



All-stars helping kids, B1

Walleye in Green Bay, B2



# PRICE COUNTY REVIEW

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2022

## Music in the Park changes hands

BY PRICE COUNTY REVIEW

PHILLIPS — For the fifth straight year the Music in the Park series at Elk Lake Park has served as a popular regional attraction for people to enjoy summer Thursday nights from June to August. Planning has already begun for the 2023 series, but with a shift in organization.

Strong Families Strong Kids of Price County created the summer event that would grow as it moved to the new Phillips Lions Club bandshell at Elk Lake Park. The organizing role will now fall to Music in the Park (MitP).

"Strong Families Strong Kids has a wider mission, while ours is more focused," said Julie Roidt Olson, an MitP board member. "Music in the Park's sole focus is providing an affordable, high-quality atmosphere filled with entertainment, food, etcetera, benefiting the entire population."

SEE MUSIC • PAGE A10

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## Couple makes mall their dream



TOM LAVENTURE / PCR

Wes and Stephanie Loften in front of the Park Mall building they purchased in February. Their goal is to make repairs and renovations to realize the overlooked potential of the 105-year-old mixed use commercial and residential property and make it the anchor piece of downtown Park Falls once again.

BY TOM LAVENTURE  
tlaventure@pricecountyreview.com

PARK FALLS — Wes and Stephanie Loften have been pursuing a new dream together since purchasing an anchor piece of downtown Park Falls in February. Their goal is to make repairs and renovations to realize the overlooked potential and while there is still time to preserve the 105-year-old mixed use commercial and residential property.

Built in 1917, the Park Mall at 177 W. Division St., has been home to retailers, arcades, professional and medical offices and apartment rentals. With each new owner or anchor tenant came temporary or permanent renovations to fit another purpose.

"There were three additions made onto the major part of the building," said Wes Loften. "So when they



TOM LAVENTURE / PCR

Park Mall owners Wes and Stephanie Loften in the dining room of the former Frontier Cafe that will soon be converted into retail space for Eric Zych to open EZ's Fish and Exotic Pets. The commercial kitchen area still available.

did those additions, they would work on one room and they would forget about a space. And then when they worked on another they kind of worked around that space."

The three-story building ended up with a row of original apartments in one building and a series of oddly shaped rooms, strange nooks and crannies, and all kinds

of electrical and plumbing above the lowered ceilings in another. Downstairs the several small businesses work within spaces built on what was once an open retail floor that will also be revisited at some point.

"We're just trying to get creative and how to utilize the spaces that are there," Wes said. "It's all brick, all around."

The brick shell and the thick wood flooring is what gives a wide open storage space on the third floor so much promise, he said. The space still contains old arcade items, film photo processing machines, an ice cream machine and related food items, and endless furniture. All of it is in varying conditions, mostly inoperable with missing components.

SEE MALL • PAGE A8

## Youngblood named Forest Supervisor for Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

BY PRICE COUNTY REVIEW

RHINELANDER — Jenn Youngblood was recently named the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Supervisor for the U.S. Forest Service, according to an Aug. 17, 2022 announcement from USDA Forest Service Eastern Regional Forester Gina Owens.

Youngblood starts work in her new position on Sept. 26, 2022. She replaces Paul Strong, who took a position as director of Environmental Planning and Stewardship in the Eastern Regional office.

"It's good to be able to stay

and serve my Wisconsin home, its residents, and the American public," Youngblood said. "I believe serving others and honoring the wisdom and words of my great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother to 'focus on providing humble service to others' and my goal is to do right by forest partners, forest employees, and the lands of Northern Wisconsin."

Prior to her selection as the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Youngblood served as the Chippewa Deputy Forest Supervisor. During her career with the USDA Forest

Service, Youngblood served as special assistant to the Regional Forester for Tribal Relations serving tribes, forest leadership, and supporting the eastern region field team.

Along with experience as acting Deputy Forest Supervisor on the Mark Twain National Forest and acting District Ranger on the Hiawatha National Forest, Youngblood brings more than 30 years of experience developing and managing programs ranging from diverse issues of importance to Tribal Nations, work in health care, and a variety of land management and environmental topics.

SEE YOUNGBLOOD • PAGE A8

## Former hospice worker publishes book on relationships

BY TOM LAVENTURE  
tlaventure@pricecountyreview.com

A former Butternut hospice worker and columnist said she spent three decades studying and writing on the complex layers and root systems that make up our relationships. She hopes the culmination of that experience will benefit others with her new book published in June, "Getting to the HEART of Relationships: The MAGIC of Relationships and Their Power to HEAL"

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» **YOUNGBLOOD**  
FROM PAGE A1

Youngblood has a degree in environmental science and a master's degree in adult education from Carroll University in Waukesha. She is also a

Registered Nurse. Before embarking on her federal career, Youngblood grew a consulting firm and attained a Doctor of Jurisprudence with an emphasis in natural resource law and federal Indian law. She also

served at the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management in Alaska. Youngblood enjoys spending time with her family. She loves working on her farm, in her garden, cooking, and raising critters. Youngblood

grew up on the Arizona/California border by the Colorado River Indian Tribes Reservation but has called Wisconsin home since 1995 and resides in Nashotah and in the Northwoods. She is a Badger/Packer/Brewer and Bucks fan and

a fan of all things Wisconsin. Youngblood believes in collaboration and sharing ideas with others to forge strong relationships and facilitate land management goals to sustain the Nation's forests and grasslands for future generations.

» **MALL**  
FROM PAGE A1

The space will probably be designed for a two-bedroom and studio apartments for first time renters, people who are just starting out, he said. There are currently three occupied units in the adjoining building that will eventually be renovated.

"There's a lot of unused space and that's what we want to convert into usable space," Wes said, adding that the basement might be converted into small storage and the main floor will remain commercial.

"Apartments are our main priority right now," Wes said.

The expansions and remodels made some of the rooms impractical for anything but storage, Wes said. One larger room in the center of the third floor has no windows and could not become an apartment unit. But one idea going forward is to install a glass ceiling and create an all seasons community space for the residents, he said.

Downstairs there are several long-term tenants who have kept the Park Mall alive during a time when the rest of the building was falling into disrepair. Stephanie operates Stephanie's This and That shop in the front of the mall. It means a lot to her to use the space because her mother used to work at the Tasty Treats store that occupied the same space.



Wes and Stephanie Loften in the third floor of the Park Mall they purchased this year in downtown Park Falls. Their goal is to convert the open space into apartment units.

There are also other businesses that help the couple to break even during this especially expensive first year of ownership. Heidi Becker runs Times to Treasure; Jenni Jones operates Tan Me; Juli Dul runs Northwoods Technologies and Gifts; Marka Feit operates Christian Missions; and the newest tenants are Nikki and Jessica Jaramillo who opened Hidden Escape, a recreational and education escape room in a former dance studio.

"Our current businesses in the mall have been awesome and supportive," Stephanie said.

The tenants are happy with the current arrangement but would certainly like to see some improvements, Wes said. Right now just one switch turns the downstairs lights on-and-off, which isn't really efficient when the shops are not all open at the same time.

"So little things like that need to be definitely fixed up," he said.

The largest space on the main floor has been vacant since the owner of the Frontier Cafe retired, Stephanie said. The space was renovated but nobody was looking to open a restaurant during the pandemic.

Fortunately, the couple have connected with Eric Zych, who will be leasing part of the space to open EZ's Fish and Exotic Pets. Zych will convert the dining room into the pet store, which leaves the commercial kitchen area still available to rent once the couple complete some remodeling.

Stephanie works part time with ACC Management Group, a Section 8 management company, and Wes also works full time with BW Paper-systems. With the three children now grown they wanted to start a sweat equity project that would generate revenue.

"I've always been good at building things and this is right up my alley," Wes said. "This is the biggest project I've taken on but it's been fun the whole way. There have been some hiccups but things that you expect with a 100-year-old building."

The couple had interest in another property that was sold before they put in an offer. When Stephanie suggested the Park Mall, Wes said it was during the walk through that he realized it was going to be a lot of work but that its potential made it attractive for the price.

The day after they purchased the building some upstairs radiators broke and they had a flood on the first floor.

The interior restoration will have a positive economic impact and address the rental property crunch

in the city, they said. The exterior renovation, with the help of the city Facade Program through the Northwest Regional Development Commission, will also have a positive aesthetic and social impact.

The couple plan to clean the dark brick and add raven colored trim to the upper floor windows that had been covered for decades until now. The plan is to restore the original look where possible with updates that make for a more efficient and functional building.

The purchase came through traditional financing and planning and resource help from Ken Pearson, a business development specialist and loan fund manager with the Northwest Regional Development Commission. The work on the building so far has been skilled labor provided by friends and relatives and often for soft drinks and pizza.

"We would like to really stress how much help our families have been and that's important to us," Stephanie said. "The local businesses have also been very supportive as well as the community."

The building isn't generating profits for the couple yet but they are confident that all of the hard work will pay off and more areas of the building are utilized.

"It's worth it," he said. "This is fun and everybody here appreciates what we do."

Stephanie remembers how the Park Mall was the center of downtown activity. Whenever there was a holiday or special event the merchants would have sales and attractions.

To try and restart that tradition the merchants are collaborating on a Mall Sale on Friday, Sept 16, through Sunday, Sept 18.

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