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# Experience Burlington's brilliance

**T**he Burlington area is known for several amenities ranging from a beautiful riverfront to multiple downtown businesses and beyond.

By **Jason Arndt**  
EDITOR

Key fixtures include Echo Veterans Memorial Park, where visitors and residents alike can view Echo Lake, the Burlington Community Aquatic Center, and trails around the area along with Richard Bong State Recreation Area.

But there is more, including downtown Burlington events, which entice people to congregate and meet one another during the warm summer months.

Events include Loop Day, Experience Burlington Days, and the Burlington Jamboree on the outskirts of the downtown region.

While visitors and residents celebrate the community, the Burlington area has seen some changes within the last year, including

a new mayor in Jon E. Schultz II.

Schultz succeeds long-time public servant Jeannie Hefty.

Outside the realm of changes, and increasing downtown Burlington excitement lies a rich history, including the area's role in the Underground Railroad movement.

Recently, the Burlington Historical Society honored a Revolutionary War hero, Aaron Smith, who resided in the area until his death.

Aside from quality-of-life amenities, and its rich history, the Burlington area is ushering in a new area of promising residential developments near the bypass.

Additionally, the Burlington area touts quality educational institutions, from kindergarten through higher education.

Institutions include the Burlington Area School District, Catholic Central High School, Burlington Catholic School, Inc., and a Gateway Technical College satellite campus.

For older residents, they also have a place for conversation, which is the Burlington Senior Activity Center.

The Burlington Senior Activity Center is open weekdays and offers multiple activities and programs.

The community at-large has also been equally important, including a crew of dedicated volunteers who make events possible, such as the Burlington Jamboree, Experience Burlington Days, and grassroots groups dedicated to making Burlington a better place to live.

Come check out the Burlington area.

You may want to live, work and play here with all of the amenities and a booming downtown business environment.

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A child enjoys a carnival ride at the annual Jamboree held on Memorial Day weekend in Burlington. The Jamboree replaced the former Chocolate Fest.

JENNIFER EISENBART *Our Town*

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**ON THE COVER:**  
Tony Simonelli, of Burlington, accompanies his son, Vincent, 3, inside a City of Burlington fire truck during Experience Burlington Days held in July in downtown Burlington.

JASON ARNDT *Our Town*

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# Children find gifts during Shop with a Cop

## Annual event brings joy to officers and families

By Jason Arndt

EDITOR

City of Burlington police officers and firefighters treated nearly two dozen children to a shopping spree last December during the annual Shop with a Cop event at Walmart Supercenter along Milwaukee Avenue.

Shop with a Cop, held annually for more than a decade, comes courtesy of key contributions from numerous businesses and community groups.

Det. Sgt. Robert Jones, of the City of Burlington Police Department, said the event gives law enforcement officials an opportunity to forge positive bonds with children.

“This event gives us an opportunity to meet with the children on a good day so we can make friendships and come out to get to know each other,” Jones said last December.

“It is not uncommon for us to see children sometimes on their worst day, and we don’t want those memories to be lasting memories. We want these memories that we created tonight to stay with the children,” he added.

Jones said 12 police officers, 3 firefighters, and volunteers from Walmart spent time with 22 area children.

Jones, who has helped organize the event for at least a decade, said he always looks forward to Shop with a Cop.

“I like spending time with the kids because I am parent myself,” Jones said.

Walmart Store Manager Rebecca Edwards said she has enjoyed having the retail outlet serve as a venue for the annual event.

“I love working with the community, the police officers, and the children,” she said. “It’s a really exciting event and does something nice for everyone.”

Edwards feels fortunate for the opportunity to serve the community, noting Shop with a Cop at Walmart offers a healthy atmosphere for both the children and officials.

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

**from top:** Officer Matthew Dennis of the City of Burlington Police Department, helps Cashton Kwapil, 4, with a purchase during the Shop with a Cop event last December at Walmart in Burlington; Sgt. Scott Wasilevich shops with Zoe Garcia, 11; Sgt. Matthew Barrows wraps up a Christmas gift during the event.

JASON ARNDT PHOTOS *Our Town*



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# Hefty served through the best, worst of times

## Burlington's long-time mayor steps down

By **Jason Arndt**  
EDITOR

Since the City of Burlington became incorporated as a city in 1900, a total of 24 mayors have held the top leadership post, with only three exceeding 10 years of service.

Jeannie Hefty is one of the three, outlasting John Thate (1970-1980) and L.A. Forge (1924-1936), by serving from 1992 to 2000 and again from 2016 to 2024.

Hefty not only served the city the longest at 16 years, she also became the first woman to lead the city as mayor two years later.

But, on April 16, 2024, Hefty officially called it a career, stepping down from the post. Common Council President Jon E. Schultz II was sworn in as the 25th mayor of the city.

Schultz, who delivered brief remarks about Hefty's accomplishments, thanked her for her years of service.

Additionally, on a motion made by the Common Council, Bridge Street in downtown Burlington has been renamed Jeannie Way in recognition for her dedication to improving safety with the installation of the overpass.



JEANNIE HEFTY



Hefty, who was moved to tears, later told the standing-room-only crowd she is thankful for the recognition and said she will be cheering for the downtown Burlington revitalization from the sidelines.

City Administrator Carina Walters also commended Hefty for her community commitment, calling her a "compassionate leader."

In separate interviews with Southern Lakes Newspapers, other local and county officials praised Hefty for her dedication to the city, including District 3 Alderman Tom Vos, who has known Hefty for about 50 years.

"She always had Burlington at heart, and she always believed she could play a part," Vos said. "When you are mayor and involved in other things, there comes a point in time where you just can't do it all. Luckily,

Jeannie had a little bit more time to give than some of the other ones."

Hefty, during her two stints as mayor, guided the city through tumultuous times, including the 2017 historic flood, and ongoing debate regarding the Echo Lake Dam.

She previously told the Standard Press she wanted to step down in 2022. However, she decided to remain on as mayor so she could ensure Echo Lake Dam remains a fixture for years to come.

Vos recognized the tremendous patience Hefty showed.

"I laud her for the fact that she hung around that long because some people get frustrated," Vos said.

### Community advocate

Hefty's list of her accomplishments included some that focused on advocacy for area senior citizens, residents with disabilities, and veterans causes.

When she became a member of the Common Council, Hefty said she pushed to move the meeting chambers from City Hall to the Police Department, allowing people with disabilities better access.

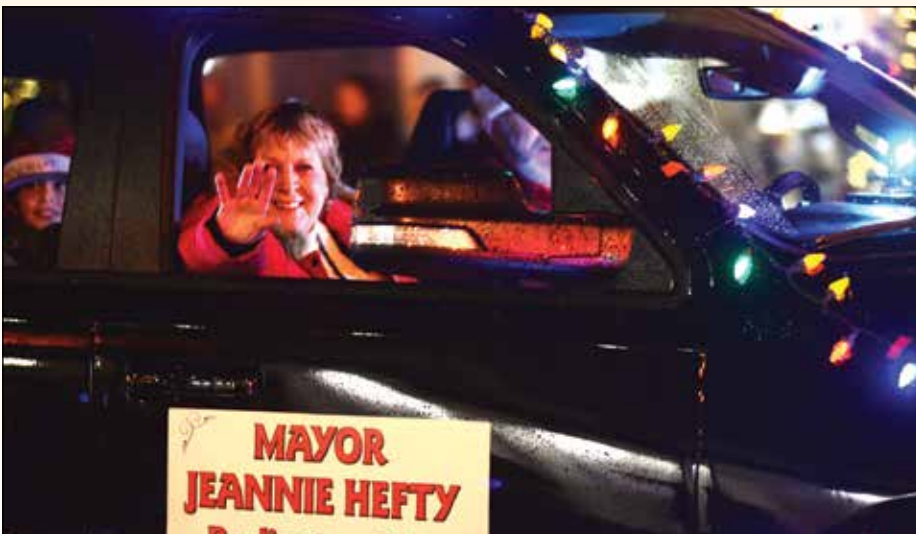
Additionally, Hefty, who founded the Burlington Senior Activity Center, worked

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

**above:** Former Mayor Jeannie Hefty sheds tears alongside Burlington's newest Mayor Jon E. Schultz II after the Common Council endorsed a resolution to rename Bridge Street in honor of her dedication.

**at left:** Hefty waves to the crowd during the annual Christmas parade in downtown Burlington last December. She served as mayor for 16 years and stepped down in the spring.

JASON ARNDT PHOTOS *Our Town*



with Racine County to secure a new facility at the former Knights of Columbus structure along State Street.

In 2016, she spearheaded fundraising efforts to install four memorial walls honoring Burlington veterans who served the United States without needing taxpayer dollars.

Vos said Hefty was an advocate for many as she always wanted to have a place for seniors, encouraged further involvement from veterans groups, and held many parades celebrating student achievements.

A former member of the Burlington Rescue Squad, where she became the first female representative, Hefty wanted to find ways to help improve response times, including the downtown area and initiated conversations with state officials to install an overpass to connect Bridge Street.

“I started the movement for the City of Burlington overpass to connect to Bridge Street. I never wanted another emergency vehicle to be stopped by the train, as was the case while they were transporting my husband when he had a massive heart attack,” Hefty wrote on her list of accomplishments.

Vos concurred, saying he felt the same way, as he was also a member of the Burlington Rescue Squad.

“She did have a big part in that. As a past member of the Burlington Rescue Squad, we

were frustrated in not being able to get past the train on emergency calls,” Vos recalled.

Other initiatives under Hefty include the Burlington bypass – which mitigated diminished road quality within city limits because of increased semi and automobile traffic; organized fundraising efforts to have police vehicles equipped with defibrillators; and the introduction of the police K-9 unit.

Vos said Hefty was also instrumental in bringing Flight for Life to the Burlington Municipal Airport for the purpose of improving responses times in Racine, Kenosha, and Walworth counties.

“Jeannie worked very hard to get Flight for Life to come to Burlington,” Vos said.

### Overcoming challenges

Under Hefty’s tenure, she helped the city cope with the 2017 historic flooding event – which caused millions in property damage and multiple power outages; the 911 consolidated dispatch with Racine County; and the highly contentious debate involving Echo Lake Dam.

Experience Burlington Executive Director M.T. Boyle was an employee of Racine County when the city endured the flooding event and 911 dispatch agreement.

“Mayor Hefty has been and will continue to be a fantastic cheerleader for the City of Burlington,” Boyle said. “Having worked

with her during both joyous and tense events – such as many business openings, the 2017 historic flood, and the 911 consolidation with Racine County – I know the mayor is tireless in her efforts to promote and improve Burlington.”

Vos, who was on the Common Council during all three of the challenging events, said Hefty never wavered and always had the best interests of Burlington at heart.

“Jeannie has never appeared to me as a panic type of person,” Vos said. “She thinks about what needs to be done and works hard to get there.”

He said Hefty worked closely with Racine County officials, including Emergency Management, in finding a solution to manage the flooding event.

“I think she did a good job, to be honest, all of them did a great job of how they managed the situation that we had,” Vos recalled.

Former Racine County Executive Jonathan Delagrave, who passed away unexpectedly in late June, said Hefty served as a municipal leader longer than most, if not all, jurisdictions in Racine County.

He also hails Hefty as a cheerleader for Burlington.

“Her passion for her community was always front and center with her,” Delagrave said.

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# Aurora Medical Center still helping after a century

## Hospital officials commemorate 100th anniversary

By **Jason Arndt**  
EDITOR

Aurora Medical Center in Burlington has served the community for a century.

Originally built in June 1924, when it was called Memorial Hospital of Burlington to honor fallen service members of World War I, the facility commemorated its 100th anniversary during a June 13 celebration at the current facility on McHenry Street in Burlington.

President Ania Horner, of Aurora Medical Center - Burlington and Aurora Lakeland Medical Center in Elkhorn, said the celebration looked to honor the hospital's history, present and future.

"For a century, our medical center has provided exceptional care to the residents of southern Wisconsin," she said.

"Despite all of the change since opening our doors 100 years ago, one thing has remained constant: the unwavering dedication of our teammates to providing quality care and innovative services."

Gabrielle Finley-Hazle, who serves as president of Aurora Health Care, called the celebration a "remarkable milestone" because the hospital has been a community mainstay for generations.

Finley-Hazle stated that, since 1924, the hospital has grown and evolved, while adapting to patient needs and adopting advancements in medicine and technology.

"We have faced challenges and triumphs, yet through it all, our mission has remained steadfast," said Finley-Hazle, adding the mission includes providing compassionate, high-quality care to patients who seek services at Aurora Medical Center.

But the long-standing success spanning generations would not have been possible without scores of people who have served at the hospital, according to Finley-Hazle. She added doctors, administrators, and support staff have devoted their careers to helping others.

"Their expertise, empathy, and resilience have been the cornerstone of our legacy," said Finley-Hazle.

Finley-Hazle added the community at large has played a key role in the hospital's success, since many residents near and far have entrusted Aurora Medical Center with their care.



**at left:** Ania Horner, President of Aurora Medical Center – Burlington and Aurora Lakeland Medical Center, delivers remarks at the Burlington facility's 100th anniversary in June.

**above:** Aurora Medical Center, of Burlington, unveiled a history cabinet showcasing artifacts and mementoes of the hospital's 100-year history at the June ceremony. Officials credited Dr. Leif Erikson for donating many of the items.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS *Our Town*

"Your belief in our mission has fueled our growth and sustained us through even the most challenging times," she said.

### Initial beginnings

Horner, who began her career at Aurora Medical Center, explained the hospital's humble beginning in front of hundreds who attended the event.

When World War I ended in 1920, the Racine County War Relief Fund had some remaining funds available, with two proposals – a Memorial Hall and a Memorial Hospital.

Officials decided to allocate \$10,041 for Memorial Hospital, she said.

After additional fundraising efforts - and construction - Memorial Hospital opened for business in June 1924 with 22 beds. The hospital cared for 504 patients during its first year.

Horner, who cited a 1925 annual report, said hospital staff performed 173 major and 176 minor operations, had 85 medical cases, 43 obstetrical cases, and saw 53 babies born at the facility.

Since then, as the healthcare landscape changed, so did Memorial Hospital.

In the early 1990s, Horner said Memorial Hospital's board joined a larger network of care, which ensured expanded access to essential services.

"Through multiple expansions and renovation projects, what is now known as Aurora Medical Center Burlington has grown to a 123-bed, nationally recognized healthcare provider," Horner said.

Horner, meanwhile, unveiled a tribute to

the hospital's rich history with a permanent historical display in Aurora's lobby that features artifacts and other mementos from the last 100 years.

She encouraged everyone to take the time and see the display.

Horner acknowledged she has her own history at Aurora Medical Center.

Horner, born in Burlington and a graduate of Catholic Central High School, followed in her mother's footsteps and started her career as a nurse at Aurora Medical Center.

"There is something so special about this hospital and its 485 teammates, many of whom have worked here for more than a quarter of a century," Horner said.

Horner reported 78 people have worked at Aurora Medical Center for at least 30 years.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ted O'Reilly, of Aurora Medical Center overseeing Burlington and Walworth County communities, said one such person is Dr. Paul Webber.

Webber, who celebrated his 50th year at Aurora Medical Center, has been one of O'Reilly's role models.

"I see the dedication and effort he puts forward before, during, and after clinic hours, taking time to contact patients, round on them in the hospital, support our teammates and his colleagues," O'Reilly said.

In addition to Webber, Horner noted Sue Harris, the hospital's senior director of operations for Burlington and Walworth.

Harris, who will retire this year, began at Aurora in 1977 in the radiology department and led several other departments during her 46 years at the facility.

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# Burlington's Underground Railroad

Area helped hundreds of slaves to freedom

By Jason Arndt

EDITOR

Racine County citizens, including some from the Burlington area, played key roles in shepherding fugitive slaves to freedom as part of the Underground Railroad network more than 160 years ago.

To commemorate local citizens and places, the Professional Women's Network of Racine and the Racine Heritage Museum have spent years working on the Racine Underground Railroad Heritage Trail project that includes placement of historical markers scattered in the City of Racine.

However, for the first time, the Burlington area recently received three historical markers and officially commemorated the additions during a ceremony last September near the Abraham Lincoln statue.

GeorgAnn Stinson-Dockery, president of the Professional Women's Network for Service, said the latest additions come courtesy of a strong partnership between her group and the Racine Heritage Museum, as well as support from Racine County and the City of Burlington.

The Burlington Area School District also offered some support.

"The Underground Railroad Heritage Trail sites are memorials to the secret network of escaped slaves," Stinson-Dockery said. "These sites are key points in helping Racine area citizens and tourists understand the historical significance of the Underground Railroad."

Collectively, she stated, a total of 17 Underground Railroad markers have been installed in Racine County through September 2023, including three recognized by the U.S. National Parks Service.

Meanwhile, for local citizens, the markers recognized Burlington residents such as Dr. Edward Dyer, Origen Perkins, Joel Henry Cooper, as well as farmer Dr. Jesse C. Mills from the Spring Prairie area.

Dyer and Cooper later became namesakes of two schools within the Burlington Area School District, while Origen Perkins has two separate streets



named in his honor - Origen Street and Perkins Boulevard.

"It is important that future generations know the role our city played in freeing slaves and these historical markers are a great reminder of our legacy," Stinson-Dockery said.

Executive Director Christopher Paulson, of the Racine Heritage Museum, said Racine County had more than 100 documented cases of fugitive slaves.

## Prominent slaves

While Racine County abolitionists helped hundreds of slaves, Joshua Glover and Caroline Quarlls were the most prominent, according to history professor Milton Dockery.

Quarlls, a 16-year-old fugitive slave from St. Louis, was known as Wisconsin's first Underground Railroad passenger in 1842.

According to the Burlington Historical

**from top:** The City of Burlington commemorated three historical markers signifying the area's role in the Underground Railroad last September; Dozens of representatives and citizens listen to Executive Director Christopher Paulson, of the Racine Heritage Museum, explain the history behind the Underground Railroad. **opposite page, from top:** GeorgAnn Stinson-Dockery, president of the Professional Women's Network for Service, welcomes visitors to the dedication ceremony; Racine's Shenelle Waters, of the Professional Women's Network for Service, reads from one three historical markers installed behind the Abraham Lincoln statue in Burlington.

JASON ARNDT PHOTOS *Our Town*

Society, Quarlls made stops in the Burlington area, including Spring Prairie, where she received assistance from several citizens such as Solomon Dwindle, Josiah O. Puffer, George and Moses Arms, and Richard Chenery, all of Spring Prairie, and Dyer.

About a decade later, Glover arrived from St. Louis to the Racine County community, working at the Sinclair Rice and Sawmill in town.

However, under the Fugitive Slave Act, his owner came to Racine and Glover was captured by several men before being brought to Milwaukee so he could be returned to his slave owner.

“The story of Joshua Glover is famous, not only for the roughness of his capture, but for the reaction of southeastern Wisconsin’s citizens to his jailing, the subsequent jailbreak, and the aftermath that brought national attention to our state,” the Racine Heritage Museum wrote in a historical synopsis.

While Racine area residents, including Sherman Booth, helped free Glover, Burlington area residents sheltered Glover for safety.

Cooper, according to one of three historical markers, welcomed Glover into his home.

“Joshua Glover was hidden in this location, now a private residence, for a short time before being taken to a more ‘rural’ station,” the marker states. “Dr. Jesse C. Mills, whose Spring Prairie area farm was one of those ‘stations,’ later lived for a time at the Cooper House.”

At the Perkins House, built by abolitionist Origen Perkins in 1846, Origen and his wife, Julia, also housed slaves such as Glover who sought freedom.

The Dyer House, meanwhile, once standing just a few feet west of the Perkins, was the longtime home of Dyer.

Dyer, known as the “commander-in-chief” for the Burlington area’s movement, helped at least three fugitive slaves by hiding them in his house.

“The abolitionist spirit was extremely strong here in Racine County,” Dockery said. “What really riled up the people of Racine County and nationally was the Fugitive Slave Act.”

## Strong support

Former Racine County Executive Jonathan Delagrave, as well as District 21 Supervisor Taylor Wishau, each commended the community for its support during the ceremony.

“The attendance at this ceremony is fantastic,” Wishau said. “It is a testament to the community.”

Delagrave, meanwhile, said Burlington area residents should have pride in knowing their citizens helped with the Underground Railroad.

“This is one of the many examples in Racine County that we should be



proud of,” Delagrave said. “Burlington and Rochester played a huge part in the Underground Railroad. We are better together.”

The Richard Ela House, of Rochester, also helped house Glover during his journey to freedom, according to the Racine Heritage Museum.

Then-President Jon E. Schultz II, of the Burlington Common Council, was among several city leaders on hand during the ceremony.

He said the ceremony should signify

unity, noting it is a humanitarian issue, and felt proud of the city.

“I think it is wonderful and probably long overdue,” said Schultz, who eventually became mayor, after the ceremony.

Then-Burlington Mayor Jeannie Hefty said the markers will serve a purpose for the city.

“The markers will live on in the City of Burlington,” said Hefty, who praised the city’s initial citizens for their efforts in the abolitionist movement.

# Recognizing a legend

## Sheffer's loyalty honored at halftime

By **Jason Arndt**  
EDITOR

David Sheffer seldom, if ever, took 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, and he received well-deserved recognition at halftime of the Demons' Oct. 6, 2023 football contest against visiting Union Grove.

According to district officials, through last fall, Sheffer had 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 24 years serving the baseball team.

"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 then-Burlington Athletic Director Eric Plitzuweit, amid loud applause from Burlington community members on hand for 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."

Sheffer was employed by the Burlington



Area School District for 28 and a half years from 1976-2005. However, he still continued to serve the athletic program as team manager.

He was inducted into the Burlington High School Wall of Fame in 2009 and 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 athletic program, including more than 30 conference championship teams, regional titles, and sectional titles. He even 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," said Staude. "He does it for the kids, he is like another coach out there. He is really the heartbeat of Burlington athletics."

Meanwhile, 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 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 with putting 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

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

Sulik said Sheffer, who has a humble demeanor, always placing student needs in front of his own during contests and making an effort to meet each player during a given season.

Sulik reiterated Plitzuweit's comments, noting Sheffer played a role in scores of student-athletes' lives and adding Sheffer 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, meanwhile, said he believes the

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

**at left:** Burlington baseball coach Scott Staude (left) presents long-time athletics manager David Sheffer with a new letter jacket at halftime of the Demons' Oct. 6, 2023 contest with Union Grove. Sheffer celebrated 100 total years of service spanning mostly three sports teams.  
**top:** Sheffer gleefully accepts the new letter jacket during the halftime ceremony.

MICHAEL STEFANICH JR. PHOTOS *Our Town*

# Burlington recognizes a Revolutionary War soldier

By Jason Arndt  
EDITOR

The Burlington area remembered a Revolutionary War veteran in June when officials dedicated a new memorial marker to honor Patriot Aaron Smith at Cooper Elementary School.

Smith, the only known soldier from the Revolutionary War buried in Burlington, was born in Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1760 and enlisted in the 5th Regiment, Massachusetts Line of the Continental Army, as an 18-year-old.

After serving for several years, Smith received a discharge, and eventually moved to Medina County, Ohio, in 1821.

Smith and his wife, Lydia, joined their three sons in Foxville, now known as Burlington, in 1836.

In 1838, at the age of 78, Smith died and was buried with his wife on a family farm near the Cooper Elementary School grounds, based on historical accounts.

Julie O'Neill, of the Burlington Historical Society, told people in attendance that the memorial marker is the third to be installed in Burlington since 1955.

"In 1955, the Daughters' of the American Revolution placed a plaque on a large boulder in Wagner Park on Chestnut Street along the White River," O'Neill said in June. "At some point, that plaque went missing. The boulder is still there."

The Daughters of the American, in conjunction with the Burlington Historical Society, then created a second flat memorial marker near the old bell at Cooper School.

By 2022, the Burlington Area School

District had enclosed the playground, leaving the monument inaccessible to the public.

"At that time, it was decided to move the second plaque near the newly planted Liberty Tree and place a more prominent plaque on the corner of Amanda and Conkey streets," O'Neill said. "We are dedicating that plaque today."

## Dedicated to service, family

President Bob Haglund, of the Sons of the American Revolution, offered a precise description of what is engraved on the plaque honoring Smith in his address to dozens in attendance.

"At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Aaron was too young to enlist. So, at the age of 15, he became a servant to a relative, Eliakim Smith, a captain of the Continental Army," the inscription reads.

In July 1778, while residing in Massachusetts, Smith joined the Continental Army serving under several captains during his tenure.

"Smith was present at the Siege of Yorktown and was mustered out two years later in 1783," the inscription states.

During the War of 1812, Smith attempted to re-enlist. However, he was denied because of his age.

But he was still able to serve as a substitute volunteer for his son-in-law who had been drafted.

Jeanette Lederleitner, Racine Chapter Regent of the Daughters of the Revolution, delivered a personal reflection of Smith based on an 1822 letter from Smith's



Julie O'Neill, of the Burlington Historical Society, delivers an introductory address during a dedication ceremony honoring Revolutionary War veteran Aaron Smith in June at Cooper Elementary School.

JASON ARNDT *Our Town*

physician, Dr. Bela Bronson Clark, to Connecticut Sen. Elijah Boardman.

"Accompanying you will receive papers relative to the revolutionary claim of Aaron Smith. This old gentleman is now near 70 years of age, laboring under an injury he received in fighting for our liberties," the letter states. "He found himself in the prime of his life, and as he enjoyed his health in other respects, he thought he could make a living."

The letter further states Smith's advanced age and diminished condition served as a call for assistance from the United States to help Smith and his wife.

"He has contributed to give his countrymen liberty and all its blessings," the letter states. "He now calls upon the same countrymen to contribute to his support."

O'Neill, amid planning for the ceremony, corresponded with Smith's fifth great-granddaughter Diana Tolladay, with Tolladay delivering brief remarks to O'Neill.

The remarks highlighted Smith's dedication not only to the country, but also to his family, in which he shared high-quality attributes.

"Aaron Smith exemplified the puritan, pioneering spirit – being honest, being thoughtful, setting a good example," O'Neill recited from Tolladay's remarks, adding Smith strived for a family centered, harmonious and healthy community.



Members of Jubilate Community Singer, of Burlington, deliver a rendition of "Buttermilk Hill" during Smith's dedication ceremony. From left are Eileen Mirsberger, Ann Newman, artistic director Anne Arnetta, and Margie Hackbarth.

JASON ARNDT *Our Town*

# Aquatic Center continues serving community

By **Jason Arndt**

EDITOR

The Burlington Community Aquatic Center entered its seventh season in June.

With a steady roster of staff members, including lifeguards, some maintenance improvements, and new additions to the concessions stand, Executive Center Director Jeanne Otter welcomed thousands of visitors.

The Aquatic Center officially opened June 1 and concluded its season on Aug. 25.

Cost of admission, including daily passes for both residents and non-residents, remained unchanged from what they were last year.

## New items, some improvements

After drawing nearly 46,000 people to the pool in 2023, Aquatic Center officials completed some general maintenance improvements, including a new shade atop of the water slide tower, and some repainting and re-sealing.

“We had to make some improvements in our mechanical room this year, so that is where some of the money went to. We did get a new red shade atop the slide tower, so it always looks pretty and colorful,” Otter said.

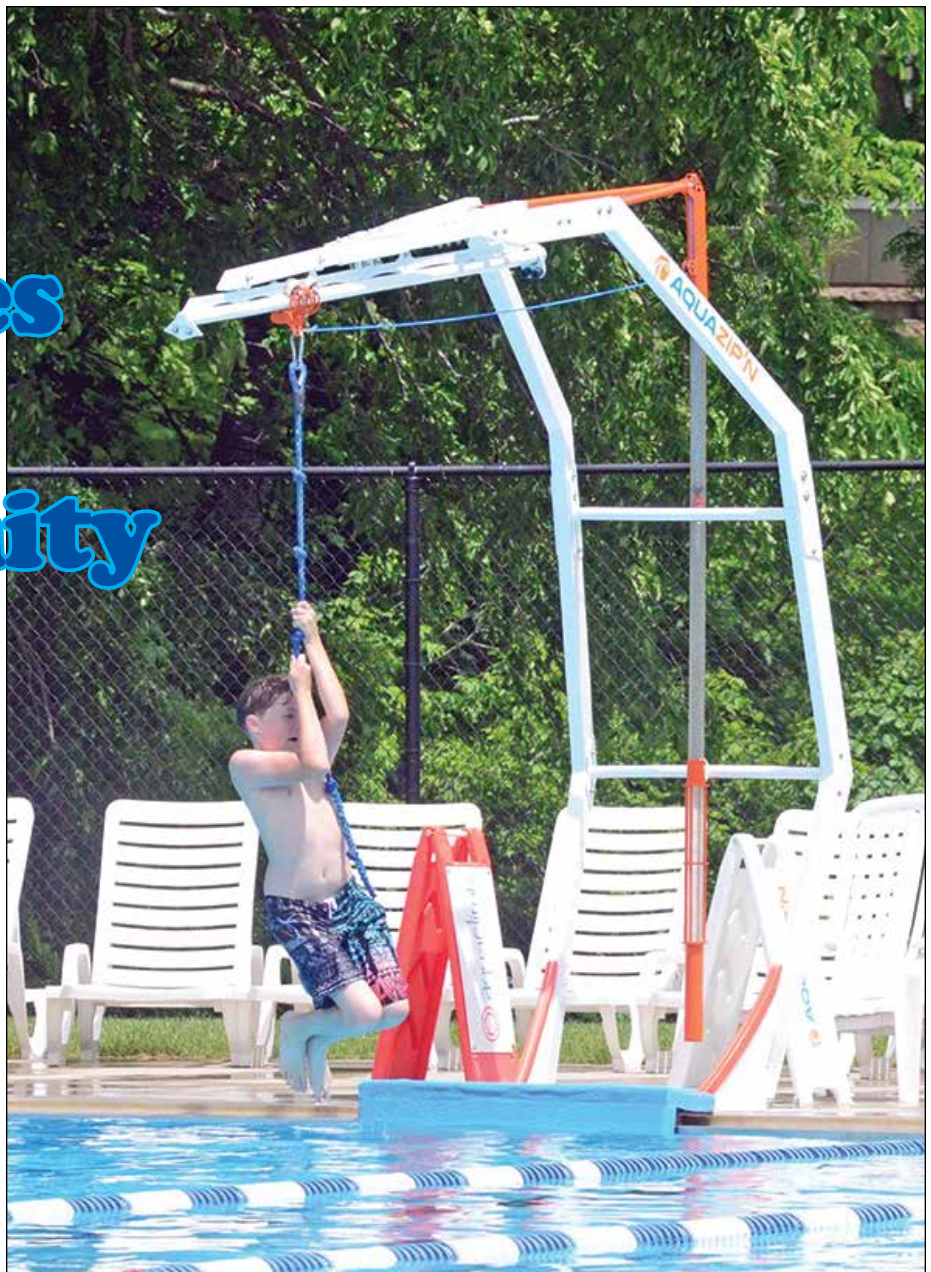
In the concession stand, some new items were added, such as churros and cheesy bread with marinara sauce.

The new additions are in an effort to keep people coming, Otter said.

“We have a few new items in our concessions stand this year,” she said. “We always try to bring in new things and keep it fresh for everybody.”

Unlike in 2023, when the pool waited until the middle of the season, the latest feature called the AquaZip’n Zipline was made available for users all summer.

The AquaZip’n Zipline, located next to the climbing wall, experienced some delays in arrival last year because of lead times.



A boy uses the AquaZip’n in June at the Burlington Community Aquatic Center. The AquaZip’n was available all season after a delayed arrival last year.

JASON ARNDT *Our Town*

## Bolstering staff

Entering the season, new lifeguards were needed and hired. Otter also hired pool attendants, some taking the lifeguard course to become certified to maintain the safety of users.

The Aquatic Center has also worked on retention efforts, such as promoting long-time staff members to new positions, Otter said.

“We created a new position for some of our employees. We like to promote from within, and we love having our employees return every year, so it gives them opportunities for growth as well,” she said.

Otter said the Aquatic Center – unlike a handful of other pools in southeast Wisconsin – did not need to close because of staffing shortages in 2023.

However, the pool does close if the temperature drops below 65 degrees, or when there is severe weather.

“We try to monitor (the weather),” she said. “Personally, I don’t like to be closed.”

Additionally, the Aquatic Center saw an influx of families enrolling their children in swim lessons, as well new memberships.

The Aquatic Center, 394 Amanda St., is open to both residents and non-residents of Burlington.

Many visitors come to the center from Kenosha and Walworth counties as well as other outlying communities.

For additional information, visit the Aquatic Center website at [burlingtoncommunitypool.org](http://burlingtoncommunitypool.org), or on Facebook.



# Family pays it forward

## Archives fundraiser brings in thousands for Make-a-Wish

By Jason Arndt  
EDITOR

Make-a-Wish Wisconsin has helped hundreds, if not thousands, of children in the state find hope and joy amid challenging times since its inception.

Henry Hanline, of Burlington, was one of the children who benefited from Make-a-Wish Wisconsin about seven years ago while he received ongoing treatment for epilepsy.

In 2017, when he was only four years old, Henry, his younger sister, Mabel, along with parents Gary and Lauren Hanline went to Disney World in Florida.

Lauren, who co-owns Archives Bar and Grill with Gary and her sister and brother-in-law Samantha and Maxwell Boyle, said the trip helped the family immensely and decided to name Make-a-Wish Wisconsin as the chief beneficiary for the establishment's one-year anniversary fundraiser which raised \$6,500 last July.

In November at Archives, with a representative from Make-a-Wish Wisconsin on hand, the establishment delivered the check for \$6,500.

"I have always wanted to give back to Make-a-Wish, so that was my suggestion, and everybody was completely on board with it," Lauren said.

Jordyn Dutkiewicz, events coordinator for Make-a-Wish, said the donation will help fund a trip for a boy named Anders who lives in Mount Pleasant, just east of Interstate 94, in Racine County.

"The fundraiser that Archives put on is a huge help for us to grant wishes," Dutkiewicz said. "They grant a local wish, which is close to them. It just really shows them who their donation is helping."

### Memorable trip

Seven years ago, the Make-a-Wish



**above:** Henry Hanline and his sister, Mabel, share their experiences from a trip to Florida six years ago with the Make-a-Wish Wisconsin Events Coordinator Jordyn Dutkiewicz at Archives Bar and Grill in Burlington. The local establishment raised more than \$6,000 for Make-a-Wish after the group benefited Henry and his family. **below:** Henry showcases his gold star while presenting a check for \$6,500 to Dutkiewicz. The gold star signifies he was a Make-a-Wish kid.

JASON ARNDT PHOTOS Our Town

Foundation reached out to Henry's neurologist seeking possible recipients, with the physician recommending the Hanlines.

Henry, who had uncontrollable epilepsy, had experienced multiple seizures and underwent several surgeries at Boston Children's Hospital at the time.

Make-a-Wish, meanwhile, organized a party at the Hanline home and invited several relatives before Henry and his family boarded a flight to Florida.

"It all started when they presented Henry with his wish, and they had a party at the house," Lauren said. "We had all the family, and they gave him and Mabel gifts. Then Mickey Mouse wrote Henry and said he couldn't wait for him to come and visit."

After the party, the Hanlines received a limousine ride to the airport, where they boarded a plane for Florida. Henry, who met Dutkiewicz for the first time on Saturday, reviewed his trip by showing a scrapbook of the activities he and his family participated in while in Florida.

"He is very happy, and I could just tell how much the wish meant to (the family). When he was talking about his trip, he had nothing but smiles," Dutkiewicz said. "It just warms my heart to know what a huge impact the trip had on him."

As a family, the trip served as a respite from the challenges he faced, Lauren said.

"I think it has an enormous impact on us all as a family. It just kind of took us away from this dark, doomsday event that we had been dealing with for years," Lauren said, as she nearly broke down in tears.

### Bouncing back

Lauren, meanwhile, said Henry had his last surgery in 2019 and hasn't had a seizure since, as she cautiously knocked on wood for superstitious purposes. Henry, who attends Dyer Elementary in the Burlington Area School District, enjoys playing video games and teasing his younger sister, and oftentimes brightens people's lives.

As for Make-a-Wish Wisconsin, the foundation delivered the Hanlines a packet of details, including information on the child who benefited from the Archives fundraiser.

"We raised a pretty substantial amount of money for Make-a-Wish, so we were able to sponsor one child for sure," Lauren said.

Considering how much Make-a-Wish helped the Hanlines, Lauren said the foundation plays a key role in changing the lives of children, including her son, Henry.

"I think it is an amazing thing that they do for these kids and their families who are in the darkest part of their lives," Lauren said. "It is way to make the kid feel like a kid and not like a patient, or science experiment, getting several tests."

"We grant wishes for children with critical illnesses in the state of Wisconsin and provide them with hope, strength and joy," Dutkiewicz said. "Of course, we can't do that without the community's help and all of our amazing donors from throughout the state."



# OUR *Government*

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www.burlington-wi.gov  
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### City Clerk:

Diahnn Halbach,  
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## TOWN OF BURLINGTON

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Fax: 262-763-2118

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262-763-3070, ext. 101  
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 Peter Turke, treasurer, [pturke@basd.k12.wi.us](mailto:pturke@basd.k12.wi.us)  
 Members: Rosanne Hahn, [rhahn@basd.k12.wi.us](mailto:rhahn@basd.k12.wi.us)  
 Noah Strohm, [nstrohm@basd.k12.wi.us](mailto:nstrohm@basd.k12.wi.us)  
 Aubrey Thompson, [aethompson@basd.k12.wi.us](mailto:aethompson@basd.k12.wi.us)

**Burlington High School**  
 400 McCanna Pkwy.  
 763-0200  
 Principal: Amy Levonian

Assistant Principals:  
 Reid Oldenburg  
 Athletic Director: Eric Sulik

**Karcher Middle School**  
 225 Robert St.  
 763-0190  
 Principal: Nick Ryan  
 Assistant Principal: Jon Nelson

**Dyer Elementary School**  
 201 S. Kendrick Ave.  
 763-0220  
 Principal: Derek Straight

**Cooper Montessori School**  
 249 Conkey St.  
 763-0180  
 Principal: TJ George

**Waller Elementary School**  
 195 Gardner Ave.  
 763-0185  
 Principal: Ann Phillips

**Winkler Elementary School**  
 34150 Fulton St.  
 539-2726  
 Principal: Joel Graham

**Southern Lakes Consortium**  
 Alternative High School  
 209 Wainwright Ave.  
 767-2626

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**Catholic Central High School**  
[www.cchsnet.org](http://www.cchsnet.org)  
 148 McHenry St.  
 Burlington  
 763-1510  
 Principal: Brian Shimon

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[www.stmb.org](http://www.stmb.org)  
 225 W. State St.  
 763-1515

**St. Charles Campus**  
[www.mystcharles.org](http://www.mystcharles.org)  
 449 Conkey St.  
 763-2848

**St. John's Lutheran Grade School**  
[www.stjohnsburlington.org](http://www.stjohnsburlington.org)  
 198 Westridge Ave.  
 763-2377

**Wisconsin Parents Association**  
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 Contact: 608-283-3131

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- Fire and rescue 763-7842
- City Hall – 342-1161

### **TOWN OF BURLINGTON:**

- Police patrol (Racine County Sheriff) 763-9558
- Police Chief (administrative) 763-7539
- Fire – 763-3070, ext. 4
- Marine patrol chief 763-7539
- Town Hall– 763-3070

### **OTHER:**

- Aurora Memorial Hospital of Burlington 767-6000
- Aurora Burlington Clinic 767-8000
- Walworth County Sheriff 741-4400

**above:** The Burlington Farmers Market ushered in another year at Wehmhoff Square Park and brought a crowd of vendors, customers, and residents. The Farmers Market is held on Thursdays from 3 until 7 p.m. through October 31. Brian Castellani, of Itsa Castellani, works on a charcuterie board on May 2.

JASON ARNDT PHOTO *Our Town*

# Community comes together for newlyweds

## BURLINGTON BUSINESSES GIFT WEDDING TO COUPLE IN NEED

By **Jason Arndt**  
EDITOR

The Burlington business community stepped up in a big way last winter to organize a wedding for a young couple that has endured challenging times, including a cancer diagnosis and a car crash.

Kaleb and Ashley Watrous, graduates of Badger High School in Lake Geneva, tied the knot during a ceremony and celebration on Feb. 2 at Burlington's Veterans Terrace.

General Manager Beth Reetz decided to spearhead the wedding coordination after receiving an email from Kaleb's mother outlining the couple's last few years.

The email included details of Ashley's diagnosis of Ewing sarcoma and her ongoing treatments to manage the cancer.

"They wanted it to happen very quickly because of the timing of the illness," Reetz said in February.

She admitted she was initially uncertain whether the wedding would be able to happen immediately.

However, once she contacted Wendy Lynch – owner of Bon Bon Belle bridal in Burlington – the uncertainty quickly vanished as Lynch guaranteed a wedding dress for Ashley and everything else continued to fall into place.

"Within 24 hours, it was close to \$20,000 in donations just to make the wedding happen," Reetz said.

Additional contributions came from Celebration on Wells, Matthew Thomas Media,

gia bella flowers and gifts, Burlington Menswear, Rooted Hair Co., Gateway Technical College, BB's Best DJ Service, The Nash for a Honeymoon Suite, and Blackbird Bakery.

While each establishment offered a different service, the sentiment was similar for all of them, according to Reetz.

"The conversation that I had with all the vendors – every single one of them – is that it just touched their hearts," she said. "It was just a heart warming example of our community and what we are."

Ashley said the wedding greatly exceeded her expectations, since she and Kaleb had initially planned a simple and intimate ceremony. She said they didn't need to contribute anything thanks to the support of so many.

"It was probably one of the most beautiful weddings that we could have planned," she said. "It was really shocking to see how many people helped us."

Kaleb, who endured his own difficulties after experiencing a head-on car crash in Colorado about two years ago, couldn't quite explain his feelings about the community's support for him and Ashley.

"The wedding was beautiful. We had so many friends there, we had great food, DJ Bob did an amazing job," Kaleb said. "It means so much to see the community come together to put this together. I just can't put it into words and am so thankful."

Reetz said the wedding falls in line with Veterans Terrace's

**above:** Kaleb and Ashley Watrous celebrate during a Feb. 2 wedding reception at Veterans Terrace in Burlington. **opposite:** The couple have been dealing with some challenging situations the past couple of years and were given a wedding they never dreamed possible.

BETH REETZ/VETERANS TERRACE PHOTOS *Our Town*



## St. Charles 65th Annual

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**SATURDAY, SEPT. 21st, 6:00 - 10:30 under the beer tent!** **New this year...** "FM Rodeo" will kick off the festival with live music, (7-10:30).

Food, wine & beer available for purchase, including Los Compadres Food Truck.

- Raffles and prizes throughout the night, don't miss it!!!

**SUNDAY, SEPT. 22nd features our FABULOUS TURKEY DINNER, \$15, served 11 am - 4 pm, or till gone. Carryout (only option), limited seating available in dining room and outside.**

- Hispanic Community food tent - Hispanic music noon – 2pm.
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- "Twin Rivers Band", 2-5:45pm.

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- Drawing 5:45 sharp on parish grounds; do not need to be present to win.
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- On-line silent auction starting Wednesday Sept. 18th.
- To bid, purchase tickets or info visit <https://scfallfest.givesmart.com>

**Need information - contact Mary @ 262-206-5569 or Parish Office @ 262-763-2260 or visit news and events at <https://www.ourblcc.org>**

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mission and community dedication.

"It's really what we are about at Veterans Terrace. The whole purpose for us is funding the Burlington Community Fund," she said. "We exist to fund the Burlington Community Fund and give back to Burlington."

### High school sweethearts

Kaleb and Ashley, formerly known as Ashley Hanson, began dating while they attended Badger High School.

In 2021, after Ashley graduated from Badger, two years after Kaleb collected his diploma, the couple moved to Colorado to start a new adventure together.

"We packed up our stuff and made it to Colorado," he said. "Initially, I waited one year, so I could apply for in state (college) tuition."

While in Colorado, the couple picked up jobs to support each other, but encountered their first obstacle in June 2022 when Kaleb experienced multiple injuries in a serious crash.

Kaleb, who said his previous vehicle experienced issues, bought a new car at a dealership before bringing Ashley to a friend's house.

On his way home, Kaleb was struck by a drunk driver on the interstate in a head-on collision, which left him with serious injuries.

"I broke my collarbone, punctured my intestines, tore my ACL, and broke my knee cap," he explained.

As Kaleb recovered from his injuries, Ashley received a startling diagnosis around October 2022, when she learned she had Ewing sarcoma.

Ewing sarcoma, a type of bone cancer, primarily affects children and young adults.

At the time, officials at a Colorado hospital offered Ashley two locations to receive further treatment, including the Mayo Clinic and the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas.

Ashley and Kaleb opted for MD Anderson, since Ashley had family in Texas, and she began receiving treatment.

### Things were going well

Once she went into remission, they returned to Wisconsin, and found a place to live in Whitewater.

"Things were going really well, and we got our jobs back and were working," Ashley said.

"We were getting our life back together once we got back here."

However, the symptoms and pain returned, leading to an unfortunate prognosis from oncologists at Children's Wisconsin.

"We were told her percentages and what her future was going to look like," Kaleb said. "We were driving home, and we were both uncomfortable with hearing the fact that she has a 10% chance of making it to the 2-year mark."



But in the midst of that discomfort, they both shouted, almost simultaneously, they said, that they wanted to get married.

Kaleb had initially envisioned a simple wedding with immediate members of their families before his mom reached out to several venues asking for assistance with the nuptials.

That's when Reetz stepped in and immediately began holding conversations with several area business leaders.

Reetz said she met them for the first time and found both impressionable.

"They crawled up inside my heart," she said. "My impression of the kids was they were just the sweetest couple. Kaleb is so

loving and attentive to Ashley and present for her as she is going through all of this. And she is as strong as anyone I have ever seen. She is an incredible person."

Kaleb said Reetz's dedication to stepping in and helping him and Ashley achieve a wedding they never even considered meant the world to them.

"Beth was amazing," he said. "She was able to reach out to so many different people in the community and put together something that was beautiful."

Ashley said she and her new husband are going to make the best of the situation.

"We are making sure that we are living life to the fullest," Ashley said.

# Senior Center bolsters services through grants

By **Jason Arndt**  
EDITOR

The Burlington Senior Activity Center has experienced a series of improvements, both in infrastructural upgrades and programming, since the start of 2024.

Most recently, courtesy of a grant from the United Way of Racine County, the center now has funding for essential services, such as hiring two coordinators to help members through grief and paying instructors to lead classes and other programming.

The \$30,000 essential services grant allows the facility to better serve seniors who don't necessarily have the funds to pay additional fees beyond the \$2 suggested donation.

Senior Center Executive Director Patricia McNamee Rosenberg said the grant also looks to bolster participation among seniors in need of support.

Rosenberg, who cited a U.S. Surgeon General report, said seniors experienced an increase in loneliness following the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our largest epidemic now is loneliness," Rosenberg said in July, adding the facility looked to have trained people on staff to help seniors. "I would say two or three times a week someone comes in seeking support."

The United Way contribution is the latest in its partnership with the Senior Center.

Since 2023, the United Way contributed funds to help the Senior Center facilitate a tell your story program, allowing seniors to share their experiences through a living history project, and a supper club that has been a resounding success.



Senior Center officials said the supper club program, which includes live entertainment, often sees capacity crowds of 100 people in attendance.

Kathy Baumeister, chairperson of the Senior Center Board of Directors, said the relationship with United Way has "blossomed" and serves as a testament to the facility's mission to help seniors.

"It has been overwhelmingly successful, and everything is just building and building," she said.

The United Way's support has helped the senior center achieve its mission.

"One hour of socialization a week keeps depression and dementia at bay," Rosenberg said.

## Infrastructure improvements

The United Way isn't the only organization helping the Senior Center.

The Rotary Club of Burlington and Burlington Community Fund each contributed \$10,000 to the senior's kitchen remodeling project.

The two organizations, coupled with in-kind donations, have helped the center with needed upgrades.

"When we came in, the whole kitchen really needed to be redone," Rosenberg said. "It has changed everything."

Upgrades to the kitchen have also helped Meals on Wheels, an organization serving meals to seniors, through improved amenities.

"Meals on Wheels operates out of there, and it's just nicer," Rosenberg said. "The drivers appreciate it."

The center's recent newsletter commended Best Flooring for helping to create an affordable solution.

Kathy and Darrel Baumeister have also contributed jar openers, which are used as a fundraiser, and assist in offsetting cost

overruns related to the project.

## Critical grants

Baumeister said the grants serve as a vital tool to help encourage more seniors to participate in the center's program offerings.

"Grants are very important to make this place accessible to anyone who wants to come," she said. "We just ask for a \$2 donation for use of the facility. Now, with all of our programs, there is no extra charge for it."

The grants from United Way will likely bolster mental health resources, she said.

"With mental health, it's just important for people to socialize. We have people who retire from their job, and all of a sudden they ask themselves what they should do," Baumeister explained. "This is a good place for them to come and enjoy some of our programs. It will definitely help them mentally and socially."

While the center continues to help its own members, the group also has an objective to serve the community, which includes a garden cart placed in front of the facility.

The Senior Center, 587 E. State St., has a garden and often places extra produce on the cart for community members in need of additional vegetables.

Baumeister said residents could contribute a nominal donation while picking up some vegetables.

However, the garden cart could always use a little more produce, Baumeister said.

"We are appealing to people in the community who have gardens and have extra produce to please bring them to us," she said. "We could put them out in the garden to provide more food to people who need vegetables."

For more information, visit the center's website at [burlingtonseniorcenter.com](http://burlingtonseniorcenter.com) or its Facebook page.

Executive Director Patricia McNamee Rosenberg, of the Burlington Senior Activity Center, removes an item from a refrigerator inside the facility's new kitchen on July 12.

JASON ARNDT PHOTO *Our Town*

"It feels like an honor to be able to help," she said. "We love that they shop here, but we also love that we can provide such a safe and exciting environment with the police department partnership."

Walmart also offered other activities, including visits with Santa Claus.

"We were able to give the kids some treats and cookies to make it a special event," she said.

"Maybe sometimes they don't get to see Santa, and they get to see him here."

Officers and firefighters walked alongside the children, helping them calculate the cost of their shopping spree before bringing the items to check out.

With assistance from Walmart staff members, local officials also wrapped gifts at the end of Shop with Cop, so the children could take them home to their family.

**Community collaboration**

Jones noted that Love, Inc. provided a list of children's names for the event, while corporate sponsors, such as Pepsi, Scherrer Construction, and Burlington Eco-Clean made "generous donations" to make the event possible.

Zoe Garcia, 11, who accompanied officer Scott Wasilevich, said the officer was a valuable resource.

"I liked how he was able to help me find gifts," Garcia said, adding that she shopped for her brother and parents.

Garcia's mother, Mara Orozco, said she recognized her daughter's joy during the shopping spree.

She also said the event raises spirits as the holiday approaches.

"They all get excited and can't wait until Christmas to find out what is wrapped inside," she said. "(Zoe) gets so excited."

**LEGEND** • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

team felt additional motivation to defeat the Broncos on Oct. 6 in tribute of Sheffer.

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

During football games, he often offers support to players on the sidelines, which is a testament to his joy of students.

"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 got guys that need their helmets fixed, he is on it."

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."

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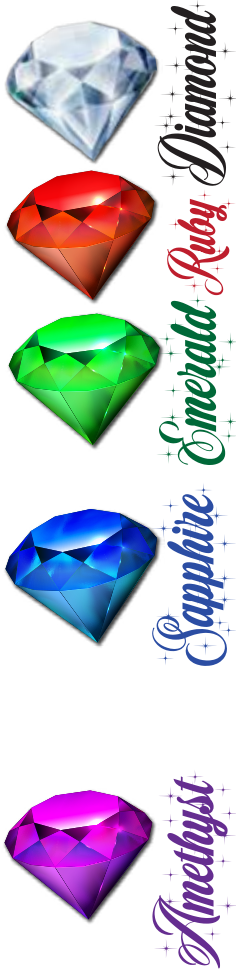
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*Next year, the Jamboree runs May 23-26, 2025, with the theme "Let the good times roll!" We hope you will continue to support us. Want to be a sponsor or get more involved? Call 262-661-1951*