

FAREWELL TO A HERO

Retired Elm Grove officer Krahn passes away at 57; honored for heroism following efforts in 2009 rescue

By Brian Huber
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ELM GROVE — Elm Grove Police Officer John Krahn was hailed far and wide as a hero for his actions in rescuing two people stuck in a vehicle as a train approached in 2009. But relatively few knew of the difficulties he endured for the next 15 years after sacrificing his body and his career to save their lives that day.

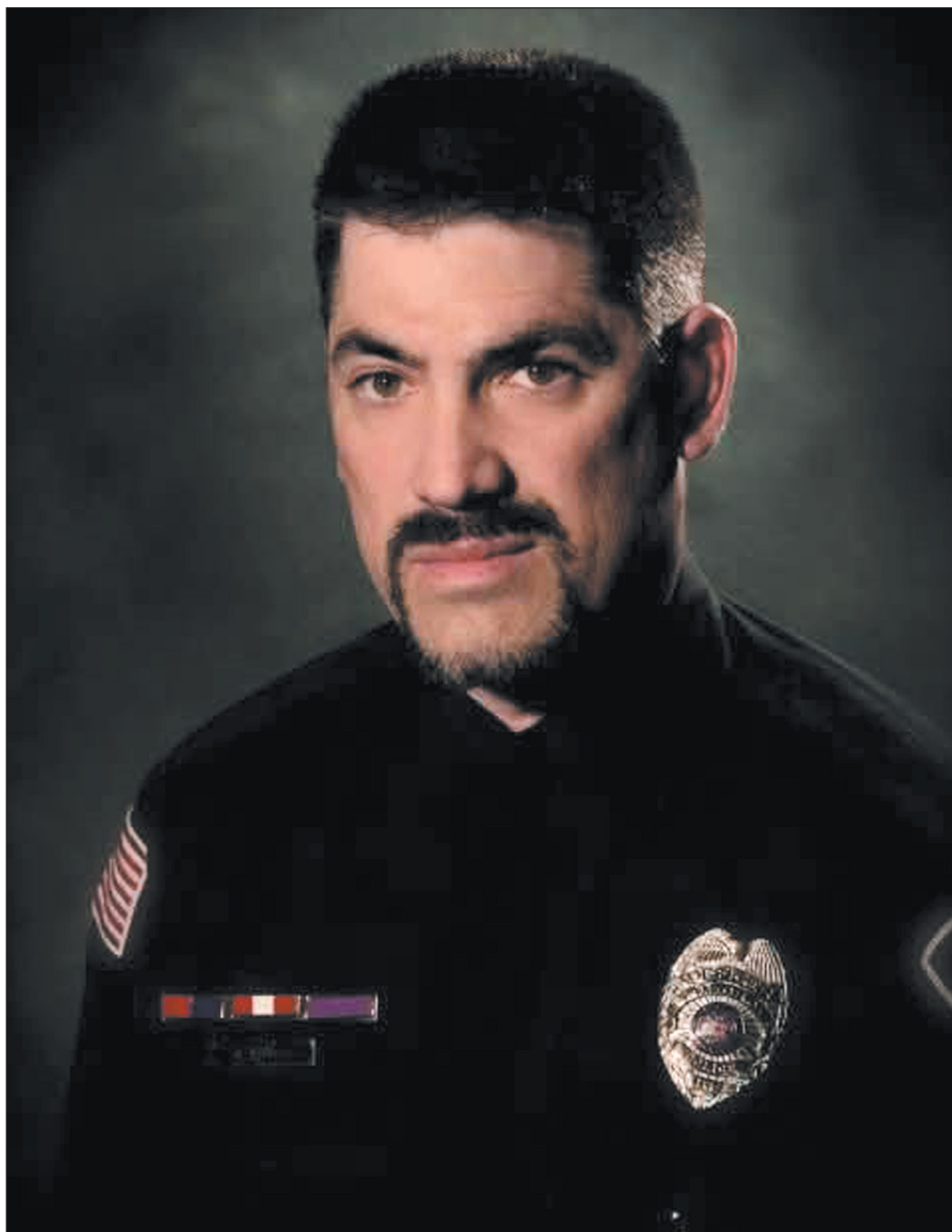
Krahn died Dec. 17 at age 57, succumbing to complications his wife, Cyndi, said were tied to the multiple surgeries he endured over the past decade and a half.

“John served with honor and distinction for 19 years, upholding the values of integrity, service and protection within our community. Throughout his career, John made a lasting impact on the lives of those he served and the students he taught in the DARE program, always going above and beyond to make our community a safer place,” the Elm Grove Police Department said in announcing his passing on its Facebook page. “He was not just a colleague, but a friend to all who knew him, and his loss will be felt deeply by the entire department and community. Our thoughts are with his family, friends, and loved ones during this incredibly difficult time.”

Krahn’s life changed profoundly May 25, 2009, when he came to the aid of Monica Partenfeller, who was driving to the Elm Grove Memorial Day Parade when her minivan became stuck on railroad tracks with a train approaching. Her husband, Scott Partenfeller, and Krahn worked to free the Partenfellers’ 2-year-old son, who was stuck in a car seat. Scott Partenfeller and Krahn were hit and injured by the 94-car freight train. The toddler was unharmed.

But Krahn suffered significant injuries that necessitated over 20 surgeries in the following years.

See **KRAHN**, PAGE 3



Submitted photo

Retired Elm Grove Police Officer John Krahn passed away Dec. 17 at age 57. Krahn was honored for his heroism following his rescue of a mother and her child who were headed to the village’s Memorial Day Parade in 2009 when their car got stuck on railroad tracks as a train approached. Krahn suffered significant injuries in the episode.

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Brookfield knife sharpener selected to visit world’s oldest knifemaking factory in Japan

By Karen Pilarski
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BROOKFIELD — A Brookfield-based entrepreneur and knife sharpener was selected as one of 12 people to visit Kikuichi Cutlery, based in Nara, the world’s oldest knifemaking factory in Japan. Alena Joling has been sharpening knives for 15 years and opened Moleta: Artisanal Sharpening in Brookfield in 2018.

Kikuichi Cutlery was founded in 1267 by swordsmiths for Japan’s famous warrior monks. Kikuichi continues to be a family-owned business.

“They are the ones who made samurai swords for the emperor. That is how they started. To this day all the knives have this floral symbol or stamp. That was the emperor’s stamp of approval on their blades. Unlike most knife companies, they still hand forge everything,” she said.

Joling will get to go in the forge and make a knife in the style she chooses. In addition, she will learn how the Japanese company sharpens knives, which is very different than anything Joling has done before. Kikuichi sharpens knives before the handle goes on. The blade is bolted to a board and is moved back and forth.

Joling explained that she sharpens knives on a small, 1-inch by 30-inch belt sander which is unusual as a wider belt is generally preferred. At Moleta, they use the soft part of the belt which doesn’t take off as much steel and the final product is smoother and lasts longer.

Joling became acquainted with Kikuichi through trade shows and spoke to Harry Rosenblum, who is the Kikuichi representative in the United States.

“He (Rosenblum) was pretty impressed with how we do things at Moleta and how particular we are. Turns out I got the invite and I’m one of 12 people. I could hardly believe it was real,” Joling said.

Joling is traveling with her good friend and photographer Robert Remme. They leave in late January and return home in early February. Joling has been studying the language and immersing herself in learning about the culture.

Part of the visit to the knifemaking factory is the opportunity to make a knife.

“I’ve never done that before. My first teachers will be the folks at Kikuichi. They are considered national treasures of Japan,” she said.

Brookfield and beyond

Joling grew up on a farm in Mondovi, and did construction to get through college.

The farm was far away from a grocery store and money was tight. She said they were self-subsistence farmers and would milk their own cows, butchered their own animals, took care of a garden.

Her upbringing also taught her the importance of taking care of equipment and not simply throwing things away.

“We had a close relationship to food and the land. If you need something, you make it. If a tool breaks, you repair it,” she said.

Joling launched Moleta due to not agreeing with the business model of others in the industry. She found their philosophy to be that the customer doesn’t know any better or doesn’t care about the quality of the sharpening.

“I launched Moleta because I wanted to see a much higher quality of sharpening out there and the customer response has been amazing,” Joling said.

Kikuichi Knives at Better Knife and Kitchen Store. Moleta: Artisanal Sharpening, is located in the store. Alena Joling was selected as one of 12 people to visit Kikuichi Cutlery, based in Nara, the world’s oldest knifemaking factory in Japan.

Courtesy of Robert Remme



Courtesy of Robert Remme

Alena Joling holds a Kikuichi knife at Better Knife and Kitchen Store in Brookfield. Joling has been sharpening knives for 15 years and opened Moleta: Artisanal Sharpening, 17000 W. Capitol Drive in Brookfield, inside Better Knife and Kitchen Store. She was selected as one of 12 people to visit Kikuichi Cutlery, based in Nara, the world’s oldest knifemaking factory in Japan.

The business is located in the lower level of Better Knife & Kitchen Store, 17000 W. Capitol Drive. Joling co-owns the store with business partner Michelle Dietz; her store is Wisconsin Cutlery and Kitchen Supply in Madison.

Joling has one more project she is helping with which is a rentable commercial kitchen, which she said can be hard for people to find in order to break into retail. Jenny Lee, founder of Kiuda MKE, has plans to go into a space in the building.

The entrepreneur also opened Farmer’s Market TO GO in November, which is a retail grocery and convenience store by and for Wisconsin growers and food producers.

“I know my farmers market family’s income in the winter just plummets. I saw this space that has a built-in walk-in cooler and started contacting my farmers market friends. I don’t take a profit from anyone there. It really is just a heart project,” Joling said.

The appeal is to make local food more accessible to the community year-round and it helps the farmers and food producers in Milwaukee and beyond.

“So far the goal has been coming to fruition,” she said.



Courtesy of Robert Remme

Alena Joling inside her sharpening room at Moleta. The knife sharpening business is located inside Better Knife and Kitchen Store, 17000 W. Capitol Drive in Brookfield. Joling was selected as one of 12 people to visit Kikuichi Cutlery, based in Nara, the world’s oldest knifemaking factory in Japan.

Callisters Christmas founding sisters announce retirement Master Z’s to take over Brookfield store

By Karen Pilarski
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BROOKFIELD — After 33 years of helping customers make Christmas memories, the founding sisters of Callisters Christmas — Melanie Jensen, Sandy Kalczynski and Michele Zelenak — retired Dec. 28.

The sisters handed over the reins of the business to the retail team at Master Z’s.

“They share our passion for creating magical Christmas experiences and have already expanded the company to bring its unique charm to even more people. We are confident that

under their leadership, Callisters Christmas will continue to shine brightly for many years to come,” according to a Callisters Christmas Facebook post.

Melanie Jensen remembered when they were located in the Brookfield Fashion Center, 16900 W. Bluemound Road, and had to find another location. They ended up temporarily leasing the former space for Laacke & Joys, 19233 W. Bluemound Road.

This year they tried to figure out how they could stay permanently in that location and Master Z’s ended up buying the business.

“We (the sisters) are all in our

60s. I have children who wouldn’t take over. Master Z’s, we all got along, and they see the vision we have and it’s working,” Jensen said.

The sisters hope the business grows in its location and that employees will stay on. Many of them have worked together for over 20 years. Jensen’s hope is to stay on as a part-time employee.

They started the business in 1991 with only 600 ornaments and now they offer 6,000 ornaments. Jensen said Bronner’s Christmas Wonderland in Michigan, a Christmas store, inspired them to open their own store.

“We all love Christmas and it

was something we always wanted to do,” she said.

At first it was challenging as there wasn’t a ton of stuff out there and they would find flat wood ornaments, mostly Disney or golf related.

“The industry has grown so much. We jumped into the industry when it was young and had great potential. I wish I was 45. I would love to ride this ride for another 20 years because it is an excellent place to be,” Jensen said.

Callisters offers an online store which will continue, but the pop-up stores will not. The personalization of ornaments customers love will continue.

“Nothing is going to change except who the main owners are,” Jensen said.

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‘His whole mission in life was to try to help people’

Krahn
From Page 1

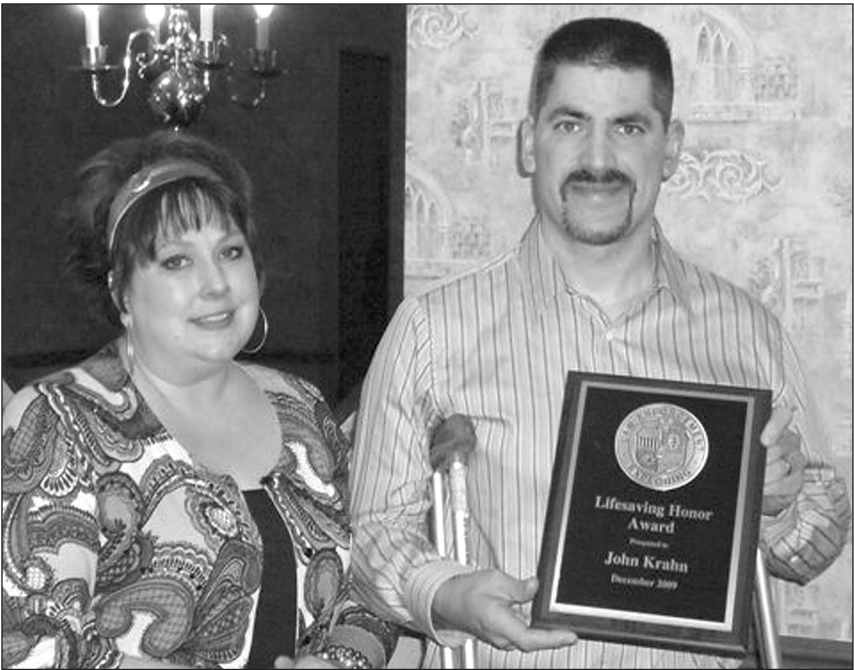
He tried to return to work, but retired in 2011 after 19 years with the Elm Grove Police Department, Cyndi Krahn said. He was a field training officer, a DARE instructor for children, and also was the EGPD’s defense and arrest tactics instructor, a gang crime liaison officer and a vehicle contacts instructor. He was a member of the Wisconsin Narcotics Officers Association, having done undercover work for two years with other agencies prior to joining the EGPD after growing up in Muskego. “Every person that knows John said he was born to be a cop. His father was the chief of police for Hales Corners. His brother is a firefighter in Arizona,” Cyndi Krahn said. “John, all he ever talked about was wanting to help people. He went into that field because he thought he could help people and he could make a difference.”

Cyndi Krahn said that about eight months after the accident, when John Krahn was using a wheelchair, they’d gone to a movie. Cyndi Krahn said there was a woman in front of him who had a medical emergency of some kind, and “he crawled out of his wheelchair on the ground in the snow to help her until the paramedics got there. That’s the kind of person he was. His whole mission in life was to try to help people.”

After the accident, Krahn was featured in “The Book of Man” by William Bennett. He was honored with a number of awards, including the EGPD’s Medal of Valor, Lifesaving and Purple Heart awards, the National Law Enforcement Award, the Top Cop Award — both national honors — and the international Carnegie Hero Award, given to those who risk harm to themselves in attempts to save others. “He was proud he got them but he always said, ‘Cyndi I am getting an award but why? It was the right thing to do.’ I can say this 100%: With the hell he went through for 15 years he’d never complain and say, ‘There is somebody worse than me,’” Cyndi Krahn said.

The Krahns were married for seven months at the time he was injured. Since then, he endured more than 20 surgeries and spent months in various hospitals recovering, coping with excruciating pain and PTSD, she said. She said Krahn died after experiencing multiple organ failure, and had two battles with sepsis and fought MRSA, all of it coming after infections he got following surgeries after the accident.

“I can tell you he suffered tremendously. ... He lived a tormented life



Freeman file photo

Cyndi Krahn, left, stands with her husband, John, after he was honored by the Boy Scouts Potawatomi Area Council with the Boy Scouts of America Heroism Award in 2010. That was about 10 months after Krahn sustained serious injuries while working as an Elm Grove Police officer who rescued a woman and her child when their car got stuck on railroad tracks as they were going to the Memorial Day Parade in May 2009. John Krahn died Dec. 17.



Freeman file photo

John Krahn, right, is congratulated by Doug Chambers, director of external affairs for the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission, after receiving the Carnegie Medal for Heroism at Elm Grove Village Hall on Feb. 17, 2011.

with very bad pain, emotional and physical,” Cyndi Krahn said. “I don’t think people realize the struggle. I think people thought probably he was semi-well. It has been an incredible

struggle since the accident. He struggled every day of his life for 15 years.”

Krahn, due to leg and arm injuries, gave up driving as well as other pursuits he loved, such as metal detecting, karate, and playing bagpipes, not to mention canceling plans for vacations and dates when he thought he could do them but found he just wasn’t up to it. His world got “so small,” with depression, pain and PTSD, yet through it all, Krahn continued to do what he could to help other officers dealing with PTSD, his wife said.

“There are police officers saying, ‘I go to work and I think of John and it makes me a better cop because I want to emulate him.’ He had the respect of police, had respect of his friends and was an incredibly kind man who would give his shirt off his back to anybody in need,” Cyndi Krahn said. “A lot of people really have used the word and it is true and I say it too — there was some good times I am not going to say all bad for 15 years — but it was a tortured existence. That’s why as horrible as this is, he is free. He is free now.”

Krahn is survived by his wife, Cyndi; his daughter, Kaitlyn Krahn; his parents, Michael and Patricia Krahn; brother Daniel (Cathy) Krahn; and other relatives and friends. A celebration of life is being planned for later this winter.

DNR invites clubs to hold free fishing weekend clinics

MADISON — The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is inviting clubs and other organizations across the state to host a free fishing weekend clinic during the upcoming Winter Free Fishing Weekend, Jan. 18-19.

During Free Fishing Weekend, state residents and non-residents are able to fish most of Wisconsin’s waters without a license for trout or salmon, according to a news release.

“Anglers ages 15 and under may fish without a license any day of the year,” the release said. “Therefore, organizers are encouraged to also welcome adults new to ice fishing.”

To hold a clinic during the weekend, clubs and organizations can register and request materials online by Jan. 8 at tinyurl.com/mr3fz3mb (registration) and tinyurl.com/3ezeettc (materials request).

“Clinic plans should include anglers with limited mobility,” the release said. “Many state properties and community partners have accommodations or equipment to make the outdoors accessible for all.”

To learn more about available accommodations at DNR properties, visit tinyurl.com/bdeww4mv.

“Clinic hosts are advised to consult the trout regulations when planning clinics and outings to ensure that the body of water is open to fishing,” the release said. “While most trout streams are open during the catch-and-release season on Free Fishing Weekend, there are trout streams, spring ponds and lakes that are closed to fishing.”

To see which waters are open to fishing, visit tinyurl.com/yxeu24bd.

The DNR also reminds anglers that “no ice is safe ice.” According to the release, a strong ice safety message is recommended to be included at every clinic held during the weekend.

Discount Tire opens in Brookfield

BROOKFIELD — A new Discount Tire location has opened in Brookfield.

Located at 20120 W. Bluemound Road, the tire and wheel retailer is open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and closed on Sunday.

The phone number for the new Discount Tire store in Brookfield is 262-317-6935. Its webpage can be found by using the store locator at discounttire.com and searching for “Brookfield, WI.”

Founded in 1960, Discount Tire has grown from a one-man tire shop in Ann Arbor, Michigan, into a national tire retailer. Since 2013, Discount Tire has seen exponential growth, opening stores in 11 additional states and surpassing 1,200 stores in 2024, including another location in the county that is off Sunset Drive in Waukesha at 1111 Spring City Lane.

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Brookfield sets possible referendum at \$6 million

Aimed at shoring up finances to avert projected shortfalls

By Brian Huber
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262-513-2674

BROOKFIELD — The Brookfield Common Council has set an amount of \$6 million to be asked in a potential referendum in the spring election aimed at shoring up finances as the city projects shortfalls in the years ahead.

The council has yet to vote on whether to formally place the referendum on the spring ballot; that vote is expected to occur this month. What the council did last month was set an asking price for that referendum should aldermen decide to officially ask voters that question.

“It will be determined in January, most likely at the Jan. 7th meeting but we’re still

sorting that out, the timing,” Robert Scott, Brookfield’s director of finance and administration, said.

He added by state law, the decision has to be finalized no later than 70 days prior to the election date. The spring election will take place April 1.

The Finance Committee has been reviewing options for the city to address expected shortfalls in the tax levy. State law limits the increase in municipal tax levy in a formula connected to amount of new construction. Amid recent inflation, Brookfield Mayor Steve Ponto previously told The Freeman the same pressures led Waukesha County to seek a sales tax, but that proposal was withdrawn just before the County Board met to vote on it.

City documents showed that that absent any referendum, the levy shortfall is \$4 million in 2026, growing to over \$11 million by 2032. A referendum of \$6 million sees the city have a surplus of \$2 million in 2026 that falls to a deficit by 2028, then a shortfall of about \$5 million by 2032. An \$8 million referendum gives the city a \$4 million cushion for 2026, which falls to a deficit by 2030 and a shortfall of about \$3 million by 2032.

The Finance Committee recommended an \$8 million referendum, but aldermen trimmed that figure to \$6 million, with the hopes that it increases odds a potential referendum would pass.

Alderman Jason Anderson said the Finance Committee has looked at the options, deciding “we’re not going to cut our way there,” and that opportunities to increase revenue are minuscule and likely would not be received favorably by the public. He said a referendum was the best option to meet the city’s needs, and said a \$6 million ask “doesn’t move the problem out as far as some of us would like, but if it doesn’t pass, we’re going to find ourselves in a serious, serious situation where Brookfield is not going to be the Brookfield we know in a few years from now.”

Scott said among the options the Finance Committee rejected was a possible wheel tax, which was discounted because it must be used for transportation purposes, and what it could be expected to raise “isn’t anywhere near sufficient to bridge the gap in the budget.”

The council voted unanimously to set the referendum amount at \$6 million, and direct-

ed city staff to prepare the required language for a referendum question the council is considering asking the voters. When asked whether he expected the council to formally authorize the referendum question to be placed on the ballot, Scott declined to offer a prediction. He did predict, though that nothing would change in the next several weeks regarding the state’s framework for funding local government services.

“Because the capacity that a \$6 million referendum would give us would provide more than we would need to fill the gap in 2026 alone, but if you don’t have that capacity you’re back in a hole within a year, so what that additional capacity would be used for is again something the Finance Committee in particular is going to make final recommendations on on Jan. 7th. What we’re talking about doing is earmarking those funds likely for debt reductions or specifically adding funds and setting them aside for additional road maintenance because that’s an ongoing issue where the money we’ve been able to allocate has been falling short of the costs of (roads) program,” Scott said.

NEWSMAKER Q&A: Melissa Baxter

Waukesha County Community Foundation president, CEO uses storytelling to create change

By Karen Pilarski
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WAUKESHA — Waukesha County Community Foundation President and CEO **Melissa Baxter** continues to use her journalistic and storytelling talents to make positive changes in the community. Each day is atypical and offers an array of different responsibilities to keep her on her toes. The Freeman asked Baxter questions about her role, how giving has changed and her leadership skills. The following are her responses.

The FREEMAN: What inspired you to go into this field?

Melissa Baxter: It has been rewarding to pair my love for writing and communication with working for mission-driven organizations. When I started my career, I was focused on storytelling and reporting, so the idea that I could use those talents toward creating positive community transformation is something that still excites me. Working in the nonprofit space is rewarding, and I’m grateful to partner with so many talented people and organizations.

FREEMAN: How has giving in the county changed over the years?

Baxter: People in Waukesha County have always been generous and supported a wide variety of needs in our communities. The WCCF was founded in 1999, and each year we have been fortunate to help connect even more donors to the nonprofits which provide essential services and make our community strong. As we share long-term as well as urgent community needs, the response from the community is inspiring.

FREEMAN: Describe your typical day.

Baxter: There is definitely not a “typical” day. There are many elements to operating a community foundation including donor stewardship, community events, governance, financial operations, and more. We have a wonderful team at the WCCF, and we are focused on serving our donors and the community every day.

FREEMAN: What is the most rewarding part of being in this type of work?

Baxter: Connecting people is the most rewarding part of my role, whether connecting a donor to a nonprofit or connecting nonprofits to each other for collaboration. No one organization can meet all of the needs of our community, and true value lies in working together.

Biography

Who: Melissa Baxter

What: President and CEO, Waukesha County Community Foundation

Age: 58

Work experience: Waukesha County Community Foundation, president, since 2021; Greater Milwaukee Committee, Director of Resource Development, 2019-2021; Carroll University, Director of Foundation & Corporate Relations, 2010-2019; Freelance writer (in Wisconsin), 2002-2010. Member of Waukesha Rotary, Tempo Waukesha, and the ProHealth Care Community Health Benefit Committee. I currently serve on the boards of the Wisconsin Philanthropy Network, Waukesha Public Library, Housing Action Coalition of Waukesha County, Non-profit Executive Council of the Waukesha County Business Alliance; and the WHEDA Foundation. I previously served on the board of the Waukesha Education Foundation for eight years prior to my tenure at the WCCF.

Education: B.A. English & History, Hanover College; M.Ed., Carroll University.

Family: husband, Mike; three grown sons and their families: Brock, Dylan (wife, Emma and daughter, Ellie), and Logan (wife, Marissa).



Melissa Baxter

Get to know

Melissa Baxter

My greatest achievement is: partnering with my husband to raise our three sons.
My favorite TV show is: “Call the Midwife.” I love the historic setting and the community focus.
My favorite movie is: “It’s a Wonderful Life” because it’s a reminder of how all of our lives are connected and matter.
My favorite actor is: Tom Hanks.
My favorite actress is: Kate Winslet.
My favorite childhood memory is: going to the library in the summer and bringing home

as many books as the librarian would allow (15 was the limit for kids, I remember).
The person I most admire is: Eleanor Roosevelt. She used her influence to make our country and world a better place.
Three words people use to describe me are: driven, intentional, curious.
The worst job I had as a teenager: baby sitting.
The food I like best is: dessert.
My favorite hobby is: reading.
My favorite music group is: The Cure.
My pets are: Roxy (a border collie mix rescue) and two cats, Peaches and Capa.
My favorite vacation place is: our cottage on Lake Winnebago.
My favorite childhood toy was: Barbie.

United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha raises over \$59M

WAUKESHA — The United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County surpassed its \$57.5 million fundraising goal by raising \$59,744,243, the organization announced on Dec. 12.

Campaign Co-Chairs John Florsheim (Weyco Group), Craig Jorgensen (VJS Construction Services), Scott Turner (Children’s Wisconsin), and DeVona Wright Cottrell (GMR Marketing) led this year’s campaign.

“Members of United Way Donor Networks alongside our Campaign Co-Chairs took to the stage to express the important work being done. Together, we applauded our Million Dollar Companies, cheered our Give & Win Sweepstakes winners, and celebrated the amazing accomplishments of our Key Initiatives this year,” a news release said.

The organization focused on four initiatives such as supporting programs that will end family homelessness, school-based youth mental health ser-

vices and resources, programs that reduce barriers for individuals to have the opportunity to start stable careers, and connecting job seekers, students, and others to computers and internet access to ensure everyone has the technology to succeed.

“Special thanks to the companies that give over one million dollars annually to help individuals and families in our local community,” the release said.

Corporate companies included: T&M Partners and the Kelben Foundation, \$5 million; Baird, \$4.6 million; Johnson Controls, \$3.7 million; Northwestern Mutual, \$3.4 million; Aurora Health Care, \$2.3 million; Rockwell Automation, \$2.2 million; BMO, \$1.8 million; We Energies, \$1.5 million; Froedtert Health, \$1.1 million; Ascension Wisconsin, \$1 million; Husco \$1 million; and ManpowerGroup, \$1 million.



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