our downtown; I have yet to find one as vibrant as ours. Even though our location (at the corner of La Crosse Street and West Avenue) is a bit away from the city center, I’m glad we can be a part of the overall sense of community. The building we are in had become an eyesore, so to be able to turn it into something like this is part of what we wanted to accomplish.”

The other part of what Cool Beans hoped to accomplish was to create a community gathering place—that third place idea. “There’s something about coffee shops that offer a sense of belonging,” says Miller. “You get a very eclectic group of people. We love the nearby students who walk in, we love the adults who drive to get here and we love the group of folks in recovery who have made this a regular hangout in the evenings.”

Coffee and connection downtown

A sense of community is also what makes Jules Coffee House—which is located in the heart of downtown La Crosse—tick, says owner Chris Kahlow. “I have a personal connection to a lot of the people who come in here and think it’s amazing what happens when



Chris Kahlow, center, is the owner of Jules Coffee House in downtown La Crosse. She gives her employees much credit for its success.

you get out of your car and walk through the downtown. My customers often ask me how I heard about some bit of news, and the answer is usually that I recently ran into someone downtown and had a quick conversation.”

Like Cool Beans, Jules opened with a sense of purpose beyond selling good coffee. Kahlow is passionate about historic preservation and initially bought the building on Pearl Street to make sure it didn't get torn down. “I thought I would be in the coffee shop business for three years and then move on to something else,” she says of her opening day in November 1993. “But I found the flexibility worked well with having young children and a family, so I just kept going.”

Over the years, Kahlow has been a part of Downtown Mainstreet, Inc., and the Historic Preservation Alliance, has served on the city's park board and has played a vital role in downtown revitalization. “The downtown was and is my neighborhood. I love the

natural environment; the river is right here, the buildings are beautiful and there's a real sense of community.”

Downtown collaboration

Kahlow credits other Pearl Street businesses such as TJ Peterslie's enterprises, Kroner's Hardware and Satori Arts for being a part of the downtown growth. She says she is excited about the hotels, Belle Square and other developments that are adding more energy to downtown La Crosse, though she says it took a lot longer than she anticipated. “Twenty years ago, I was saying, just wait, in five years the downtown will have really changed. Then five years later, I'd say the same thing.”

She says, in hindsight, the slow growth isn't that unusual. “It takes the risk-takers to start the dream, and then when it looks like it makes economic sense, others come in and really ignite the process. But you need those

dreamers to get started; it makes for a great partnership.”

After 25 years in business, Kahlow may be finally ready to do what she planned all along—move on to something else. She is confident Jules—and the downtown—will continue to grow and flourish without her. “It's been an honor and a privilege to have such an incredible staff over the years. What we've accomplished at Jules would not have been possible without them. And it's an exciting time in downtown La Crosse; I'm looking forward to seeing what happens in the next 25 years.”

If current trends are any indication, good coffee shops, and the women behind them, will be an important part of energizing the community for years to come. [crw](#)

Julie Nelson lives in the downtown area and enjoys watching the downtown transformation.

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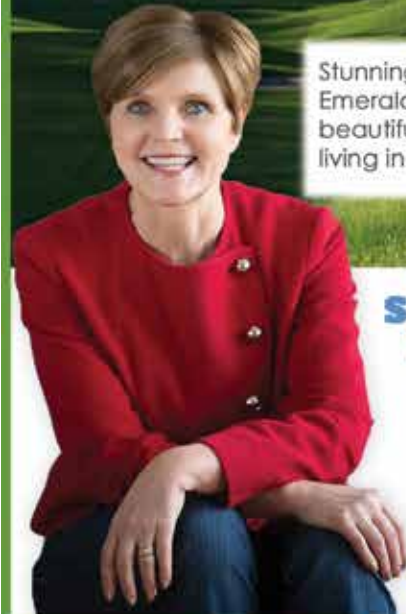
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NEWS



AT SIX & TEN



Vickie Stevenson (far left) draws strength from her family (from left): daughters Lindsey, Sydney, Bailey and Aubrey, and her husband, Ritch.

“I Call Her *Superwoman*”

Vickie Stevenson’s life is all about positive energy, both on the job and off.

BY SUSAN C. SCHUYLER
Contributed photos

Some women just can’t be stopped, and Vickie Stevenson is one of them. “I call her superwoman,” her husband, Ritch, says of his entrepreneurial, hardworking and resilient wife, and he’s not exaggerating.

Since 1993, Vickie has been vice president and treasurer of Building Automation Products, Inc. (BAPI), which manufactures temperature sensors for commercial energy-management systems in Gays Mills. She and Ritch founded the company with two employees; today, 120 workers share a freshly expanded facility, now double in size.

Wisconsin.gov lists BAPI among Crawford County’s top employers. “There are lots of opportunities for folks to stay here if they really want to,” says Vickie. “It’s a great place to grow up.” The company truly is a family affair. Vickie’s parents retired from BAPI, and her four daughters help out in the summertime.

Passion for community

In addition to her work at BAPI, Vickie is a founding board member of the North Crawford Community Education Foundation,

which is building an endowment to support school excellence and to support scholarships. “We’ve gotten our first 50 pledges of \$1,000,” says Vickie.

Also, for 10 years, Vickie extended a lifelong passion by coaching junior high volleyball in the North Crawford School District, where she coached her daughters, all of whom share her love of the sport. Vickie started playing volleyball her freshman year at Seneca High School, and her varsity team went to state twice.

In fact, Vickie says volleyball brought her and Ritch together. The first time Ritch saw Vickie was on the front page of the *Wisconsin State Journal’s* sports section when her team played on the all-star team in 1987. They met in person on a Mississippi River sandbar the summer after she graduated, and Ritch became a regular at her University of Wisconsin-River Falls games. “My two biggest followers were my husband and my sister,” says Vickie. The couple married in 1990, and Vickie earned a business degree from University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The rules are different now

“Maybe he calls me superwoman,” Vickie says. “I used to be all



Stevenson enjoys a mother-daughter moment during an infusion at Gundersen Health System.

about, “Yeah, I can do this.” She says she always felt like she had to prove herself. “I grew up in a time of women’s liberation, and I wasn’t going to depend on a man.”

But now she lives by new rules, hard-won from a series of life-threatening health crises. In 2006, she learned she had a benign tumor in her spinal cord that attached to her brain stem. “I was just growing another spinal cord,” she says. Her surgeon predicted that after surgery, she had an equal chance of either becoming a wheelchair-bound paraplegic on a respirator or walking out of the hospital, unaffected. “I

fell somewhere in the middle,” Vickie says.

She endured seven hours of surgery and six weeks in the hospital, where she left in a wheelchair requiring round-the-clock supervision. During the months of rehab that followed, she learned to walk again. However, she still deals with the loss of sensation from Brown-Séquard syndrome, a result of spinal-cord damage.

Other setbacks

As she describes her recovery, Vickie dabs her eyes with a napkin to slow a sudden flood of tears. She says she got through it all for her daughters: Aubrey, Bailey, Sydney and Lindsey. “My kids grew up helping their mom,” she says. “They couldn’t get in trouble because they had to help me.”

Vickie called on her daughters’ compassion again in 2016, when she learned she had breast cancer. As treatment, Vickie endured chemotherapy, targeted antibody infusions, a bilateral mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. She says losing her hair and having it grow back gray was hard. However, she’s delighted now because it broke the cycle of coloring her hair. “What a great, easy way to get out of it,” Vickie says. “Not everybody can just start over.”

Before chemo, a PET scan revealed she had a malignant thyroid tumor. Again, Vickie finds something positive in the experience. “They only removed half of my thyroid,” she says. “That’s a good thing.”

A balancing act

A saying stuck with Vickie before her first surgery: success is not a destination, but a journey. “That was the hardest thing for me to figure out,” she says. “I got through all of this because of all the people around me. Today, I’m more about the human connection.” She says she’s reinventing herself while learning about life balance and relinquishing control.

And her husband? “Yeah,” Vickie says. “I love him.” *(crw)*

Susan C. Schuyler is a freelance writer and cancer survivor who finds inspiration in other survivors’ successes.

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Energy for Healing

**Reiki treatments free the body to relax
and mend itself.**

BY SHARI HEGLAND
Contributed photos

When energy is blocked within the body, it creates tension. When those blockages are removed, a person is able to relax. With the body's natural energy able to move freely, the body is in a better place to be able to heal itself.

That is the central idea behind reiki, a Japanese therapy involving the laying on of hands with the intention of energy transfer from one person to another, says Shannon Amberg, a reiki master practitioner at Naturally Unbridled Wellness in La Crosse.

What is reiki?

Amberg and Mike Larsen, a reiki practitioner who volunteers at the Mayo Clinic Health System-Franciscan Healthcare's Cancer Center in La Crosse, both say the focus begins with the body's main energy centers or chakras, relying in part on intuition and experience to feel where there are blockages and allowing energy to remove them to bring the person relaxation. Amberg describes it as moving out what is heavy and replacing it with a feeling that is lighter and more peaceful, which makes it easier for a person to heal physically, emotionally and spiritually.

"You actually don't need to believe in it for it to work," Amberg says, but notes that many people can feel the energy at work as a tingling or warmth.

While Amberg sees clients challenged by a number of ailments, including chronic pain, long-term illness, post-surgery or post-injury recovery, depression, grief and anxiety, Larsen is focused primarily on working with cancer patients, often during their chemotherapy treatments. A Ferryville resident, he also volunteers in a hospice in Prairie du Chien.

How does it work?

Reiki sessions involve the patient lying on a massage table, fully clothed. After talking with the practitioner about concerns or areas of stress and pain, the "hands-on" part of the session involves only very light touches to the head, shoulders, hands, hips, knees and feet, and hovering the hands over the body.



Shannon Amberg, reiki practitioner at Naturally Unbridled Wellness, La Crosse


Both Amberg and Larsen admit that the practice and how it works on the body can be difficult to explain, but the results they see can be very noticeable.

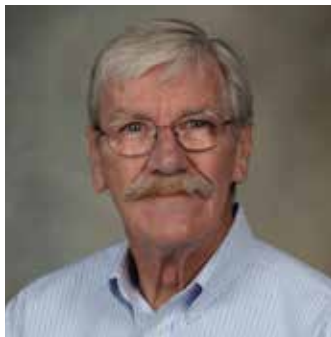
"To see people shift beneath your eyes in a short period of time is very powerful," Amberg says, noting that clients often leave a session looking noticeably younger and more relaxed. For Larsen, the proof of relaxation he offers is in those clients who nearly fall asleep during a treatment. "Their breathing will start being more steady," he says. "They look forward to that time when they can just relax and let go of everything."

Helping the body heal

Both practitioners say the art relies in part on intuition. Amberg says that as she studied reiki, she realized she was already using similar techniques with her children and others. "It came very naturally," she says.

Larsen began learning about reiki more than a decade ago when it was suggested to him as a way of helping his wife, who has rheumatoid arthritis.

Even letting go of stress for a half hour makes a difference, Larsen says, even for those he treats in the cancer center. "You still have cancer, but it's changed a little bit. If you can relax, your own body can help with the healing." 



Mike Larsen, volunteer reiki practitioner at Mayo Clinic Health System-Franciscan Healthcare, La Crosse

Shari Hegland is a Holmen freelance writer and editor, mother, wife and runner, who could use a little relaxation and energy in her life as well.

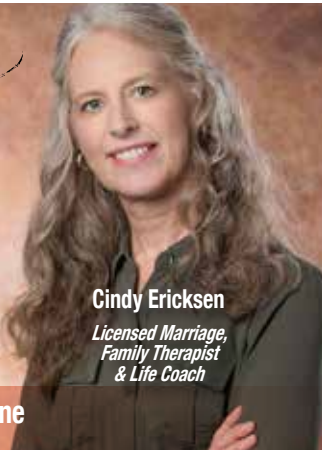


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HARNESSING KID ENERGY

Teacher Jodi Hoscheit gets her students fired up about nature.

BY ELIZABETH LIPPMAN
Contributed photos



Jodi Hoscheit's third grade class from Sand Lake Elementary School observes the tundra swan migration at the Brownsville Overlook in Minnesota. Hoscheit, far right, believes in connecting her students to the natural world.



Each spring, Hoscheit's class does an aquatic invertebrates study at Halfway Creek Marsh. The children are always amazed at the living things they find in samples of water from the marsh. Hoscheit is at center, in blue and black.

For teacher Jodi Hoscheit, time in nature is nothing short of magical. And moments spent sharing the magic of the local landscape with her Sand Lake Elementary School students—and, ultimately, their families—are some of the most rewarding. “I want to be that teacher who introduces them to the amazing natural world that exists out there,” she says.

Hoscheit teaches third grade, and nature and environmental education have always been an important focus in her work. The most popular books among the 5,000 on her classroom shelves, she says, are the nature journals and field guides. “I don’t have to work very hard to sell the magic of the refuge,” she assures. But her work extends well beyond the schoolhouse doors. Each month, Hoscheit rounds up her students for hands-on interaction with the natural world, trekking to sites in the Upper Mississippi River Refuge.

Hands-on, local lessons

In partnership with area rangers, Hoscheit incorporates her science and environmental education lessons locally, “rather than teaching them about a rain forest that many of our kids will never see in their lives,” she explains. “We can have a lesson plan and can anticipate what we’re going to be focusing on, in terms of what we want kids to be taking away from the experience,” Hoscheit says. “But when you’re out in nature, there’s always that element of you never quite know what you’re going to encounter and what kids may see and experience. There are those magical moments. They just happen.”

She recalls a particularly memorable meeting with a snake. “One of

the rangers picked it up and let the kids see it and hold it and touch it,” she says. “And then we went back and learned all we could about snakes.”

Discovery upon discovery

Snowy owls are on the agenda this winter, and Hoscheit and her students recently headed out to watch for them and scatter seeds they had collected in October. Owl endeavors have, in the past, led to in-class opportunities to study owl adaptations and behavior through, for instance, the study of pellets—those chunks of undigestible materials that owls cough up after devouring their prey. And each discovery of a skull or beak or other contents leads to further inquiry—like the biology of voles.

The learning doesn’t end there. “Parents have been wonderfully supportive,” Hoscheit attests. “The kids go home and talk about what they see and did,” she says. “And then they go out as a family and explore. I know it’s something that has grown within the families because the kids had this first experience at school.”

Grants provide much of the funding for Hoscheit’s nature activities, and the school’s latest awards will help pay for the addition of an artist in residence who will help enhance the students’ focus on nature journals, as well as the purchase of binoculars and digital cameras.

“Kids really have a lot of energy to be passionate about something if an adult can show them why it’s important,” Hoscheit says. [\(crw\)](#)

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




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YWCA La Crosse Announces New Executive Director

New executive director Kelley Waddell comes to YWCA La Crosse from The Salvation Army, where she has been director of social services for the past five years. Her career has focused on being an advocate for the underserved and underrepresented. In her more than 10 years in social services, Waddell's roles have included administration, public relations, child welfare and psychiatric case management in Wisconsin, Oklahoma and Colorado. Waddell will assume her role on February 5, 2018. Jessie Fortuna, CASA for Kids program director, remains the interim executive director until that time.

Women's Alliance of La Crosse Awards Scholarships


The Women's Alliance of La Crosse provides annual assistance to bright, motivated women seeking further education.

In 2017, WAL awarded \$6,000 and recognized six worthy candidates who have overcome significant challenges and have demonstrated that this financial support will enable them not only to complete their studies, but also to make their community a better place. We searched for women who have shown strength, leadership and drive in their past and the motivation to strive for more in their future. We feel that the women we chose truly are working to make a better life for themselves, their community, and their family.

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A NEW OLD HOME

A remodel brings new life and modern amenities to an older North Side home.

BY JESSIE FOSS

Photos by Jordana Snyder Photography

Nestled between walking trails and shopping destinations lies one of La Crosse's North Side neighborhoods, and among the residences there sits one that has gone from a house to a home for one couple: Wes and Jordana Snyder.

The couple moved into the neighborhood in August 2008. "We had been looking, and there was nothing on the market that was exciting," Jordana says. "So we stopped looking." And once they stopped, they came across the house that would become their home. A house went up for sale kitty-corner from Wes' aunt's home, and after one look, the Snyders knew this was meant to be theirs.

The itch to remodel

Fast-forward a few years, and the Snyders started to get the itch for a few more amenities in their home. They began looking at other houses that were for sale, but nothing compared to the location of their current house. Ultimately, they were left disappointed with the lack of amenities and up-to-date features at their price point. They also loved their neighborhood and knew "the North Side is the spot for us," says Jordana. They decided a remodel of their current house was their best option.

Demolition of the first floor of the Snyders' house began in the summer of 2017. The goal was to open up the rooms, put in a whole new kitchen and update and refresh the space overall.

Jordana, who loved implementing her creativity throughout the project, designed the kitchen and came up with a few other elements she loved, including raw-edged wood shelves and a textured wall in the kitchen. She pulled from several sources for inspiration, including HGTV and Pinterest.

Keeping old-house charm

While adding their mark to the home, maintaining the house's character was also important to the Snyders.

"We love the charm of older homes," Jordana says. "So doing the remodel in our older home let us have our new dream kitchen with our old-house charm. This old house has stories, and now our remodel is part of this house's story."

Discovering the house's previous stories became a part of the remodel with the discovery of what the Snyders refer to as "the reno treasures."

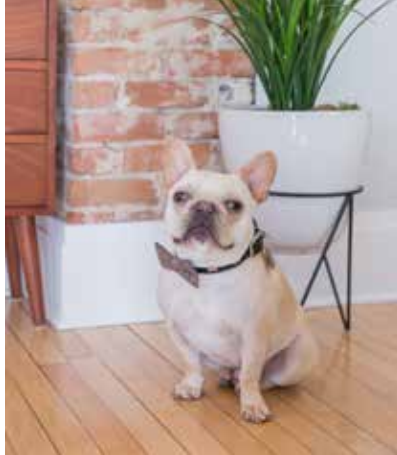
"When taking down walls and ceilings, we found all sorts of cool old stuff: a child's leather shoe, old toys, Christmas cards from ages ago and some other cool trinkets," Jordana recalls. She estimates the Christmas cards to be at least 100 years old.

The Snyders each had something specific they wanted in the remodel. Jordana made sure the kitchen featured a white with gray vein quartz waterfall-edge countertop, and Wes wanted a professional range. The two also love what they refer to as the "pet station." The Snyder family includes a dog, Toby, and two cats. The pet station features an area to feed the pets as well as a special door leading to the cats' litter boxes and a built-in kennel for Toby.

One of the most fun parts of the project, for Jordana, actually included Toby. She documented the 82-day remodel with updates featuring Toby on his own Instagram page.

Floor to finishing

The house's maple floor presented one of the largest challenges. The floor was intact in parts of the main floor, but when the walls were opened up, the Snyders discovered it was not laid throughout



Clockwise from top left: A reclaimed gym floor provided the perfect match for the original maple floors. The family dog, Toby, became an Instagram celebrity during the remodel. He and the Snyders' two cats also enjoy their new "pet station." The old house provided "reno treasures" within its walls, and the new kitchen boasts updated amenities tied together in a modern gray and white palette.

the remodel area. The Snyders could either replace the entire floor or tie in other maple flooring with the original. They decided to save the existing floor and tie in new pieces. However, that wasn't as easy in practice because the floor was maple.

In order for maple floors to match, the wood needs to have been milled around the same time. American Floor Sanding of Sparta was able to find a salvaged 70-year-old gym floor that matched, and the Snyders installed the floor themselves and had the flooring business finish the sanding and varnishing. Wes' carpenter uncle, Ron Hauser, lent his knowledge and assisted in feathering in the reclaimed wood flooring.

Finishing touches to the remodel included painting in a gray and white color palette and mixing metals in the kitchen, including the brass cabinet hardware.

Overall, Jordana says, the remodel went smoothly, and there was an added bonus of getting to know many neighbors.

"We were living in a fishbowl throughout the project," Jordana says, noting there were no window coverings on the home's street-facing windows during the remodel. "People were curious about what we were doing."

"Our old home"

The Snyders eventually plan on remodeling the upstairs of their house, but for now they are enjoying their new, yet old, home. "I think we've made the main floor function to the best of its ability for us," she says.

Jordana adds that they were impressed with every business they worked with during the remodel process: Lassig Lautz Custom Builders of West Salem, Earley Drywall, Solid Surface Specialist, Wisconsin Building Supply, Maxwell-White Plumbing, Elite Electric Solutions and, of course, American Floor Sanding. She also notes that Paul Klipp of American Family Insurance helped them reinsure their home, something she points out is an important step after a remodel.

"This is definitely still an older home, but it is *our* older home," Jordana says. "The remodel is going to help us love our old home for a lot more years."

Jessie Foss is a freelance writer living in La Crosse. She loves a good remodel project herself and enjoyed getting to see the love and hard work the Snyders put into their home. An added bonus was getting to meet a neighbor in the process.

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A CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

Middle-school Justice Circles offer a new way to solve problems and foster understanding.

BY HEIDI BLANKE
Contributed photos



Justice Circles, which operate at Lincoln and Logan Middle Schools in La Crosse, are meetings of students, student Circle Keepers and adults intended to resolve conflicts and thwart student suspensions.

Tracie Stinson doesn't see justice as a straight line, but as a circle—a Justice Circle, to be precise. This unique form of restorative justice is helping countless area middle-schoolers solve their own problems and stay out of the criminal justice system.

Steering toward justice

Justice Circles is a YWCA La Crosse program; Stinson is its Teen Services director. “We had been talking for a while about how we could expand our mission of eliminating racism,” Stinson says, “and we had a restorative justice program in the past that worked with adults,” one in which offenders were engaged in accountability and making amends. Turning that focus to local youth, Stinson notes that a 2014 La Crosse County report revealed that students of color were being arrested and ticketed at higher rates than their white peers.



Tracie Stinson, Teen Services director at YWCA La Crosse

The Justice Circles program created to address this, now operating at Logan and Lincoln Middle Schools, is similar to one used by the YWCA in Madison, where it made a very positive impact on school climate.

Rolling into understanding

A Justice Circle is a meeting of students and adults intended to resolve a conflict of any kind, but specifically those that could warrant a student suspension. Select students are trained as Circle Keepers and meet weekly with adult advisers. Because Circle Keepers are privy to confidential information, it's an opportunity for them to debrief, says Stinson. “We're asking those Circle Keepers to take on a lot; they hear about other students' lives. Sometimes it's stuff they've never really thought about, so they need a space to be able to maintain good mental health.”

Circle Keepers are a diverse group and are equally split between genders. Because tickets and suspensions are skewed toward students of color, says Stinson, it's important they are well represented as Circle Keepers.

Both adult and student participants sit in a circle to talk over the incident and suggest solutions. Specifically, the circle is populated by the Circle Keeper, a YWCA staff member, a school staff member, the student involved in the incident and two support people of that student's choosing. One person speaks at a time, following a predetermined format. “The circle's goal,” says Stinson, “is to hold students more accountable than in a suspension because they have to own up to what's happened with a group of their peers and work as a community to fix it.”

Closing the loop

Stinson looks forward to the day when restorative justice is the go-to tool for conflict. “Success for us is helping to change the school climate,” she says. Not only does it build stronger relationships between students and adults, but it also helps staff understand their students' worlds. “We know that most of our teachers are white, middle-class folks, and that's not what our schools are always comprised of,” Stinson says. She stresses the importance of knowing the lens through which you view the world—that of white privilege, for example.

“This is not magic,” she says. “It doesn't work for every single student, and sometimes it takes multiple circles for someone to help fix something or be better for somebody.” Yet the successes are there, helping students curve in the right direction. [crw](#)

Heidi Griminger Blanke, PhD, is a widely published area writer. She applauds the many YWCA programs that help people whose lives don't necessarily go in a straight path.



Sweet Success

Baker Jen Barney takes the cake at the Holiday Baking Championship.

BY BETTY CHRISTIANSEN
Photos courtesy of the Food Network

Baker Jen Barney recently did the Coulee Region proud as winner of the Food Network Holiday Baking Championship.

Hers is the classic story of the hometown girl done good—and it couldn't have happened to someone sweeter. Meet Jennifer Barney, owner of Meringue Bakery, local celebrity and winner of the Food Network's recent challenge, the Holiday Baking Championship.

If you've had the pleasure of meeting Barney—or sampling her cupcakes, which have been described as “life-changing”—you'd agree she deserves her time in the limelight for many reasons. A mom, foster mom, entrepreneur and farm girl steeped in the beauty and bounty of the Coulee Region, this corrections-officer-turned-pastry-chef is a remarkable representative of the Coulee Region. She's our everywoman, proof that working hard, doing good and giving of yourself sometimes does get the recognition it deserves.

We've enjoyed her journey vicariously; now *Coulee Region Women* offers a peek

behind the Holiday Baking Championship scenes—and a look at what lies ahead.

In a reality TV show, we viewers only see what producers want us to see. What was it really like on the set?

The show was taped back in June, in New Orleans. The entire taping lasted two-and-a-half weeks, and we averaged 10-hour days. There was one day we were picked up at 7 a.m. and left the set at midnight. You have to consider, they had to condense nine people's stories into a one-hour show. It was interesting to see what they picked and chose, but they stayed pretty true to what actually happened. There was one episode where they made (fellow contestant) Josh look snarky toward me. But we didn't remember it that way.

Drama is part of the game; I figured if that's what I have to put up with for the exposure, I can do it. And it was a holiday show, after all—not *Hell's Kitchen*.

What was your strategy for winning?

The week before I went, I crammed. I practiced any recipe I could. I had a wall in my bakery covered with ideas, photos and inspiration. I thought about what Christmas meant to me and how I would convey that on TV. I had 10 recipes I wanted to incorporate, but the show's challenges made it hard. They combined unlikely flavors that limited my ideas, and I had to run with whatever popped into my mind. Remembering my grandparents' farm—running through cornfields, milking cows, exploring woods—is how I came to incorporate a farm, a cow. And then my favorite recipe, a gingerbread cake, fit perfectly with the finale.

You always appeared kind and generous toward your competitors, and kindness is really refreshing right now. I like to think you won the judges over, at least partly, on your midwestern charm.

My mother always said, “Kill them with kindness!” But really, *they* were all incredibly nice, likeminded people. In this surreal process, we bonded. I’ll be friends with them for life—as an adult, that opportunity is rare.

And people in Wisconsin have been so nice and so responsive after the show, especially after the barn cake episode. Recently, three random people each sent me a Christmas ornament: a barn, a cake and geese (inspired by Barney’s winning creation based on “six geese a-laying”).

How has this experience changed you?

I’ve always had a strong sense of confidence, always believed in myself and have done things my way. This experience has established the fact that I bake well; now my goal is to be a really phenomenal businesswoman. I have an intense drive to be successful: to work smarter, to leverage the social media exposure I’ve gotten into new opportunities and eventually to open a downtown shop. But I don’t want to rush into it. Our space is fully functional for now, and we do have our kids. I’d like one year of being an awesome businesswoman first.



Barney (far right) says that she and her fellow contestants were much more than competitors—they became close friends.

What is the biggest lesson you have learned from this experience?

I’ve never been afraid to put myself out there, and this affirmed that, as a businesswoman and a mom, it pays to expose yourself to new people and new ideas. The experiences I’ve had, the events that make me a good pastry chef, the people I’ve met—

they’re all part of this web that has led to this point. The timing for this opportunity was perfect, because I have put myself out there. I say YES a lot. (crw)

Betty Christiansen is editor of Coulee Region Women. She is delighted to know Jen and to have sampled those cupcakes.



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Small Family Farm feeds the region
with fabulous food.

BY LEAH CALL
Contributed photos



If fueling your body with fresh, nutritious fare is important to you, you're in luck. The Coulee Region offers an abundance of organic and locally grown produce at farmers markets, food co-ops and community supported agriculture (CSA) farms.

For more than a decade, Small Family Farm CSA owner Jillian Varney has shared the bounty of her farm with people throughout the region. Varney and her husband, Adam, grow 10 acres of organically grown vegetables on their farm in La Farge. Additionally, they raise and market pastured pork and free-range organic chicken.

"It is just part of my core values to want to eat good, healthy food and make it available to people," says Varney.

Growing up in Dubuque, Iowa, Varney worked on farms in her teens and early 20s. "I spent about six years as a farmhand, bouncing around the United States, getting different farm experiences," she says.

She met her husband while working on a farm in La Farge. "We bought our farm in the spring of 2007 and have been doing this ever since."

Farm and family

There are more than vegetables growing on Small Family Farm. The Varneys' not-so-small family consists of two daughters, Ayla, 6, and Aliza, 3, and a son, Arlo, just 2 months old. Raising a family while working a farm is both a challenge and a blessing.

A self-proclaimed workaholic, Varney often works with kids at her side, which doesn't always go smoothly. In the summer months, she hires child care in the mornings and spends the afternoons with the children. And while there never seems to be enough time in the day, she finds joy in having the family all together on the farm.

"I'm really trying to honor that there is this seasonal cycle to our family. I sort of allow the farm to take over and sweep us away throughout the summer and consume most of our time and energy. And then in the winter, I let the family take over and put the farm on the back burner."

Feeding the community

Small Family Farm CSA has roughly 450 members. "We pack about 300 quarter-bushel CSA boxes each week," notes Varney. "Some of those are every-other-week shares."

From June through October, boxes are delivered to more than 35 drop sites across La Crosse, Onalaska, West Salem, Sparta, Viroqua and La Farge. They even go as far as Dubuque, with some stops along the way, and anticipate adding Tomah to the list in 2018.

The farm employs four with about 35 Worker-Share participants. The Worker-Share Program allows people to work three-and-a-half hours on the farm weekly in exchange for a CSA box.



On beautiful acreage in La Farge, Jillian and Adam Varney grow a variety of vegetables, plus pork and chicken, available through Small Family Farm CSA. Their small family also includes Ayla, 6, and Aliza, 3. Not pictured (yet) is their son, Arlo.

“We get people who might not normally work for us, this really diverse community involvement,” notes Varney. “It really makes our farm feel like a community farm. It comes alive with all these people coming in and out, energized and excited to help on the farm.”

Worker Share participants must commit to 20 weeks throughout the summer. Varney expects that deters some. “We are a little flexible for students. And we almost never turn anyone away that wants to do it.”

Using the whole box

The boxes are loaded with fresh-picked seasonal veggies. And like most gardeners, the Varneys occasionally try some new varieties just for fun. “We have to be careful not to get too weird; we don’t want to turn people away or intimidate them in the kitchen,” says Varney.

“People want to sign up for CSA farms, and they want to be part of this, but one of the reasons they don’t continue is because they don’t know what to do with this big box of produce.”

Varney provides an array of recipes to help on that front. She plans to offer even more recipes and additional how-to videos in 2018, in part to compete with mail-order meal-preparation companies. “These mail-order companies are really good at marketing, and people are paying crazy money to be part of those programs. But it’s not even

local. It’s not organic. We are so much better.”

Check out Small Family Farm CSA at www.smallfamilycsa.com.

ORANGE GLAZED CARROT RIBBONS

- 2 lb. large, long carrots, peeled
- 2 cups orange juice
- 1½ tsp. dark brown sugar, packed
- 2 T butter (¼ stick)
- 2 tsp. honey
- ¼ tsp. balsamic vinegar

Chopped chives

Run vegetable peeler down the length of the carrots, shaving off long ribbons (you will need about 8 cups of ribbons). Cook in large saucepan of boiling salted water 2 minutes. Drain and gently pat dry. (Can be made 6 hours ahead.) Cover; chill. Stir orange juice and sugar in large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat until sugar dissolves. Boil until reduced to a scant 1 cup, about 5 minutes. Add carrots and butter; simmer until carrots absorb most of orange syrup, about 4 minutes. Add honey and vinegar. Mix gently. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer carrots to serving bowl. Sprinkle with chives.

PARSNIP SPICE CAKE WITH GINGER CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

Try this twist on carrot cake.

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ¾ tsp. plus ⅛ tsp. salt
- ¾ tsp. ground nutmeg
- ¾ tsp. ground allspice
- ¾ tsp. ground cloves
- 3 large eggs
- ½ cup canola or vegetable oil
- ½ cup whole milk
- 1½ tsp. vanilla extract, divided
- 2 cups (packed) shredded peeled parsnips (about 3 large)
- ½ cup walnuts, toasted and chopped
- 4 oz. cream cheese, room temperature
- 2 T butter, room temperature
- 2 tsp. peeled, grated fresh ginger
- 3 cups (about 12 oz.) powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 13x9x2-inch baking pan. Combine flour, sugar, ginger, baking powder, cinnamon, ¾ tsp. salt, nutmeg, allspice and cloves in large bowl; whisk to combine. Whisk eggs, oil, milk, and 1 tsp. vanilla in medium bowl to combine.

Pour egg mixture over dry ingredients; stir until just combined. Stir in parsnips and walnuts. Transfer batter to prepared pan. Bake until tester inserted into center comes out clean, about 25 minutes. Cool cake completely in pan on rack.

Beat cream cheese and butter in large bowl until smooth. Beat in fresh ginger and remaining 1½ tsp. salt and ½ tsp. vanilla. Gradually add powdered sugar and beat until frosting is smooth. Spread over cake. (Can be prepared 1 day ahead. Cover and chill.)

CELERIAC MASHED POTATOES

- 1 lb. russet potatoes, peeled and sliced 1½ inches thick
- 1 lb. celeriac, peeled and sliced 1½ inches thick
- Coarse salt
- ½ cup sour cream
- 2 tsp. unsalted butter
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground nutmeg
- Freshly ground pepper

Place potatoes and celeriac in a medium saucepan, and fill with enough cold water to cover by about 2 inches. Bring to a boil over high heat; add salt generously. Reduce heat to a simmer, and cook until vegetables are tender when pierced with a paring knife, 20 to 25 minutes. Drain in a colander.

Pass potatoes and celeriac through a ricer or food mill into a serving bowl. Add sour cream and butter, and stir until combined. Stir in nutmeg, and season with salt and pepper. Serve immediately. (crw)

Freelance writer Leah Call appreciates Varney's hard work and commitment to providing nutritious locally grown food.

To Chill or Not to Chill

That's been a question for at least 100 years. So what's the answer? As with many wine questions, the answer is "it depends."

There are scientific reasons why some wines are chilled and some are not. Studies indicate serving temperature does make a difference in taste.

For example, astringency and bitterness are perceived less at warmer temperatures. Dry red wines often have bitter and astringent qualities, so they are usually served at room temperature. In contrast, cool wine temperatures enhance appreciation of the subtle flavors. Because of that fact, the more delicate white wines are served chilled to exhibit the lighter flavor qualities of those wines.

Some wine temperature recommendations are based on common logic. Like a warm kettle of soup on the stove, a warmer wine allows the volatile aromas to escape into the air. This provides that swirling burst of aroma that red wines provide.

Many winemakers put chilling recommendations on their bottles, such as "chill and enjoy" or "best served at 65-70 degrees."

Whatever the temperature, the main thing is that you enjoy the wine at the temperature you choose!

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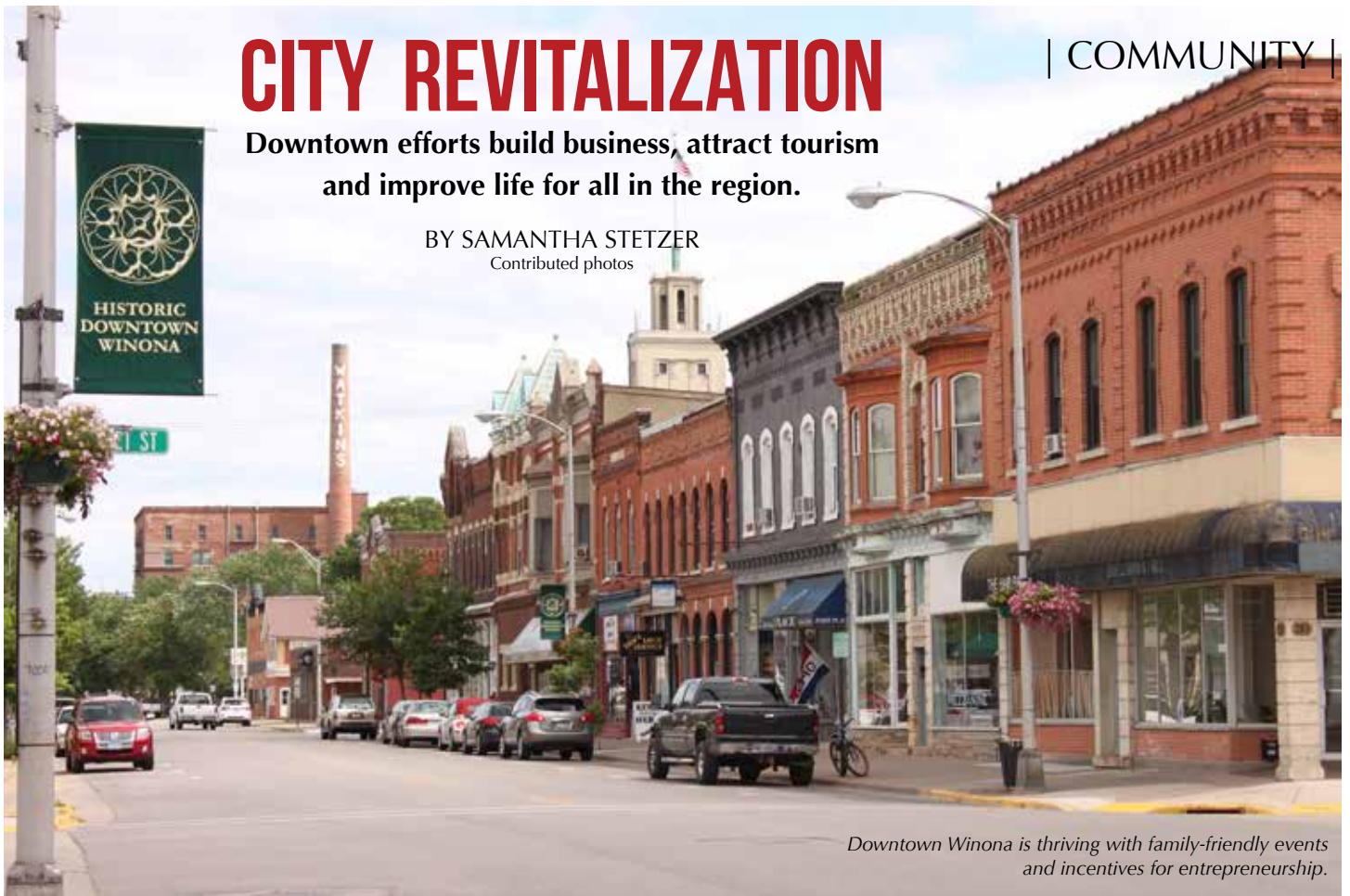


CITY REVITALIZATION

| COMMUNITY |

Downtown efforts build business, attract tourism and improve life for all in the region.

BY SAMANTHA STETZER
Contributed photos



Downtown Winona is thriving with family-friendly events and incentives for entrepreneurship.

When it comes to maintaining a downtown location, local Main Street program directors and coordinators Nora Roughen-Schmidt, Emily Kurash and Robin Moses all agree: it's vital to a community.

"Downtown is for everybody, and we want people to feel like they have a personal investment in downtown," Kurash says.

With the beginning of 2018 well underway, Roughen-Schmidt with Viroqua Chamber Main Street, Kurash with Winona Main Street Program and Moses with Downtown Mainstreet, La Crosse, each have new goals and expectations for their respective downtowns, focusing on ways to energize their communities and maintain their function in the towns they serve.

Enticing entrepreneurs



Nora Roughen-Schmidt, Viroqua Chamber Main Street

The nationally accredited Viroqua Chamber Main Street focuses on programs for families and businesses, including ribbon cuttings and beautifications, boasting one of the largest farmers markets in the state.

Yet even with its longstanding tradition and tenure, Viroqua Chamber Main Street is looking to expand its programs—starting with entrepreneurs.

Coming in 2018, Viroqua Chamber Main Street is launching another Co.Starters Cohort, an educational program for entrepreneurs, in partnership with CouleeCap, Roughen-Schmidt says. The program uses the expertise of experienced entrepreneurs to inspire and assist budding entrepreneurs in Viroqua.

Also feeding those aspiring entrepreneurs, Viroqua Chamber Main Street will continue its pop-up shop initiative through 2018. The program fulfills two needs in a downtown space: local entrepreneurs try out their businesses in vacant storefronts for a temporary period of time, both filling a space and supporting the local business. The program has resulted in Viroqua Chamber Main Street becoming a pop-up expert of sorts, consulting with six different communities in 2017, Roughen-Schmidt says.

Viroqua Chamber Main Street's 2018 will also continue to focus on local Young Professionals and will create a podcast designed to spread the longstanding tradition of Viroqua Chamber Main Street's mission.

If there's one thing that isn't changing with Viroqua Chamber Main Street, it's the community participation locals have come to know and respect. "We have such a high level of participation," Roughen-Schmidt says. "It creates a different kind of community; everybody is so supportive of each other."

Drawing people downtown

Positioned on the intertwining Black and Mississippi Rivers, La Crosse boasts the largest historical district in Wisconsin. And creating a sustainable downtown, says Moses, is necessary for it to thrive.

Noting the trend of downsizing baby boomers and social-life-seeking millennials desiring homes within walking distance of city-life accommodations, Moses says downtown spaces have a need to fulfill.

"I think it shows the character of your community," she says. "It's where businesses started ... where people gather and come together."

Moses emphasizes Downtown Mainstreet's role in growing multigenerational events, such as its Summer Street Dance, which



Robin Moses, Downtown Mainstreet, Inc. (La Crosse)

combines different genres of music for an all-inclusive celebration during the summer.

Beyond events, Moses emphasizes the significance La Crosse's downtown program plays in supporting local businesses and downtown upkeep. Working with the city, Moses encourages business owners to apply for grants between \$10,000 and \$20,000 to upgrade their business's appearance, awnings and signage to help with downtown beautification. With the number of downtown hotels doubling in the last five years, Downtown Mainstreet also continues its focus on supporting tourism.

Recognizing the need to fill a dwindling workforce, in keeping with nationwide trends, Moses says having a downtown that is inviting and accepting of all races, genders, ages and other socioeconomic identifications will also help workforces and downtown areas grow.

"For growth to continue as a community, we need to be more culturally diverse and welcoming," she says.

Downtown is for everybody

Thirty miles up the river, Kurash is excited to see the five-year-old Winona Main Street Program grow and thrive.

The Winona-centric program focuses on free and family-friendly events, Kurash says, such as its Touch-a-Truck day and Sweet Stroll. The focus of these events is getting more people into downtown spaces without the pressure of having to try a new business on their own.



Emily Kurash, Winona Main Street Program

With its own focus on entrepreneurs, Winona's Main Street Program has partnered with the national initiative 1 Million Cups to offer discussion sessions with fellow entrepreneurs. The program will also continue its partnerships with smaller events in the community, such as downtown cleanups and getting businesses the resources they need. Winona's Main Street Program is continuing its push for the beautification of downtown facades, Kurash says.

Kurash also emphasizes the importance of continuing to make Winona's landscape not only a destination for tourists, but a destination that employees want to settle into as well.

"They look at a downtown as a gauge of what's going on in the community," Kurash says, "just a really compacted view of what the community is as a whole."

In 2018, the Winona Main Street Program is pushing for bigger volunteer and member engagement. It's vital to their success, Kurash says, and it's open to everyone.

"We're really excited to grow volunteers," Kurash says. "We probably have a spot for you. There's room for everybody." **crw**

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

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BY PAIGE FORDE
Contributed photos

The ideal bedroom is inspiring when you awake, yet inviting at the end of a long day. To achieve this balance, we went for a design that is both energizing and relaxing. For a tranquil vibe, soft grays and blues are the ideal palette, while the addition of greenery is a great way to offset the winter blues. By finishing off with a pop of contemporary blush tones, this space is given a fun, lively look.

The Company Store: Platinum satin fitted king sheet, \$74; Lofthome Daphne stripe flat king sheet, \$59; Primaloft Deluxe down alternative comforter, \$249; white satin king duvet cover, \$159; Legends Egyptian cotton white king pillowcase set, \$99; Legends Egyptian cotton pearl gray king pillowcase set, \$99; Legends Egyptian cotton rose quartz standard pillowcase set, \$89; gray textured standard sham, \$49.

J Company Studio: Rectangle breakfast tray, \$65; blush faux fur throw, \$98; orchid in vase, \$172; teardrop turquoise small vase, \$75; teardrop turquoise medium vase, \$70; gold floor lamp, \$837.

Practically Posh: Teal metallic stripe rug, \$37.99; white shag pillow, \$17.99; gold and white floor vase with greenery, \$39.99.



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WINE COUNTRY, RE-ENERGIZED

The Sonoma and Napa regions are welcoming you.

BY COURTNEY KUBLY

Contributed photos

Fire is a regenerative force of nature. Destructive though it may be, it actually clears the way for new growth and prosperity. While the northern California wildfires this past fall were widespread and damaging, much of the beloved wine country they affected has already rebounded and is open for visitors.

This September, my husband, sister, brother-in-law and I traveled to northern California for a getaway. We were fortunate to have visited just weeks before the devastating wildfires that affected the region and winemaking industry. To our relief, once the fires were extinguished, much of the wine territory we loved was left untouched, its magic waiting to be experienced by new and returning visitors.

Planning your trip

Before you book your airfare and your accommodations, you have a little homework to do. “Wine country” is a general term for a large region in northern California that encompasses close to 2,400 square miles and is home to more than 800 wineries. Sonoma and Napa Counties are the two most visited and closely associated with winemaking. Depending on the length of your trip, you will need to narrow down your itinerary and make specific plans about what you want to see and do while you are there. Four nights in the region would allow you to experience a good variety of wine, food and culture.

Three international airports offer service within an hour or two of

wine country: San Francisco International, Oakland and Sacramento. From each location, renting a car would be the best option for flexibility during your trip. There are also various tours that will arrange your transportation, accommodations, tastings and meals for a flat cost. We opted for a rental car, an Airbnb and a driver, so we could freely indulge in the many tastings without having to maneuver narrow and curvy roads. For first-time visitors, limiting your visit to wineries in either the Sonoma or Napa region is recommended, as they are distinctly different, and driving between regions is more time-consuming than it appears.

Also consider whether you'd prefer booking private tastings or casually do “winery hopping” at your own pace. Most wineries have open tasting rooms that do not require reservations. We did both and thought it was a nice balance. Even if you're a seasoned wine drinker, book a maximum of four tastings a day. You'll enjoy the one-on-one attention from the staff and the additional facts and information.

Exploring the region

Sonoma and Napa both have about 400 wineries in their regions, and both produce internationally award-winning varieties of wine. However, that is where their similarities end. Sonoma has a very laid-back, midwestern feel to it. The landscape fits the culture of Sonoma with gentle, rolling hills and larger private estates set off the main roads.



Wine country lovers Courtney and Derek Kubly fearlessly take on the best of Sonoma and Napa Counties.



Kuleto Estate in Napa Valley embodies the beauty and charm of wine country.



Cline Cellars in Sonoma invites visitors with quality, affordable wines.

There are farmlands, roadside stands and quaint charm. Napa gets all the glitz and glamour of the celebrity crowd due to the concentration of wineries in a 35-square-mile area. Some of the best dining in the world can be found in Napa, with a reservation requiring up to a year. On weekends, the traffic is bumper to bumper, and you are bound to see some very luxurious cars and extravagant style. Sonoma is cowboy boots. Napa is Louboutins. Both are awesome, just different.

Sonoma

Because we had not received the advice about only choosing one area to visit on our first trip, we made the cardinal sin of packing too much into a short time frame. Our first stop on the way from the airport to our Airbnb was, naturally, a winery. We chose Cline, a charming little house that has been converted into a winery producing some very affordable, quality wines. In Kenwood, near our Airbnb, we discovered Landmark Vineyards, which had a distinct feel of the Italian countryside. It featured a gorgeous fountain hedged by cypress trees against a mountain backdrop. The wine was good, too! We didn't book a private tasting, but sampled.


The next morning, we rose early for a private tasting at Paul Hobbs in Sebastopol. This was an unmarked winery, which means they do not have a tasting room, and all visitors must be part of a private party. It felt like a sleek museum, with modern leather and metal furniture, mirrors and contemporary design. We had our tasting with just two other people, so it was very intimate and informative. The wines were outstanding, with a price tag to match. Because of our tight time table, we ate lunch at a roadside bistro serving French-inspired sandwiches, which we ate in the car. Our next stop was Dutcher Crossing in Geyserville, owned by La Crosse native Deb Mathy. We had a private tasting in the vine-covered gazebo, and it was nearly impossible to leave. The atmosphere was so inviting, it felt like being back in the

Midwest. Each wine we tasted was delicious, so my husband and I became club members. Mathy stopped by to say hi, which was a great treat. We had time after Dutcher to stop at another winery, Bella. Their tasting room was in a cave! We fell in love with a late-harvest 2015 Zinfandel.

Napa

For our excursion to Napa, we hired a local driver to take us to our tastings. Napa was farther away than we realized, and we didn't want to risk driving while intoxicated. Our first tasting was Duckhorn, my favorite for Sauvignon Blanc. It didn't disappoint, but we did notice the increased tourist traffic and commercialism in Napa. Cakebread was next, where we also had a private tasting. It had a friendly atmosphere and nice property. The last stop on our day-drinking adventure was Kuleto, a hidden gem of a sprawling estate tucked on the side of a hill two miles up a winding road in a canyon. The driveway alone was not for the faint-hearted. And the wines! This was collectively our favorite winery visit.

Bringing wine country home

Like many wine country visitors, we underestimated how much wine we were going to purchase and had to ship extra bottles home. You'll discover varieties that are not available for purchase in your home state, so take advantage of getting them during your visit. Shipping varies in ease depending on which state they are being sent to. Wisconsin is an easy one, so stock up. Most wineries will ship directly to you, allowing you to recapture some of the magic of wine country at home. 

Courtney Kubly, wife and rescue-dog mom, has a passion for travel and community involvement. She is a recent transplant to Indiana but will always be a Wisconsin girl at heart.

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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.
Children's Museum of La Crosse weekly programming:
Silly Sundays Special activity 12:30-1:30 and 3-4 p.m.
Spanish with Senora Jenny every Tues., 10:30 a.m.
S.T.E.A.M. Team every Wed., 10:30 a.m.
Wee Move for ages 1-7 with adult, every Fri., 10:30 a.m.
Little Learners for ages 1-7 with adult, every Thurs., 10:30 a.m.
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 Toastmasters Club 2nd and 4th Tuesday 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, 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.
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

Feb. 1, Matt Vee Family & Friends Celebrate the Music of Neil Diamond, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center.
Feb. 1-11, *I Do! I Do!*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2:00 p.m. Sun., Weber Center for the Performing Arts, La Crosse Community Theatre, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.
Feb. 2-3, Snowflake Ski Jump Tournament, Westby, www.snowflakeskiclub.com.
Feb. 7-11, SPLaSH!, 7:30 p.m. Wed.-Sat., 3 p.m. Sat.-Sun., Studio Theatre, Saint Mary's Performance Center, Winona.
Feb. 6, Diavolo—Architecture in Motion, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center.
Feb. 7, The Guthrie Brothers—Simon and Garfunkel Tribute, 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.
Feb. 7-11, Frozen River Film Festival, Winona, www.frff.org.
Feb. 9-11, Winona Winter Carnival, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Lake Park Lodge, Winona.

Feb. 9-10, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Weber Center for the Performing Arts.
Feb. 10, La Crosse Symphony Valentine Ball, 5:30 p.m., Waterfront Cargill Room, www.thewaterfrontlacrosse.com.
Feb. 10, Valentine's Heart Throb Walk/Run, 8 a.m., YMCA-North, Onalaska, www.laxymca.org.
Feb. 17, Candlelight Snowshoe, 5-7 p.m., Eagle Bluff Learning Center.
Feb. 20, Mindfulness for Stress Reduction, 5:30-6:30 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.
Feb. 21-22, Jersey Boys, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center.
Feb. 23, Celebrating Her Heart Health, 11 a.m., Cargill Room, Riverside Center South, www.celebratingherhearthealth.com.
Feb. 23-Mar. 4, *Big Fish (The Musical)*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun, Toland Theatre, Center for the Arts, UW-La Crosse.
Feb. 28, *Puppet Up! Uncensored*, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center.
Mar. 1-4, *Big Love*, 7:30 Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., LaCroix Black Box Theatre, Viterbo University.
Mar. 2, Luck of the Irish Workshop, 5:30-6:30 p.m., Minnesota Conservatory for the Arts, http://mca.smumn.edu.
Mar. 2-3, La Crosse Polar Plunge, 5 p.m. Fri.-1 p.m. Sat., Pettibone Beach, La Crosse, www.polarplungewi.org.
Mar. 2-4, International Festival of Owls, Houston, Minn., www.festivalofowls.com.
Mar. 3, Four Guyz in Dinner Jackets, 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.
Mar. 3, Local Lupus Alliance Murder Mystery, 5:30 p.m., Waterfront Cargill Room, www.thewaterfrontlacrosse.com.
Mar. 8, Rhythm of the Dance, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center.
Mar. 9-25, *Calendar Girls*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2:00 p.m. Sun., Lyche Theatre, La Crosse Community Theatre, www.lacrossecommunitytheatre.org.
Mar. 12, Schools Out Day Camp, 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m., La Crosse Wellness Center, laxwc.com.
Mar. 16, Kid's Night to Dance, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Applause Dance Academy, www.applauselacrosse.com.
Mar. 16, Reptile Roundup with Matt Heeter, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Myrick Park Center, wiscorps.org.
Mar. 17, Logan Craft Fair, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Logan High School.
Mar. 18, Bonnie Koloc with Don Stille, 4-6 p.m., Pump House Regional Arts Center, www.thepumphouse.org.
Mar. 18, Switchback "Americana," 7:30 p.m., The Heider Center, www.heidercenter.org.
Mar. 23, Reptile Roundup with Matt Heeter, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Myrick Park Center, wiscorps.org.
Mar. 24, CRPW Holler for Scholars, 5:30 p.m., Boot Hill Pub, La Crosse, www.crpwomen.org.
Mar. 25, Dallas Children's Theater Presents *How I Became a Pirate*, 3 p.m., Viterbo Fine Arts Center.
Mar. 30-31, Easter EGG-Stravaganza, 5:30-7 p.m. Fri., 8:30-10 a.m. Fri.-Sat., Children's Museum of La Crosse, www.funmuseum.org.
Apr. 13-14, Mid West Music Fest, La Crosse, www.midwestmusicfest.org.
Apr. 27-28, Mid West Music Fest, Winona, www.midwestmusicfest.org.



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