



A few things you'll find in this month's newsletter

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From the Desk of the Executive Director: Jackson's Corner

Highlights

We just wrapped up the 2015 Annual Breakfast. Thank you for helping us make it an amazing one. We had 95 people buy or RSVP their tickets in advance and came very close to maxing out the 100 person maximum capacity of the Lunda Center room.

We were grateful to have the opportunity to share our successes and future goals as well as thank some special people. Sherri Swan was named the 2014 Volunteer of the Year. She donated 184 hours to keeping the center doors open last year and a countless others helping us organize events like PRIDE and the Gala. Sherri Swan accomplished this while going to school full time, working to build a small business and fulfilling her duties as a proud grandmother.



2015 Annual Breakfast

On the following pages you will read more about our Lifetime Achievement Award recipient and the new board members elected at the meeting. We are excited about the foundation we've built with your help and look forward to fulfilling more of our mission the coming year. Thank you for your continued support!

2014 Lifetime Achievement Award – Mary O’Sullivan

The culture we experience today is due to the work done by so many who came before us. This Lifetime Achievement Award affords us a special opportunity to acknowledge the work of one individual who has shown a lifetime commitment to this endeavor.

The committee chose Mary O’Sullivan as this year’s recipient. Wanting to reflect her tireless dedication to the LGBTQ community, we reached out to those closest to her to help us summarize the decades of commitment. Below is Mary’s story as told by those closest to her.

Mary O’Sullivan has been in the middle of what’s going on since her high school days at Our Lady of Good Counsel Academy, where she was an editor of the school paper, and helped a very butchy friend avoid modern dance class.

As an adult, Mary moved to La Crosse, where she and a few other women started a lesbian potluck group that met monthly for just over 30 years. Mary and friends started a chapter of the National Lesbian Feminist Organization and developed a newsletter for that group. The newsletter quickly became a source of communication for the wider lesbian community. It was later re-named the Leaping La Crosse News and was published until 2007. When Women’s Music exploded in the 70’s, Mary and some friends formed a production company called Out and About Women, which brought dozens of performances to La Crosse. Mary was a supporter of Tattoos, a feminist bar, and was often seen working the crowd with her little notebook of things to talk to people about for the newsletter or for Out and About. She also created community informally. One really popular event for a number of years was the tux party, which began as a birthday bash and evolved into a big fundraiser for Out and About Women’s productions.

Mary was an English instructor at Western Wisconsin Technical Institute. Among her feminist accomplishments there, she founded the Women’s Opportunity Center in 1978 and ran it for three years to get it on its feet. That Center helped many women develop the skills they needed for success at Western.

When a group came together in 2003 to discuss the possibility of founding a Center for the gay community, Mary was present from the first meeting. Mary and all of the original board members staffed the Center for the first couple of years. She produced the newsletter for the Center from 2004 through 2009. She created and maintained the first website for the Center in 2004 and maintained it until Vendi graciously offered to create a professional website and image for the Center. Mary was on the board for five years, serving as President for two. Though Mary has stepped down from the Board, she remains an active volunteer, most recently working with a friend on organizing the Center library.

Throughout Mary’s endeavors so far, there have been a couple of themes: Mary is passionate about making things better for our community; Mary could not have accomplished what she did without the support and participation of her great friends. They are too numerous to mention by name, and nothing could have been done without them. Thank you to Mary and thank you to her friends.



Introduction of New 2015 Board Members



Fai DeMark

Fai DeMark relocated to Viroqua by way of Occidental, CA in March 2013. She worked for E3 Coalition in Viroqua, an alternative energy business. While in California, she completed a Permaculture Design Certificate program (PDC) in Petaluma, CA, facilitated by Toby Hemenway, author of Gaia's Garden. She earned a BS degree in Education from UW-Milwaukee (1975) and has an AAS in Horticulture (1998).

Milwaukee was her home the previous 17 years. During that time, her work was principally with women and families experiencing homelessness. She was Executive Director of a domestic violence organization/shelter, ran a transitional housing program and 7 other programs for the YWCA, and was Director of Shelter Services for The Cathedral Center, where she was one of the co-founders.

Fai has served on a number of Milwaukee boards including Fondy Food Center, Unitarian Church North, and The Cathedral Center. She was a founding member of The Lesbian Fund, a sub-fund of The Women's Fund of Greater Milwaukee and on the Board of Diverse and Resilient.

Fai is currently the Executive Director of Bluff Country Family Resources (BCFR) in Hokah, MN, serving women and families experiencing domestic and/or sexual violence and homelessness.

Fai moved to La Crosse at the end of 2013 and lives with her partner, Melani Fay.



Janelle Cooper, MD

Dr. Janelle Cooper is a retired neurologist who specialized in dementia and Alzheimer's care. As a respected member of the medical community, she looks forward to helping us expand our Elder Network training and outreach. Dr. Cooper practiced in the Gundersen Health Care system and has already helped The Center make inroads into working with Gundersen to provide a comprehensive LGBTQ-friendly and welcoming Health and Human Services Directory. She is an expert marksman who provides firearm and marksmanship training and, in the process, has built relationships with law enforcement in a few Minnesota counties. Janelle's retirement sanctuary is as the owner of the certified organic apple orchard in Houston County with her dog Jackie.



Lynn Weiland

Lynn Weiland has been living in the La Crosse community for 17 years. She works at UW-La Crosse and is an Assistant Director in credit programming, teaches Understanding Human Differences to undergraduates, supervises student teachers and coordinates summer and winter intercession. Lynn and her partner, John, have two amazing children that support her passion of advocating for safe and secure environments for all, including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. While serving on the board, Weiland hopes to help educate the community about the Center, increase donors and support the celebration of equality and inclusion through the awareness of the Center's services and projects.

InQueery: Examining Your Relationship to Sugar

Health InQueery

How are those New Year's resolutions working out for you? Got off to a good start and then Super Bowl parties followed by the Valentine's Day sugar buzz have stopped you in your tracks? And now you are back to this same-old story:

- ✓ Sick of your jeans feeling too tight?
- ✓ Unable to control your eating, especially when it comes to sugar and refined carbs?
- ✓ Ready to let go of the bloated, puffy feeling that seems to follow you everywhere you go?
- ✓ At 3pm find yourself in an afternoon haze, unable to focus, get any energy, and wishing you could either take a nap or stuff your face with sugar and caffeine?
- ✓ After dinner continuing to open refrigerator and pantry doors, never feeling satisfied and continuing to eat until your head hits the pillow at night?

If you answered YES to one or more of the questions - It's never too late to RESET your life and make a resolution that sticks. But first you need to find out why this keeps happening. Join Carol Ebert RN, Wellness Specialist for an informal gathering to hear the facts about why you can't get off that sugar roller coaster and what steps will help you take back the control you want over what you are eating and how you are feeling. She will show you how it is possible to:

- ✓ Stop those continuous carb cravings
- ✓ Detox your body from all that sugar
- ✓ Boost your mood
- ✓ Increase your energy level
- ✓ Improve your sleep
- ✓ Clear that mental fog
- ✓ And release fat!

This InQueery session is FREE, just RSVP to reserve your spot by 2/20 by emailing info@7RiversLGBTQ.org

Where: The Center

When: 2/28/15 at 9:30am



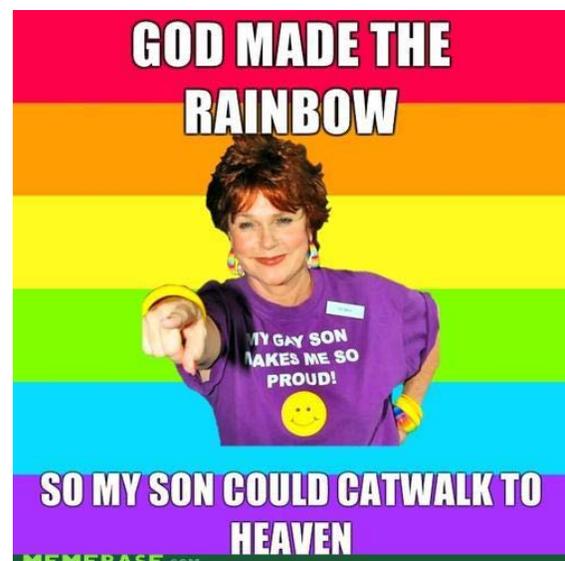
Carol Ebert, RN and Wellness Specialist

PANDA

Change Announcement

We continue to change and adapt to the needs of the PANDA participants. Until further notice, PANDA will be meeting virtually and setting physical meeting times as participants of the group require a meeting.

If you are a parent or ally interested in joining this group, please contact Niki Pohnl at PANDA@7RiversLGBTQ.org. We have a secret Facebook group for participants of this group. It can't be found in a search or seen on your wall, so just ask Niki to invite you to the group too if you are a Facebook user.



Regularly Scheduled Groups

Support

AA (Closed Group Style)
Every Tuesday at 6:00pm

Andromeda (Ages 18-25)
Every Thursday at 4:30pm

Galaxy (Ages 13-20)
Every Thursday from 6-8pm

Transgender Support
2nd and 4th Saturdays at 12:00pm

PANDA – (Parents and Allies)
1st Monday of the month 6–8pm

EmbrACE – (Asexual)
2nd Monday of the month 6–8pm

Social / Drop-in

Meditation Group
On Hiatus for February

Gay Friendly Professional Network (GFPN) - 3rd Wednesday in February from 5-7pm at the Pump House Regional Arts Center.

GFPN space before a gathering



Special Opportunities

Around town

Feminism on Tap – La Crosse*
Topic: VDay (Options Clinic Hosts)
Location: JavaVino
2311 State Road, La Crosse
2/4/2015 at 5:00pm

The Remedy Event*
Location: Boot Hill Pub
1501 Saint Andrews St, La Crosse
1/25/15 5:00 – 11:00 pm
Tickets \$20 in Advance or \$25 @ Door
(See Page 6 for more information)

InQueery: Examining Your Relationship to Sugar
Location: The Center, 230 6th St S
2/28/15 9:30-11:30am
FREE - RSVP to reserve a spot and give questions you'd like addressed:
ExecutiveDirector@7riverslgbtq.org

Dance for Hope *
Saturday, March 28th
1:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Radisson Ballroom at the Radisson Hotel in downtown La Crosse
A FREE public awareness event by the La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative
(See page 7 for more information)

Short Road Trip:

Laverne Cox
Location: (MSU-Mankato)
Wednesday February 18 7:00pm

*Event not produced by The Center

Red Ribbon Remedy Event

By: Travis Pyka

The Remedy began as a way for me to help a friend who is living with HIV. He had recently lost medical coverage for his daily HIV medication, and his co-pay went from \$15 to \$500 a month. I could not believe the financial burden that it would take for my friend just to stay alive and healthy. I began to think that if this happened to him, there must be others, and that is how The Remedy was born.

In 2012 there was a 19% increase in HIV infections in Wisconsin, so I knew there was work to be done. The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin was key to providing me with the information that I needed to begin my philanthropic journey to help people living with HIV live longer, healthier lives.

Here we are, three years later, and The Mayor of La Crosse Tim Kabat, Mayor of Onalaska Joe Chilsen, and the CityMayor? of La Crescent Mike Poellinger have declared the fourth Wednesday of February as HIV/AIDS Awareness Day in La Crosse, WI. Gatherings, the event company that I work for, has embraced the vision of ARCW:

**The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin
envisions a world without AIDS and
strives to assure that everyone with HIV
disease will live a long and healthy life.**

We continue to support the work that they do through events and fundraising.

The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin is home to the ARCW Medical Center—Wisconsin's largest and fastest growing HIV health care system. Through its integrated medical, dental and mental health clinics along with its pharmacy and dedicated social services that include food pantries, a legal program, and social work case management, more than 3,300 HIV patients in Wisconsin gain the health care and social services they need for long-term survival with HIV disease from ARCW. For more information please visit www.arcw.org.



Dance for HOPE

By Suicide Prevention Initiative

The La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative is planning a Dance for HOPE on Saturday, March 28th, 2015 from 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. at the Radisson Ballroom at the Radisson Hotel in downtown La Crosse, located at 200 2nd St. North. We invite all members of our community to attend this event and help us promote awareness about suicide prevention, education and hope in our community. This event is FREE and open to the public and is designed to bring people and resources together in a fun and entertaining environment.

Our schedule for the day includes dance groups providing entertainment as well as local dance instructors teaching several fun and easy dances, giving everyone the opportunity to get up and participate. In addition to entertainment by local dance groups and dance activities, our featured guest will be our current Miss Wisconsin 2014 Raeanna Johnson! People of all ages are welcome. We will be holding a raffle and will offer exciting door prizes throughout the event. Attendees can be entertained and/or participate in dance activities. There will also be display tables by area resources and agencies, providing information to the public about the many valuable resources in our community.

Donations will be accepted at the door. All proceeds will go directly to the La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative to strengthen our efforts to reach members of our community as we educate, offer hope and strive to save lives! For more information please contact Tim at (608) 386-8902. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Members of the La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative

Our Mission Statement:

La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative is committed to promoting awareness that suicide is a public health problem that is preventable.

Our Goals:

1. To educate:

Educate the community that suicide is a preventable public health problem. We are able to educate through public awareness events, maintaining our website and providing written information at educational events

2. To advocate:

We support current efforts to create and establish legislation for mental health insurance parity and suicide prevention.

If you are in crisis and need immediate help, please call 911.

Website: <http://www.lacrossesuicideprevention.org/>

The event:

Dance for HOPE

Saturday, March 28th

1:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Radisson Ballroom at the Radisson Hotel in downtown La Crosse

A FREE public awareness event by the La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative

GOOD CREDIT IS IMPORTANT

By Christina Mae Olson, CFP®

Your credit report and credit score matter. Your credit report is a detailed analysis of your credit history. You are awarded a score based on your history. Scores range from 300 to 850. A good score is generally something over 720 points. A good credit report will save you money. Insurance companies check your credit report before selling you a policy. They will give you the best rates if you have a clean credit history. You won't even qualify for some insurance products with a bad credit report. Cell phone companies check your credit report and often require a deposit before signing a contract. Many employers check your credit report before hiring you. Employers maintain that employees with a low credit score or bad credit have high absenteeism rates and poor performance reviews. A credit check is a good way to screen potential applicants. Some colleges and universities run a credit report on their graduate school applicants and will screen out students with a low score. Banks, credit card and loan companies use credit reports as part of their approval process. A high credit score means the lowest interest rate on your student loan, mortgage, car loan or credit card. Some loans are exclusively underwritten off of an applicant's credit check. They don't even want to know about your job history or income if you have a low credit score.



HOW CAN YOU GET & MAINTAIN A GOOD CREDIT REPORT?

1. A long credit history. Start small and start young. There are options if you can't get a conventional credit card:
 - Ask your bank or credit union for a *secured card*.
 - Apply for a gas card. Gas cards are pretty easy to obtain without a long credit history.
 - Paying a cell phone bill or utility bill on time is a good way to build a credit history.
 - Apply for one department store credit card. These are often the first credit cards issued to a young person.
2. Pay your bills on time and every time. Pay your credit card balance in full each month. Don't charge on credit more than you can pay off at the end of each month. If you can't afford to do this then you absolutely can't afford to make the purchase in the first place.
3. Watch your credit limit. Your credit limit is a big part of a good credit rating. Lenders are quick to issue you credit once you have a long enough history, but be careful that you don't apply for too many credit cards. You should have just two cards and you should keep these for a long time. If you think you absolutely need more cards, then get a debit card from your bank or credit union. Each card has a credit limit, and it's the *total* limit of all cards *combined* that influences your credit rating. **Use no more than 30% of your total credit limit.** Anything higher will bring down your credit rating. If the credit card company "rewards" you by raising your limit – call them and insist that they lower it!

4. Be careful not to have too many department store credit cards. The limits add up and can bring down your credit rating. Resist the temptation to take out a new card just to get a discount on that particular purchase.
5. Be careful not to close accounts and transfer balances to a new card. This seems like it's smart but what it does is put you close to your credit limit on that card, and it will bring down your credit score.
6. Close down credit arrangements you've had for one-time purchases like furniture, cars and home remodeling projects. The credit line may still be "active" long after you have paid off the balance if you don't actually contact the company and close the account.

What about my partner's bad credit? Are you contemplating marriage and worried that your future spouse's nasty bad credit history will ruin you? **NO! IT WILL NOT HURT YOU!** This is a myth. A credit history is tied to only one person and is generated off of your Social Security number. If you change your name when you get married then you will have a new alias attached to your unique credit report. The only time a spouse's bad credit might hurt you is if you apply for credit together. His/her lower score could lower your ability to get the best rate on a loan. On the other hand, your good credit might be just what it takes to qualify for the best rate on a mortgage for that house you have been dreaming of!

Check your credit report regularly. You can do this for free at www.annualcreditreport.com. The law requires each of the three credit bureaus (Experian, TransUnion and Equifax) to provide you with one report annually. Check a different one every four months and you'll have a good idea of how you stand. Look for open and closed accounts, accurate address and name information and properly reported bill payment information. Follow their instructions to correct it if you find something wrong. Checking your credit report regularly will help you identify fraud and theft. Credit Karma (www.creditkarma.com) is a free web site (there are some ads) and provides good information on your credit standing. They even give you your credit score. Credit Karma offers tips and information on how to develop a better rating and a higher score and will even warn you if something suspicious has happened to your rating.

Paying attention to your credit history will help you!

Chris Olson is a Certified Financial Planner™ with a fee-only practice. Her credit score was 829 when she wrote this article. You can reach her at CMoney@centurytel.net or 608-525-9818 with questions or suggestions about articles for future issues of the newsletter.





Meet Alesha

What is your position on the board? How long have you been involved with The Center?

I am honored to have just been voted in as Vice President and can't wait to get started with our new Executive Committee! I started volunteering at The Center and co-facilitating GALAXY (youth group for 13-20 year olds) at the beginning of 2013, took over as Chair of the Outreach & Events Committee later that year, and I was elected to the Board of Directors in January of 2014.

Why did you get involved and join The Center?

Equality (equal·i·ty)

noun \i-'kwā-lə-tē\ : the quality or state of being equal : the quality or state of having the same rights, social status, etc.

I feel very strongly about our responsibility to improve life not just for ourselves, but for humanity as a whole. I am dedicated to making this world a better place for my children (and those I work with). I feel education is key; it is imperative that we teach compassion, tolerance and basic humanitarian beliefs.

How has The Center and your involvement affected you?

I have always been very dedicated to social justice, human rights, and equality, but The Center brings this to the forefront of each day.

I'm so proud that the past two years have really been a turning point for a lot of LGBTQ+ visibility and issues. We can get married in more states than not. There are new laws being put into place all the time, protecting our jobs and safety. We have access to better health care. Anti-bullying efforts have increased tenfold. We even have openly LGBT politicians.

But, while these amazing things are happening, there is still so much work to be done! We can't become complacent and must make new strides each day.

What is your vision for The Center and the LGBTQ+ community?

The Center has really gone through some major changes in the last few years, and I think we are headed down the right path; our new space is really functional, we now have Jackson as a full-time Executive Director, and we are adding new programming elements. I want to make sure we continue to partner with more like-minded businesses and individuals.

Anything else you would like to share?

I just want to express my sincerest appreciation for the people I work with. I feel honored to spend so much time around such amazing individuals.

Will You Support our Work?

Ways You Can Help

Individual Donations-

If you haven't already, please consider becoming a **SPONSOR** or **Donor**! Your yearly financial support is critical to our success.

<http://7riverslgbtq.org/get-involved/individual-memberships/>

Or, make a **one-time** or **monthly donation** in any amount here:

<http://7riverslgbtq.org/get-involved/give-gift/donate-amount/>

Business Sponsorship or Donations-

Do you own or know a business who wants to support our work?

Businesses can support our work, become a larger event sponsor and enjoy additional visibility in the process. More information can be found on our Supporting Business Member page:

<http://7riverslgbtq.org/get-involved/supporting-business-member/>

Shop with our Business Partners-

Please vote with your dollars and support our business partners when possible. You can let them know their support is valued by letting them know you found them in our directory. Visit our Business Directory online to find the most current and complete list of supporters. We add new ones all the time! <http://7riverslgbtq.org/directory/business-directory/>

Volunteer!

Many of the services The Center provides are made possible through the generosity of individuals. There are a variety of ways to get involved either through donating time, skills or financial resources.

If you would like to learn more about opportunities visit our **Get Involved** page at

<http://7riverslgbtq.org/get-involved/>. If you have specific ideas on how you'd like to get involved, email Jackson directly at ExecutiveDirector@7RiversLGBTQ.org.

Spread the Word by Wearing Center Logo Gear!

We have all kinds of shirts, hoodies, bags and other cool stuff at our online store. You can check out the new store on Café Press by going to this web address: <http://7riversLGBTQ.org/store/>.

Thank You

We, like many regional and metropolitan LGBTQ Centers across the country have a huge mountain to climb. National trends are such that when individuals make charitable gifts, 95% of the time they only give to large national organizations with great marketing department budgets. Rarely (or never in our case) do any of those dollars make it back to local communities or centers for support and grass root efforts.

It takes a great many small donations and a yearly commitment to help us meet our budget goals and to increase our advocacy and outreach ability.

We sincerely mean it when we say, "Thank you, we could not do this without you!"

Subhead for newsletter



We are here if you need us!



"You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you." - John Bunyan



7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection

together.

