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SISTERS AT WORK

A SISTERHOOD
OF MOMS

A TIME TO DANCE

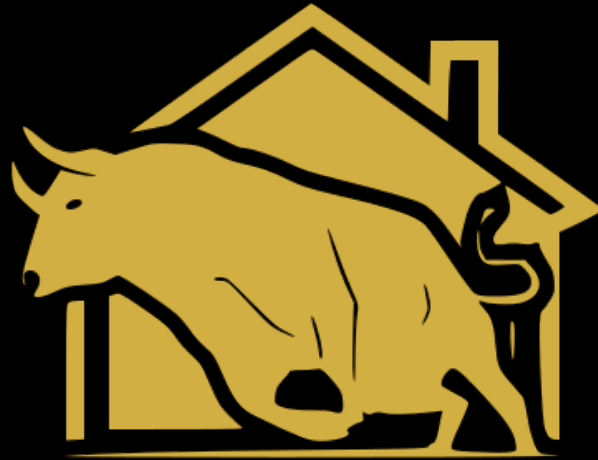
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Sisterhood

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Big Brothers Big Sisters creates connections that can change lives.

Pictured on the cover and above left: Tashyra Jackson and Shamawyah Curtis, founders of Hope Restores. Photos by Frontier Photography.

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*Sisters by blood.
Sisters by love.
Sisters born of sweat and tears.*

From the time we started planning this issue, these phrases began rolling through my head. Perhaps I've read them somewhere, or heard something similar, but they just seemed to encapsulate all the ways we as women create the meaningful connections we need and crave.

I am lucky to have all of these types of sisters. My younger sister and I are fiercely loyal to each other now, though there were times in younger years that was not the case. Something about an older sister with a need for control and information clashed with a supremely stubborn younger sister sporting a reckless streak.

I've had women who I fell into deep connections with and love as sisters—women I may only talk with every few months, but though we live separated by states and time, when we are together, the conversations are instantly easy and deep and real. We just get each other.

And then there are those sisters of shared experiences. Coworkers, teammates, friends I have literally sweated and cried beside as we took on hard things together—through which we found power and fulfillment and a shared vocabulary of experiences. Runners, you know what I mean.

You'll find stories of all of those same relationships in these pages.

Our cover women—Tashyra Jackson and Shamawyah Curtis—are middle school frenemies turned best friends who have created an entire organization based on fostering connections among women that build them up and empower community-building. The small groups hosted by Hope Restores provide space for women and girls, from age 5 on up, to share stories and develop relationships that validate their own experiences.

Sisters-by-birth Dani Peterslie and Azia Thelemann have recognized their individual strengths and joined them in family

entrepreneurial pursuits that allow each to put their talents to work.

You'll learn about women who have created a sisterhood around the shared challenges and rollercoaster ride of parenting. Friends Sue Ann Davis-Mitley and Mary Kay Lind have shared the grief of one of the greatest tragedies a parent can imagine, yet are side-by-side 10 years later propping each other up whenever the grief comes back around.

Join sisters Trina Schlifer and Tracy Doyle, and two more generations of their family, for a holiday baking tradition that will warm your soul with sprinkle-laden sugar cookies, laughter over mishaps and memories that never grow cold.

Conversation, stories and connections are just as vital to the health of the members of the Mothers' Unity dance group at the Hmong Community Cultural Center as the music and heart-strengthening movement the regular dance classes provide. The multigenerational group gives women from their 20s into their 60s a chance to slow down when they aren't dancing and create relationships that matter.

Some sister relationships are based on giving, on looking for meaning beyond yourself. Among the best of these you'll find the Big Sisters who spend time mentoring girls and young women and giving them just one more member of the circle of support cheering them on as they grow.

Laurie Sullivan and Michele Pettit are two more "sisters" who sought out community and service—they are part of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, a La Crosse-based order that has been a foundation of local institutions such as Viterbo University and the former Franciscan Hospital. While today's Sisters have roles that have evolved beyond teachers and nurses, the organization's members continue to place their focus on service, social justice and faith.

Coulee Region Women magazine is itself a sisterhood. As a staff, we share the trials of our lives—from the sleepless nights of early parenthood to the "joys" of menopause and the challenge of reinventing as retirement opens doors to even more opportunities. Our advertisers are strong advocates for other women in business, offering referrals, supporting one another's enterprises and recognizing that together we all do better.

A part of our stated mission is "to connect with each other and the community. The goal is to develop stronger, healthier and happier women, families and community." We are proud to include our readers in our sisterhood. We are all better together.

Shari

coulee region women

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PUBLISHER
Betty Christiansen

EDITOR
Shari Hegland

DESIGNERS
Kate Brue
Jaclyn Berg
Bonnie Martin

MARKETING ACCOUNT REPRESENTATIVES
Rachel Persson, Director
Claire Ristow-Seib
Olivia Walker

PHOTO EDITOR
Diane Raaum

PHOTOGRAPHY
Frontier Photography

DISTRIBUTION
Jennie Kolek
Heide Harron


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Holmen, WI 54636
608-394-3334



Kris Birkholz
Financial Advisor
1027 Riders Club Road
Onalaska, WI 54650
608-519-4200



Megan Coots
Financial Advisor
16864 S Davis Street
Galesville, WI 54630
608-582-2495



Denise Halverson, AAMS®
Financial Advisor
2101 W Wisconsin Street
Suite C
Sparta, WI 54656
608-269-9136



Heidi Lydon, CEPA®
Financial Advisor
606 W Wisconsin Street
Sparta, WI 54656
608-487-9509



Sheri Plantz, CRPC™
Financial Advisor
2424 State Road
La Crosse, WI 54601
608-788-6420



Margaret Severson, AAMS®
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520 North Main Street
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LET IT GO!

Disney’s most popular sisters take the stage at La Crosse Community Theatre’s performance of *Frozen: The Broadway Musical*.

The show opens Friday, December 5, with performances running through Sunday, December 21.

In the beautiful mountainous kingdom of Arendelle, Princesses Anna and Elsa grow up sheltered inside their castle, isolated from the world and increasingly distant from each other. When Elsa is crowned queen, the magical powers she’s desperately tried to conceal from her sister take control, and she flees into the mountains. As a ferocious winter descends on Arendelle, Anna sets off on an epic journey to find Elsa and bring her home.

Directed by Mary Cate Wesling, the LCT performances will also include an ASL interpreted performance Saturday, December 6. Corissa Vought-Carey portrays Elsa, with Chloe Hart as Anna.

Tickets can be purchased at www.lacrossetheatre.org.



CANCER RETREATS HELP PATIENTS AND FRIENDS THRIVE

Women with Stage IV metastatic breast cancer (MBC) can find connection and healing alongside a chosen friend through Temple of

Kinship, a 501(c)3 organization in Wisconsin offering no-cost retreats that strengthen social bonds and build community—important to managing one’s care.

Retreats provide a space removed from home and work for thrivers and their best friend to connect and engage. Activities include sound healing, watercolor painting, journaling and hiking. Nourishing meals, fireside chats and quiet time round out the experience.

One local woman, Michelle Byom, attended a Bayfield retreat with her Stage IV MBC-diagnosed friend. “The Temple of Kinship retreat helped me understand what Candy is experiencing emotionally and how I can support her,” Byom says. “Surrounded by nature and the beauty of Lake Superior felt holistic and healing. Soul-searching activities stretched comfort levels while strengthening our bond. I will always cherish this time we enjoyed together.”



Michelle Byom of Holmen, right, with her friend Candy Schill of Menomonee Falls.

Plans for 2026 include five-day retreats in Bayfield, Wisconsin, and Portland, Oregon, and one-day retreats in the Greater Milwaukee area. “MBC is incurable, and ‘survivorship’ programs often leave us feeling left out,” says Alyssa Tsaogong, co-founder. “My best friend and I had a vision to fill that gap, from our lived experience of navigating this disease,” she explains.

To apply for a 2026 retreat, the MBC thriver and their friend must each submit applications. Find details, join the email list and donate by visiting www.templeofkinship.org.



La Crosse County Historical Society

RINGING UP GIVING

The Salvation Army in La Crosse kicked off its 2025 Red Kettle Campaign November 7 working toward a goal of raising \$400,000 by December 31. The campaign is the primary fundraising effort for the Salvation Army’s shelter, which provides food and housing for 65 individuals 365 days a year.

The shelter has housed nearly 400 different individuals in the last year and served more than 91,000 meals, in addition to giving out nearly 600 vouchers for clothing, shoes and furnishings. Working together with other services and the county’s Pathways Home program, 73 people have been moved from emergency shelter into permanent housing.

The first donation was made by Kelly Krieg-Siegmán (pictured), community education and tour coordinator for the La Crosse County Historical Society, who donated her tips received during historical tours throughout the summer. The first kettle sponsor was Borton Construction, represented by Melissa Borsheim, which contributed \$1,250 as the day’s sponsor.

Kettles and bell ringers will be at 19 locations throughout the area Monday through Saturday through December 24, along with a one-time kettle at the Holmen Jinglefest on Main event December 6.

More than 40 organizations and companies ring bells to support The Salvation Army, along with special Match Day sponsors who match proceeds for a day or sponsor a kettle.

Volunteers can sign up to ring at www.registertoring.com; donations may also be sent directly to The Salvation Army at 223 8th St. N., La Crosse, WI 54601.



FIGHTING RACISM THROUGH SISTERHOOD

Shamawyah Curtis, co-founder of Hope Restores, and Quinn Devlin will be the presenters of

Fighting Racism Through Sisterhood, an in-person program planned February 13-14 at the Franciscan Spirituality Center in La Crosse.

This intergenerational healing event is open to all humans of any background and identification, with a special focus on mothers, daughters, grandmothers and sisters. Designed to bring women of all backgrounds together to confront racism and build solidarity, participants will engage in discussions and activities focused on healing judgment, recognizing roles in racism, deconstructing unconscious biases and healing generational trauma. The retreat will include meditation sessions and inspirational guest speakers who will share diverse perspectives and cultural histories.

Both overnight and commuter options are available for the event, which begins at 6:30 p.m. Friday, February 13, and concludes at 4 p.m. the next day. A discounted rate is available for those needing financial assistance.

Register online through www.fscenter.org under Programs/Retreats.

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Hope. Healing. Sisterhood.

The founders of Hope Restores see the possibilities and the necessity of creating connections.

BY SARAH ARENDT-BEYER

PHOTOS BY FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHY

While Shamawyah Curtis and Tashyra (Shy) Jackson have always been community builders, they haven't always been friends. They're both products of large families, with seven siblings each. And in a way, those given families are what led them to become chosen families. Today, they're as close as sisters.

Says Curtis, laughing: "We met in middle school and did not like each other at all ... like, not at all!" That changed when Jackson knocked on Curtis's door, on a mission to find one of Jackson's siblings. Curtis's mom shooed Curtis out the door to help, and the girls ended up talking for hours. They discovered that despite their differences, they had a lot in common and became fast friends.

Fast-forward to 2021, and the country was beset by social unrest. The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others unjustly taken or harmed created a crushing weight felt by Curtis, Jackson and many others. Curtis and Jackson were still friends, held close with a love for life, laughter and big dreams. One of those dreams became Hope Restores.

"Our community was hurting. Our kids were also hurting, you know?" says Jackson. Yet amid all the uncertainty of those times, Curtis and Jackson could still see the beauty and hope in the world, and they wanted to bring that hope to their community.

A COMMUNITY IS BORN

They started Hope Restores, a nonprofit organization in La Crosse that provides culturally responsive support, services and advocacy for the African American community. Its core programs are support groups, which were first formed to provide a safe haven and emotional refuge for those struggling to carry the spirit-breaking weight of racism and injustice. "I think it's always been easier for us to recognize that our situation is not necessarily our circumstance. One is very much so temporary, and the other is a promise that's to come. And it's easy for us to see the promise without letting our situation speak doubt into it," adds Jackson. The support groups help teach people to do just that: how to see the possibility of the future while finding connection.

Hope Restores continues to offer support groups, including several for women and girls: Little Women of Melanin for girls ages 5 to 10; Girls Group for girls ages 11 to 18; and Women of Melanin, a support group empowering Black women. Together, they tackle tough topics like bullying, body image and breaking generational curses. Jackson and Curtis often draw on their own experiences to facilitate these conversations.





Participants in community groups at Hope Restores—including Women of Melanin (top) and Little Women of Melanin (bottom)—spend time together developing friendships and sharing experiences that empower and uplift.

SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

When Jackson got married, she chose Curtis as her maid of honor. Curtis told her, “I think you’re supposed to pick your sister!” but Jackson was adamant—Curtis *was* her sister. “It really made me feel good,” Curtis says, “because at that moment in my life, I was going through a bumpy relationship, and I was going through this feeling of ... I loved me, but I didn’t feel like my body was looking the way that it should.”

Like they had so many times before, they lifted each other up and supported one another. Jackson encouraged her, Curtis got a gorgeous dress and it was a beautiful ceremony. Curtis says, “Those are the things that sisters in life give you that you really need ... those reminders you need that that person loves you for you, and sometimes reminds you to do the same thing.”

The importance of lifting one another up is something they discuss during group sessions. It’s especially crucial for students facing bullying at school. As girls get to know one another through the group sessions at Hope Restores, as they learn how to use their voices, and as they learn that they have things in common, they begin to look out for one another and to support one another. They begin to build a sisterhood.

FINDING YOUR VOICE

The group sessions also teach empowerment. Jackson shares this example: “There was one little girl who was able to begin talking to her parents about what bothered her. She used to get so upset and would just blow up.” But then, using the skills she learned in the group, she started to talk with her parents about what was troubling her. She started journaling.

“That is so huge for them to find their voice, because you only use your voice when you know that your voice matters. When you know that you have something to say, and it has value. To have little girls finding their voice at a young age, that is powerful, and it can only grow from there,” she adds.

EMBRACING JOY

Another prevailing theme of the group discussions is joy. “It’s figuring out how to find that joy inside of you because it’s not going to come from the outside,” Jackson says. “It’s not going to come from people saying nice things about you. You cannot confirm my joy. I have to confirm my own joy and find that trust that ‘I’m going to be okay, and I’ll be fine.’ You’re stronger than everything you’ve ever had to go through and survive.”

COMMUNITY + CONNECTION

Loving yourself. Communication. Joy. And through it all, connection and community. Now, Hope Restores also hosts monthly coffee chats and community events and conducts agency outreach to build authentic community. As Curtis says, “Human connection is so important, and a lot of times we take the traumas that we have, and we just go hide. But you have to get rid of that fear of connecting with others, because you need it. It’s like water. You need to be able to connect with other people.”

So how can you find your community?

Jackson has this advice: “Start where you are. Don’t be afraid to make new friends, you know? A lot of times, we fight so hard to hang on to that one friend that we’ve had that lives miles and miles away, but we underestimate the people that we see every single day.”

Instead, she recommends getting out in the community. Start a conversation with the people you always see at the grocery store. You might have a neighbor who can turn into a great friend. It might be your kid’s soccer coach, or the girl who’s at the checkout who always has a bubbly smile, or the lady at the bank that you always have great conversations with. “Those are all friendships that are waiting to happen—you just have to give them permission to happen,” Jackson says. You may—like Jackson and Curtis—find that you have more in common than you thought, and you just might end up with a friend and sister for life. **CRW**

Sarah Arendt-Beyer is a writer in La Crosse. As an only child, she treasures her “chosen sisters.”

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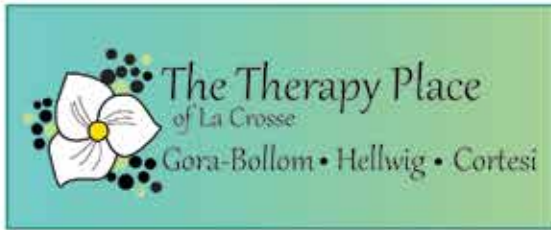
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Dani Peterslie, left, and Azia Thelemann are sisters and entrepreneurs, working together to launch complementary businesses Drift Mercantile in La Crosse and Keeper Goods in Onalaska.

Sisters by Birth, Partners by Choice

Business owners Dani Peterslie and Azia Thelemann balance sisterhood and a working dynamic.

BY MACKENZIE R. HANSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Dani Peterslie and Azia Thelemann were born with entrepreneurial genes. As daughters of TJ and Michelle Peterslie of The Pearl Ice Cream Parlor, Confectionary and Coffee House, there was little question of whether they too would go into business. While many caution against mixing work with family, Peterslie and Thelemann find that their bond makes them the perfect team.

“We were always close,” Thelemann says. “Some people aren’t as fortunate and grow up fighting, but we never had that relationship. It just seems natural.” Both note that being siblings only strengthens their ability to work well together. Having the commonality allows the pair to conduct business in a more straightforward way. “There is 100 percent comfortability,” Peterslie adds. “I’m never guarded; she’s never guarded.”

DRIFT MERCANTILE

In 2017, Peterslie and Thelemann began contemplating how to make better use of the space connecting The Pearl with TJ’s Cheddarhead Store & La Crosse Shop. Originally an art gallery operated by their parents, the sisters considered what they could create that would be an asset to

the region while also complementing the other family businesses. The result of their brainstorming was Drift Mercantile. Named for the region and for the mercantile-inspired eclectic merchandise sold, Drift Mercantile provides the area with local goods ranging from art and home decor to food.

During the business’s creation, the

duo faced the hardships of the Covid-19 lockdown. Thelemann explains, “We didn’t have an online presence, and Drift was meant to be an in-store, local shopping experience. So during that period, that was taken away.” Despite the struggle of opening and maintaining the business during this time, Drift Mercantile has become a staple on Pearl Street West.

KEEPER GOODS

Opened as a sister store to Drift Mercantile, Keeper Goods offers the Coulee Region a unique boutique experience. Previously a Masonic Temple, the sisters purchased the location in downtown Onalaska and immediately began the building’s construction overhaul. The sister duo found themselves in a difficult

situation as they navigated the building's renovation while simultaneously laying the foundational groundwork for the business that would become Keeper Goods. "We had this store that was still an idea," Thelemann says, "but we also had boxes of inventory that we were waiting to bring in. It was just hard to wrap your head around all the projects that were going on at once."

Keeper Goods created an opportunity to expand their horizons into fashion retail—something neither sister had been familiar with previously. "We hadn't operated anything with fashion prior to Keeper, so even navigating the ordering process was a challenge at first," Peterslie says. "We didn't know what to anticipate. We didn't know what people were going to want to buy, and you really need to have a large amount of stock to open a store." Despite their initial lack of experience in the realm of fashion retail, the pair have continued to apply their familial

skills to provide the Coulee Region with a locally driven clothing shopping experience.

SHARING THE WORKLOAD

In becoming business partners, the sisters have few issues in divvying the day's work. "I feel like we both fell into our strengths," Thelemann explains. "I do a lot more of the back-end, finance, accounting and business aspects, and Dani does more of the human resource and design work." Peterslie finds herself naturally gravitating toward the creative portions of their business ventures, whereas Thelemann's talents lean toward the businesses' financials. Both sisters find themselves tackling the marketing needs of the business and contribute to this aspect according to which sister has more available time.

To women—particularly sisters—in the Coulee Region who are contemplating opening a small business of their own, Thelemann says, "I've always told people

who ask what I recommend when starting a business that they need to put a lot into the development and plan. If you're bored with that, you are going to be bored with your day-to-day." While passion levels can vary on the average day—especially on the more stressful days—the ability to run their own businesses on their own terms overrides any lulls the pair may feel.

"It's not really work to work together as a partnership—it's nice that I have this other person who is sharing responsibilities with me," Thelemann adds. "It just works. We're able to have the best of both worlds by seeing each other at work and doing the fun things together." **CRW**

MacKenzie R. Hanson is a La Crosse-based freelance writer and artist. She enjoys learning more about all of the small businesses in the Coulee Region.



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Karn Schwartzhoff, center back, is now the leader of the La Crescent Early Childhood parenting classes that helped her find connections when her children were young.

A SISTERHOOD OF MOMS

Karn Schwartzhoff's life comes full circle in seeking and creating connections for new parents.

BY BONNIE MARTIN | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

In her role as the La Crescent-Hokah Community Education Early Childhood Coordinator and Parent Educator, Karn Schwartzhoff feels lucky to have a job with a focus on making connections.

“Increasingly in this stage of life, and in the world, I feel that connection is a precious commodity. When I see people in what can be a lonely stage of life, building connections, I feel really lucky to be a part of that work,” reflects Schwartzhoff.

Minnesota’s Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) programs provide educational and supportive services for caregivers with children from birth through kindergarten entry. Schwartzhoff has found through personal and professional experience that having a network of support is a key factor in parenting. Her perspective is amplified by having been a participant in the ECFE programs with her own children in the early days of her parenting journey.



Karn Schwartzhoff reads with children in the Early Childhood Family Education program.

FEELING DISCONNECTED

Twelve years ago, Schwartzhoff found herself in need of connection after leaving her full-time job as an English language teacher to welcome her second child; she quickly realized she missed the relationships and adult interactions her previous job offered. As she searched to find her place in this new phase of life, she joined a Friday morning “Time to Connect” parent and child ECFE class. Her hope was to meet other parents. It was a life-changing move. Not only did participation open the door to her current profession, it was also the start of a sisterhood with a number of friends she has been parenting alongside ever since.

Throughout the years, she has noticed that one of the steady reasons parents attend her programs is to carve out time with other adults. Raising babies and young children can be a lonely business. Schwartzhoff says for many people it’s more than learning

parenting tips and tricks; it's a routine of time spent in community with other people who are in the same season of life.

“WHO IS HELPFUL TO YOU IN THIS SEASON?”

Schwartzhoff often asks participants in her programs to reflect on who their support system is at this moment. She notes that many of the reasons she sought community in those early days of parenting remain the same for parents participating in her classes now. The space that's created to discuss life with others who are in the same season is a valuable tool for parents.

Having a sisterhood of other moms to lean on has helped Schwartzhoff personally and professionally. “When I was trying to get back into the workplace and our son was starting school, one of my sisterhood friends was willing to provide childcare for our daughter while I student taught,” she says. “That was very helpful, but the most helpful part was when I came to pick up my daughter at lunchtime. My friend and I could sit and visit while the kids kept playing. Most days I would stay for an hour or two until our son was done with his schoolday. It was a wonderful weekly reset and recharge. We encouraged one another. We laughed and cried. We sat in stillness and sipped cappuccino. It felt very much like those afternoon visits came at a time in the week when I was very close to my maximum capacity, and I'd leave with a renewed sense of optimism and energy.”

HELPING OTHERS FIND THEIR VILLAGE

Schwartzhoff's personal story of friendships, children and community is strongly connected to her professional story of being an educator and community builder. It drives the work she does. “Being a parent has been by far the most rewarding and the most challenging thing I have done in my life,” she says. “I have often thought about the saying, ‘It takes a village.’ It's true. Children thrive most when they know they have a village of support around them, but I think it's just as true (or maybe more so) that parents need a village of support to encourage, reassure and sustain them as they work toward being the best parents they can be for their own children.

“I like to think creating that village I so needed (still do, in fact, need) is central to my work as Early Childhood Coordinator and Parent Educator,” Schwartzhoff continues. “Whether parents attend our programs and find people who become part of their village, or they just rely on those in attendance each week and myself and the other ECFE staff to be their village, I take enormous pride and comfort in knowing I can help people find the village they need when they need it.” CRW

Bonnie Martin loves connections, storytelling and raising children with a network of caring friends. She is also one of the lucky people in Karn's sisterhood of moms.

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The Mothers' Unity dance group through the Hmong Cultural and Community Center connects multiple generations for physical activity and relationship-building.

GOOD FOR THE SOUL

Mothers' Unity Hmong dance group goes beyond physical fitness to foster community and friendship.

BY ANASTASIA PENCHI | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

There are very few dances that Nao Vang won't practice as a member of the Hmong Cultural and Community Center Mothers' Unity group.

Vang clearly enjoys being one of about 25 women learning to dance at the center, located on Ward Avenue on La Crosse's South Side. The women range in age from 21 to 68 and practice their craft twice a week—most of them in comfy black yoga pants and tennis shoes. The dance they do can be described as a combination of a hip-moving salsa and country line dancing. Music is played via recordings in both Hmong and English.

"It's so much fun," Vang says. "It's easy."

But Vang and a few others will slip out of the well-lit, mirrored practice room when the dance in question features a lot of spinning. There is talk of age. And vertigo.

Vang is the oldest participant at 68, after all. No one wants to get dizzy and fall.

The younger ones in the group continue on.

MORE THAN DANCE

Most of the time, Mothers' Unity (called Niam Tsev Line Dance Salsa in Hmong) is learning to sway and hop in sync, but as time has passed, it has evolved into a support group filled with education, laughter and encouragement for one another.

A type of sisterhood? Perhaps. There is definitely a family vibe.

"They don't even call my name," Vang says. "They all call me Mom."

Mai Tia Yang, HCCC board secretary and program manager, says Mothers' Unity started with four or five people (Vang was one of them) who began meeting to learn to dance just more than a year ago.

Yang attributes its growth to the women being able to get together and have fun—something not necessarily encouraged for young Hmong girls growing up. Dancing and smiling are sometimes seen as being flirtatious, she says, so it is often discouraged.

"(Here) we laugh and joke about everything," she adds. "It's a fun thing, but it's also good for the soul."

Yang says the community has noticed, as several husbands have mentioned their wives are happier since joining the group.

Local grants paid for the costumes the women wear during requested performances like those at the Hmong New Year celebration, at Hmong American Day and at North Woods International School. It's important that the group not be a financial burden for members, Yang says, as that might prohibit some from attending. Costumes were \$150 each.

In addition to the joy the dancing brings, the movement helps provide an opportunity for physical activity and fitness, Yang said. Losing weight and increased fitness is a bonus, but it's the camaraderie and connection that attracts the women and keeps them coming.

BLENDING IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

When a well-known member of the Hmong community died of a heart attack and members of Mothers' Unity kept talking about it, Yang brought in an expert to talk about how heart attack symptoms present in women.

Sessions now start with discussions about whatever is on the mind of attendees. Some talk about their own physical and/or mental health journeys because they feel safe to open up, Yang says.

There is at least one cancer survivor in their midst.

And even though the women are also together at weddings, funerals and other community events, they are more likely than to be working the event instead of talking about what's on their mind.

They cook large meals, prepare ingredients



Dance instructor Mee Xiong and her daughters Paze Vang and Zoua Pa Vang are part of the multi-generation dance group.

from scratch, clean up after themselves, serve food and restock snacks to make sure everyone is taken care of. They also help to organize, host and support the family emotionally.

"It's beautiful work, but it means that these women rarely have time to sit, relax or connect with one another," Yang says. "My

hope is that Mothers' Unity will continue to inspire and provide a space for all generations to connect and build stronger bonds through shared experiences and cultural traditions."

GENERATIONAL BONDING

Pazee Vang, a 2022 graduate of Holmen High School, grew up performing the traditional Hmong dance routines and decided to join Mothers' Unity last spring.

"It's fun, and sometimes the line dances are challenging, too," she says. "I think it's good for your mind."

Her mother, Mee Xiong, is the dance instructor. She says her mom picks out the music based on the beat. Pazee's sister Zoua Pa Vang also dances. It is a family bonding activity that spans two generations and strengthens bonds within generations as well.

"I think I've become closer to the (other) older ladies, too," founding dancer Nao Vang notes. **CRW**

Anastasia Penchi loves music and dancing, but she has reached the age where she can no longer spin. She can be reached at callmeloislane@hotmail.com.

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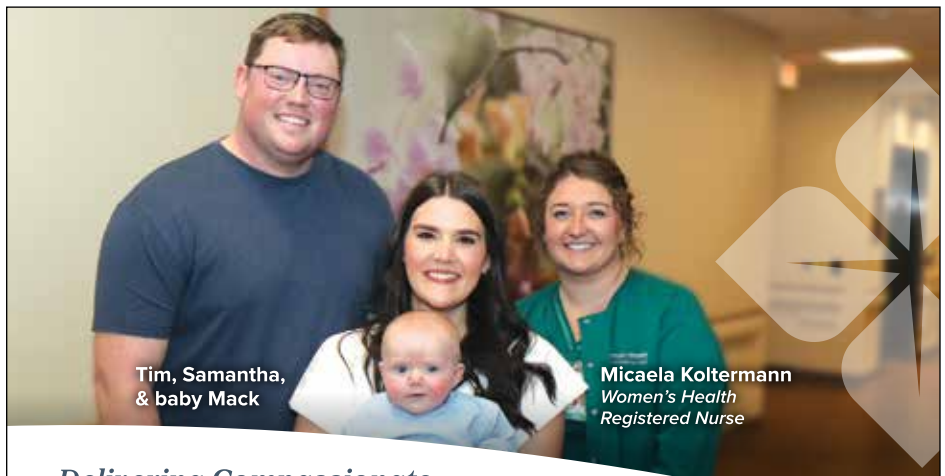
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Mary Kay Lind, left, and her friend Sue Ann Davis-Mitley hold a painting Davis-Mitley created of Lind's son, Jeremiah, based on the photo at right. The photo was taken just days before Jeremiah's death by overdose. Davis-Mitley had also lost a son to overdose just six months before.

A Really Tight Bond

Close friends Mary Kay Lind and Sue Ann Davis-Mitley strengthen each other through tragedy.

BY DIANE BREESER | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Ten years ago, Sue Ann Davis-Mitley created a painting that she gave to her dear friend, Mary Kay Lind. On the back she wrote:

*They may say that pain shared is pain halved.
I think sometimes it's just pain shared is made bearable.
I share your pain, my friend.*

The artwork depicts Lind's son, Jeremiah, who had died from a drug overdose. Six months earlier, Davis-Mitley had been through the same heartache with her son, Jimmy.

Entitled "My Beautiful Boy," the painting, along with a heart mosaic they created together in the memory garden at Coulee Council on Addictions, represents the shared loss and mutual support of two longtime friends.

"HE MADE ME SMILE"

"Jimmy was such a character," says Davis-Mitley of her son. "He had orange curly hair. He was funny, and he made me smile." Davis-Mitley called her oldest child "my little cute funny clown."

Diagnosed with ADHD, Jimmy fell behind academically. Davis-Mitley took him to the library every night, and she was grateful for the medication that helped Jimmy focus in class. "I was overjoyed when he graduated high school!" she says.

In the spring of 2015, 29-year-old Jimmy struggled with back problems. Davis-Mitley

took him to the emergency room, where it was discovered he had MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus), a severe skin bacteria affecting his bones. Jimmy needed surgery.

It soon became clear Jimmy was a drug addict, that needles caused the infection. Davis-Mitley had no idea. The shock of the moment still overcomes her face when recalling the doctor's words: "Wake up, Mom."

She cleaned Jimmy's trailer home before his release from the hospital. After settling him in, she went to The Muse Theatre to continue painting a mural. But, feeling

uneasy about the recent events, she headed home. Later that night, the doorbell rang; three police officers and a priest told the family Jimmy was dead.

"HE WAS CREATIVE"

"Jeremiah had a lot of friends. He was a very social kid," Lind says of her own son. She brightens recalling her son's early years. "He loved to ride his bike all over. He was creative, and I still have much of his artwork."

Jeremiah first smoked marijuana at age 12. "It's sad to say, but Jeremiah's addiction ruled over so many fond childhood memories," Lind muses. Through divorce, remarriage and extended families, Lind maintained a close relationship with Jeremiah. She was always there for him, even as his drug use escalated, resulting in several years in prison.

By October 2015, Jeremiah appeared to be doing well. Mother and son spent time together at a local apple orchard, taking photos that depict their loving relationship.

Two days later, Lind was leaving a Nar-Anon meeting when her daughter called,

asking her to come right home. There were several cars parked by the house, including Davis-Mitley's; she admits to having premonitions about Jeremiah for the six months since her own son had died.

The news of Jeremiah's death at 32 from a heroin overdose was more than Lind could bear. She ran down the street to escape the words she never wanted to hear.

"WE KNOW EXACTLY HOW THE OTHER FEELS"

Over the past decade, the two friends have continued to help each other through the grief and each anniversary of their losses.

The similarities of their experiences show themselves in even the most unexpected places. While the experience of choosing an urn for their sons was painstaking and excruciating, without realizing it, the two friends had each picked the same design.

"We know exactly how the other feels, because we have both had our firstborn child die from overdose," Lind says. "We still lean on each other for support. Sue encourages me with my running. I support

her by attending her theater performances and giving her suggestions for her paintings. We listen to each other."

They have given each other gifts as reminders of their sons—a blanket of Jimmy's pictures and bracelets to signify each passing year. They have traveled together and shared hours of conversation and comfort.

"Sometimes you get overwhelmed, you need a break, you check out for a while to feel the sun and laugh with a friend," Davis-Mitley says. "You can't do it all by yourself."

Lind and Davis-Mitley can be open and honest with each other, as they know the other woman understands.

"Nobody can ever really know or even imagine the pain that comes and lingers and forever changes your life," Davis-Mitley says. "As a mother who unfortunately now knows, that's a really tight bond." CRW

Diane Breeser is a local actor and writer. Contact her at dbreeser@gmail.com. If you or someone you know is battling drug addiction, speak with someone you trust. There is help for you.

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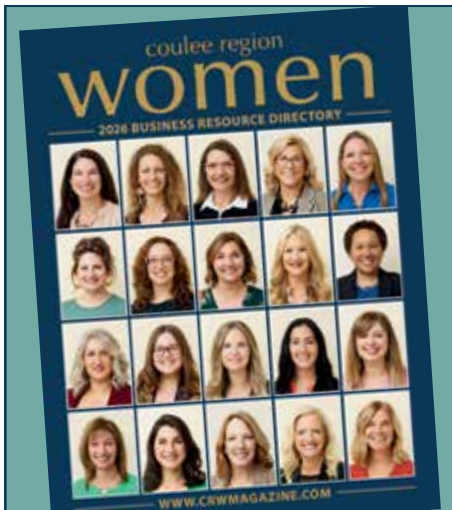
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Setting the Stage

Interior designers share tips to prep your home for the best first impression possible.

BY SHARI HEGLAND | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



This great room showcases many of the tips offered by designers for staging: minimal clutter and personal items, layered lighting with lamps and houseplants to offer a fresh feel. Photo courtesy of Lisa Jacobson.

Selling a home can be stressful, and much of that stress may come from preparing it for showings, when you really need it to shine.

Local interior designers with years of experience staging homes say that some of the most important things you can do are relatively inexpensive and may just take a little of your time, depending on how well you've maintained things all along.



Jessica Apfel Miller of Rooms by Jess



Lisa Jacobson of Now to Wow



Rachel Swieter of Swieter Interiors

THREE OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

Three key elements all our designers addressed are clutter, odors and lighting.

Paperwork on a home office desk, magnets on the refrigerator, hygiene items on the bedside stand and walls of personal photos—it all needs to go. Pack it up, tuck it into drawers, give away or toss.

“Those are all distractions that take buyers’ attention away from the features of the home,”

says Jessica Apfel Miller of La Crosse, owner of Rooms by Jess, who got her start in design in 2003 after a Realtor was impressed with how she had staged her own home for sale.

Odors can also be an instant turnoff—not only pet odors and cigarette smoke, but too much air freshener, which may leave prospective buyers wondering what you are covering up, says La Crescent’s Lisa Jacobson of Now to Wow.

Apfel Miller suggests cleaning carpets two weeks before that first showing to allow odors to fully dissipate.

Finally, lighting. Making the most of lighting can be as simple as installing new bulbs all around to be sure you don’t have any that are burnt out and that they all match the task at hand.

Jacobson also recommends thinking in layers: Overhead lights can be harsh, and especially in these colder, darker winter months, building in layers of light with table or floor lamps and task lighting in areas like offices helps buyers feel at home. You can also incorporate accents like fairy lighting or lighting over a piece of artwork.

FROM THE STREET

Jacobson, who began her business “unofficially” 20 years ago in Boscobel primarily doing landscaping work around her full-time teaching career, says something as simple as power washing walkways and being sure that the last mowing of the season leaves the grass short and the edging well maintained will add to curb appeal even this time of year.

FRONT DOOR

One of the first things a buyer sees and touches is the front door. Rachel Swieter of Swieter Interiors in West Salem says that while refreshing paint on the front door (without



Refreshing the fireplace, eliminating clutter, adding greenery and keeping furnishings simple showcases the features of this living room. Photos courtesy of Rachel Swieter.

going for that big statement color) is great if you can do it, a simpler upgrade is to install a new doorknob or handle. “Even on an older door, it makes such a difference,” she says.

Inside, especially this time of year, Apfel Miller recommends having a large neutral rug—buyers and agents will need a place to take off wet shoes comfortably.

LIVING ROOM

Less (furniture) is more (space) when it comes to living areas. Swieter, who has been doing design in the La Crosse area since 2018, recommends minimizing the big, overstuffed furniture if you can—it may be great for family movie nights, but the giant ottoman makes the room feel smaller to potential buyers.

By moving it into a storage room, you also gain space to pull furniture away from windows and walls to create a more open feel.

Corral blankets in a nice basket, and consider thinning out a book collection if your shelves are overstuffed as well.

KITCHEN

Show off the countertops by clearing them off as much as possible. Tuck large appliances

into the corners, cupboards, the pantry or a box ready for your move.

“You want to show as much space as your home has,” Swieter says. “If that means putting things away in boxes for now, do it.”

Even dish drying racks should be hidden out of sight. And add some fresh flowers or a plant.

BEDROOM

In bedrooms, the designers recommend thinking about neutral décor and a focal point. “I’m surprised by how many homes I’m in that don’t have headboards,” Jacobson says. Adding a headboard or a large piece of artwork can provide a focal point for the room.

Apfel Miller also suggests trading out a bedspread or duvet with a busy pattern for something more neutral and soothing. It doesn’t have to be expensive and could even be borrowed from a friend for the time you are showing the home.

BATHROOM

In your bathroom, Apfel Miller says to look up. One frequently overlooked—but potentially off-putting—detail is the fan. Be sure it has been cleaned. And while you’re

there, tuck the plunger, garbage can and toilet brush out of sight.

For a spa-like look, Swieter recommends rolled white towels, a plant (faux is fine) and a fresh hand towel for each showing.

WHAT ABOUT WALLS?

If taking down your personal photos has left an empty space on your walls, Swieter says that can be okay. “It might actually give people more space to visualize what they might put there,” she says.

But if you simply must have something, Apfel Miller suggests taking advantage of the Coulee Region’s greatest assets: step outside, snap a photo of the beautiful bluffs, enlarge it at Walgreens and pop it into the frame in front of your family photo. No need to deal with the nail holes in the paint, and the investment in time and money is minimal.

DEDICATED SPACES

Jacobson says it is best if you can arrange rooms so that each has an obvious purpose: bedroom, office and so on.

If that just isn’t feasible, Apfel Miller says you should at least create clear zones in multipurpose rooms. If a home office doubles as your craft space, make it clear where one starts and the other ends. The same with that guest room/workout area.

WHY WAIT?

If you’ve lived in your home for years, suddenly needing to prepare it for showings can be overwhelming, but our designers say that you don’t have to wait until you are selling to look at your home with new eyes.

“The best time to stage your house is when you aren’t thinking of selling,” Apfel Miller says. Fix those little things now. Have an honest friend take a critical look and help you eliminate some of the accumulation of the years. Or bring in a professional with years of experience to help you make the tough decisions.

You may find you enjoy living there even more. **CRW**

These interviews have inspired Coulee Region Women editor Shari Hegland to take a closer look at her home—she has no plans for moving, but it might be time to declutter and touch up some chipped paint.



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Baking Fresh Memories

Trina Schlifer gathers family for cookie-baking, memory-making fun each holiday season.

BY HEIDI OVERSON | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



One of many families' most cherished traditions of the holidays is baking. For some families, it is as much about time, togetherness and laughter as it is the cookies on the tray.

The Schlifer family tradition started 10 years ago. Trina Schlifer and Tracy Doyle are sisters, and in 2015, they got together in Trina's North Side La Crosse home with a mission in mind—to bake a lot of Christmas goodies. Two can be a lonely number, so they asked Trina's daughters-in-law, Abilene Schlifer and Tia Schlifer, to join them. That year was the beginning of a wonderful family tradition that is now shared with six grandchildren: Ella, Emersyn, Eva, Harper, Ellyanna and Harrison. Trina's husband usually quietly retreats for a peaceful day outdoors while her sons, Andrew and Adam, stay in their homes and enjoy some rare solitude while the children are gone.

As you can imagine, the first year of baking was nothing like the later years, but the family has taken all of the changes in perfect stride and continues to have as much fun as possible.

KEEPING TRADITION

"Thankfully, it's never chaotic, even with the younger children," says Trina. "There is a cheerful feeling in the air, and we all look forward to spending time together."

The holiday baking sessions usually last between six and eight hours, and Trina always has something good in the Crock Pot and on the table for everyone to eat when they get hungry. While the cookies are cooling or in between batches, they enjoy whatever is on Trina's menu that year. Frosting the sugar cookies is always done after they eat. To keep their clothes clean and to add to the spirit of the day, each family member wears a red apron with their name and initial on it.

"Each year we write the year on the aprons along with a cute little saying, and then we iron on a Christmas decoration," says Trina. "The patches help the aprons tell their own stories from year to year. Abilene's still has flour on it from the first year we baked!"

THE KID IN ALL OF US

Conversation is lively as everyone catches up on each other's lives. The grandchildren keep the women busy

in between the baking and decorating, but everyone realizes they are making wonderful, warm memories that the children will never forget. Each year, another child is old enough to help roll out and cut the sugar cookies.

"The kids love it all," says Tia. "They love getting their hands 'dirty' and sampling the products. There is usually a flour fight at some point of the day."

"This special day is a purposeful way to connect generations, slow down and create lasting memories," says Tracy. "The perfect batch of cookies isn't the point. The point is the conversation that happens when we mix, the memories we share while we wait for the timer and the collective joy of creating something to share. It's a sweet, delicious way of saying we are still here, and we are still together."

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

Tia agrees that it's not just about the baking. "The cousins come together, and in those small moments of watching them help each other and have fun, we realize that this is something beautiful. I didn't grow up with this tradition, and I feel very lucky to be able to share these moments and traditions with the next generation."



Trina Schlifer (top, from left), her sister Tracy Doyle, and her daughters-in-law Tia Schlifer and Abilene Schlifer have added a third generation throughout years of baking cookies together.

“Having my children be able to have at least one tradition they will continue to be a part of makes me feel happy, grateful and blessed.” – *Abilene Schlifer*

“I get emotional as I look back over the years since we started this,” says Abilene. “Having my children be able to have at least one tradition they will continue to be a part of makes me feel happy, grateful and blessed. Families can be complicated; however, these types of gatherings and memories can never be replaced or forgotten. It makes you appreciate what you have, no matter what.”

COOKIES FOR ALL PALATES

The group makes sugar cookies, peanut butter cookies, no-bake chocolate oatmeal cookies, chocolate-covered pretzels, Mexican wedding cakes, snickerdoodles, gingerbread cookies, molasses cookies, turtle pretzels and buckeyes, which is a recipe that is handed down from Abilene’s mother. Apparently, North Side squirrels also have a taste for

buckeyes. One year they were set on Trina’s back porch to cool, and a squirrel found them and was ready to eat the whole batch. The memory of this near disaster still keeps Abilene up at night.

The sugar cookies are the stars of the show every year. They are rolled out, cut and extravagantly decorated by the children.

“Our sugar cookies have a unique look,” says Tia. “We laugh when we admire our decorating skills and the amount of sprinkles the kids put on the cookies. There are more sprinkles than cookie!”

MISHAPS AND MUSIC MAKE MEMORIES

There have only been a couple of mishaps over the past 10 years. Tia recalls when they forgot to buy holiday-colored sprinkles for

the cookies and had to use whatever Trina had on hand. On another baking day, they tried to take a shortcut and bought sugar cookie dough at the store instead of making it from scratch. “When we baked our cut-outs, the dough expanded and became one giant cookie. Oops!”

When the baking is done, everyone gathers around Trina’s keyboard and sings as she plays Christmas songs. It’s the perfect end to each baking day. When the cookies are cool, the family members divide the goodies to take home, and there are always plenty left over for Trina to decide what to do with. She is thankful.

“I have another sister, Heather, who lives in Maine, so I miss her being able to take part in this,” says Trina. “But I am emotional and grateful to have these wonderful women in my life, and I’m equally blessed to have daughters-in-law who are wonderful mothers to my grandchildren. I, of course, look at my grandchildren with a deep love that is hard to describe. It’s important to find the joy in traditions, which we are doing.”

May you and yours find or continue to enjoy a special tradition this holiday season!



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The advertisement features a dark red background with white text. On the left, there are circular images of a salad with tomatoes and feta, a sandwich, and a bowl of deviled eggs with radishes. On the right, there are circular images of a bar with a self-pour wine wall and several craft cocktails, including a yellow drink with a lime wedge and a red drink with a blackberry. The text is arranged in a clean, modern layout.



Schlifer's Sugar Cookies

- 2 cups flour
- 1½ tsp. baking soda
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup softened butter
- 2 tsp. grated orange peel
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ cup Egg Beaters

In small bowl, combine flour and baking soda. Set aside. In medium bowl, with electric mixer at medium speed, beat sugar, butter, orange peel and vanilla until creamy. Add Egg Beaters and beat 1 minute. Gradually stir in flour mixture until blended. Cover and refrigerate dough for 1 hour. Roll out cookie dough and place on lightly floured cookie sheets. Bake at 375°F degrees for 8-10 minutes. Cool on wire rack.

Maple Orange Glaze

- 1¾ cups powdered sugar
- 1 tsp. orange zest
- 3 T melted butter
- 3 T orange juice
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- ½ tsp. pure maple syrup

In a bowl, stir together powdered sugar and orange zest. Stir in melted butter, orange juice, vanilla and maple syrup until smooth.

Molasses Cookies

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 4 T molasses
- 2 tsp. soda
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. cloves
- 1 tsp. ginger
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 2½ cups flour

Mix all ingredients well. Roll in balls and flatten. Sprinkle with sugar and bake at 350°F until golden. **CRW**

Heidi Overson loved getting to know Trina for this story, and she wishes them all another successful and fun day of baking this year. She also hopes they remember to squirrel-proof their back porch.






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ACCOMPLISHMENTS



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OUTSTANDING WOMEN HONORED

At its annual Tribute to Outstanding Women November 6, YWCA La Crosse recognized nine women for their contributions to the YWCA and the larger community.

Honored were Laura Abellera, La Crosse School District Cultural and Family Connections Coordinator, Eliminating Racism; Chris Haskell, voter services coordinator with League of Women Voters, Empowering Women; Dr. Debra Murphy, director of behavioral health services at Scenic Bluffs Community Health Centers, Empowering Women; Hetti Brown, CouleeCap executive director, Social Justice; Holmen High School student Emersen Strangstalien, Outstanding High School Senior; University of Wisconsin-La Crosse student Alex Morris, Outstanding College Student; Mac Kiel, Project Proven instructor at Western Technical College, Trailblazer; county administrator Jane Klekamp, Legacy; and Hannah Amann, Friend of YWCA.



CHAMPIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

The Sustainability Institute announced its 2025 Inspiring Sustainability Awards in November. The organization recognized Kaarina Dunn as the individual winner. She has completed projects to incorporate sustainable practices into her youth symphony concert, launch a summer camp to teach local youth about living sustainably and restore a section of the Mississippi River shoreline.

The organization winner was The Nature Place. The Nature Place has become a true hub for nature education and community connection in the La Crosse region. With a strong focus on youth engagement, it sparks curiosity and nurtures care for the natural world through environmental education, community programs, citizen science and land stewardship.

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Laurie Sullivan



St. Rose Chapel is the home of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in La Crosse.



Michele Pettit

Bigger Than Themselves

Franciscan sisters find meaning in service, community and one another.

BY JANIS JOLLY | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Who nowadays becomes a religious sister? It's a career that won't make you rich or famous. But for women who want to deepen their relationship with God, to serve others in a Christ-like manner and to have close companionship with other like-minded women, it is the right choice,

Not a cloistered order, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are known for their work for social justice in our community and the world. Since their inception in 1850, the order has founded the area's first hospital, St. Francis Hospital; founded the school that became Viterbo University and its prestigious nursing school; and has had a major role in the creation of St. Clare Health Mission and the Warming Center.

Two local women, Laurie Sullivan and Michele Pettit, already had a good start in life but were looking for something more. For both, contact with the sisters of the FSPA helped them find their way on this journey to joining the order that now includes 128 sisters who have professed final vows and four more on their journey to final vows.

THE CALL

Sullivan felt a strong call to serve God and live the gospel. At a retreat at Marywood Franciscan Spirituality Center in Michigan, she met FSPA sisters for the first time.

In 2010, she came to La Crosse to see and experience the beautiful St. Rose Adoration Chapel, where sisters took turns praying around the clock. Their devotion helped firm her resolve to join them permanently. In 2011, she applied to join the order, a process that usually takes around nine years from application to final vows. Sullivan took her final vows in 2020.

Pettit came at it a different way. "I was drawn to religious life for several reasons," she says. "First and foremost, I desired a

deeper relationship with God. Second, when I first started to discern religious life, Pope Francis had just been elected and the Nuns on the Bus group inspired me with their focus on social justice issues. Third, I had a desire to be part of something bigger than myself, to be less self-centered, and to participate in service activities I wouldn't participate in on my own. Fourth, I appreciated the countercultural nature of religious life."

THE PROCESS

An applicant works with another sister, who helps her find her true purpose and calling within the order. Temporary vows precede several years of study and work.

"Temporary vows are typically six years," Sullivan says. "A sister learns to live her vows and continues to grow and learn about the FSPA congregation and the Franciscan way of life. It is a time to balance ministry, prayer, community life and personal enrichment and prepare for permanent commitment." After making her temporary vows, she attended Catholic Theological Union and earned a certificate in Pastoral Studies and ministered in various ministries within the church and at Catholic Charities.

Most sisters of working age have jobs in the secular world. Sullivan serves as the operations manager at Wafer Food Pantry in La Crosse. Pettit works as a professor in the Department of Public Health and Community Health Education at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and will take her final vows in the summer of 2026, "God willing," she says.

Both Sullivan and Pettit thrive in the love and support of the FSPA sisters. "The sisters are a joyful, loving and affirming presence in my life. They make me want to be a better person, and for that I am grateful," says Pettit. **CRW**

Janis Jolly is a freelance writer who lives and works in the Coulee Region.



Big Sister matches spend time together in many ways, creating connections and supporting each other.

BIG HEARTS MAKE A BIG IMPACT

Big Brothers Big Sisters creates connections that can change lives.

BY NICOLE CZARNOMSKI | CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Across Wisconsin and Minnesota, many kids and teens are growing up facing more challenges than support. Some deal with financial stress or family instability. Others are still feeling the emotional impact of the pandemic. And with nearly 30 percent of households led by single parents, a lot of young people simply need an extra caring adult by their side.

That's where Big Brothers Big Sisters of the 7 Rivers Region comes in. The program connects adult mentors, called Bigs, with kids ages 5 to 17, and through a national initiative, young adults up to age 24. These matches are built on consistency, trust and shared experiences that can last a lifetime.



*Jeanne Meyer,
Executive Director.*

TIME TOGETHER

Bigs and Littles usually meet a couple of times a month. They might bake, shoot hoops, go hiking or just catch up about life. "It's not about how much time you spend," says Jeanne Meyer, executive director. "It's about showing up and being genuine. That quality time builds confidence and belonging."

For Keira Pickwall, a college student and Big Sister volunteer, this experience is personal. "I chose Big Brothers Big Sisters because I was in the program as a Little when I was younger," Pickwall shares. "I wanted to be able to provide the same thing for another child when the opportunity arose."

Now she's paying it forward. Pickwall spends about six hours a month volunteering. She visits her Little Sister at school each week for about an hour and a half. "We hang out outside on the playground, do arts and crafts, play games or whatever else sounds fun to her that day," she says.

Pickwall admits the experience has been just as rewarding for her as it has for her Little Sister. "It's helped me realize how much being present means to somebody," she explains. "As a college student, I often get caught up in school, work and other responsibilities. When I'm with my Little Sister, I'm not focusing on anything else. I'm entirely there for her, and that mindset has carried over into all other parts of my life."

She also hopes her Little Sister takes away an important life lesson. "I'm hoping my Little learns it's always okay to be yourself and that everyone is human. We all have bad days and good days, and that's okay."

NOT IN IT ALONE

Big Brothers Big Sisters supports every match with regular check-ins, training and fun community events. Monthly REACH activities, like the annual Halloween celebration, help Bigs and Littles connect, share ideas and just have fun together.

"You don't need special skills to make a difference," Meyer says. "You just need to show up with a genuine heart. That's what changes lives."

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the 7 Rivers Region relies on community support through donations, grants and word of mouth. Every hour volunteered and every dollar donated helps ensure local kids have the mentors they need to reach their full potential.

To learn more about becoming a Big, making a donation or getting involved, visit Big Brothers Big Sisters of the 7 Rivers Region online or on Facebook.

Because sometimes, one simple connection can truly change two lives. **CRW**

Nicole Czarnomski is a freelance writer in southeastern Minnesota. She's also part of a local bank's planning committee, where she helps organize and take part in volunteer activities that strengthen her community.

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ONGOING EVENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

La Crosse Area Retired Educators Luncheon, 1st Thurs. Sept.-Dec. and March-June, 11:30 a.m., Cedar Creek Country Club, lacrosserea@gmail.com.

La Crosse-Bantry Friendship Association 4th Wed., 5:30 p.m., La Crosse Eagles Club, www.lacrossebantry.org

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

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

La Crosse Rotary East Mon., noon-1 p.m., Radisson, La Crosse, www.lacrosserotaryeast.org.

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

League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area monthly programs, Sept. - April, www.lwvlacrosse.org.

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

Onalaska Hilltopper Rotary Wed., noon-1 p.m., Mary Cody's Restaurant, 205 Main St., Onalaska.

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

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

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

Women with Purpose, 2nd Wed., 11:45-1 p.m., La Crosse Country Club, 300 Marcou Road, Onalaska, cr.wppwwi.org.

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 Lights, Riverside Park, www.rotarylites.org.

Dec. 4-20, *One Christmas Eve at Evergreen Mall*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for the Performing Arts, www.lacrossetheatre.org.

Dec. 4-7, *The Game's Afoot, or Holmes for the Holidays*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs-Sat., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun, Toland Theatre, Lowe Center for the Arts, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, www.uwlax.edu.

Dec. 5-21, *Frozen*, 7:30 p.m. Thurs. and Fri., 2 p.m. Sat. and Sun., La Crosse Community Theatre, Weber Center for the Performing Arts, www.lacrossetheatre.org.

Dec. 6, 6th Annual Jinglefest, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., downtown Holmen, www.jinglefestholmen.com.

Dec. 6, St. Elias Holiday Bazaar, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., St. Elias Orthodox Church, 716 Copeland Ave., La Crosse, www.stelias-lacrosse.org.

Dec. 6, Old-Fashioned Christmas, 10 a.m., Norskadalen Nature and Heritage Center, Coon Valley, www.norskadalen.org.

Dec. 6, A Viterbo Christmas, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fac.

Dec. 7, Brunch with Santa and Mrs. Claus, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Holmen Area Community Center, www.holmenc.org.

Dec. 7, Winter Maker's Market, 11 a.m.-4 p.m., The Nature Place, La Crosse, www.natureplacelacrosse.org.

Dec. 7-14, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, Viroqua Community Theatre, www.viroquacomunitytheatre.org.

Dec. 9, Coulee Chordsmen Winter Concert, 7 p.m., Capella Performing Arts Center, www.capelling-performingartscenter.com.

◀ Dec. 9-13, Cocktails and Cabaret:

A Holly Jolly Holiday, 7:30 p.m. Tues., Wed., Fri. and Sat., Pump House Regional Arts Center, www.pumphouse.org.

Dec. 11-12, *A Holly Jazzy Christmas*: La Crosse Jazz Orchestra featuring Debbie O'Keefe, 7:30 p.m., Capella Performing Arts Center, www.capellingperformingartscenter.com.

Dec. 11-14, *Sam Shovel, Twelve Days of Chaos Christmas* radio show, 7 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., The ARC-Home of the Historic Masonic Theatre, 255 Main St., Winona, www.theatredumiss.org.

Dec. 12, La Crosse Dance Centre's 36th Annual *Nutcracker Ballet*, 7:30 p.m. Fri., 5 p.m. Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fac.

Dec. 12, Christmas Sing-Along, 7 p.m., Old Main Cultural Center, Galesville, www.oldmaingalesville.org.

Dec. 13, "A Home for the Holidays" Gala supporting Karuna House, 5:30-11 p.m., Radisson Ballroom, www.karunahousing.org.

Dec. 13, La Crosse Community Theatre Holiday Gala, 5 p.m., Weber Center for the Performing Arts, www.lacrossetheatre.org.

Dec. 13, Johnson Street Underground Holiday Concert, 7 p.m., Winona Arts Center, www.winonaarts.org.

Dec. 14, Giving Hearts Choir Concert, 3 p.m., Capella Performing Arts Center, www.capellingperformingartscenter.com.

Dec. 16, SimpleGifts, 7:30 p.m., Heider Center for the Arts, www.heidercenter.org.

Dec. 17-19, String Ties Holiday Concert, 7:30 p.m., Pump House Regional Arts Center, www.pumphouse.org.

Dec. 20, String Ties Christmas, 7 p.m., HPB Theater at St. Cecilia Hall, 1124 W. Wabasha St., Winona, www.hurryback.org.

◀ **Dec. 20**, *La Crosse Symphony Orchestra: Holiday Glories*, with guest vocalist Emily Birsan, 7:30 p.m., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.lacrossesympphony.org.



JANUARY

Jan. 2, Women's Christmas: An Epiphany Celebration, 5:30-8 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Jan. 3, Epiphany Day of Rest, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Jan. 9-10, Johnsmith, 7:30 p.m., Pump House Regional Arts Center, www.pumphouse.org.

Jan. 10, Not Quite Brothers performs A Tribute to Arena Rock, 7 p.m., HPB Theater at St. Cecilia Hall, 1124 W. Wabasha St., Winona, www.hurryback.org.

Jan. 16-17, One Word Retreat, Franciscan Spirituality Center, www.fscenter.org.

Jan. 17, La Crosse Symphony Orchestra: Richard Record Rising Stars Concerto Competition Finals, 3:30 p.m., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center Main Theatre, www.lacrossesympphony.org.

Jan. 17, Mason Dixon Line, 7:30 p.m., Heider Center for the Arts, www.heidercenter.org.

▶ **Jan. 17**, *Artists Next Door: The 22nd Row*, 7 p.m., Minnesota Conservatory for the Arts, 1164 W. 10th St., Winona, <https://hbp.ticketspice.com/20260117>.

Jan. 17, Chris Thile, 8 p.m., Historic Temple Theatre, Viroqua, www.historictempletheatre.com.

Jan. 18, La Crosse Wedding Expo, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., La Crosse Center South Hall, www.lacrosseweddingexpo.com.

Jan. 19, MLK Community Celebration, 7 p.m., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center Main Theatre.

Jan. 23, Cash in Hand: Johnny Cash Tribute, 7:30 p.m., Weber Center for the Performing Arts Lyche Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fac.

Jan. 24, La Crosse's 34th Annual Great Tri-State Rail Sale, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., La Crosse Center, www.4000foundation.org.

◀ **Jan. 29-Feb. 1**, *I Love You Because*, 7 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., Viterbo University Fine Arts Center LaCroix Black Box Theatre, www.viterbo.edu/fac.

Jan. 30, Gadan, 8 p.m., Historic Temple Theatre, Viroqua, www.historictempletheatre.com.





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