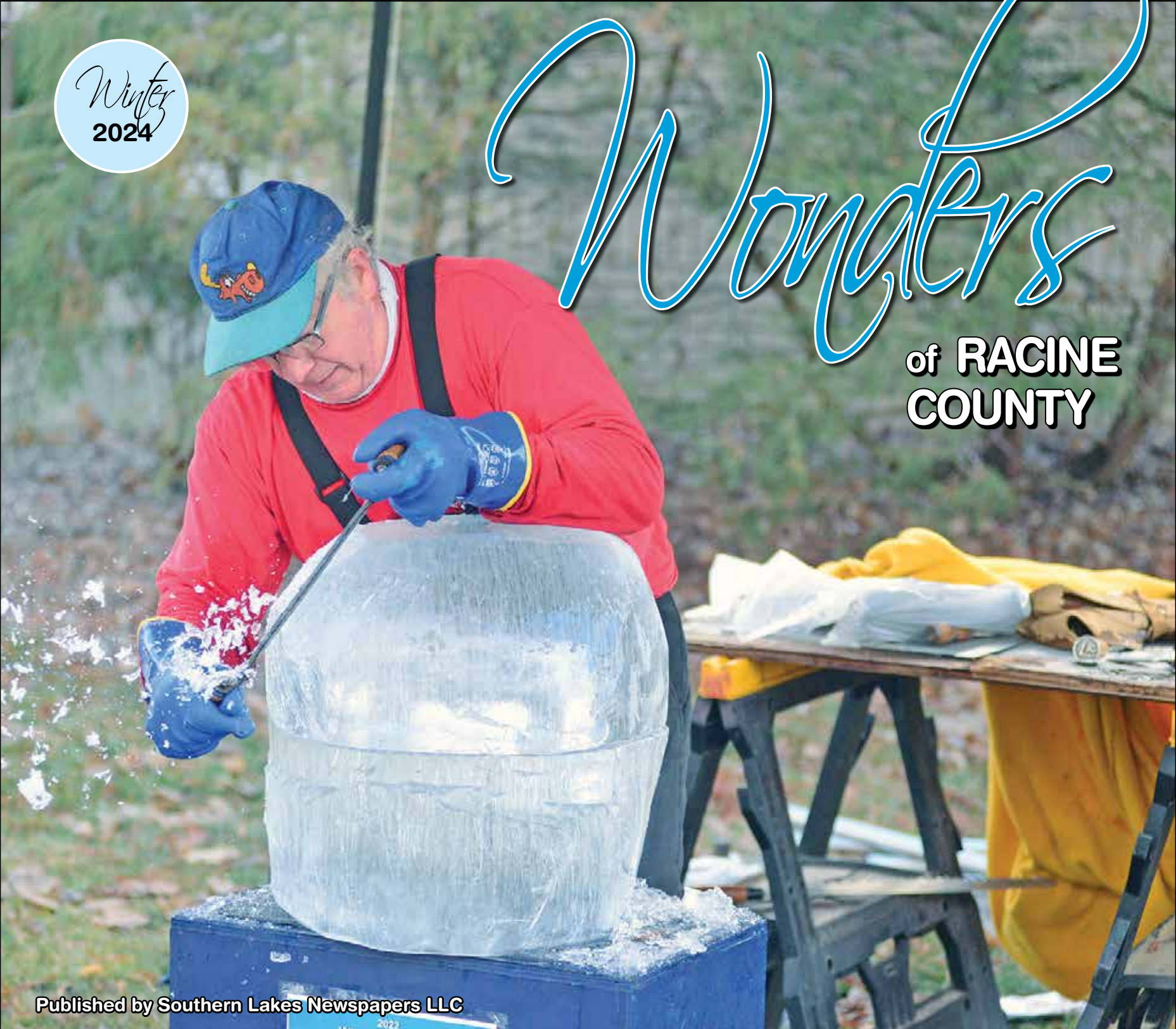




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# Wonders

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# Sculptors create icy works of art

## Mild weather proves challenging for competitors

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

Artists overcame a series of challenges, most notably unseasonably mild weather, to create stellar ice sculptures at the Wisconsin State Ice Carving Championship in December in Burlington.

The Wisconsin State Ice Carving Championship, held in conjunction with the Burlington Ice Festival, drew 14 artists from around the state to Wehmhoff Square Park as well as several family-friendly activities.

Additionally, courtesy of local businesses, the downtown area saw additional foot traffic in the Chestnut Street loop, where a host of vendors participated in the Kris Kringle Market.

Burlington Mayor Jeannie Hefty, who spearheaded starting the event several years ago, praised sculptors who managed the weather conditions during the awards ceremony at Napoli Restaurant and Pizzeria.

Dan Ingebrigtsen, of Franklin, won the 2023 title with a sculpture he called "Off for the Holidays."

Ingebrigtsen, a frequent competitor in the State Ice Carving Championship, drew inspiration from his childhood for his work of art.

"When we were young, we couldn't wait for Christmas to get here, so that was the sculpture's intent," he said.

He said he's continued to compete in the event because of the Burlington area's friendly demeanor, including residents who marvel at each ice sculpture, which are neatly scattered throughout Wehmhoff Square Park.

"It is fun to talk to the people on the sidewalk," he said. "That is what keeps me coming back."

### Weather challenges

Mike Austin, of Burlington, commended his fellow competitors during



**at left:** Dan Ingebrigtsen, of Franklin, works on his ice sculpture during the Wisconsin State Ice Carving Championship in December in Burlington's Wehmhoff Square Park. He won first place in the competition.

**below:** Milwaukee's Gina Diliberti works on the finer details of her ice sculpture.

JASON ARNDT  
Wonders of Racine County

the awards ceremony as they battled weather conditions.

The event brought some sun, gusty winds and unfavorable temperatures around 40 degrees.

"We had warm temperatures, then we had intermittent sunshine, and those combinations are not good," he said. "The sun is not friendly to the ice."

However, Austin explained, each artist needed to compete under similar circumstances, and officials couldn't merely reschedule the event due to unfavorable conditions.

Austin finished second at the event for an abstract perspective of a snowman. He admitted he didn't come up with the idea

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



Shaina Boldt, of Oconomowoc, carefully etches her 300-pound ice block during the event.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

## Wonders of Racine County

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**On the cover:** The City of Burlington hosted the Wisconsin State Ice Carving Championship in December at Wehmhoff Square Park. Dick Emmerich, of Jefferson, shaves off pieces of ice while creating his entry for the competition.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

# Recognizing a legend

*David Sheffer  
honored for loyalty to  
Burlington athletics*

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

**D**avid Sheffer seldom, if ever, takes breaks between seasons as a team manager for several Burlington High School athletic programs.

In fact, Sheffer, who graduated from BHS in 1976, has volunteered his time overseeing 100 total athletic teams since he started as a student. He received well-deserved recognition at halftime of a Demons football game in October.

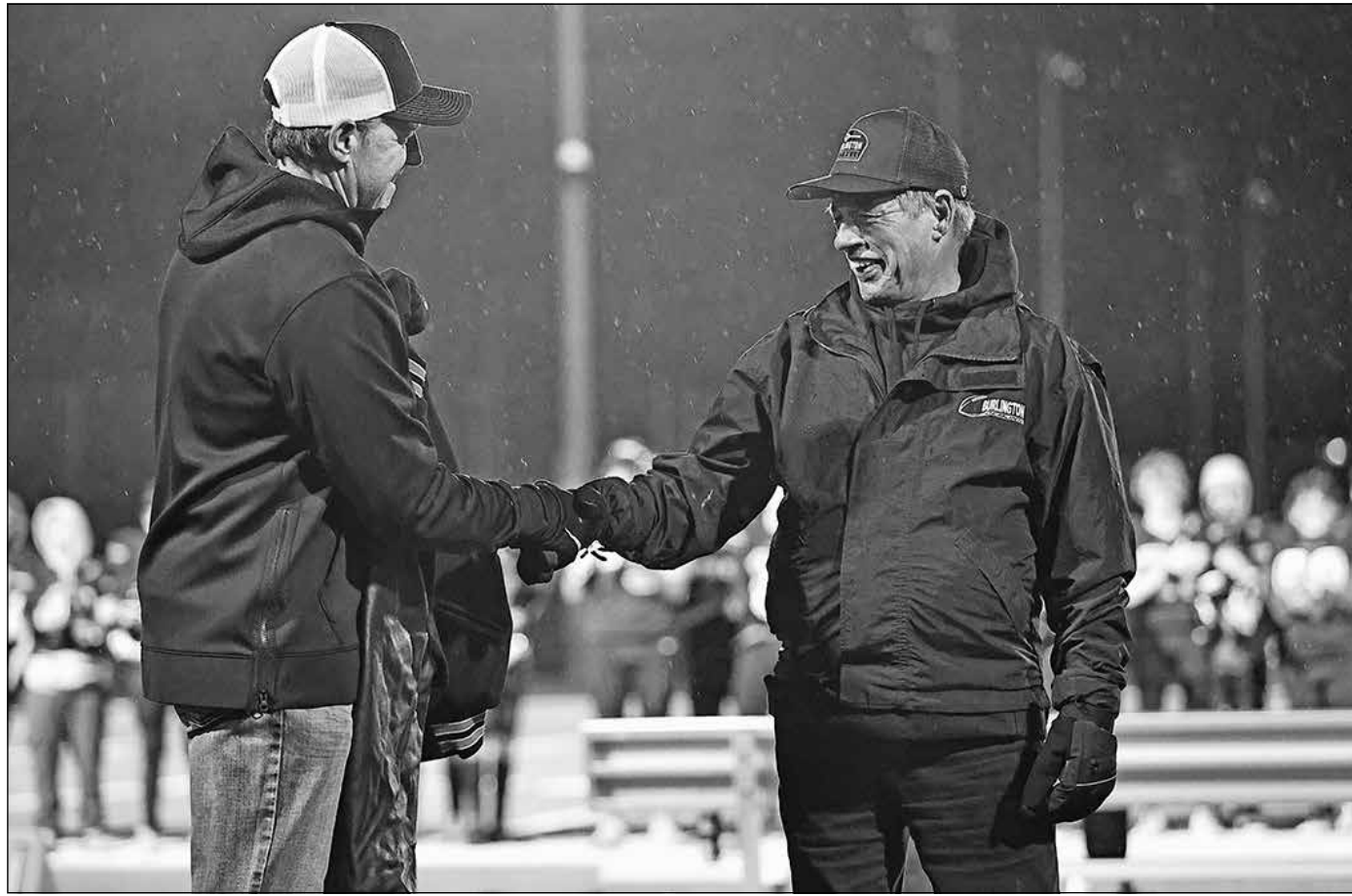
According to district officials, Sheffer has been a manager for the football team for 49 years – including time under legendary football coach Don Dalton, 27 seasons on the bench for the boys basketball squad, and served the baseball team for 24 years.

“David has been a fixture on the sidelines and in the dugout since he went to school here in the 70s. David has had a positive influence on hundreds, if not thousands, of high school student-athletes and coaches in his time serving as team manager for a variety of teams,” said Burlington Athletic Director Eric Plitzuweit, during the recognition.

“David is a valuable member to our coaching staff. His dedication to the many pre-game and post-game responsibilities has been second to none. He truly cares for our student-athletes. He expects a victory every time the Demons compete,” Plitzuweit added.

Sheffer was employed by the Burlington Area School District from 1976-2005 but still continued to serve the athletic program as team manager.

He was inducted into the Burlington High School Wall of Fame in 2009 and



Burlington baseball coach Scott Staude (left) presents long-time athletics manager David Sheffer with a new letter jacket at halftime of a Demons football game in October.

MICHAEL STEFANICH JR. Wonders of Racine County

received the Distinguished Service Award from the Wisconsin Athletic Directors Association two years ago.

## Witnessing history

Sheffer has been a part of several milestones within the school’s athletic program, including more than 30 conference championship teams, regional titles and sectional titles. He also served as

a member of the 2016 boys baseball team that won the WIAA Division 1 state title.

Burlington baseball coach Scott Staude, who presented Sheffer with a new letter jacket during the ceremony, said Sheffer’s dedication to Demons’ athletics is second to none.

“He goes from season to season without a break, and when there is that one or two weeks in between seasons, it drives him crazy because he wants to be a part of the athletic experience,” Staude said. “He does it for the kids, he is like another coach out there. He is really the heartbeat of Burlington athletics.”

As for the state championship team, Staude remembers seeing the bright smile of Sheffer after Burlington hoisted the trophy.

“That was kind of the pinnacle of his managerial career,” he said. “He was really happy for the kids.”

Staude said Sheffer is always the first person in and last person to leave the diamond, conducting pre-game set up, and post-game take down responsibilities, including managing equipment and helping the coaching staff put bases on the field.

“He will greet the players when they come in. He stays later than anybody else does,” Staude said. “He is an integral part of what we do. He also reminds us of things that we sometimes forget. We need him and we can’t function without him.”

## Motivated to win

Burlington football coach Eric Sulik said he often gives Sheffer rides to and from practices.

Sulik said Sheffer, who has a humble demeanor, always places student needs in

front of his own during contests and makes an effort to meet each player during a given season.

Sulik reiterated Plitzuweit’s comments, noting Sheffer has played a role in scores of student-athletes’ lives and has carved out a niche of his own.

“To have that impact on hundreds, if not thousands of kids, in an athletic program is something unique and incredible,” Sulik said.

Sulik said he believes the team felt additional motivation to defeat the Broncos on Oct. 6 in tribute to Sheffer.

“Our kids were easily more motivated to play harder tonight because it was his 100th season,” he said.

During football games, Sheffer often offers support to players on the sidelines.

“He is critical to the program. He is not just a guy that shows up and is there. He wants to help out. He handles the equipment really well in a sport where our kids are wearing \$500 to \$700 worth of equipment,” Sulik said. “If you’ve got guys that need their helmets fixed, he is on it.”

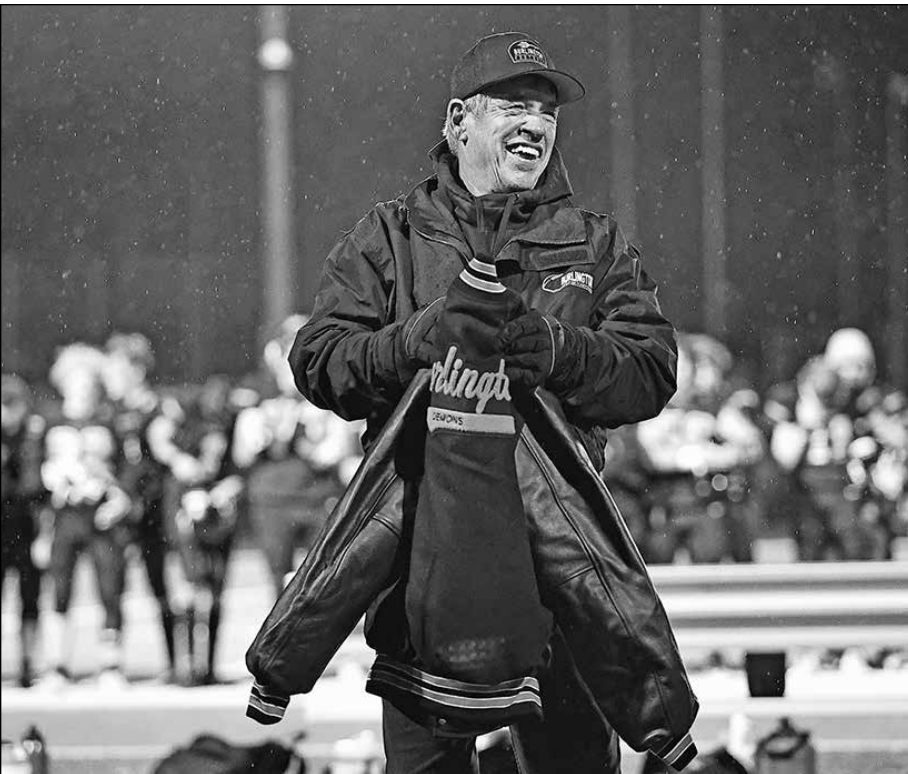
While varsity programs receive the most attention, Sheffer also takes the time to focus on junior varsity teams, Sulik said.

“He gets just as excited in a JV game as he does in the varsity game,” Sulik said. “He takes the losses as hard as you do.”

Plitzuweit said Sheffer has shown fierce loyalty to the program, even during trying seasons.

“He has always remained loyal and positive to our student-athletes, coaches and athletic programs,” Plitzuweit said.

“The way that David interacts with everyone he comes in contact with has proven time and time again, that it is never a mistake in life to show someone you care for them.”



Sheffer accepts the jacket during a ceremony recognizing his many years of service.

MICHAEL STEFANICH JR. Wonders of Racine County

# New To You touts high-quality items

*Downtown Rochester business has been going strong for 26 years*

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

**N**ew To You Women's Consignment Boutique in charming downtown Rochester has served the community for more than 25 years.

The shop, owned by Maggie Hodgson, features casual wear, dresses, athletic wear, outerwear, jewelry, scarves, handbags and purses, shoes and boots from hundreds of consigners both in Wisconsin and beyond.

According to Hodgson, who has owned the establishment since 1997, New To You offers a personalized touch to customer service compared to big box retailers with high-end items from brands such as Kate Spade, Anne Taylor, J. Crew, among others for sale.

Over the years, Hodgson said she's developed relationships with a strong core of customers as well as consigners – who have become part of the New To You family.

"You really get to know your customers, some of them I have had for over 20 years, so they are like friends. It is a close knit-family," she said. "It's an interesting job and changes every day with new seasons, new clothes and new things coming out."

Hodgson estimates New To You has about 800 total consigners who receive compensation for their items.

"They come in and drop off the right clothing for us to sell for them and they receive 40% of the selling price," she said. "And then the items offer our customers a wide selection of varying degrees of clothing that they don't have to spend retail prices for. We are anywhere from 30% to 50% off of the original retail price."

New To You has three part-time employees who work diligently to help customers find the items they need. Hodgson said her employees are instrumental to the shop and the success of the business.

"They are extremely important. They are the face of my shop. They are the first person a customer sees when they walk into my shop. They are great girls, very friendly and very helpful," she said.

## Initial business launch

Hodgson previously worked in the corporate world, primarily at an area mall, before moving out of Wisconsin and taking some time off.

When she returned, she and a friend teamed up to start New To You, which was initially located next to a children's consignment shop two blocks from its current brick-and-mortar store.

"I had a really good friend that had this idea of opening up a women's shop and wanted a little bit of help, so I started helping her," Hodgson said.

At the time, having New To You next to a children's shop served as an ideal complement, since customers could often find items from both stores in one visit.

"We just thought it was a great compliment to the moms who would be shopping for their kids and then they would shop for themselves and it just blossomed from there," Hodgson said.

While her friend moved in a different direction, Hodgson remained at the store and eventually found a permanent location along Main Street in downtown Rochester.



**top:** Maggie Hodgson, owner of New To You, a women's consignment boutique, said she and her staff offer personalized customer service to each person who walks through the door. **above, left:** The shop, which is at 200 W. Main St., Rochester, offers high quality items from hundreds of consigners, locally as well as from out-of-state. **above, right:** New To You, which has been going strong for 26 years, has a wide variety of items from outfits and shoes to purses and jewelry.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

## Strong reputation

For 26 years, Hodgson has built a strong network of consigners and customers, even without a formal online store.

"We are just a brick-and-mortar at this time. I do not have an online store, I do have a Facebook page, which we post many outfits on there," she said. "During COVID, I did post more on Facebook and I did ship out at that time."

New To You can still ship items to customers if they request it, Hodgson said.

As for consigners, she said some have come from Chicago and beyond.

"We do have consigners from out-of-state. I have consigners that ship me things. I have a lot coming up from Chicago," she said. "We have a very, very wide variety of consigners that bring me things."

She credits reputation and stellar

customer service as key components for the store's continued success.

"Word of mouth is a big part of that," she said.

While New To You presents a variety of inventory options, she said customers are often drawn to two particular items.

"Women love handbags and shoes," she said. "Other than that, I would say tops are probably our best seller."

Hodgson said she donates items that are not sold to local women's charities.

## 'Hidden gem'

New To You, 200 W. Main St., Rochester, is one of several small shops in downtown Rochester.

Hodgson said stores in the village – including DW Coffee, Chance's Food and Spirits, Fox and Fork and Riverside Studio, among others – have made the area an ideal stopping point for customers in the area.

"Downtown Rochester is like a little hidden gem because we have many other little shops here besides me," she said. "There are lots of things to do in Rochester. It can be a whole day of fun."

Visitors and local residents can stop in at New To You, have lunch at Chance's, visit Fox and Fork, and other local businesses to make a day of it, she said.

The small town charm has drawn people from around the region.

"We are so close to Racine and we are close to Milwaukee and Kenosha," she said. "I have people coming from those areas all of the time."

New To You is open 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. on Saturdays.

For more information, including seeing some of the inventory available, follow New To You on its Facebook and Instagram pages.



**above:** Brian Jensen, president of the Racine Astronomical Society, works on a telescope inside the main building of the Modine-Benstead Observatory. **below:** Astronomy photographs taken by members of the Racine Astronomical Society adorn the walls of the main building at the observatory.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

# Stargazing at Modine-Benstead

## *Nonprofit group keeps astronomy tradition alive in Racine County*

By **Jason Arndt**  
STAFF WRITER

**B**rian Jensen has a fondness for photography and stargazing the night sky.

When he puts both together, he is able to hone his hobby of astronomy, particularly at Modine-Benstead Observatory on the outskirts of Union Grove in Racine County.

"I enjoy the night sky and I enjoy photography, so the two fit well together here," said Jensen.

He serves as president of the Racine Astronomical Society, a nonprofit group

of volunteers tasked with maintaining the 3.5-acre complex.

"I can put my cameras on the telescopes," he said.

Jensen, who joined the Astronomical Society about 46 years ago, said the observatory depends solely on donations and membership dues to keep the tradition alive on the site.

The observatory contains two large telescopes open for public use once a month from April through October during open house events.

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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# Trotting for a cause

*New record for annual event, which benefits area food pantries*

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

Runners from throughout the region hit the terrain at Burlington High School while spectators offered overwhelming support during the record-setting Burlington Turkey Trot last Thanksgiving morning.

The 5K run/walk, presented by Thrivent Financial with sponsorships from dozens of businesses, exceeded 1,000 registrations with all proceeds benefiting food pantries in Racine, Walworth and Kenosha counties.

"It is definitely a record. We had 1,128 registered and most of the people showed up," said Scott Herrmann, of Thrivent Financial-Shoreline Group based in Burlington. "It's a definitely a record for the most runners and the most registered."

Proceeds go to Love, Inc., of Burlington, the Walworth County Food & Diaper Bank, The Sharing Center in Trevor, and Helping Hands at Norway Lutheran Church in Wind Lake.

Herrmann said he took pride in witnessing all of those present enjoying the annual event that brings families and community members together.

"I saw so many families and groups just having a blast. I saw all kinds of group photos everyone was taking," he said. "It's great to get out and be physically active. The weather today was fantastic as well."

In addition to benefiting local food pantries, another group spearheaded a fundraising effort for the family of Randi Wulff, the former longtime cross country coach and teacher at Elkhorn Area High School who was killed in a motorcycle crash in October.

For a suggested donation of \$5, competitors could buy a doggie bandana, with proceeds going to the Wulff family.

Burlington Turkey Trot organizers extended gratitude to Harris Pet Hospital, of Paddock Lake, and Fox Valley Veterinary Service in Waterford, for their contributions to make the doggie bandanas possible.

Other features at the 2023 Turkey Trot included an appearance from sisters Rachel and Micah Gebel, of the Gebel Girls, who sang the National Anthem before presenting a series of songs inside the high school's commons area as competitors filed in.

## Hundreds finish

According to race results, nearly 1,000 competitors finished the race, with Waterford's Ian Williams winning the men's race for the second consecutive year, and West Allis resident Kerry Gordon capturing the women's title.

Williams, 22, a former Waterford Union High School cross country standout, completed the race in 15 minutes, 36.9 seconds.

A fourth-year participant of the Turkey Trot, Williams said he always finds joy in seeing the community come together for the event, especially before Thanksgiving.

"I just enjoy the sense of community. It's so fun to see all of the people who get together," he said.

He said the Thanksgiving feast later that



**above:** Runners begin the Burlington Turkey Trot 5K run/walk on Thanksgiving morning. The number of registrants, at more than 1,100 for the 2023 event is a new record. **top:** Josalyn Hallman, Hope Rogowski and Cailyn Kysely run in unison toward the finish line. Proceeds from the event help support food pantries in Racine, Kenosha and Walworth counties.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

day has served as motivation for his back-to-back victories.

"I know that after this race, I could eat all I want," he said.

Gordon, 27, of West Allis, made her second appearance at the Turkey Trot after she heard positive reviews from a member of her Milwaukee-area running group.

"One of the members had come here a few times and he talked a lot about the course and said that it's really a great

course," said Gordon, who finished in 18:52.6.

She said she has plans to return again next year, noting the strong sense of community camaraderie, especially among people who have made it an annual ritual.

"The weather was very good. The course was very good and seeing all of my friends was great," Gordon said. "I am looking to make this a tradition. It's a great community. It's a great race and so much fun."

While numerous participants had taken part in the event previously, for Megan Wagner it was her first time at the Turkey Trot.

Wagner, a member of the Burn Boot Camp - Burlington team, said she was encouraged to participate by her teammates.

The Waterford resident said she found

the event supportive, regardless of someone's running ability, and credited organizers for putting it together.

"I think the community does a really great job putting this on for everybody. It was absolutely enjoyable and a good start to Thanksgiving Day," Wagner said. "It doesn't matter whether you are in front of the pack or in the back of the pack, everybody is just so supportive," she added.

Wagner, 33, finished 25th overall

of more than 900 competitors with a total time of 19:45.5 to place second in her age group.

### Reuniting with friends

Cory Harris, a Burlington native who lives in Gurnee, Illinois, notched the third best time in the men's race at 16:24.8.

Harris, 35, who graduated from Burlington High School in 2007, said he's participated in the Turkey

Trot for more than a decade.

"I always like coming back to my hometown. It's a tradition of mine to meet with family and friends, and catch up on things," he said, adding the event serves as an opportunity for him to also visit his old school.

Harris admits he registers for the competition, but acknowledged the event's purpose is a bonus.

"The running is a cool aspect and to have proceeds benefiting area charities, that makes it even better," Harris said.

until a day earlier.

"I didn't have a lot of time to think about it and what I was going to do," he said.

While Austin and Ingebrigtsen have been to the ice festival before, many competitors appeared for the first time, including third-place finisher Shaina Boldt from Oconomowoc.

### Strong first impression

Boldt, who finished third with a sculpture titled "Hoppin' Around," said she learned about the State Ice Carving Championship during an event in Fond du Lac last year.

"The people here are so nice and it's such a cool and close-knit community," she said. "This is the first time I have ever been in Burlington, so it's really cool to see all of the stores and shops."

Boldt, like other competitors, battled the weather with the winds threatening to topple her sculpture.

"As I was carving, my canopy actually lifted off and almost knocked over my piece, but the people of Burlington came in and held it down," Boldt said.

She described her sculpture as a frog sitting on a leaf, which came from inspiration by a foreign student who spent time with her family.

"Our family hosted a foreign exchange student this last year, and he became a part of the family," she said. "When he came into the house, he gave us gifts, one of them being a plaque, like a toad or frog on a leaf. It's kind of a family piece for me."

### Continued success

In 2016, the city hosted its first ice festival with success. Since then, the event has grown, which includes the Wisconsin State Ice Carving Championship.

Each sculpture is carved from a 300-pound block of ice, which has been frozen in a special process, ensuring the blocks remain crystal clear.

Artists have just hours to create a sculpture using hand tools before a live audience of spectators.



Thrivent Financial's Kristen LaFranco and her daughter, Fiona, 5, stand with Turkey Trot mascot Miles McStuffin, along with Acelyn Zientek, 5, and her father, Danny, at the finish line. They were on hand to offer support to competitors at the annual event.

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# Waterford Stillhouse adds saucy new addition

## *Establishment's Bourbon caramel sauce draws rave reviews*

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

**W**aterford Stillhouse already had the distinct and unique honor of being the first and only legal distillery in Racine County since the Prohibition Era.

The establishment, located on Main Street in the heart of downtown Waterford, has been in operation since 2021 and produces spirits, premium vodka, bourbon, light whiskey, lemon vodka, a line of several syrups in small batches on site.

Most recently, Waterford Stillhouse introduced a new item – bourbon caramel sauce – and it has drawn rave reviews from customers and even a large retail outlet.

“We’ve had a major grocery chain that actually expressed interest that they want to carry it in their grocery store,” said Waterford Stillhouse owner Tammie Begotka, who runs the business with her husband and head distiller Brandon.

She credited employee Gaye Gotto, who Begotka said has also been instrumental in producing honey simple syrup and jalapeño simple syrup, both of which serve as an ideal addition to any cocktail, baked recipes and tea.

Gotto, who took the necessary classes through the state of Wisconsin, said she developed bourbon caramel sauce almost by accident while at home.

“We started with the syrups and that went over well. I was messing around at home and making caramel sauce and I thought, ‘Let’s put bourbon in here. That would be good,’” Gotto recalled.

“I tried it at home, and ran in to (Tammie’s) house and she liked it, so we decided to give it a try,” she added.

Tammie said other employees sampled the initial product and also delivered positive feedback.

### Sweet approval

After a few months of approvals, including one from the Department of Agriculture, bourbon caramel sauce became available for sale at Waterford Stillhouse.

Since then, the newest addition has been high in demand, according to Begotka.

“(Gaye) has been coming in several times a week to make it, because we make them in small batches, which is really unique to distillery,” Begotka said. “Many distilleries that are selling products other than spirits outsource those products, whereas, we are making them right here in our production facility.”

Gotto said she uses the bourbon Waterford Stillhouse has already distilled, which makes producing the caramel bourbon sauce much easier however she focuses on small batches because it mitigates some issues.

“It’s a fairly easy thing to make here, but it is very temperamental. You have to be careful with the sugar so that it doesn’t burn,” said Gotto.

“I prefer to do it in much smaller batches because it’s less likely to burn. If I do burn it, I am not losing as many ingredients,” she explained.

While the latest item includes alcohol, most of the alcoholic content has diminished through production methods, which makes the product safe for consumption by anyone.

“The alcohol content is minimal per



Waterford Stillhouse owner Tammie Begotka (left) and employee Gaye Otto showcase some of the establishment's latest offerings, including the popular bourbon caramel sauce, which has drawn positive feedback from customers.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

batch,” Gotto said. “Whenever you add alcohol to any recipe, the actual alcohol gets burnt out, so there is no concern with alcohol. The people who don’t drink should have no concerns.”

She said some customers have reportedly used the bourbon caramel sauce to drizzle on waffles.

According to Gotto, the shelf life for an opened product of bourbon caramel sauce is about two years.

“Once it’s opened, we do recommend refrigerating it,” Gotto said.

### Worth the wait

As for the Begotkas, they envisioned opening a micro distillery in 2018,

according to its website.

After about two years of planning, the distillery received its state and federal licenses to begin operations in 2020, but the owners’ original plans were placed on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, while the distillery was under construction, the Begotkas made hand sanitizer to serve the community before the original plans came to fruition with an opening in July 2021.

“We have been overwhelmed by the support we have received from our community and our visitors,” the website states.

“And we’re not done. We have been blessed with an incredible team, who we affectionately call The Stillhouse Family,

and they are ready to serve you,” it states.

Tammie said Waterford Stillhouse only uses natural ingredients without any preservatives.

The business, which has a tasting room, also offers items available for sale to customers looking to bring the establishment’s products home.

Additionally, there is an online store, which features a variety of products, including apparel.

Under the business’ federal and state licenses, the establishment can only serve products made on site, according to Tammie.

Waterford Stillhouse is at 228 E. Main St., Waterford. For more information, visit [waterfordstillhouse.com](http://waterfordstillhouse.com) and follow them on Facebook.

The main building includes a 16-inch Newtonian-Cassegrain reflecting telescope designed and built by club members as well as local industries, according to the society's website.

Additionally, the complex has a smaller domed building, which holds a 14-inch Celestron Schmitt Cassegrain reflecting telescope.

Unlike some observatories, the Modine-Benstead facility offers visitors a chance to experience the telescopes themselves, instead of just photographic projections on a large screen.

"It is a place where you can actually look through a telescope," Jensen explained. "We actually do look through the eye pieces."

Some members, he explained, also join the open houses by bringing their personal telescopes for viewing on the main building's observation deck.

Jensen estimates about 300 people attend the observatory's open houses on a monthly basis. However, he has seen attendance much higher, with as high as 600 coming to visit at one session this season.

The observatory, at 112 63rd Dr., Union Grove, does not require registration for the open houses, with visitors able to come and go as they please.

Visitors are not assessed admission, or parking fees, but the Racine Astronomical Society encourages a small donation during visits for the purpose of routine maintenance.

"We are very low budget, we try to keep our costs at a minimum, so we can continue this without incurring so many expenses," Jensen said.

According to its website, on occasion,

the observatory could have dozens of visitors waiting in line to use a particular telescope.

"Astronomical equipment you'll find at the RAS observatory will range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars in value," it states.

He explained that the open houses are paused in the winter because of the weather.

"For best viewing, the inside temperature (at the observatory) must equal the outside temperature, so if it is cold outside, it is going to be cold inside," Jensen explained.

### Aspiring astronomers

The Racine Astronomical Society began at a meeting in 1956 among Racine area residents interested in the field before becoming incorporated as a non-profit organization four years later.

In 1961, two local business leaders, A.B. Modine, founder of Modine Manufacturing in Racine, and H.M. Benstead from Western Publishing Company spearheaded a fundraising campaign to build an observatory.

Modine and Benstead, the observatory's namesakes, purchased a 3.5-acre plot of land from a farmer and completed the facility in 1963.

"At the time, it was a nice, dark site, and it is high up (in elevation)," Jensen said.

According to the Racine Astronomical Society, club members remained involved in the design and construction of both the observatory and the telescope.

"Many other local businesses donated parts and materials needed for the construction," the website states.



Modine-Benstead Observatory, 1123 63rd Drive, Union Grove has an outdoor observation deck overlooking the smaller building on its 3.5-acre complex.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

Once completed, the total out-of-pocket cost for the telescope was \$2,500, in 1960s dollars.

While the observatory welcomes visitors for open houses, Jensen said there are additional opportunities for paying members.

"For members, we have members nights once a month from April through October, so there will just be members out here using their telescopes," Jensen said. "We occasionally offer private tours."

He said the society has about 50 members and on the lower level of the main building, some astronomy photos taken by members are on display.

### Starting a hobby

For people looking to purchase a telescope for personal use, Jensen recommends buying directly from

businesses specializing in the device, including Orion.

Orion Telescopes and Binoculars, a California-based company, has been in business since 1975 and offers outdoor optics products for sale directly to customers.

While the company has retail store in California, some products are available in select astronomical dealers in the United States, according to its website.

Jensen estimates people new to astronomy, or casual hobbyists, can purchase a telescope for as low as \$300.

"Typically you would buy from companies that are specialized in telescopes," Jensen said. "Orion, they are big and they have got a lot of low-end telescopes."

For more information about Modine-Benstead Observatory and the Racine Astronomical Society, visit [www.rasastro.org](http://www.rasastro.org).

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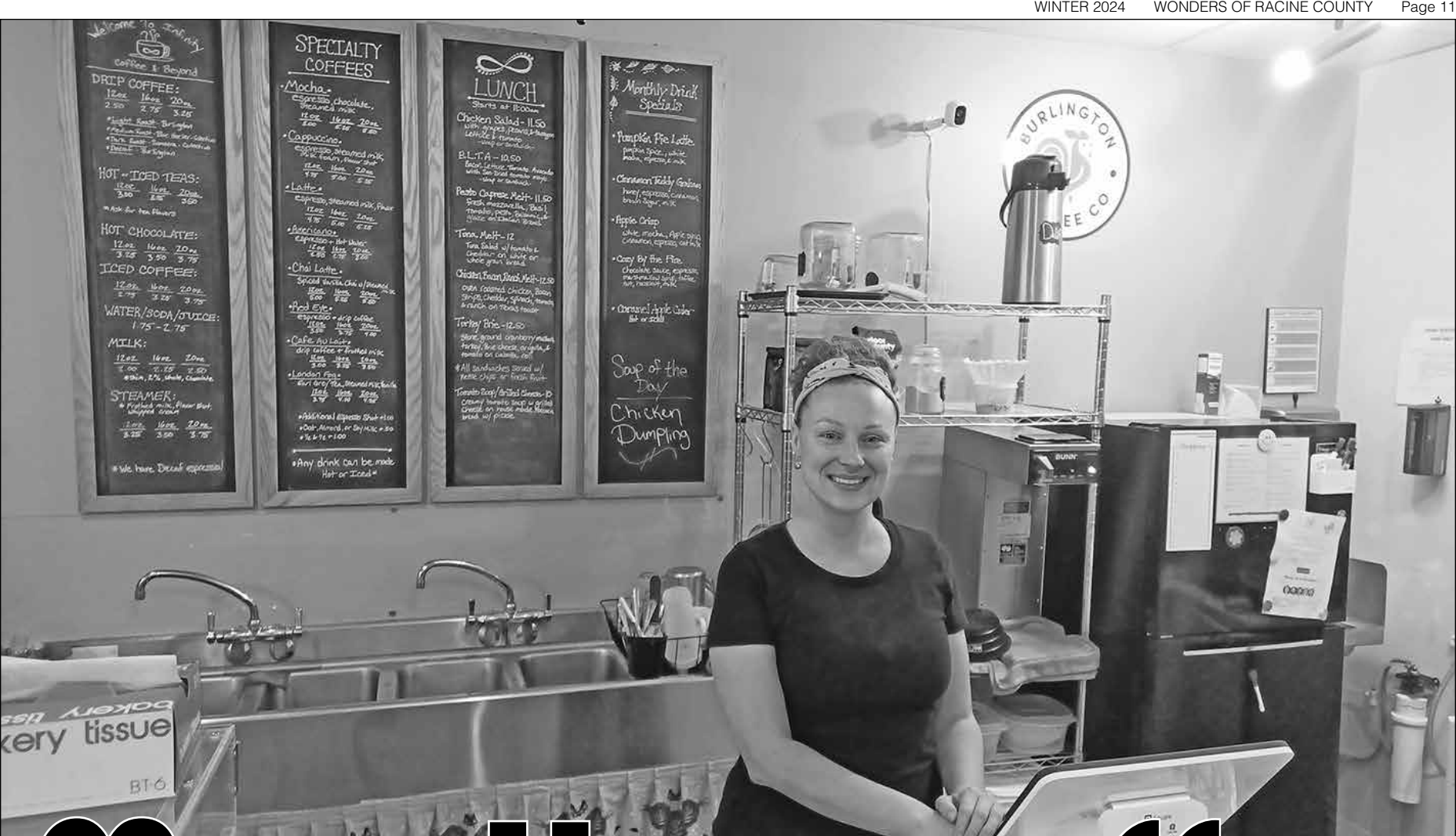
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# More than coffee

*Area native returns home to build a Burlington business*

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

**I**nfinity Coffee and Beyond is more than a place for customers looking for their morning cup of Joe.

Nestled in the Chestnut Street loop in downtown Burlington, where businesses come together for community activities on a regular basis, Infinity Coffee features locally sourced specialty coffee, a lunch menu, monthly specials and bakery items designed to satisfy many tastes.

Valerie Kowalski, who was born and raised in the Waterford area, is the mastermind behind the business.

While Infinity Coffee and Beyond has quickly established itself in the loop, it has also weathered multiple changes early on.

## Returning home

Kowalski, who graduated from Waterford Union High School in 2007, spent more than a decade in the Madison area before coming back to southeastern Wisconsin.

A culinary artist by trade, Kowalski worked as an executive chef for Epic Systems in Verona before opening a catering business in Sauk City, just northeast of Madison.

However, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, many businesses including Kowalski's endured challenges.



**above:** Customers can select from numerous menu options at Infinity Coffee and Beyond, which is in the loop in Burlington. **top:** Valerie Kowalski, who owns the business, offers more than coffee and pastries, including a variety of drinks as well as breakfast and lunch options.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

"The business was really growing out there and then COVID leveled it," she said.

With limited options, including some financial challenges, Kowalski found her way back to the Burlington area and discovered Café B was available for sale.

At the time, Café B was at the corner of Chestnut and Dodge streets, where The Nash and two other businesses now sit.

"I decided to buy the bakery, and as a Hail Mary play, began a new business, and a new start, in a new town," she said.

In 2021, under the ownership of Kowalski, the establishment experienced a rebranding and location change.

She opted for Infinity Coffee and Beyond. It began as an inside joke amongst friends.

"Infinity Coffee and Beyond is the full

name. The beyond is that it's not limited to just coffee and pastries. I can do lunch and I can do whatever I want to do," she said.

"The name actually started as a joke at our old location, that we drink endless amounts of coffee, and when we were looking to rebrand, that's just how it came to be."

## To the loop

When the business began, Kowalski admits there wasn't much traffic at the former location because it was a little outside the booming downtown area.

"At the time, I was kind of an island down there, so when Hopscotch Cakery closed and this became available, a lot of people emailed me and texted me immediately, telling me I should move to the loop."

Kowalski followed through, and discovered endless possibilities at 133 E. Chestnut Street, including an expanded kitchen and more cohesiveness with neighboring businesses such as Jacobs Smokehouse, Burlington Menswear, The Runaway Micropub and Nanobrewery, The Loop Commons, and Chic and Unique Consignment and Boutique.

Since then, business has boomed, she said. "It has picked up quite a bit. The loop has got a lot of festivities and things that draw people out and we get a lot of exposure that way," she said. "In general, it's really accessible, there is parking in the back, people find us as they do with good food."

## Coffee and pure food

Infinity Coffee and Beyond offers coffee produced by Burlington Coffee Co. and Colectivo, based in Milwaukee.

The beverage menu consists of mocha, cappuccino, latte, Americano, Chai Latte, Red Eye, Café Au Lait and London Fog.

Additionally, with Kowalski's culinary skills, Infinity Coffee serves chicken salad; chicken, lettuce, tomato, avocado sandwiches; Pesto Caprese melts; tuna melts; chicken and ranch favorites, turkey brie, and traditional breakfast favorites.

"Our quiche has been selling along with our

sandwiches and soup, so a lot of our lunch items have been gaining a lot of popularity," she said. "Lately, I can't keep danishes, bear claws or turnovers in stock and we do make all of those in house with real butter, so it's a pretty good selling point."

While people stop in for coffee and some breakfast pastries, Kowalski said she also finds enjoyment in creating lunch dishes, considering her background in culinary arts.

"It's a good thing because I am getting to use my degree in culinary and also use the baking background to incorporate into the place here," she said.

## Strong support

Kowalski, who has one other employee, said she has also drawn support from her parents, who still reside in Waterford.

All things considered, she said she's relished having family and friends nearby, which has made returning home worthwhile.

"It is awesome. My parents are 15 minutes up the road. They, along with others, have been an integral part of helping build this business into what it is," she said. "We have got an army of people helping out."

In the future, Kowalski hopes to see continued growth in the lunch demand, which could spark a possible return to catering events.

"I hope to be at the point where lunch takes off and I would be able to cater again. That would really be a good step," she said. "Catering is something I have a big passion for, so I would like to find my way back to it."

In the meantime, Kowalski said she has found the new business rewarding.

"It's a lot of work, but we love what we do," she said. "We hope to keep expanding and growing as we get busier."

For more information, visit Infinity Coffee and Beyond's Facebook page.



Born and raised in Waterford, Kowalski said her family and friends, among others, have helped her business grow.

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