

Black Hills Woman

AUGUST // 2023

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Black Hills Fresh

Gramma's
Delicacies

**The Art of
JEWELRY**

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K. Nielsen

I had something prepared for this. About how I had floor tickets to Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour... and then didn't go.

But then I felt this strong urge to pivot.

Can you hear the Friends line in your head?

Pivot! Pivot! Piv-ot!

Which coincidentally ties into my original line of thought.

Sometimes you make plans, only to have to break them for one reason or another.

Maybe, something unexpected comes up. Maybe, you can no longer attend for financial reasons. Or maybe, you just decide that the best thing for you - emotionally, mentally, physically, whatever - is to no longer go.

Allowing Yourself to Pivot

A lot easier said than done.

How often do we keep plans out of obligation or guilt even when we know it's not in our best interest?

How often do we force ourselves into situations where the whole time we're watching the clock, waiting until it's socially acceptable to go home?

I used to do this a lot more in my 20s. Call it FOMO or whatever, but I thought if I didn't show up I'd risk losing those connections on account of not being down for anything and everything at any given time.

Spoiler Alert: If relationships crumble because you miss one or two girls nights or big get togethers... then they probably weren't the kind of relationships worth holding on to.

When I told my girlfriend (through tears) that I was not going to go to the Taylor Swift concert, she praised me for listening to my body and knowing what was best for me and the little miracle growing inside of me.

We live in a very "Yes" driven culture. But how often does saying "Yes" cause us stress, anxiety, and exhaustion?

We should praise saying "No" more.

Now hear me when I say I'm not championing hiding out in your basement every weekend and never interacting with the outside world. I am however, all for allowing each other the grace to make plans and then break them for the sake of what makes serves you best in that moment.

Allow yourself to pivot.

It may not be the path you were planning, but it may be exactly what you need.



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DISCOVERING NEW DEPTHS

with Rene Ohms

Creating a career can mean more than just doing a job. It can mean exploring uncharted territory beyond traditional employment to find growth opportunities in activism, community service, and volunteering. Some of life's most meaningful work isn't paid. So, what makes volunteer work worth doing?

For Rene Ohms – a local caving expert and volunteer – it's a draw toward mystery and dreaming about where new discoveries might lead.

"Caves are some of the last remaining places on the planet that haven't been fully explored by humans. You never know what you're going to find," Rene explains. "When you go through a tight crawl, it might dead end, or it might get smaller, or it might open up into a giant room with several other unexplored passages branching from it. You might find a mineral or cave formation that's never been documented before."

At 12 years old, Rene enjoyed her first caving trip with the Girl Scouts, but she didn't realize how much more there was to discover in caves until college. As a summer intern, she led cave tours at Wind Cave National Park and took her first cave survey trip. From then on, she was hooked.

Similar to a land survey, cave survey trips help to create the master map inside a cave. Teams of no fewer than three people work together to gather information including distances, compass bearings, and inclination measurements between defined points to generate the shape of cave passages.

"It's a perfect blend of math, science, art, and physical difficulty. There's nothing more rewarding than seeing the data that you collected added to the master map of the cave," Rene says.

by Krystal Bresnahan



Jewel Cave is one of the longest caves in the world with more than 200 miles of mapped passageways. Rene's volunteer work on cave survey trips has contributed over 50 miles to the master map.

To date, Rene has traveled around the world on caving expeditions through the Caribbean, Hungary, Slovakia, Mexico, Germany, and many more caves deep underground. Last year, in New Mexico at Fort Stanton Cave, she was on the team that set the record for the farthest distance traveled from a cave entrance on the planet at 12.4 miles one way.

(Yes, go ahead and pause here for applause.)



Photo Credit: Rodney Mulder

Even after all her traveling, Rene chooses to live right here in the Black Hills, where the area is encircled in limestone – the cave-bearing rock – and more than 400 known caves are here to explore. In fact, two of the longest known caves on Earth exist in the same county: Wind Cave and Jewel Cave.

“Caving can be very demanding, and as we continue to find more of each cave, the end gets farther and farther away from the entrance,” Rene explains, describing cave passages like a giant underground obstacle course. “In Jewel Cave, it takes us 7 hours at a very fast pace to reach Deep Camp, which is where most of our exploration is currently based. From Deep Camp, it’s another 3-4 hours of travel to the very ‘end’ of the cave. On camp trips, we spend up to 4 days inside. I’ve now done 50 camp trips in Jewel Cave, which is the most of anyone.”

Rene is often the only woman on these long caving trips, but that doesn’t bother her, and her male companions always treat her as a valued member of the team. She does acknowledge the unique challenges women deal with underground like managing monthly cycles on extended cave trips or mastering how to pee into a bottle through a tiny collapsible kitchen funnel.

Throughout her caving career, Rene has had a number of mentors who inspired her, and several of them are women. “Jan Conn, who surveyed more than 60 miles of Jewel Cave with her husband Herb, became a friend of mine. She always lent me a great perspective on the cave and its possibilities. The Conns brought a sense of whimsy to their caving, and were always coming up with clever names for the cave passages that they discovered. They were true pioneers in both rock climbing and caving, and I consider them both to be mentors.”

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"I'm proud that I stuck with it, and have continued to explore these big caves as the physical challenges become greater and greater."

Caving requires balance, endurance, speed, and the abilities to climb over obstacles and fit through extremely tight spaces. It also requires problem-solving skills, a willingness to weigh risks, and to do everything possible to ensure team members return home safely after each trip.

"Things can certainly go wrong when you're caving. People can get stuck, fall, or get sick. I try not to dwell on that possibility, but I always know in the back of my mind that something unexpected could happen." Rene stays prepared for all possibilities by maintaining her wilderness medical training and cave rescue training. "I'm proud that I stuck with it, and have continued to explore these big caves as the physical challenges became greater and greater."

In 2020, Rene was awarded with the National Speleological Society's Lew Bicking Award for lifetime achievement in cave exploration. Today, her volunteer efforts continue as maps for the largest caves in the Black Hills continue to grow and changing technology enhances the surveying process. There's still the chance of exciting new discoveries, and that's enough to keep her going.

Are you up for the challenge?

Join Rene and other local cavers in the Black Hills by joining the Paha Sapa Grotto, the local caving club for monthly meetings and to learn about planned trips suitable for beginners. Exploring the natural wonders can also be worthwhile during a cave tour at Jewel Cave National Monument, Wind Cave National Park, or various other caves.

As an inspiring woman drawn to the unknown, Rene Ohms reminds us all that "once you find something you're passionate about, just keep at it. You can't let risks hold you back."

A Clean Prospective

Black Hills Fresh

By Madigan Schmitz

Betsy Akers never expected to own her own business, but since February of this year, she has created a successful cleaning company, while also making an effort to give back to her community.

With her degree in psychology, Akers never saw herself as a business owner. The idea for Black Hills Fresh came to her during a time where she craved more flexibility in both her schedule and her life. She had always enjoyed cleaning, felt it was something she did well, and decided that a cleaning business would be the perfect first business venture for her.

After initially starting her business, Akers has grown in popularity, with the help of some social media marketing on Instagram. Her presence on her social media pages has helped her clientele to see a personal side behind her business, something that isn't normally present in a field like hers.

"I've noticed Instagram has been pretty popular. I post things that I would want to see, and that people can relate to. Being on Instagram and having an online presence has definitely helped a lot," Akers said.

Akers' work not only comes highly recommended, but her personality does as well. Reviews showcased on her page always commend both the quality of her cleaning, and personal interactions with Akers. With Akers' work in cultivating her online presence, she's been able to bridge the gap between a business transaction and a relationship with the customer, and this has not gone unnoticed by those utilizing her services.

The process Akers has streamlined for prospective clients has made receiving her services incredibly simple. Clients fill out a quote request form through her website, receive the welcome packet, and the rest of the services are taken care of on the day of the cleaning. Akers encourages and appreciates clients reaching out to ask questions regarding services.



Originally, Black Hills Fresh was a solo endeavor for Akers, but with growing popularity and demand, she has recently been able to hire more staff for both commercial and residential services.

Akers is still able to tap into her psychology degree when working on cleaning, and views each service not just as a job to complete, but as a way to impact someone else's life in a positive way.

"The biggest thing is how much it impacts people's mood when their space is clean and everything is in order. From that perspective that's what I love, is helping someone feel better at the end of the day. I never expected to work as a cleaner, but after doing it you realize it's so much more than cleaning a house," said Akers.

As for the future of Black Hills Fresh, Akers hopes to help more and more clients with cleanings, and to give back to her native Rapid City community.

Something Akers' is particularly proud of are what she calls "Good News Cleanings," where people are able to nominate someone through their quote request form, and she picks a nominee for a free cleaning. She hopes to do more of these services as her business grows.

"I truly take pride in the work I do and want each customer to have a positive experience with our services. This means I strive to give each client a quality cleaning, every single time," said Akers.

Becky and Black Hills Fresh can be found on Instagram @blackhillsfresh, on Facebook at BH Fresh, or at www.blackhillsfresh.com



Photo Credit :
Jenna Schultz





Lach's Legacy

by Sarah Grassel

Brianne and David Edwards both grew up in Spearfish and are high school sweethearts. They share six children together. More than 15 years ago, one day changed their world forever.

Going about their day like every other, the two faced the unimaginable in 2008. The loss of their son, Lachlan.

"Just five weeks shy of his first birthday, we got the call from daycare that no parent ever wants," Brianne remembers. Lachlan was napping and found unresponsive by the daycare. It was later determined that through no-one's fault, Lachlan had passed from sudden infant death syndrome, SIDS.

Brianne explains that loss through SIDS is unique because a perfectly healthy baby unexpectedly dies. It is also known as SUID or sudden unexplained infant death meaning that after a full autopsy and review of the death scene, there is still no identifiable cause.

"The unexpected and unknown are hard to process," she adds. "There is some great research happening, but it is a phenomenon that is still not well understood. Parents who lose children this way always carry a longing to understand what happened."



Because of their experience, the idea of Lach's Legacy was born. Like those before them that had experienced loss through SIDS, Brianne and David began searching for explanations. They searched for resources to help them cope, and they searched for support to help through the doubt. Unfortunately, those resources were scarce and harder to find than they should have been.

Today, Lach's Legacy serves as three key things for families and individuals grieving the loss of a child: connection, comfort, and hope.

It was an answer to the three things that Brianne was missing most when grieving her son. Brianne never stopped thinking about Lachlan and started working on the non-profit in the year after he passed. Beginning the process of this organization was something that Brianne was able to do with her grief and something that would later on benefit a great number of families. "That idea alone was what helped me to create some meaningful purpose in my pain," Brianne shares.

Together, bereavement support, research funding, and SIDS/safe sleep awareness come together to complete the three-fold mission for Lach's Legacy. Primarily, the organization serves the state of South Dakota.

Brianne shares, "We send out physical care packages to families who have experienced an unexpected infant death, but our digital world has meant that we've been expanding our reach to families outside South Dakota as well."

Other resources for grief are listed on LachsLegacy.org and can be found throughout the state. In the Black Hills specifically, the majority of resources are in Rapid City and Spearfish including Monument Health Home and Hospice, Behavior Management Systems, Heartspace Counseling, CARES, Stronghold Counseling, and more.



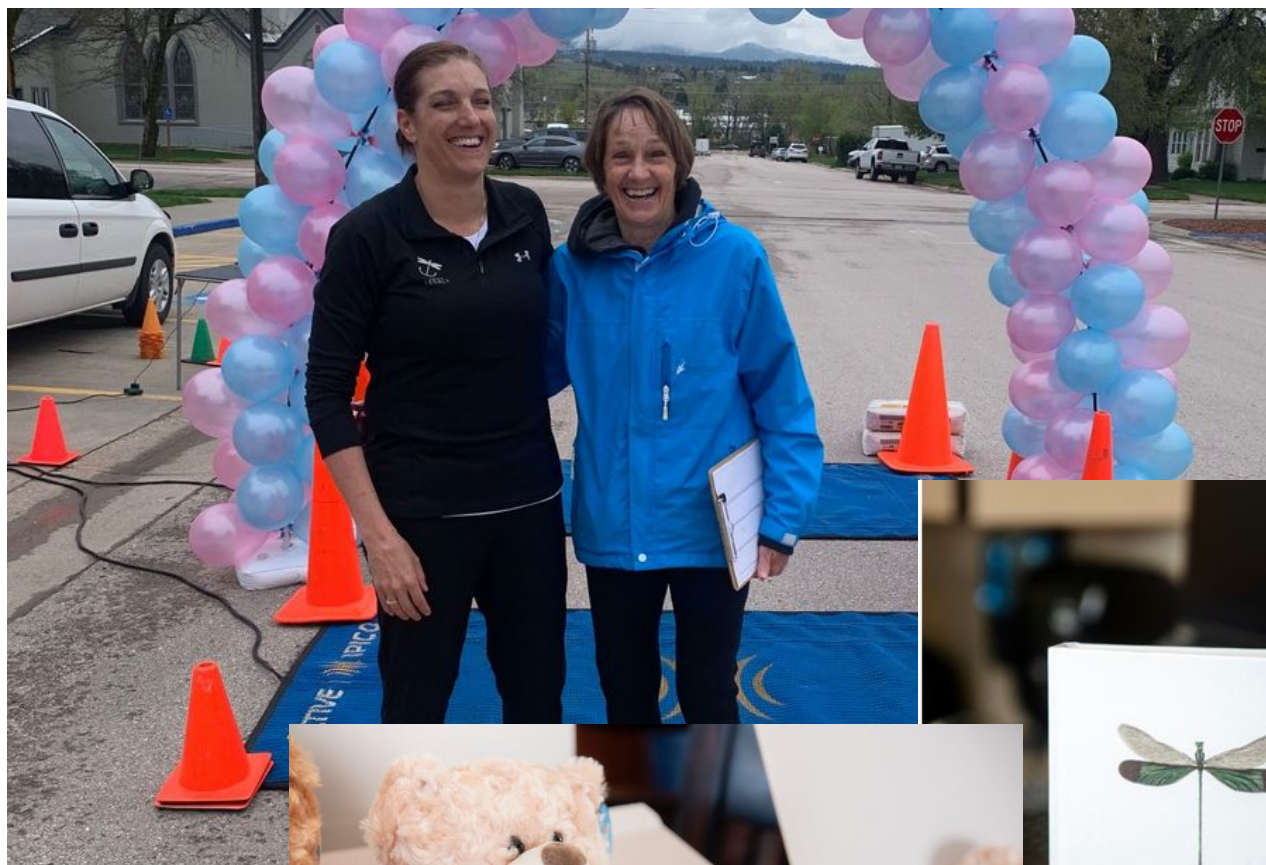
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More Outreach Efforts Inspired by Lachlan

A Thousand Pounds is the memoir that Brianne published in 2022 on what would have been Lachlan's 15th birthday. The book shares more about the family's journey to authentic peace and hope. It is also a guide or companion combining their story with academic and anecdotal research along the way. Throughout the chapters, readers will find journaling prompts to encourage their own healing journey, and the book made quite a splash after it was released.

Brianne proudly shares, "It was number one on Amazon in the grief and bereavement category, and most recently won some awards in the Catholic Media Association's Book Awards."

In addition to the non-profit organization and the book release, Brianne also hosts the annual "Run for Their Lives!" family-friendly 5k event in Spearfish. Mothers who have lost children are invited to include their kids on the list of names to remember and honor on that day.

"Their names go on the back of the T-shirt and a sign with a photo of each child is posted along the course," Brianne says.

An easy and beautiful way for everyone in the local community to do something with their friends who have faced the loss of a child.



BACKING UP IS HARD TO DO

by Dorothy Rosby

There's something about fresh air, sunsets and campfires that draws you closer to the one you love. And there's something about ticks, mosquitos, and rain dripping into your tent that tears you apart. For the sake of your relationship, check out the ways my husband and I have managed to camp together and still stay married for almost 35 years.

1) We built an ark. Or rather we bought a camper. It's the perfect size for two. The table makes into a bed so theoretically the camper could sleep four. But they'd really have to like each other.

We bought the camper partly because the only thing that leads to torrential downpour faster than us washing our car is us going camping. We used a variety of tents over the years, and they were all waterproof—mostly. But

lying on a sleeping bag all afternoon while puddles lap up against the sides of your tent tends to dampen your enthusiasm for both camping and the person you're spending all day in the tent with.

Sitting in the camper while the rain beats on the roof is cozy, even romantic. For one thing, the Ark, as I like to call it, has a stove and refrigerator. While rain may dampen my enthusiasm for camping, it doesn't dampen my enthusiasm for eating. And my hangries have been known to...well...dampen my husband's enthusiasm for me.

2) We both learned how to back up the Ark. Not really. I haven't learned that, but I did have the good sense to marry someone who does. And he's very good at it. That's lucky because the only thing that tests a relationship more than backing up a camper badly is misplacing all your tent stakes.



You see the problem. One partner backs up the camper while the other calls out instructions and encouragement—or criticism and insults depending on how well it's going. It's just like that old Neil Sedaka song, "Backing Up is Hard to Do." Oh wait. I think it's "Breaking Up is Hard to Do." Same difference.

3) We learned to close doors and drawers in the camper. And by we, I mean me. For reasons I can't fully explain, I have a habit of leaving them hanging open. I suppose it's because I'm so efficient. Why close them when I'll just have to open them again.

But items that are not secured tend to fly around in a moving camper. I've tried to do better since the day I opened the camper door and discovered doors and drawers aren't the only things I leave open. An open bottle of dishwashing liquid had fallen out of the cupboard enroute to our campsite and was now lying on the floor in a pool of soap. This could have put a strain on our marriage—if I'd told my husband about it. Instead, I took the opportunity to scrub the floor.

4) We learned to make do. One of the benefits of the Ark is that a lot of what we need for camping can be stored in it. But not everything. And if we forget something, we have two choices: We can blame each other for forgetting it. Or we can make do without it. Making do is easier on our relationship. Still sometimes we do both.

When we forgot cooking oil we made do with boiled eggs. After the incident with the dish soap, I made do by washing our dishes in shampoo. And when we forgot bath towels we made do by driving to the nearest town and buying some.

Dorothy Rosby leaves the cap off her toothpaste too.





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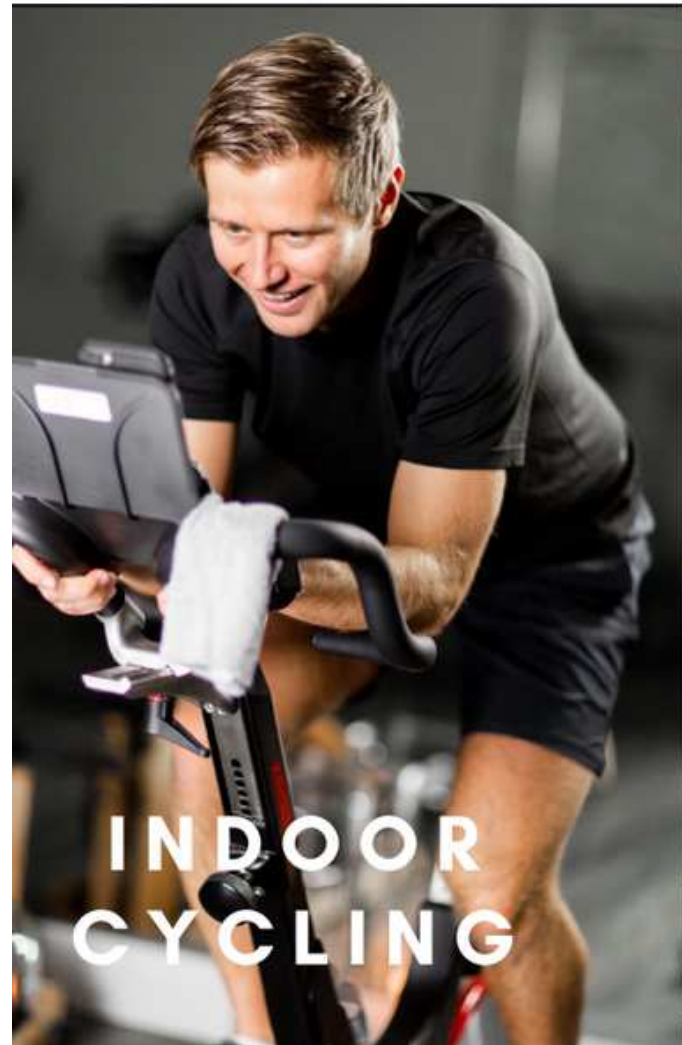
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The Art of Jewelry

By Sarah Grassel

When it comes to art, there is so much local talent in the Black Hills area — from amazing painters to outstanding photographers to sculptors and innovators of delicious cuisine. Outside of traditional art forms and spread throughout the area are three talented jewelry artists who specialize in different styles and techniques.

Cora Carroll, Hadlee Denett, and Kristin Abear do have one thing in common: a passion for beautiful things.

Mountain Maiden Designs

Cora Carroll is originally from the Black Hills and spent the better half of her childhood between Rapid City, Deadwood, and Hot Springs. Without any formal education in jewelry making, Cora has run a trial and error approach in her business, Mountain Maiden Company, that has really paid off. As a self-taught artist, Cora does carry a BFA in photography with a minor in studio arts that doesn't necessarily relate to her business, but certainly helps maintain quality through all aspects of the company.

"I kind of got thrust into this world and one day woke up to find myself the designer behind a jewelry brand," Cora explains. "I started out by simply having an urge to figure it out and bring some ideas to life, but I never thought I would do it professionally. It's something that sort of happened organically."

Mountain Maiden Company mixes hand-crafted metal work and beading to create beautiful designs depicting landscapes and scenes from the natural world.



Cora is greek for “Maiden.” Mountain Maiden Company pays homage to the mountains majesties (the Black Hills) that we all call home.

Cora says, “The originality and storytelling in each of my pieces is truly unique. You aren’t just going to find anyone that is able to replicate my craftsmanship, style or technique!”

With years of hard work and problem solving, Cora has found a commitment and appreciation for her work that is not gifted or given, it’s earned. “I wouldn’t say I have a set style, but I do feel like I have a certain aesthetic,” she adds.

Pulling inspiration from nature, landscapes, and mythology, Mountain Maiden Company is full of life and color. From deep blues to rich nudes, the company is most known for its earrings. However, Cora has also designed several matching necklace sets, rings, and most recently hat-bands!

Another passion that Cora has is travel. Throughout the year, Cora takes Mountain Maiden Company on the road going from art fair to art fair. She has won Best in Show at Tulsa Mayfest in Oklahoma, Best in Category at the Edina Falls Arts Festival, Award of Merit at the Omaha Summer Arts Festival, and more. Cora was also invited to Spain to film a course on her artwork with the documentary crew Domestika.

“All of these awards and honors have blown me away, I’ve been in a total state of euphoria,” she smiles.



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For the Love of Craft



Also from Rapid, Hadlee Denett now resides in Summerset and most recently married her wonderful husband, Zach, this summer. Outside of everyday life, Hadlee runs For the Love of Craft.

“Since I can remember, I’ve always been an artist and crafter. I think I started making jewelry when I was around 10 years old,” she reminisces.

Using her craft as an outlet to escape the anxiety of reality and the space around her, she is constantly thinking of new ways to create things with the endless possibilities of flowers and greenery.

I consider myself a bit of a flower child, so in a sense I combined the two things I love most,” Hadlee shares.

For the Love of Craft specializes on emphasizing the preservation of the natural world. In that aspect, she and Mountain Maiden Company share a similar passion. However, Hadlee takes pieces from the earth around us and incorporates them into her works of art.

She explains, “All of my pieces are curated with flowers grown by myself, my parents, or foraged throughout the Hills. I love the beauty the Black Hills creates, and I want people to take it with them every single day.”

Hoping to connect her audience with the flowers and joy that the natural beauty that the area provides, For the Love of Craft is known most for their earrings and necklaces. Not only do the pieces include preserved floral and greenery, but many of them also revolve around celestial themes and crystals.



“The dream is real, and I am chasing it!” said Hadlee.

Preserving living, growing florals and greenery can be challenging. It takes a special touch and a keen eye to know how much pressure to put on each small detail. If not handled properly, they can fall apart in a heartbeat according to Hadlee.

Another challenging aspect that Hadlee faces is ensuring that she gathers enough material throughout the growing season to carry her through the long winters faced in the Hills.

She adds, “Trying to gather as much as I can before the winter hits is tricky; I am not wasteful with them either. I use as much as I can of the flower because of this challenge!”

After the materials are gathered and preserved, Hadlee lays everything out and gets to work. Through a lot of experimentation, trial and error, Hadlee adds stars, moons, and crystals in a setting that appeals to her while keeping in mind what others may like as well.

“I will never make the exact same thing twice. Similar? Yes, but never the same,” Hadlee smiles. “You can’t really do that with flowers anyway, so it works out great!”

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Royal Bear Designs

Unlike the first two artists, Kristen Abear is a transplant to the Hills. She, her husband, and their three boys are from central Minnesota and found home in the Hills during the summer of 2019 after a vacation to Spearfish.

“My path in jewelry started by complete accident after my third baby,” Kristen starts. “I found and purchased my own raw gemstone mother’s ring and was instantly obsessed with the craft, the uniqueness of the gemstone, and everything in between.”



Growing up, Kristen says she always had a passion for art and drawing, but crafting wasn’t really something that she played around with or even thought about pursuing as a profession. To further emphasize that fact, Kristen notes that her formal education and background is in computer networking.

After being a full-time stay-at-home-mom for a couple of years, Kristen found herself yearning for an outlet.

“I decided I was going to learn how to make this jewelry that I was so intrigued by and this process called electroforming,” she says.

Royal Bear Designs was born. To this day, each piece is individually handcrafted in her studio out of Spearfish.

“I fashion your memorable pieces to be worn, loved, and enjoyed every single day to bring you all the light, magic, and happiness for years to come,” Kristen exclaims.

In addition to Royal Bear Designs, you can find Kristen working with permanent jewelry at Saldare! Her journey in linking and permanent jewelry was another happy accident after stumbling upon the idea through social media in the spring of 2022. “Saldare” is Italian for “to weld, to join together.”

Electroforming is the process of growing copper onto a conductive surface through electrolysis. Essentially Kristen explains it as a thick “skin” of metal that is built onto a surface. Walking through the process, Kristen adds that she starts with a single loose gemstone and loosely fixes it to an appropriate base.

“Then epoxy clay is applied to the piece and hardened after many hours, sanded, and shaped appropriately,” she says.

Finishing with several coats of conductive paint, the process heavily relies on alchemy and science! In total, the last step takes anywhere from 12-24 hours to complete. Like Hadlee’s craft, Kristen’s work is completely unique with no two pieces alike.

“It is an extensive process and gives such a unique twist in the aesthetic of this jewelry,” Kristen smiles.





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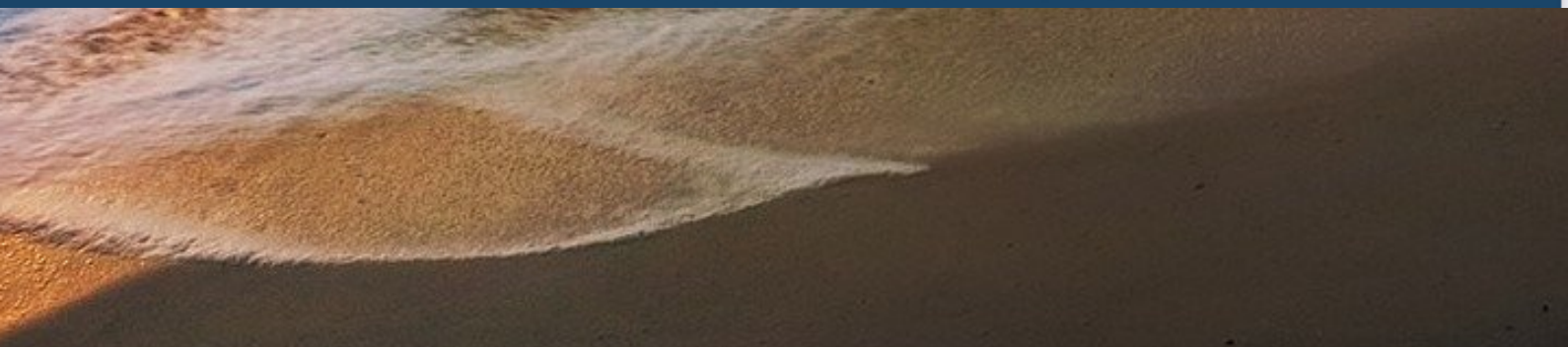


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Grammar's Delicacies

By Madigan Schmitz



After crossing the pond with her husband in 1983, Angelique Mills found her new home in Rapid City. While running a household with two children, and a husband in the Air Force, she hoped to have a successful career, while still being able to take care of her family. In 1995, Grammas Delicacies was born, and Angelique's goods have become a Black Hills staple.

Angelique was always interested in culinary arts, growing up working with her mother in the kitchen. After moving from England, the culture and customs of Rapid City were completely foreign to her. Utilizing her interests in cooking, she used her skills to bridge the cultural gaps and form connections with people.

"I love to experiment in the kitchen, and meet people, and what better way to meet new people than to break bread together," said Angelique.

Angelique and Grammas Delicacies create all different kinds of goods, from jams and jellies, to spices, freeze dried meals, and even fiber products. Angelique spoke happily about how she's always appreciated a little variety in her life.

"I get bored if I do just one thing. Absorb as much as you can and experience different crafts and trades. Variety is the spice of life, that's my motto!"

She has found a new love and hobby in her fiber arts, which are sold on her website. It's a more calming and relaxing hobby compared to the fast paced jam and jelly making that she's used to.

"Fiber arts is my relaxation time. Knitting and felting is so relaxing. It might be work to someone else, but to me it's relaxation," she said.

When she's making her food products though, it's hard for her to determine a favorite between all of her delicious creations. Even when asked, she always brought her focus back to the customer, making sure their opinion of the product was her utmost priority.

“My most popular is my carrot cake jam, tropical fruit tequila sauce. Choosing a favorite is like picking between children! Tasting is believing, and I always enforce to my customers that you have to taste before you buy,” Angelique said.

In order to fulfill demand for all of these highly desired products, Angelique and her husband are often working 12 hour days between the two of them. She says this wouldn't be possible if they both didn't absolutely enjoy what they were doing. They both have a passion for bringing joy into others lives, Grammas Delicacies allows them to do just that.

“The key to the whole thing is to thoroughly enjoy it, and we enjoy what we do. At the end of the day we're tired, but it's a good tired. I enjoy my customers. When my customers are happy, I'm happy,” Angelique said.

Contrary to the name, Angelique and her husband have no biological grandchildren, however, she takes pride that she's an “adopted” grandmother to so many. Angelique radiates kindness, and she's able to pass on her joy and positivity to everyone she's able to connect with.

“I have so many grandchildren because they are drawn to me for some reason, and I love them dearly,” she said.

Even after nearly 30 years of running her business, pulling 12 hour days every day, and traveling throughout the Black Hills to sell her products, Angelique and her husband have no intentions of slowing down anytime soon. She truly loves what she does, and her value for her customers keeps her more than happy to keep producing her goods.

“We have no intentions of retiring unless there are health problems. My husband and I work well together. Married for 48 years. We just work well together. Don't ask me how, don't ask me why, we just work well together. The future is going to be what it's going to be, and as long as we have health and strength we'll keep going!”

When she's not working, Angelique and her husband love to tour the Black Hills together, driving aimlessly and enjoying the scenery.

Angelique and her delicious goods can be found every Saturday at the Black Hills Farmer's Market, or at grammasdelicacies.net



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