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of RACINE COUNTY



Winter  
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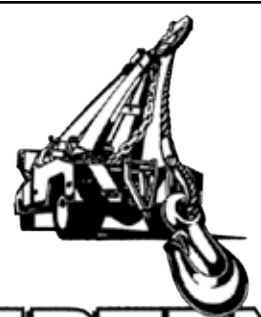
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# Indie bookstore thriving in downtown Waterford

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

Reads by the River Gifts and Books has been serving the Waterford community and beyond for nearly three years.

Since opening in November 2021, co-owner Kelly Klein, who operates the business with husband, Steve, said she never anticipated seeing the establishment in the heart of downtown Waterford show rapid growth.

“It has far surpassed anything we could have expected. People have really supported us, not only in the community, but we have a lot of customers who travel here,” said Klein, who has seen customers come from Waukesha County communities and other areas in southeastern Wisconsin.

She attributes the growth to a loyal customer base that supports independent booksellers, instead of big-box bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble.

“People who love bookstores really want to support an indie bookstore and are willing to travel to get their books,” said Kelly.

## Dream becomes reality

Kelly worked as an early childhood special education teacher, owned a photography business, and spent time as a stay-at-home in between both careers.

While she was in the workforce, Kelly always wanted to open a bookstore, which she enjoyed as a child with her mother.

“I have always loved reading, loved reading books since I was little,” she said. “I spent a lot of time in bookstores with my mom throughout the years. She and I were both big readers. It was something that we loved doing together.”

Before opening in Waterford, she looked at other locations, including one in the Village of Rochester before launching the establishment.

When the historic downtown Waterford structure became available, she pounced on the opportunity, adding it came at an impeccable time.

“The time was right in my life where this space became available and I was ready for a change,” Kelly said.

While Reads by the River offers readers



a solid inventory, the establishment also facilitates multiple community events, including book clubs, author visits, and other events.

Recently, Reads by River hosted New York Times best-selling author Shelby Van Pelt and drew nearly 400 avid readers to Waterford Union High School.

“We do a lot of events and that was by far our biggest event up to this point,” she said. “But we do a lot of events.”

Events include cocktails and conversation at Waterford Stillhouse, where about 30 people can attend and visit with authors, she said.

Kelly said the conversation includes a question and answer forum with the author.

“It is really a great and intimate gathering,” she said. “People have usually read the book in advance and have great questions. We do those monthly.”

Additionally, on a quarterly basis, Reads by the River hosts a cookbook club at DW Coffee in Rochester.

Other events include the recent author fair at Low Daily brewing in Burlington that featured 25 local writers promoting their latest titles, Kelly added.

## Planning ahead

Reads by the River has been proactive in introducing new releases to its inventory.

“I pre-order books usually a few months in advance because we look at catalogs of books that are coming out,” Kelly said. “Right now, I am working on orders that are coming out in January through May.”

Following trends, and using her three years of experience as owner, Kelly said she has been able to plan more efficiently in bringing in new books.

For customers seeking a specific title, Reads by the River orders the book, and places them on hold for them to pick up.

“We also take special orders,” she said. “Our shop is only 650 square feet and we have a lot of books. But we can’t have everything.”

For more information, including upcoming events, visit Reads by the River at [readsbytheriver.com](http://readsbytheriver.com) or follow them on Facebook.



**from the top:** Steve and Kelly Klein, owners of Reads by the River Books and Gifts, work behind the counter at their store in downtown Waterford; Kelly shows off the children's section the bookstore offers for younger readers; Steve works on organizing items.

JASON ARNDT PHOTOS Wonders of Racine County

## Wonders of Racine County

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**GENERAL MANAGER:** ..... David Habrat  
**EDITOR IN CHIEF:** ..... Heather Ruenz  
**CREATIVE DIRECTOR:** ..... Heidi Schulz  
**PAGE DESIGNER:** ..... Jen DeGroot  
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**On the cover:** Charlotte Lininger, 7, of Waterford, strikes a pose beside a snowman in the Burlington Farmer's Market booth at Family Day on Dec. 15 at Wehmhoff Square Park. ASDA Enterprises Inc. sponsored the event which included visits with reindeer, s'mores, numerous business booths, the Polar Express presented by Dousman Transport Co, and more.

JAJASON ARNDY Wonders of Racine County

# Lavelle leads the way in rubber products

By Jason Arndt

STAFF WRITER

Lavelle Industries, Inc. has been a leading manufacturer of rubber and plastics products for more than a century.

Founded in 1912, the business, headquartered in Burlington has four manufacturing facilities in North America, including a second area location in Whitewater.

Lavelle manufactures high-quality rubber and plastic products and assemblies, which go into items such as plumbing products, water softeners, food manufacturing equipment, electronics, healthcare products, toilets and tank trim, and much more, according to its website.

Although the company produces a diverse range of products, one item stands out above the rest, according to President Kathryn Turke.

“Lavelle is best known for our Korky brand of toilet repair products which are sold at all home improvement retailers, hardware stores and online,” she said. “Korky launched the toilet flappers in the 1950s and has a loyal plumbing pro and DIY following.”

Lavelle manufactures everything inside, and outside, the toilet tank, including the award-winning Korky Beehive toilet plunger.

“We like to joke that our careers are really in the toilet,” Turke said.

She said Lavelle’s Korky brand of toilet repair products can be found all over including at Menards, Home Depot, Lowe’s, Walmart, Ace Hardware, True Value Hardware, Tractor Supply, and Amazon.

## Family-owned business

Rhonda Sullivan, who serves as majority owner and chief executive officer, and her husband, Paul, recently celebrated 37 years with Lavelle.

According to Turke, the Sullivans are the fourth generation of family members

who have been involved with the company.

In addition to the same family, Lavelle Industries also has a roster of employees who have a mission to provide the best quality products, Turke said.

“Our employees are very passionate about continuous improvement and manufacturing high quality products for our customers,” Turke said. “We are proud to have the reputation of being the best at what we do.”

Lavelle Industries also emphasizes growing from within and Turke said the company’s professional development process puts it at a competitive advantage.

“We foster an inclusive environment where all team members can thrive and build lasting careers across the company,” Turke said.

Annually, Lavelle hires many young adults as interns, including recent high school graduates and those attending college. The program allows them to gain real-life experience and serves as a roadmap for success, Turke said.

“Many Lavelle leaders today have grown from our strong internship program,” Turke said.

## Community contributor

The United Way of Racine County recently announced Lavelle Industries made a \$75,000 donation to support key initiatives.

They include Imagination Library, a program providing free books to registered Racine County children.

“We are incredibly grateful for Lavelle Industries’ ongoing partnership and their significant investment in our mission,” said Ali Haigh, president and CEO of United Way of Racine County in a news release. “The support of Imagination Library will help build a foundation for lifelong learning for children across our community. And the contribution to western Racine County programs will strengthen our collective work in



addressing challenges related to education, financial stability, and health for families in western Racine County.”

Sullivan said the contribution serves as a testament to Lavelle’s community commitment.

“We are proud to support Imagination Library, ensuring children have access to books that inspire learning and creativity, and to support the United Way-funded programs that strengthen the well-being of families in western Racine County,” she said.

Other community causes supported by Lavelle include donations to the Burlington

Area School District (to bolster arts, athletics and the Montessori program,) the Burlington Community Aquatic Center, the Burlington Public Library, and other local organizations.

“Lavelle believes in giving back to the community where we live and work,” Turke said.

In addition, Turke said the Sullivan family also started the Coffee House at Chestnut and Pine in downtown Burlington.

“This has been a staple in our downtown community,” she said.

**clockwise from top:** Lavelle Industries CEO Rhonda Sullivan (left) and President Kathryn Turke showcase the company’s signature Korky products; Numerous women serve in leadership roles within the company; Lavelle team members at the Burlington facility work together in making Korky products.

# Area company offers full service for travelers

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

Travelers often enlist the help of an area travel agency carrying decades of experience in the tourism industry. Bon Voyage World Travel Experts, owned by Kari Mullikin, was previously known as Bon Voyage Cruise and Vacations before the establishment expanded to offer more services.

Mullikin has been involved in the industry for more than 35 years and offers travel guidance to tourists looking for destinations in the United States as well as abroad.

Bon Voyage, which has locations in the villages of Waterford and Union Grove, serves as a full-service travel agency and offers a vacation care concierge service to travelers hoping to create a memorable experience.

“There is such a demand for travel and there is a demand from clients looking to have somebody carry out their itineraries for them,” Mullikin said. “That’s where our business continues to grow.”

Bon Voyage employs nearly a dozen staff members who work directly with travelers in drafting destination plans.

Before planning a trip for clients, Mullikin said she often spends time speaking with them in an effort to gather information about the vision for the trip.

Additionally, Mullikin, a travel advisor, helps ensure clients understand rules and regulations for overseas countries and have the necessary documents, as well as offering airfare options.



Kari Mullikin

## Diverse clientele

At Bon Voyage, the agency serves couples, families, and solo travelers – anyone looking for a customized travel experience.

“We have a broad mix of clientele, so we are doing a lot of family vacations, a lot of extended generational type travel, where grandma is taking grandchildren, great-grandchildren on a trip,” Mullikin said. “We are also doing a significant amount for solo travelers. It’s very popular these days.”

She attributes the uptick in solo travelers to the demand for more personalized trips, where they can pursue their own interests, which can differ from those of friends and family.

“Clients are doing solo travel based on their specific interests,” Mullikin said.

Bon Voyage also helps clients with traditional trips, including those involving the immediate family, as well as couples celebrating a honeymoon or anniversary.

Bon Voyage has planned for trips to just about anywhere including Alaska, European nations, Hawaii, and the Caribbean islands.

While most destinations involve airfare, Mullikin said she also sees clients interested in road trips within the contiguous United States.

“We have some interest in driving vacations,” she said. “I had clients that wanted to go to the east to see the fall colors this year and we put together an itinerary for them.”

## Client advocacy

In the fall, the southeast region of the



Bon Voyage World Travel Experts, based in Racine County, helps travelers achieve memorable trips such as Portugal. Couples are one of many population segments the agency’s travel experts assist with planning trips.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS Wonders of Racine County

United States experienced back-to-back hurricanes, Helene and Milton, which destroyed parts of Florida.

While Bon Voyage had a small number of clients affected, it could have been worse, considering the storms happened in the early fall compared to the summer when families with children often travel to Florida.

“If that hit at a different time of the year, although not hurricane season, but storm season, it would have affected us more so than it did,” she said.

“It really does bring home the value of a travel advisor,” she added.

A travel advisor, according to Mullikin, often serves as the client’s advocate during natural disasters or unplanned circumstances beyond the traveler’s control.

“When something goes amiss or unplanned – that is no fault of your own, it shows how important it is to have someone as your advocate,” she explained, adding that travel advisors help clients depart destinations, or find a safe place to stay, during unexpected circumstances.

Travel advisors are known to help find the best deals on flights, hotels, activities, and more and use their connections with many segments in the tourism industry.

## Planning ahead

Bon Voyage, like many travel agencies, often stays busy even during lighter periods of the year.

For example, by early October, Mullikin had begun scheduling trips for clients for



2025, 2026, and even 2027.

“Right now, we are booking a lot of travels through 2025, much of Alaska is already sold out in 2025, and we are already booking into 2026,” she said in the fall.

She suggests people start planning sooner rather than later, particularly for some destinations.

However, Bon Voyage can still assist in

planning trips on short notice, in as soon as four months in advance, depending on the destination.

Bon Voyage World Travel Experts, 116 N. Milwaukee St. Waterford, and 1014 Main St., Union Grove, is open from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at both locations.

For more information, visit [bvworldtravel.com](http://bvworldtravel.com).

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# Bond, an athlete for all seasons at CCHS

## High school senior looks to join West Point upon graduation

By Jason Arndt  
STAFF WRITER

Emma Bond, a senior at Catholic Central High School, has never shied away from competition.

Bond, of Lake Geneva, who specializes in distance running events at Catholic Central, began her foray into the sports world as a competitive dancer before becoming more involved in Hilltoppers' athletics.

Since enrolling at CCHS, she has not only participated in track and cross country – qualifying in each of her three years – but also joined the junior varsity basketball and tennis teams, played soccer, and added wrestling to her athletic portfolio.

“I am only in high school once, so I might as well try things while I have the chance,” Bond said in an interview in the fall.

In addition to competing in a host of Catholic Central High School programs, she has also served as manager for the boys and girls basketball teams as well as the girls volleyball teams, which include responsibilities as a statistician.

A school record-holder in the 1,600 – supplanting the previous benchmark held by Elsie Kmecak, whom Bond calls a “hero” at Catholic Central – Bond also managed to run a marathon in Hawaii before she turned 16 years old.



Catholic Central's Emma Bond competes in a cross country meet as a junior last year.

JOHN FISHER FILE PHOTO Wonders of Racine County



It was celebration time for Emma Bond after achieving her goal of running the Honolulu Marathon in December 2022.

SUBMITTED PHOTO Wonders of Racine County

### Dancer to runner

Bond, daughter of Kevin and Kirstin, first became exposed to running in the first grade by competing in a 5K event.

At the time, Bond admitted she wasn't receptive to running, but that changed once she discovered the results.

“I ran my first 5K when I was in first grade and I hated it,” she said. “After I found out that I got third place in my age group, I got so excited and then I just kept running after that.”

Bond's family moved to Lake Geneva during her middle school years, and she attended St. Francis de Sales Parish School.



Emma Bond runs the 1,600-meter run during the Racine County Invite at Union Grove High School last year.

JENNIFER EISENBART FILE PHOTO Wonders of Racine County

In Lake Geneva, she participated in competitive dance, which she continued until her freshman year at Catholic Central.

As a freshman at CCHS, she primarily focused on track, competing in the 800-, 1,600-, and 3,200-meter runs, and served as the sixth or seventh runner on the WIAA Division 3 state qualifying Hilltoppers' cross country squad.

At the WIAA Division 3 State Cross Country Championships, where Kmecak claimed the individual title, Bond became inspired to try more sports with hopes of emulating Kmecak.

Kmecak, who holds several school records, now attends the University of St. Thomas, where she competes in track and cross country.

“(Elsie) had a very, very big impact on me,” Bond said. “You went to school with this cross country hero. I thought it was a major opener that a girl from my school, when I was in high school, won the state championship. It was so cool to watch that happen right in front of me.”

Bond said Kmecak didn't necessarily push her to join other sports – but she served as a role model.

“It was more like I wanted to be her,” Bond said.

### Maintaining friendships

In addition to finding inspiration from Kmecak, she decided to join other sports because she wanted to stay connected with her friends, who participated on other sports teams.

While she participated in cross country and track, where she qualified in the 1,600, Bond opted to join the Catholic Central junior varsity basketball team at the coach's request.

“I was originally going to just be a

manager for the girls basketball team,” she said. “However, the coach needed more people on the junior varsity team so he put me on the team so I got to play.”

But joining the team came with a catch.

At the time, she was training for the Honolulu Marathon, which would be held that December two years ago.

“I would run right after school, and then I would go to my (basketball) practice and they were all okay with it,” said Bond.

Bond had a simple goal at the Honolulu Marathon, which is one of very few, if not the only marathon that allows people younger than 18 years old to compete.

“I really pushed myself to run a marathon my sophomore year,” she said. “Not a lot of marathons let you run before you are 18.”

“If I could get under six hours, it would be great, that was my goal. Then I ran it in four hours and 16 minutes.”

### Hitting the mats

During Bond's junior season, she qualified in the fall for state in cross country but experienced a stress fracture that caused her to take a step back during the winter sports season.

Instead of running during the winter, she was limited to swimming and biking, and she needed to walk away from basketball.

“I couldn't do basketball because it was too much running, so I would lift weights every day after school,” said Bond, who served as manager for both the girls and boys basketball programs.

During sessions in the weight room, the wrestlers caught her attention, and she felt compelled to join girls wrestling.

“As I was lifting, I always watched the wrestlers walk past and decided to give it a try since it had a low impact on my leg,” she said. “I found out I was pretty good at it, and

I got second in conference in the 106-pound division.”

Bond said her father, who wrestled collegiately, was receptive of her joining wrestling because the WIAA began sponsoring girls competitions.

Since hitting the mats, she decided to focus on wrestling as her winter activity, making Bond a three-sport varsity in each season.

“I really hope (wrestling) grows because it is such a great sport,” she said. “I am really pushing to make it farther this year.”

She continued running distance events in track in the spring and played on the soccer team for the second straight year.

### Future aspirations

Bond, who works at Lake Geneva Cruise Line, looks to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point to major in kinesiology or psychology with a minor in terrorism studies.

She said she initially didn't envision a future in the Armed Services.

But one day as she sorted through her mail, she came across a flyer promoting a program at West Point and nearly tossed it in the trash.

“Then my dad said, ‘Maybe you should look into it,’” Bond said.

She learned West Point offered a running camp, immediately fell in love with the campus when she enrolled, and later attended a Summers Leaders Experience program at the facility.

According to the website, the program is a weeklong immersion into the academic, military, and social life of a West Point cadet. It allows attendees to “explore West Point from all angles, including our high-tech educational facilities, team-building athletic activities, and realistic military training.”

# The fabric of their lives

*Creative Spaces Studio offers variety of quilting products and services*

By **Jason Arndt**  
STAFF WRITER

Creative Spaces Studio, of Waterford, has found a unique niche in the region as a full-service quilt shop.

The downtown Waterford storefront, in addition to offering quilting fabric and long arm services, also has a gift shop stocked with unique, handcrafted items, including art and jewelry made by local artisans.

Co-owned by Barb Hayes and her daughter, Donna Fearing, the business has served the community since 2019, when they opened the shop in a larger building before recently relocating.

Fearing said her mom has been quilting since she was a youngster.

"My mom has been sewing and quilting since I was a baby and I got into art at a young age," Fearing said.

While Hayes continued to hone her quilting passion, Fearing initially found herself in specializing in fusion glass and stained glass artwork.

The two eventually decided to join forces and bring their strengths together in business.

After some time, Hayes and Fearing opted to focus solely on quilting, while offering some gifts made by local artisans.

"I think we always wanted to be a quilt shop and to be a space for our quilters," Fearing said. "There is not a lot of local quilt shops anymore."

They often spend time working on projects for others, including long-arming

services, and completing memory quilts for customers who want to honor their loved ones.

## A family affair

Hayes said she began selling crafts before finding quilting as a hobby.

"I got tired of doing the craft sales and decided to open a business," said Hayes, who began working on quilting projects at the request of her friends.

She admitted her daughter did not have the same quilting passion, at least initially, until a few years ago.

"She is my glass artist, so she worked with fused glass and stained glass," Hayes said. "But she decided quilting was more fun than glass. She's got a good eye for colors."

Fearing said she and her mom are both "strong and independent" but when it comes to business, they generally find an ideal compromise.

Her mom agrees.

"There are days when it is very challenging working side-by-side with your children, but we get along, we compromise," Hayes said. "But it's fun and I enjoy coming to work everyday."

## Consistent business

Fearing said Creative Spaces Studio experiences a steady flow of customers throughout the year.



Donna Fearing (left) and her mother, Barb Hayes, co-own Creative Spaces Studio in Waterford, which has been in business since 2019. In addition to having a wide variety of materials and quilting kits, they also offer long arm quilting services.

JASON ARNDT *Wonders of Racine County*

However, she noted it's busier at times, including this time of the year.

"It is almost Christmas so people are trying to get their Christmas quilts done. We do notice kind of a huge uptick in quilts starting in the fall because (customers) are rushing to get their Christmas projects done."

The month of June brings another influx of traffic, courtesy of a statewide shop hop consisting of quilt shop owners.

"We have a really big statewide shop,

where quilt shops throughout the state participate and everyone is encouraged to visit them all," Fearing said.

Some people perceive quilting as a hobby for elderly women, Fearing said.

She said that's not the case, especially with quilt shops introducing more modernized fabric and colors.

"It's a beautiful art form that I think is underrated. You can apply modern fabrics and get crazy with colors," Fearing said. "We have more modern options and I love sharing creativity with the ladies coming in. I love it. It is not really work when I get to stitch fabric and get creative."

Creative Spaces Studio often promotes its selection of fabrics – for sales by the bolt, fat quarter size and precuts – and oftentimes assembles sampler quilts to offer a vision for customers.

"When a new collection of fabric comes in the idea is you make a sampler so your customers could see how it is used and then they get creative and inspired to use the fabric," Fearing said.

Creative Spaces Studio, to 407 E. Main St., Waterford, is open 10 to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays. For more information, visit the website [creativespacesstudio.net](http://creativespacesstudio.net) and follow the shop on Facebook.

Hayes said she always finds pleasure when customers come in and visit.

"We just enjoy seeing people coming in and seeing what projects they are working on," Hayes said.

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