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Handing off the coffee pot to someone else

Perkup coffee shop owner steps back while family officially steps in

By **Jennifer Eisenbart**

STAFF WRITER

When Laurie Kyle opened Perkup in downtown Elkhorn in March 2012, she wanted to create a space for coffee, community and conversation.

“I wanted it to feel like an attachment to our dairy farm,” explained Kyle, whose Scandinavian roots made her want a place where people could talk, share and be comfortable. “Our open space out at the farm, you can get grounded, no pun intended.”

Now, 13 years later, she and her husband, Dave, still own Kylecrest Holsteins and Jerseys – the family farm – but Perkup is staying part of the family.

Devin Peter, Kyle’s future daughter-in-law, has taken over the day-to-day operations of the coffee shop.

Peter has been managing the shop for the better part of three years, but Kyle decided to formally hand over the reins after realizing last summer how much of a lead she had taken at the shop.

“I came in one Monday. I was literally standing at the counter,” Kyle said. “My heart and head are attached. I said, ‘It doesn’t feel like my place anymore.’”

While Kyle still handles the bookkeeping for the coffee shop, Peter has been running everything else including the menu, promotions and ordering.

Taking a look at the transition, Kyle is open to admitting she’s been stepping back from the leadership role for a few years.

“Devin has been the face of the shop for a while,” Kyle said. “I just kind of meandered. I think that’s the hard part for an owner. You say words that you’re going to relinquish control, and that’s hard. I feel like sometimes, my presence when Devin is the face of the shop, my ego can get in the way.”

“You feel like a little lost sheep,” she added.

Her husband, Dave, she said, has been supportive and guiding in helping her make the transition.

“We’re both used to doing stuff where you just roll up your sleeves and get stuff done,” she said. “We both know our purpose.”

Kyle said she has been blessed, as she and Dave have the farm together, but with Perkup she was able to create a warm,

comfortable community gathering space in Elkhorn.

“It’s been coined the name, ‘Elkhorn’s living room,’” she said. “It’s like, ‘Wow, that’s what I was going for.”

“Dave and I, we’re not about the money,” she added. “We’re about the community. It’s really about growing your soul.”

Kyle made the official announcement about stepping away on Facebook Jan. 5, roughly a week and a half after her brother, John, died of glioblastoma. The two had a strong, close relationship amidst the various changes in life, and Kyle said he is readily a part of Perkup.

His passing – and the grief she has experienced, discovering the love she and others had for her brother – helped her realize that the store needed to take a back seat to family.

“Life changes so quickly and if we don’t pay attention, it can skip a few chapters and end up being confusing and stressful,” Kyle wrote in the post, calling Perkup one of her greatest joys.

“Recently it became apparent that there is a different plan for my life and the future of Perkup.”

On a wall in the shop is a sign for Sawyer’s Baker Boy crackers, what would now be Keebler saltines. The sign has been in the family since the early 1930s, moving from home to home.

When Kyle opened Perkup, her brother knew the perfect place for the sign. It’s one of many pieces of nostalgia in the store, along with a large variety of 1950s Fisher Price toys, dairy farm memorabilia and purposeful artwork.

“I never sit in all the different positions and see what I’ve created,” Kyle said. “I’ve been blessed.”

The intentionality of the Perkup space is something she hopes will continue.

“I like to experience all aspects of life,” she said. “(Perkup) for sure fills my cup up. It’s definitely taken me to realize what my purpose is in life.

“I love it that people can find comfort here. That’s what you hope you can create.”

Perkup, 27 N. Wisconsin St., Elkhorn, is open Monday from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Tuesday through Saturday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. The shop is closed Sundays.



Laurie Kyle’s future daughter-in-law, Devin Peter, is now officially handling day-to-day operations at Perkup.

JENNIFER EISENBART *Wonders of Walworth County*



After 13 years of running Perkup in downtown Elkhorn, Laurie Kyle has transitioned from being in the coffee shop on a daily basis.

SUBMITTED PHOTO *Wonders of Walworth County*

Wonders of Walworth County

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On the cover: Turtle Creek Elementary School in Delavan recently hosted members of the City of Delavan Police and Fire department for “Lunch with a Hero” at the school. The department members were treated to the student’s pizza day lunch, while the kids got to meet those who help keep them safe. Officers Mike Sulzer (second from left) and Danielle Apker (fourth from left) spend time with a group during lunch.

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Fundraising friends

Students and staff from Whitewater High School spend time at Fairhaven, teaming up with residents for a dog treat making event. Once the treats are ready to go, they're bagged up and given to the high school's Key Club, which sells them to raise money.

FAIRHAVEN FACEBOOK PHOTOS Wonders of Walworth County



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Schools partner for program with 'character'

By **Jennifer Eisenbart**

STAFF WRITER

With a gathering at Gateway Technical College that featured six students, numerous teachers and administration, the Elkhorn and Delavan-Darien School Districts showed off a new partnership earlier this year.

The program is called Craftsman with Character – it's a semester-long initiative connecting students with skilled trades and emphasizing character development at the same time.

Elkhorn's College and Career Academy has three students participating – Abel Chavez, Colten Welch and Griffin Brieschke. The Delavan-Darien Technical School is represented by Cesar Medrano, Josh Hersrud and Rafael Perez.

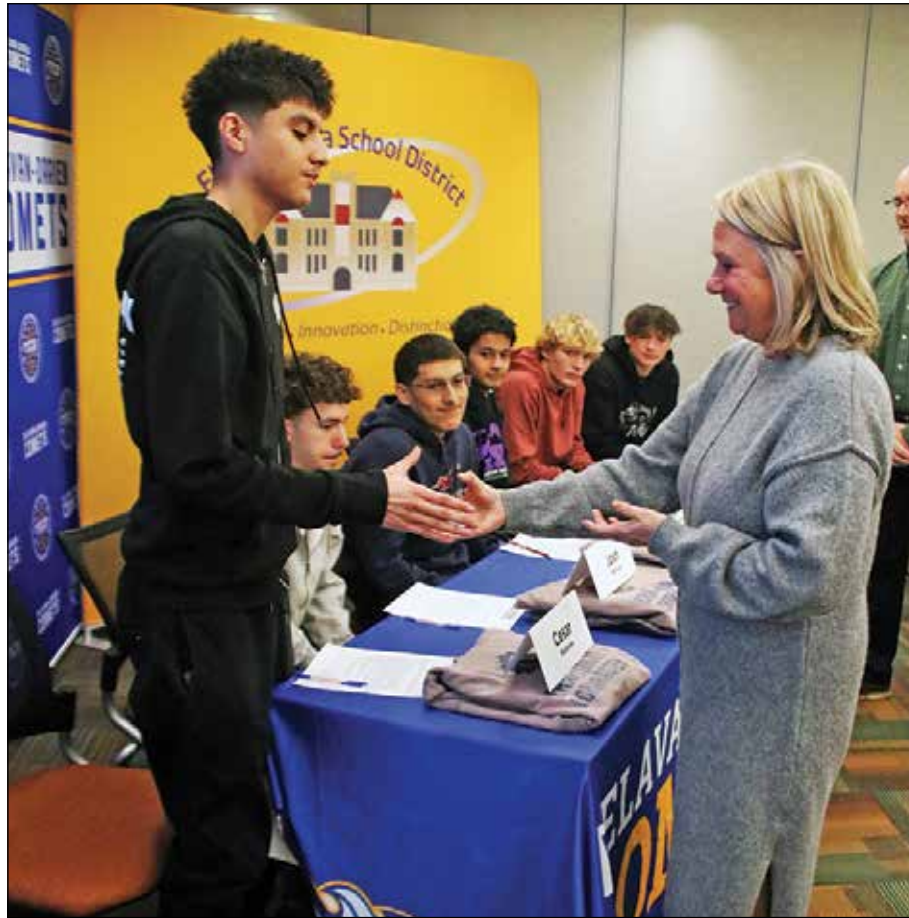
The students will spend four days each week working directly with six local companies – Propshaft, R & L Springs, Wisconsin Oven, Integra, Continental Plastic Corporation, and Royal Basket Trucks, Inc.

One day a week, the students will take part in classroom-based character development, led by two people – Jon Anzalone, the EASD Community Engagement Coordinator, and Lisa Pavett, the program manager for the Walworth County Economic Development Alliance's Inspire & Made in America Walworth County program.

The partnership was coordinated by Chris Trottier, EASD's Director of Strategic Partnerships, and Mike Rick, Delavan-Darien Tech Administrator and Career and Technical Education coordinator.

"The launch of the Craftsman with Character Program by the Delavan-Darien School District and Elkhorn Area School District showcases the power of collaboration in education," said Rick, adding that pulling character development into the skilled trades will not only steer students on a meaningful career path, but teach them values at the same time.

"With the support of local businesses and dedicated mentors, these students are building the foundation for a bright future – one rooted in craftsmanship, character, and community," Rick said.



"The Delavan-Darien School District takes great pride in having three of its DD Tech students participate in this transformative opportunity."

Trottier was equally enthusiastic.

"The launch of Craftsman with Character demonstrates two districts' investment in strategic partnerships and experiential opportunities for students," he said. "The Elkhorn Area School District continues to ensure all students have an identified career pathway where they are earning stackable credentials. Collaborating with the Delavan-Darien School District, six employers, Craftsman with Character, Gateway Technical College and WCEDA exemplifies our value on community engagement

and strategic partnerships and the impact collaboration has on student achievement."

CWC is a workforce development program founded in 2013 by Dave Hataj of Edgerton Gear. The program offers a structured model and curriculum that brings together schools and local businesses to provide meaningful job shadowing, character education, and mentorship.

Speaking about the program, Hataj said, "In choosing 'craftsman,' we honor the tradition of excellence while embracing the diversity of talents and voices that contribute to the world of craftsmanship.

"We believe that anyone who embodies these values and skills is, indeed, a craftsman."



Earlier this year, a Craftsman with Character program was launched. It's a collaboration between the Delavan-Darien and Elkhorn School Districts, featuring three students from each school who are getting a chance at a unique educational opportunity. Shown above, from left are students Cesar Medrano, Josh Hersrud and Rafael Perez (from Delavan-Darien Technical School) and Abel Chavez, Colten Welch and Griffin Brieschke (from Elkhorn's Career and College Academy.) Upper: Lisa Pavett, who is offering character education through Walworth County Economic Development Alliance's Inspire & Made in America program, offers her congratulations to Medrano.

DAVE DRESDOW PHOTOS Wonders of Walworth County

Turning a wish into a lifelong career

Wishing Well Florist owner retires, employee takes over

By **Jennifer Eisenbart**

STAFF WRITER

When Jerry Rahn started the Wishing Well floral shop in Elkhorn 42 years ago, he didn't expect the run to be decades.

"I didn't know how long it would be, but I didn't think I would have it this long," Rahn said.

Rahn started the business in his late 20s, but he's now ready to hand it off. The business officially went into the hands of Nikki Kolp.

Kolp took over the reins of the flower shop March 1, as Rahn decided to retire. In addition, the shop will be moving one building over, from 26 to 28 S. Wisconsin St., Elkhorn.

There's also going to be a small name change.

"It's going to be Nikki's Wishing Well now," Rahn said. "She's going to put her name in front of it."

Rahn said Kolp has worked holidays for the last few years for him and expressed an interest in starting her own flower shop – and in purchasing Rahn's store.

"I thought it was a great opportunity to step away and retire and have someone take over who really wanted to do it," Rahn said.

He said his first and only goal in starting his shop was to serve the community by providing flowers and plants.

"It was me and actually my sister, Kathy," Rahn said. He said he had worked before in the floral business – basically his only employment. Living in the area, he frequented Elkhorn often.

"Knowing the area, I knew I would draw a lot of people from even other areas, because we knew a lot of the people in the Walworth County area," Rahn explained. "It was good word of mouth ... and Elkhorn was in need of a florist at the time."

When he started in 1981, "everything was kind of big." The shop started out with flowers and gifts while funerals and weddings also provided business.

"After they saw what I did the first couple of times, they liked what I did," said Rahn, adding that he's done numerous funerals and weddings, with families coming back after a positive experience.

"It's just grown over the years," Rahn said. "It's having quality flowers and then getting those

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

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A cool start

Williams Bay played host to an annual Polar Plunge on New Year's Day, with the event taking place at Pier 290. Hundreds of people hit the water for a refreshing – to say the least – start to 2025 while many others gathered to observe or offer their support. Those who participated appeared to enjoy the quick dip in Geneva Lake despite chilly temperatures both in and out of the water.

PHOTOS COURTESY RICK JESSEN *Wonders of Walworth County*



WISHING WELL • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

returning customers back.”

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't necessarily hurt the shop as it did other retail outlets. Funerals continued to happen, and Rahn said that likely influenced how people viewed life.

“People have realized that life can be short,” he said.

He thanked the community for the support over the years. The Wishing Well is the only remaining flower shop in Elkhorn.

“It's going to be very different,” Rahn said, adding that he's seen many people come and go over the year. As often as he's done weddings for families, he's also seen people die.

“We've gotten to know many people.

Through their support, we've done a lot,” he said. “It's going to be hard for me, very much.”

Kolp, a Milwaukee native who fell in love with the Walworth County area, is in her 30th year in the floral business.

She started freelancing for florists in the area about two years ago, which led her to cross paths with Rahn.

She decided to make the offer on the business and take over out of respect for the work Rahn has done in Elkhorn.

“To carry on Jerry's legacy and continue the long-standing commitment he's had to the community of Elkhorn,” Kolp said. “After I met Jerry, I could tell we shared the same passion for our floral design



Left: Nikki Kolp is taking over Wishing Well Florist from founder Jerry Rahn. Additionally, in early April, the business was planning to move next door, from 26 to 28. S. Wisconsin St., Elkhorn.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS *Wonders of Walworth County*



skill. I really related with him on that professional level.”

Kolp said she plans to keep many of the same practices that Rahn had in place with the community involvement and one-on-one customer service.

“I don't think you get that kind of service in big box stores,” she said.

What will be coming however, are more unique designs, as well as in-house, hand-tied, vase-ready arranged bouquets.

“I believe that will make me stand out from others,” Kolp said.

She said her goal is to purchase locally grown flowers as much as possible and

try to limit the store's carbon footprint by limiting the use of plastic and foam.

The plan was to make the leap to the new building in early April.

“There's going to be a new look, a new feel,” Kolp said. “Just putting my own special touch onto it.

“I'm just very grateful for this opportunity,” she added.

To reach Nikki's Wishing Well Florist, call 262-723-6677, follow the shop on Facebook or visit the website at flowerswishingwell.com. The shop is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday.

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UW-Whitewater tabbed as best business school

The 2025 "U.S. News & World Report" Best Online Programs rankings were announced in late January, with one Wisconsin college earning top honors.

The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's College of Business and Economics was named the top single business college in the state, topping Wisconsin schools in a number of categories and also ranking well nationally.

The College of Business and Economics is also nationally ranked in all five categories:

- No. 23 Graduate Business Programs for Veterans, excluding MBA (Best in Wisconsin)
- No. 32 Veterans (tie) MBA Programs (Best single school in Wisconsin)
- No. 46 (tie) Online MBA (Best single school in Wisconsin)
- No. 46 (tie) in Online Graduate Business, excluding MBA (Best in Wisconsin)
- No. 68 (tie) Online Undergraduate Business (Best in Wisconsin)

The rankings are more impressive knowing that this year's edition of the U.S. News report evaluates more than 1,790 online bachelor's and master's degree programs.

"U.S. News & World Report" assessed schools based on a variety of objective factors, such as student engagement, faculty credentials, and services and technologies.

"Being ranked the best online business school in Wisconsin reflects why we're the state's largest business college and among the top 2% of business schools worldwide, as recognized by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business – the premier international accreditation agency," Dr. Paul Ambrose, Dean of the College of Business and Economics, said. "Our flexible, student-first online programs empower learners to balance work, family, and education seamlessly."

According to information online from U.S. News & World Report:

- The bachelor's degree, Grad business degree and MBA programs scored between 81 and 83 out of a possible 100.
- Individual rankings saw UW-Whitewater competing against roughly 300 and 500 programs nationwide, including

larger schools like Stanford, Cal-Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

• Online programs had a different set of criteria. According to the publication, "Most undergraduate programs assessed in the Best Online Programs rankings are degree completion programs, meaning few, if any, new entrants at most of these schools are first-time, first-year students."

"Consequently, ranking indicators like standardized test scores and high school class standing that are used in the Best Colleges rankings are not used in the Best Online Bachelor's Programs rankings."

"Indicators distinct to the Best Online Programs rankings include measures of services offered remotely, available technologies and course delivery best practices," the publication states.

• Regarding online programs, specifically in graduate programs, it stated: "Highly ranked programs have strong traditional academic foundations based on the excellence of entering students, graduation rates and instructor credentials. They also excel at educating distance learners while offering robust career and financial support."

The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater College of Business and Economics (CoBE) is Wisconsin's largest business college.

UW-W is the only college in the state that offers an AACSB-accredited Doctor of Business Administration degree program. The College of Business and Economics is in the top 2% of the world's business schools having earned both AACSB and AACSB Accounting Accreditation.

In addition to business degrees, UW-Whitewater offers 13 fully online bachelor's degree programs outside of the College of Business and Economics. The programs address key workforce needs in the region, including early childhood education, special education, social work, and more.

The university recently added an online degree program in legal studies for students pursuing careers in law, which are expected to grow faster than average over the next decade according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

For more information about UW-Whitewater, visit uww.edu or call 1-262-472-1234.



Winner, winner!

East Troy High School earned the Judges' Choice award at the first ever Walworth County Pro/Am Culinary Showdown, held in January at Lake Lawn Resort in Delavan. Students from throughout the county were paired with professional chefs to craft dishes and compete. Gracelyn Hell, Gracy Fox and ETHS alumni head chef Nathan Dettinger created the winning dish: Hometown Breakfast Bite. "Flaky puff pastry encases savory breakfast sausages sourced from East Troy's Hometown Sausage Kitchen, with a bacon jam and drizzled with a rich maple glaze. A nod to East Troy mornings, crafted with local love," the description says. The team gave a special shoutout to East Troy Brewery and Hometown Sausage Kitchen for their support throughout the entire process.



Sharing their favorites

Representatives from the Bloom360 Learning Community entertained members of the community and beyond with renditions of their favorite songs at East Troy Intergenerational Community Center in February. According to audience members, hearts were touched and smiles and cheers were abundant throughout the performance!

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SUBMITTED PHOTOS Wonders of Walworth County

Creativity a critical part of Artisan's Alley

By Jennifer Eisenbart
STAFF WRITER

Kristy Klein's full-time job might be digital marketing and social media management, but she isn't averse to a little crafting.

"You can only work on a computer so long before your eyes go crazy, so I started crafting between jobs," explained Klein, whose company, Socialyn Marketing, LLC, serves as the "doing business as" behind Artisan's Alley, located at 17 E. Walworth St. Unit 6, Elkhorn.

Klein's craft shop is in the suite with a pair of lit palm trees on each side. Her mother-in-law, Helen Schacht, operates an extension of the store, Grandma Helen's Crafts, in the suite next door.

The shops are the result of Klein and Nicole Schell, who she shares space with, collaborating to try and find a home for their collective works.

Klein explained that, after she had managed to pull together a large selection of her own crafting, her husband basically said, "What are you going to do with all this stuff?"

"This stuff" includes soaps, candles, beading, direct-to-film transfers (both clothing and non-clothing) and jewelry.

Schell, meanwhile, works under Full Revolution Fab, which she owns with her husband, Mason. He provides the metal

frames for her larger epoxy work, while items like bookmarks, cutting boards and serving trays are on sale in Artisan's Alley (again, epoxy work).

But it's not just the work of those two women. Klein's daughter, Cecelia, also does beadwork for the shop, while Schell's sons Odin and Trygg randomly make trinkets.

"It depends on their mood," Schell joked.

Next door, Grandma Helen's offers just about anything that can be crocheted – baby clothes, doll and Barbie clothes, scarves, afghans, hats and more.

The shops opened on Small Business Saturday late last fall, a year in the making after Klein's introduction to craft fairs wasn't exactly positive.

"I did a couple of craft fairs and said, 'I'm never doing that again,'" she explained.

The goal now is to get the name out in the community. The store offers a number of the DFT transfer items Klein makes, on everything from purses and bags to t-shirts and wall décor.

The sayings can be everywhere from support for animal lovers (Klein has three dogs) and for people (one bag reads, "Kindness is free, sprinkle that stuff everywhere") to sass ("Underestimate me. That'll be fun." And "I'm not for everyone.")

Klein also will work with customers to transfer any number of designs to items.



Kristy Klein (left) and Nicole Schell put their work together to open Artisan's Alley at 17 E. Walworth St. in Elkhorn – a craft store with a wide variety of items.

JENNIFER EISENBART Wonders of Walworth County

Right now, she's working on making matching shirts for a small club of women who go out for Brandy Old Fashioneds every week.

Klein considers the DFT work, her soap making – she has a variety at the store, including shower steamers – and her candle work to be her passions.

Her other work she'd be willing to potentially shelf as she tries to recruit consignment sellers into the store with the rule of having "no duplicates."

Currently, the store operates four days a week – Thursday and Friday from 1 to 5 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Additional items – including more from Full Revolution Fab – are expected in the coming months.

For more information, call the shop at 262-249-6907, or search "Artisan's Alley" on Facebook.



Shower steamers are among the scented items Klein makes. They are dropped into the shower to release their scent.

JENNIFER EISENBART Wonders of Walworth County



Racing to Candy Land

Maximus Mrioued, 5, from Waukesha, plays the life-size Candy Land game that was set up at East Troy Lions Public Library for a few days in late December. Nearly 60 people took the time to stop by and play the game that organizers hope it will become an annual event. Max is the grandson of library director, Tami Bartoli.

SUBMITTED PHOTO Wonders of Walworth County



Operating under Klein's business license is her mother-in-law, Helen Schacht, who runs Grandma Helen's Crafts next door to Artisan's Alley.

JENNIFER EISENBART Wonders of Walworth County

'Reformed' look at mobility, fitness

Everyone can benefit from Pilates at new studio in Whitewater

By **Jennifer Eisenbart**
STAFF WRITER

After Mariah Lohff had her first child in January of 2023, she noticed something.

Her normally fit body didn't exactly do what she wanted it to anymore. A life-long dancer who turned to weightlifting as she got older, Lohff said she suddenly couldn't even lift an "easy" weight – 90 pounds.

"The pelvic floor, it's completely torn apart," she said of giving birth.

What Lohff discovered in her aim to become better educated about exercise was Pilates. Now she opened her own studio, Pilates Reformed, in Whitewater – a city that has become home to her after both she and her husband graduated from the UW-W.

"Pilates is not only for everyone – and I truly mean for anyone – I can work with any mobility level," Lohff explained.

Pilates, she said, offers a little something for everyone. While Lohff worked on Pilates with her mother-in-law to help with range of motion in the woman's shoulder, Pilates can be used at whatever level it needs to be.

Beginners work with a far different set of

exercises than the advanced level, but Pilates has also become a popular workout for professional and high-level athletes.

"You'd be hard-pressed to find a professional athlete that hasn't tried Pilates," Lohff explained. NBA great LeBron James does the exercise, but so does golfer Tiger Woods.

It's also popular among Olympians – gold medalists Kerri Walsh-Jennings (volleyball) and Missy Franklin (swimming) have tried it as well. Even gold-medal gymnast Simone Biles has tried Pilates – though, in her case, it's one of the few things she found difficult and won't be going back to.

As Lohff explains, once she got into Pilates, she discovered how much it toned the entire body – something that creator Joseph Pilates intended when he started the exercise practice during World War I while interned in a British camp.

Lohff prefers to teach – and exercise – using the Reformer, but Pilates can be performed on a mat as well. Mat work and early Reformer work both provide a base for those performing the exercises to move up to

more advanced moves.

Currently, Lohff offers only Reformer Pilates. With the Reformer – basically a platform with a sliding carriage allowing resistance exercises using loops and springs – beginners start out on their backs and engage their core while also working specific muscle groups.

Each workout at Lohff's studio is 50 minutes long. As people progress from the beginner levels into intermediate and advanced, workouts can go from one a week to two or perhaps even three – and exercises progress from not just on the back but in kneeling and standing positions as well.

Lohff is certified to teach Reformer 1 and 2, as well as pre-natal and post-natal Pilates. She also now owns a triangle wedge, which allows pregnant women to work in positions other than on their side once they are past 16 weeks in the pregnancy.

"I highly recommend Pilates if anyone is pregnant, as a way for preparing the body for childbirth," Lohff said. "But I also recommend it for post-natal recovery. Pilates is a game-changer."

As of opening week, she was staffing the studio with herself and one other employee but was still looking for at least one other instructor to potentially handle early morning classes.

As Lohff's career progressed from human resources to owning this studio, one important thing has remained constant.

"It's helping people," she said, adding that she also volunteers in the Whitewater community. "It's what's been consistent in



In February, Pilates Reformed owner Mariah Lohff celebrated the grand opening and ribbon cutting for her new business, at 131 W. Center in Whitewater. Behind her are the Reformer machines she uses in her studio.

SUBMITTED PHOTO Wonders of Walworth County

my career.

"It's just the next endeavor for me – how I give back. I'll never stop learning about how to be better at this," she said.

Classes and costs for Lohff's studio can be found at pilatesreformedww.com.

For more information, contact Lohff at 715-571-2202 or by email at pilatesreformedww@gmail.com.

She can also be found on Facebook and Instagram, under [pilatesreformedww](https://www.facebook.com/pilatesreformedww).



Ready for 'Adventure'

Members of the East Troy High School Drama Club presented the spring play, "Adventure" in late February. Patti Punzi directed the play, written by JD Atkins and produced through special arrangement with Heuer Publishing, LLC. It was performed on stage at the East Troy High School Theater, 3128 Graydon Ave.

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