Suggested headline:

*Winter weather doesn’t mean fun has to stop*

**By Bill Barth and Stephanie Klett**

Beautiful lake. Forested, rolling hills. Impeccable green golf courses. Unparalleled hiking and biking trails.

Our region in southern Wisconsin around Lake Geneva has it all.

But, hey, it can get really cold outside. With snow piled up like sand dunes. What is there to do indoors, where it’s warm and cozy?

Lots. But let’s focus today on two relatively young businesses featuring fun and unique experiences.

Kurt Jennison is the owner of Lake Geneva Billiards. It’s located at 772 W. Main St. and is accessed by taking the stairs to the lower level from the Broad Street side of the building. (Not to worry, for those who may not be nimble with stairs; there’s an elevator in the building’s common area.)

Open just a few months, Lake Geneva Billiards is a classy spot, well designed and finished in what previously had been empty space. Currently there are three pool tables, a nifty long bar – beer and wine only – and room to spread out. Already, Kurt is considering ways to expand because demand has been strong even though he has not yet experienced the community’s busy summer season.

Initially, he was interested in opening a private club, but with encouragement from civic and business leaders the facility was opened to the public. Good choice. The place stays busy seven days a week (open Monday-Thursday 2-12 p.m., and Friday-Sunday noon to 2 a.m.).

“We want to expand,” Kurt told us. “And I have the ability to expand quickly,” looking at various opportunities ranging from additional space for pool tables, private coaching sessions, even a program he calls “Pool After School” for kids. He’s also looking to create private-room availability for rent to accommodate parties.

“I’m very happy with what we’ve created,” he said. “It’s done very well, being a brand-new business.”

Kurt is a busy guy, and it’s a family affair with his wife, Ali, deeply involved in planning and training staff. Both have full-time jobs away from the pool hall, along with side gigs. For example, Kurt for years was a professional motocross racer and now owns a promoting company that annually puts on one of the largest races in the country at the Lake County (Illinois) Fair. He’s worked in the bar business, operated a motorcycle dealership, even served as a life coach. Now he manages a sales team for a software operation.

“I’m a sales guy at the core of who I am. An entrepreneur,” he told us.

And they have four busy kids. Right now, though, he’s committed to making Lake Geneva Billiards a rousing success.

“This town needed this. You’ve got to have the right room to accommodate pool played at the level I want it to be played,” he said.

Kurt knows his business, having played and won in high-level competitions. Lake Geneva Billiards has league play three nights a week, sells quality pool cues and accessories, and offers a menu of tasty finger foods. Table reservations can be made and are recommended during busier hours.

Madelyna Kelly is the owner of LG Axe Throwing, at 253 Center St., with access behind the retail building adjacent to City Hall. It’s closed Monday and open Tuesday-Thursday from 4-8 p.m.; Friday, 4-10; Saturday, 1-11; and Sunday, 1-8. Beer, wine and soft drinks are available, along with an assortment of finger foods.

One might wonder: Is it safe to be in a place where people are chucking around sharp, scary looking axes?

Yes. Here’s why.

First, axe throwing takes place inside enclosed “lanes.” The thrower stands well back and tosses the axe at a wooden target. Lanes are limited to four people. And would-be throwers are assigned a “Coach Master” to make sure they’re doing it right, safely and to explain how the games work.

Bill tried it and not only survived, he’s still bragging about sticking the axe. So how did Madelyna come upon this unusual activity and decide to start a business?

“I’ve been to one (axe venue) in Milwaukee,” she told us. “I didn’t hit the board one time. But I thought it was cool.”

She had the idea – and a father who knows how to build stuff. She found the space, he did the build-out, and Lake Geneva got a place to throw axes. It opened just over a year ago.

Like Kurt at the pool hall, Madelyna has an entrepreneurial spirit. She stays busy with her other company, Knowledgeable Billing, which caters to mental health professionals with financial set-up and support. She has five active kids, so why start another venture?

First of all, she thought, it could be a place her kids could work. Also, she believed it could be good for her existing clients.

“I sent a message out to all my clients letting them know they and their teams could come here and throw axes,” Madelyna told us. “It’s a really good stress reliever.”

The latest addition is putting axe-throwing on wheels, with a trailer her team has taken to the Racine County Fair, Country Thunder, Christmas parties and more. If that sounds like fun for your backyard birthday party, you can call her and reserve.

Moral of the story: Stop looking out the window moping over the cold, snowy landscape. Grab a cue. Grab an axe. Grab a beer and a chicken wing.

Fun is an indoor activity, too.

*Bill Barth is the former Editor of the Beloit Daily News, and a member of the Wisconsin Newspaper Hall of Fame. His wife, Stephanie Klett, is the President and CEO of Visit Lake Geneva, and the former Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.*