

She will be missed, but Kathy Potter says 'it's time'

And, she has so many plans for her retirement that don't require meeting a deadline

By JoDee Brooke

Kathy Potter's first "official" job in sales started around 43 years ago, give or take. And, this year, Kathy is retiring from each of the roles she's held through the years working in the news-

paper business. She remembered those early days and shared some of where her journey has taken her.

"Bruce Gasch, he owned Airport bar back then," recalled Kathy Potter. "I played softball on his soft-

ball team. They were having a fundraiser where they were selling ad spots on a poster. The money raised was used to maintain the ball field. Bruce asked me if I could sell some of those ad spots. I went out and sold

more ads than they'd ever sold before. Fast forward, an employee had left the Jackson County Shopper. Bruce also worked there. He called me and asked if I'd be interested. Kris Olson was the manager at the Jackson

County Shopper. She called me up and told me what the job involved. She asked me if I could type. Yeah, I could type, but I didn't tell her I'd gotten kicked out of typing class when I was in high school."

Kathy got the job. When she got to work the next day, she was handed a sales list of businesses she was to visit and sell ad space to. "I was supposed to go to Alma Center, Merrillan, Hixton and Black River Falls," shared Kathy. "I left that morning and headed to Merrillan and realized I had no idea where I was going. We didn't have cell phones back then, but my dad always told me to just keep driving and I'd end up somewhere I knew, so that's what I did. At the end of the day, I got back to the office and Kris said, 'Where have you been?' I got ads that day from businesses they'd never gotten ads from before."

Upon arriving at work on her second day, Kris handed Kathy an auction. "Go back on the 'comp' and type this," she told me. She came to the back that afternoon and asked what I was doing, I told her I was typing the auction she'd given me. 'You're still typing that,' she said to me. 'You can't type.' From then on I sold ads."

So it was, Kathy found herself selling advertising. "At my mom and dad's store, I had to work with people, so selling ads was easy," shared Kathy. "I had a history with people in town."

"Your job should not be No. 1 in your life, but your job should help you with the No. 1 thing in your life and that's family."

Kathy had worked at the Jackson County Shopper for eight years when she started thinking about heading down another path. It involved starting her own shopper newspaper.

"The first person I went to talk to was John Hagenbrock," Kathy remembered. "He owned John's IGA. He was my account. He did two center pages every week. I used to work for John's IGA. John was a good teacher; he was a good business man. He was fair to his employees, but he felt the need to teach them. I went to John and asked him what I should do. He told me, 'Start with everything you know. You start with a good publication. You know where you have to go. You have our ad. Go to the bank and talk to them.'

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JoDee Brooke/Banner Journal

This was a common sight for anyone passing by Kathy Potter's office on a typical day. She'd often be on the phone discussing one of her customer's ads. It didn't always look like this, though, and after 43 years in the newspaper industry, that included Kathy starting her own shopper, The Shopper's Choice, in 1985, she has lots of stories to share. News Publishing Company purchased The Shopper's Choice, Jackson County Shopper, Banner Journal and The Clark County Press in 1989. Kathy filled the role of manager, overseeing the publications' operations, for over 31 years. This Thursday is the last day she will have to worry about a deadline, unless, she wants to place an ad.

County continues to address ongoing need for adult protective services

By Joe Beck

Johnson County (JC) Board supervisors approved the hiring of a fulltime adult protective services (APS) worker at its Jan. 18 meeting. The APS division of JC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) oversees reports of abuse to at-risk adults who can range from 18 years on up. The 65 years and older population continues to grow, as will the number of people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

"We hired an LTE (limited-term employee) last August to help streamline APS," explained JC DHHS Aging and Disabilities manager Angie Schaffer. "That has made life easier on that side. We are seeing more social isolation, more people turning to substance abuse, and we do have more eyes through the home-delivered meal program."

DHHS APS has seen an increase in referrals and the complexity of those clients it is serving due to a growing aging population.

Locating placement for the referrals, assisting guardians and increasing collaboration with community and partners, meeting required court documentation and statutory deadlines for hearings has created the need for the additional APS social worker.

"There is a social worker at the hospital and things are tying together," explained Schaffer. "Social workers are able to spend more time with families. That is less cost to the county. With more people, we're able to catch more and there is more awareness. With the greater awareness, we are able to get them into treatment programs."

APS helps elder adults and at-risk adults who have been abused, neglected or exploited. Protective services or protective placement is most often coordinated through the local human services agency to assure someone will continue to get long-term care. "These costs are the responsibility of the county if people can't afford to pay for the services themselves," explained Schaffer.

The JC Executive and Finance Committee (EFC)

was presented a resolution for approval late last year that outlined a request to review funding for APS to ensure disabled and aging seniors unable to care themselves or diagnosed with long-term cognition issues have the services they need.

Some funding for the care of at-risk adults and the elderly is provided by the Wisconsin HHS. However, that funding amount has not changed since 2006. The number of people needing protection has. An average of \$97,463 was spent in JC between 2010-2011 and then increased to \$221,377 in 2019. State funds to offset these costs have been in the amount of \$27,981, which has not changed since 2006.

As the size and proportion of the U.S. population age 65 and older continues to increase, so, too, will the number of people affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. In Wisconsin, it is projected the number of people affected by dementia will go from 129,000 in 2020 to 184,000 in 2030. By 2040, it's projected that number will increase to 242,000.

It has become increasingly difficult to find locations for clients to be placed for long-term care. Facilities, such as nursing homes, assisted living or a community-based residential facility are unwilling to take anyone with cognitive issues who may also be acting out with behavior issues.

"We need to get more clients with cognition-dementia needs left waiting for a place to stay, as hospitals and other health care facilities are unable to safely care for elder adults in risk. In some instances, up to 40-plus facilities are needed to care for one person that they will not accept an elder at risk."

Schaffer explained to JC Board members the new social worker would be working to find placement for those APS serves and getting them the services they need. The referrals they require to get long-term care services. "These costs are the responsibility of the county if people can't afford to pay for the services themselves," explained Schaffer.

The Shopper's Choice came to be. The office, which was also home to the Copy Shop, was at 24 N. Water Street in Black River Falls.

Going back a bit, Kathy grew up in Black River Falls. She graduated from Black River Falls High School. Her parents owned Pearson's Hardware. "My mom and dad always had us doing odd jobs. They made us work, stacking shelves, fixing bikes; we were expected to work and to learn. I remember saying to my mom one day, 'Why

do I have to work all the time in the store?' I got to work with the toy inventory in the cement, you'd think I would hate that. But my mom stopped what she was doing that day, sat down on a chair and said, 'Kathy, you don't have to work in this store. When you are old enough, you can get a work permit and go work some place else.' When I turned 15 I got my work permit and went to work at the nursing home. I remember Jenny White. Her goal was to live to be 100. Well, she died when she was 101. Her secret to living a long life was drinking well water. So they told me, whatever I did, don't drink the water. Stop the drinking fountain, to get it from the other room. It was at the nursing home I learned kindness and just taking a minute with someone and being nice to them."

Once the decision was made to start the Shopper's Choice, it was time to put together a staff.

"I was working at The Bootery back then," shared Joy Peterson, ad rep for The Shopper and Banner Journal. "I had worked at the Jackson County Shopper for a little while, too, and when Kathy started the Shopper's Choice I got a lot of work with her."

"She wanted me to sell advertising," explained Joy. "I told her I don't do sales, but that first day, she sent me off on my route. That was 35 years ago, and I'm still in sales. I've been selling for Scholze's Hardware wasn't even in business then. I remember heading out with Kathy every week at 4 or 5 in the morning to take the Shopper pages to the printer; I think it was in Onalaska or La Crosse. We'd sometimes take the printer, bring them back to the office and then they were all bundled and hand-delivered by carriers. Now they're taken to the post office and mailed."

"Why have carriers? Because it worked," explained Kathy. "They did all the inserts and delivered the Shopper on each of the specific routes."

"Jeff and David (Schumacher) worked for me from the beginning. Their mom was a carrier, and she used to babysit for me and she would bring Jeff and David along. She made sure those kids worked. She'd make them come over and shovel the driveway for us when she was babysitting."

"We did the shopper routes," remembered David. "We started with the Shopper in '90 or '91. That was the first truck we had; it was a 1992."

David says they never missed a day. "Rain, snow or sleet," said Jeff; "we even drove on black ice. We never put the truck in the ditch once. After we didn't have to drive the pages to the printer, we had work with maintenance."

In the early days, Jeff and David would pick up the Shopper pages and the Banner pages, drive to Black Earth to the printer, and then bring them back to the office in Black River Falls. "We would usually leave around 4 in the afternoon," explained David. "We'd drive to Black Earth, wait for the plates to be made and then help bundle them up to bring back to Black River. But, eventually, they had us

helping with a little bit of everything. It'd be around 11 or 12 when we'd head back. We took The Shopper down on Mondays and the Banner on Tuesdays."

It was in 1989, News Publishing Company purchased the Shopper's Choice, the Jackson County Shopper, the Banner Journal and the Clark County Press. Eventually, they took over the Arrow and went to work at the Trempaleau County weeklies. At the time, Kathy was the manager overseeing day-to-day operations of those publications.

"When we originally purchased the paper that Kathy owned, she knew she just had the knowledge of advertising. She had every account wrapped into her head," shared News Publishing owner Mark Witte. "Dan and I always matched Kathy's advertising ideas. She came from the advertising world, but once she started working with the newspaper, she saw how important the newspaper was to our advertisers. If the industry changed, we changed with it. Yes, there were many changes in technology, but the biggest change is the people's names keep changing."

"This year marks the 34th year Theresa Rodenberg has worked as a graphic artist, beginning at the Jackson County Shopper and for the past several years at The Shopper's Choice. Journal/Clark County Press. Kathy and I was working at the Jackson County Shopper, the Shopper's Choice had just started," remembered Theresa. "That was the Shopper Kathy started, and they had us scared to death of Kathy; she was getting all the ads. But we soon found out how nice she actually was."

"I guess you could say I came with the purchase of the Jackson County Shopper," said Theresa. "I remember typing ad copy on a computer typewriter. We'd do it 9 to 5, and I would hope you were gone by 10 that night on deadline days. There really were no deadlines back then; we just kept taking ads."

Theresa remembers many of the former businesses for which she designed ads. There were three or four grocery stores and supper clubs, Pine's bowling.

She also remembers some controversial issues the Banner Journal addressed - opposition to the prison and to the big pig farms.

"I remember the brown wooden box. Kathy had made that we would put the pages in to take to the printer," shared Theresa. "I would say, though, in all those years, we never missed an issue. We always got it done, no matter what the weather was or if we had computer or printing issues; we never missed an issue."

"Of course, in this business, you get used to it, but you always have deadlines and when you got done, then you'd start all over again working on the next issue, said Kathy. "It was some time I was used to doing from the very beginning. I remember leaving Black River with the pages, going to Neillsville and pick up their pages and then we'd take it to Stevens Point. It

wasn't a technological process; you had to physically shoot each page with a camera."

"I remember one day, this office supply sales person stopped in and he told me he had this machine," recalled Kathy. "He called it a copy machine. Back then, whenever we needed a graphic for an ad, we'd have to go through 'the book' to figure out how to do it right. He showed me how he could take a picture, blow it up or shrink it down. We thought it was voodoo."

Julie Iverson started working with Kathy in 1984. "I was working at the Jackson County Shopper, and when Kathy made the decision to start her own shopper, she asked me to come with her," remembered Julie. That was 36 years ago. Julie came to work for Kathy at the Shopper's Choice as a graphic artist. Soon after, she took on billing. Kathy had a computer doing graphics. Through the years, as News Publishing acquired more newspapers, billing for the ads that appeared in each of those publications had to be done.

"Back in the day, billing was more complicated," explained Julie. "The Shopper would be 36 pages and it was all manual billing directly out of each paper and it was all done on a typewriter. I'd type out each invoice, make copies of each statement, fold them and put them in window envelopes. We really counted on the computer doing billing so I didn't have to type everything."

When computers became part of the day-to-day operations, it made production much easier. Not right away, though. "We'd gotten two computers," remembered Kathy. "That was when I started the Shopper's Choice, and we were working out of my basement. This guy was trying to sell me a computer, and he took me to the paper in Osseo to show me what it was. I could see the advantage to it, so we ordered one."

When they came, we set them up and we couldn't get them to print or save. I loaded them in my car and headed to Eau Claire to take them back. I called the guy from the Osseo paper and he told me to wait, not to take them back. I'll come and help you get them going. I brought it back, and he set it up and got it to work. We all hugged and jumped up and down. Remember that Julie?"

"And, we had a shopper to get out; John's IGA came to us, so did Burnstad's," shared Julie. "We had our tonsers relying on us getting that shopper out."

"All the information was stored on a floppy disk; there was no internal memory," said Julie.

"Now we could format the ads, print them out and paste them on the pages," said Kathy. "You didn't have to cut every single line. I remember one ad I did for The Inwood; the last part of a word in his ad had fallen off. The owner called me and said he'd never had so many people stop."

"I got in a 1992 left significant damage to the Water Street office, forcing them to relocate to a building at the corner of Main and Third Street. Eventually, News Publishing built a new office at 409 East Main

Street.

"We actually purchased land across the street from here," explained Julie, but she wouldn't get into details. "We had wetlands, so D&S sold us this land."

There have been changes in every aspect of the sales and newspaper industry. Change is a constant in the newspaper business.

"I used to drive to each business to get the ad copy," explained Joy. "Sometimes, we'd fax proofs to them. We used to fax a lot. Now, we just email the proofs. Almost everything is done through email."

"The business world itself has changed. It was a time when Main Street in Black River Falls had a number of jewelry stores, dress shops, shoe stores, dime stores and hardware stores. "There were so many more businesses - Harmony House of Fashion, Taylor and Jones, Club 95," shared Joy. "When I started the Shopper, it seems sometimes their business went away with them."

"As a graphic artist, we have access to more graphics today," said Theresa. "In those days, like for a car dealership, someone had to take a picture of every car that was in and, develop the film in to dark room here and then we had to reduce it on the copy machine and cut every one of them out. Some of the car ads had 40 cars in them. Computers changed all that. No more cutting and pasting either. That's why it took so long. I remember Joel Peterson; he worked here for a little bit selling ads. He'd come in, and he was so particular about his ads and would want changes made. He was hilarious, too, but it'd be 10 at night sometimes, and we just wanted to be done."

"We had deadlines, but never really abided by them," recalled Julie. "There'd be times we would still be working at 2 in the morning." Computer programs used by the company today have resulted in more efficient and better layout of each publication.

"The office was always kid- and pet-friendly," recalled Theresa. "Family was very important to Kathy, and that was important to us when our kids were little."

"My philosophy was to make it as easy as possible for people working here to do their job," explained Kathy. "Your job should not be No. 1 in your life, but your job should help you with the No. 1 in your life and that's family. I just wanted to help make it easier on the employees."

"I've always dealt with the most important things in their life or any problems that arise in their life." Jeff and David remember the truck breakdowns, the snow storms and the heater blowing quitting in the winter time, but they also remember the good times working for Kathy. "She was a very good boss," said David. She treated us like we were her kids."

"And, if she ever did get mad, it didn't take her long to get over it," shared Jeff. "We became good friends throughout the years," shared Joy. "She was always helpful and made it a fun place to work. My kids grew up here. I remember them taking naps on the shelves in

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Kathy Potter From Front Page

And, that's what she did. "I went to the Jackson County Bank and talked to Bill Meyer, and I told him what was going on; told them what I needed for equipment and that."

"From there, I went to Burnett County. I was doing odd jobs. They made us work, stacking shelves, fixing bikes; we were expected to work and to learn. I remember saying to my mom one day, 'Why

the back room. We weren't pushy sales people. We were friends with many of our customers. That's how Kathy was. We got to know those we didn't know, and they would want to do business with us."

"It's been wonderful," echoed Julie. "She leads by example. She would never ask you to do something she wouldn't do herself. She's very family oriented. She truly cares for each and every one of us. She will be missed."

Through her years in the newspaper business, Kathy met a lot of people. She learned about the many organizations that exist in her community whose purpose is to help others.

"One thing I didn't realize is that I would meet so many wonderful people being in this business," she explained. "This business lead me to the Chamber; it's where I met Tiny Gile. It got me involved in other things the community did, like saving the dam. Because of the newspaper, I got involved with people in government and in bringing the prison here. I was glad to be a part of it. It's led me to working with Friends Sharing Food, the hospital board. All the things I've become involved with is because of things I learned about working with the paper."

Kathy says she will continue to be available for any situation that may come up. "The newspaper and shopper are vital to our community. If anything comes up they need help with, I'll be here in a second – if I'm not traveling."

And, traveling is No. 1 on her list. "There's an awful lot of beauty in the U.S. Bill and I want to go to Utah, to get outdoors and hike up to a waterfall and see the beauty of the mountains. We live in Disco, and we have a lot of hills and ridges out there. We have trails that go all around, and we get on them and just get lost. Bill loves hunting. We like to fish. We have friends living in different places and we want to spend time with those friends. I will be gardening. I have a bunch of canning jars in the basement; maybe I'll do some more canning. If something comes up, I will decide if I want to get involved in it. Golfing, I'm not good, but I want to golf with my friends. I have my crafts, sewing, quilting and my photo albums. I'll fill my kids' house up with stuff."

"I still have the Print Shop. I will definitely stay in touch with everyone at the paper. You don't just walk away from something like that. I will always be there for everyone at the paper."