



BLACK HILLS  
*W*OMAN  
MAGAZINE



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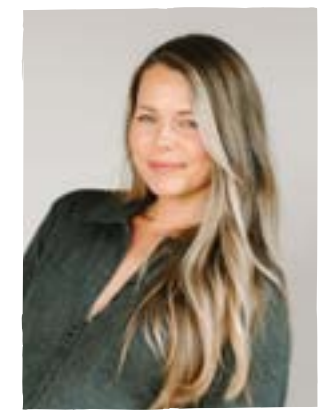
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# contents



6

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

The Art of Being Present

8

**ARTIST**

Leading with the Heart

12

**CALENDAR**

The Local Edit



14

**COVER STORY**

Tending to the Seasons

20

**POEM**

Rupi Kaur

22

**WOMEN IN BUSINESS**

More Than a Title



28

**FAMILY**

Creating Happily  
Ever After

34

**HEALTH**

Healing, From the  
Inside Out



40

**LIFESTYLE**

Why Quality Never  
Goes Out of Style

44

**GIVING BACK**

At Work in the Wild

# the art of being *present*

Every year, our family takes a week-long vacation with my parents. For the past five years, we have gone to Arizona — the convenience of a one-way flight with children and the promise of warmer weather were always hard to beat. However, this year, we branched out and went to the Florida coast. The boys gathered way too many seashells, built plenty of sandcastles, and spent almost every moment we weren't at the beach in the pool.

They lived their best lives, and we lived ours.

As a stay-at-home mom and a homeschool mom, I spend practically every day with my children. However, there's something special about escaping the day-to-day demands and truly being present.

No emails to check.

No laundry to fold.

No cleaning to be done.

Sometimes, that's all we need to shift our mindset and recharge.

A mental break — the permission to slow down and prioritize presence over productivity.

I constantly have a to-do list running through my head. Going on vacation allows me to put that on pause. To breathe. To enjoy. To actually have a conversation with my husband. To relish in watching our children explore new places and experiences. To have firsts alongside them.

And that feeling of calm carries over long after we've returned. I can reengage with my to-do list with a renewed sense of creativity simply because I allowed myself to disengage first.

May you be inspired to do the same.

You don't have to get on a plane to disconnect.

You simply have to give yourself space to recharge.

*Warmly,  
Kari Nielsen*

# Debbie Ellerton's Dance Legacy

Chasing passions takes dedication and patience, but more than anything, it takes belief. For Debbie Ellerton, teaching dance is a belief. Born in North Dakota and the oldest of four children, Debbie grew up moving a lot. Her dad was a grocer by trade, but Debbie likes to say that he was “a dancer at heart.” Her parents met on a dance floor, and her dad even taught carry-out boys how to dance for prom to impress their dates. However, Debbie was more interested in rock-and-roll music at the time and wasn't particularly keen on dancing.

Debbie moved to Custer in 1971 and eventually settled in Rapid City in 1973. When her children were in high school, she convinced her husband and several friends to join her for a dance class. Debbie fondly recalled, “We learned several styles and rhythms, and from the very first lesson I was completely hooked. I couldn't get enough — I loved every style we tried.” From there, she discovered line dancing and fell in love with the independence it offered her. She could dance anywhere and anytime without needing a partner.

Her first teaching experience came in 1993 when she was asked to teach a Community Education

Program at North Middle School. She felt under-qualified for the opportunity and was nervous to speak in front of an audience. Surprisingly, she found that she enjoyed teaching and that there were many eager students who wanted to learn. Her first session even drew a crowd of 90 middle school students. “The overwhelming interest inspired me to begin teaching on my own, and that's when Heartland Dancing was born,” Debbie explained.

When Debbie opened Heartland Dancing, she was working full-time and raising two children. For her, the balance between the two was a “journey.” But she seamlessly integrated dance into her life, creating Heartland Dancing as a reflection of her heart. While she was working at Rapid City Parks and Recreation Office, Debbie and her team decided to incorporate her dancing skills into their summer programs. They offered “Dancing in the Park” for kids eight and older. She would teach children to dance in picnic shelters, and they performed during costume changes for RCC Western Wear at the Central States Fair.

This program changed everything for Debbie. “I never set out with the vision of becoming a dance instructor or opening a studio. But as opportunities

*leading with  
the heart*



“At the heart of everything I do is the belief that dance builds confidence, connection, and joy.”

kept presenting themselves — and with my passion growing stronger — I truly felt my Higher Power was leading me in that direction.”

That clear direction led her to starting the year-round Hot Shots Dance team. The Hot Shots were a part of the Rapid City community for 25 years with over 200 girls and one boy performing at local venues and events. They performed for 23 half-time segments annually at football games. They also performed at various events, including the Central States Fair and the Kids Fair. During the summer months, Debbie ran Hot Shot Dance Camps to fundraise for the year-round team. She looks back on that time fondly, saying that she still meets girls from the teams. Many of those girls still express their gratitude to Debbie for introducing them to their best friends.

But Debbie’s passion did not end with the Hot Shots. During that time and into the present, she teaches couples’ dancing. She loves teaching jitterbug, line dancing, country swing, salsa, country 2-step, cha cha, East Coast swing, West Coast swing, night club 2-step, rumba, hustle, waltz, and bachata. For her, anyone who signs up for these and her many other classes becomes a family member.

They can come with a friend, a significant other, or by themselves, but either way, they join the Heartland family. Debbie shared, “My dance family is so near and dear to me, it makes me teary-eyed. . . . Any void in my life is filled by my dance family.”



And Debbie’s dance family reaches beyond the bounds of Heartland Dancing through Heartland Dancing Ambassadors. These are adult dancers who go to various social dances and encourage people onto the dance floor. The more experienced dancers teach the less experienced ones, demonstrating how fun it is to move their bodies. The Dance Ambassadors have become a symbol within the dance community of Debbie’s philosophy: “Dance! It’s good for your heart!”

Debbie lives by this motto in every class, dance event, party, and homeschool class. She firmly believes that dancing not only strengthens a person’s heart physically but also has a profound impact on their overall well-being. She believes

that dance improves balance, strength, flexibility, cognitive function, as well as emotional and social well-being. More than that, dance is a great way to make friends that last a lifetime, and these are the beliefs that continue to push Debbie to pursue her passion and love for dance. “At the heart of everything I do is the belief that dance builds confidence, connection, and joy.”

If you’re ready to dance with your heart, check out Debbie’s classes at [heartlanddancing.com](http://heartlanddancing.com).

# THE LOCAL EDIT

BY KELSY PETERSON

**SIT BACK AND SOAK UP THE SOUNDS OR BUCKLE UP FOR A NEW ADVENTURE – THESE EVENTS WILL HAVE YOU SAVORING THE SUMMER IN A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT WAYS!**

## 2026 Canyon Acoustic Series

**SPEARFISH | JUNE 10, 17, & 24**

Savor the summer season with live music in Spearfish Park during the Canyon Acoustic Series. Taking place on Wednesdays, you'll discover a park transformed by local food vendors, art vendors, along with a beverage garden as you take in the sounds of various performers.

## Heart & Hooves South Dakota Trail Retreat

**HELL CANYON HORSE CAMP | JUNE 12-19**

Join in for a day of riding! This retreat is all about riding as a group, enjoying the beautiful nature around you, and spending time with good people and good horses. Michelle, a Ken McNabb Master Trainer, will be along for the ride offering encouragement and support when needed. After the ride, enjoy a home-cooked meal, campfire, and good conversations.

## On Location Fly Fishing

**RAPID CITY | JUNE 22**

Discover a new summer hobby with the help of Outdoor Campus West! The instructor will cover the basics of fly fishing, and then you'll get an opportunity to put on a pair of waders and try it out for yourself. All equipment is provided, making this the perfect opportunity to try it out!

## The 9th Annual Miss Black Hills Roundup Queen

**BELLE FOURCHE | JUNE 29 & 30**

Rodeo Queens are gathering to compete for the title and crown of Miss Black Hills Roundup on June 29th. This event will crown the rodeo royalty who will represent the Black Hills Roundup, one of the oldest, consistently-held outdoor rodeos in America and seven-time winner of the PRCA Medium Outdoor Rodeo of the Year. Coronation to take place on June 30th.

## Soulful Sounds in Rapid City

**RAPID CITY | JUNE 27**

New York-based duo Acute Inflections, is creating a night of music and comedy at the Dahl Arts Center during the Soulful Sounds event in Rapid City. Blending classic jazz with modern soul, this pair adds their own style to their sound but pulls inspiration from artists like Billie Holiday and Erykah Badu. Come and enjoy their performance as they blend storytelling, comedy, and live music into one great show.





TENDING TO THE SEASONS AT

# Cycle Farm

STORY BY KRYSTAL BRESNAHAN

Have you noticed how some plants respond after a hail storm? Or how a farm can steady a sad kid? Did you know some ants smell like lemons? Or that daffodils will dye wool yellow? Trish Jenkins has a big heart for careful attention. She notices these things and more as life unfolds on Cycle Farm.

## *Planting Seeds*

Before beginning life on the farm, Trish Jenkins and Jeremy Smith spent time identifying their values and working on goals that felt good. Their commitment to each other, land health, and community were top priorities.

“My first job out of school was with an

environmental consulting company that worked with several large dairies in the Southwest. I learned about CAFO dairy farming in the desert, especially in relationship with our food system, animal welfare, the land, the workers, and water quality,” Jenkins explains.

While she was taking water quality samples and writing reports for the state environment department, her sweetheart Jeremy Smith was working as a prep chef in a noodle shop and going to the farmers market each week to

*“My life is fuller for the farm.”*



help stock the kitchen. “He also worked with a construction crew building outdoor schoolyard and community gardens. He got to know the farmers, meet the kids, and see a radically different side of the food system. You might imagine our conversations at dinnertime after work.”

Jenkins later worked on stream restoration, erosion control, and fish habitat in streams on working lands in the West. During this time, she got to know people who were using deliberate methods of food production to heal the land, including land stewards, organic no-till farmers, and grass-fed cattle ranchers, soil scientists, and wildlife biologists.

Witnessing the ways this network of land stewards and mentors engaged with their communities planted a seed of curiosity for Jenkins and Smith: What would it look like to farm in relationship with a place?

## *Growing Seasons*

Since Fall 2011, when the first seeds (garlic!) were planted by friends, Cycle Farm has remained a collaborative effort rooted in curiosity and community.

Each season has been so different from any other that Jenkins says they haven’t experienced a “normal” growing season. “Something will grow great one year and be a complete loss the next. What we’re trying to do is grow a wide enough diversity of healthy, resilient plants, such that however the season falls — hot, cold, wet, dry — we’ll have some good food for our market,” Jenkins says.

One year a fierce hailstorm in early July put farms and gardens all around Spearfish in bad shape. Saturday morning at the farmstand, customers, share members, and neighbors who

had never been to Cycle Farm asked how they could help.

“There wasn’t much that could be done. The field was a sad place to be. Without leaves the garlic crop was likely done growing and we didn’t want plants to rot,” Jenkins recalls. She let people know they would be harvesting garlic that afternoon, but everyone had their own hail damage messes to clean up, so she didn’t expect many to come. “And yet the field was full of folks digging garlic and cleaning bulbs. Sure, Jeremy and I could have done the harvest on our own, but it would have been sad; we would have

been pretty blue about all the ruined squash and stunted garlic. With neighbors and friends, the afternoon was full of cheer and gratitude.”

This year, they’re celebrating 15 growing seasons at their

small, three-acre farm in Spearfish Valley, and Jenkins is endlessly grateful for the caring and generous people she’s gotten to know through the farm. “We would not be doing this if it weren’t for the community that has wrapped its arms around this little project.”

## *Going to Market*

Jenkins and Smith tend to nearly an acre in mixed vegetables, cut flowers, and herbs. Beyond that, they plant a number of fruit trees and shrubs at Cycle Farm.

“We try and market produce from the end of April through the end of October, so we’re growing everything from spring greens, peas, and radishes, to summer treats like green beans, cucumbers, and tomatoes, to fall storage crops like potatoes, winter squash, leeks, and garlic,” Jenkins says.

Seasonal items hit the farm stand as they grow. For example, garlic scapes are a super seasonal treat that typically sprouts in June. Scapes are the flowering top of hardneck garlic plants. They are only available for a short window of time before garlic bulbs mature and are ready to harvest. “We cut them while they are wily, pigtail-y, and tender. They have a mild garlic flavor and go great in all sorts of things. Our favorite sourdough pizza shop Dough Trader Pizza makes a seasonal pizza using local garlic scapes that is scrumptious,” Jenkins says.

June also brings a full field of greens. Over the course of the season, Cycle Farm is growing 30-some varieties of lettuce and different mustard greens, bok choy, tatsoi,

and more. In addition, Jenkins offers free recipes for how to easily prepare and enjoy meals made from food grown on the farm.

## *The Art of Life on Cycle Farm*

Over the years, Jenkins and Smith have hosted a number of art events on the farm, including touring musicians playing a farm concert, an author talk, a poetry open mic night with The Black Hills Writers Collective, and Spearfish Spanish Summer Art on the Farm kids camps.

Every other fall, Black Hills State University watercolor art class visits Cycle Farm for a project. “Everyone finds a spot around the farm to settle in and focus. It’s a neat sort of energy, all these eyes and focused attention. I love wandering around and peeking over shoulders, seeing what catches someone: A frost-singed sunflower, or a bright bed of salmon-y snapdragons; the compost pile or the tool shed. It’s a special privilege to get to see this place through their eyes,” Jenkins says.



“I see so many similarities between the artist and the farmer. Both are risk-takers; the work they do is creative, imaginative, inventive, problem-solving. And they are both doing things where frequently they don’t have much control over how things [will] turn out.”

When asked about the most surprising thing she’s learned on the farm, Jenkins shares a poetic list: “The resilience of a wounded chicken. The personality of a lamb. The strength of the wind. The memory of a seed... Everything. Every day. Maybe I’m easily surprised.”

It’s no wonder that when she creates her own art, her favorite subject is the farm. “My relationship with the farm, and the work I do, is very much a part of my quality of life. My life is fuller for the farm,” Jenkins says.



*what's the greatest lesson a woman should learn?*

that since day one.

she's already had everything

she needs within herself.

it's the world that convinced

her she did not.

- rupi kaur



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## Leading with Purpose at the YMCA

**K**eiz Larson's name tag doesn't say CEO. It says "Chief Problem Solver."

For Larson, that chosen title reflects a career spent navigating complexity, building community, and leading with purpose.

With more than 25 years in the nonprofit sector, Larson built a career rooted in curiosity, compassion, and commitment. As CEO of YMCA of the Black Hills, she leads by asking better questions, listening closely, and focusing on people.

"I believe titles matter far less than teamwork," she said. "Some of the best solutions come from people closest to the work, and I try hard to create space for that."

This mindset began as a child, where Larson says she was always deeply curious. "Maybe a little stubborn about finding solutions," she joked. "I always look at complexity and think... 'OK, how do we make this better?'"

In 2021, Larson stepped into the CEO role after spending time in development and operations. She also has a background in mathematics, which taught her the importance of financial stability, and in education, which sharpened her understanding of systems and equity. She also worked in community advocacy, which taught her the value of collaboration.

"Every role I held was preparing me to be a problem solver at this scale."

STORY BY  
MIRANDA  
O'BRYAN  
HERTEL

# more than a title

# BE A GOOD HUMAN

The ability to zoom out and see both the big picture and the individual experience has become a defining part of her leadership. It's also what allows her to navigate an organization with as many facets as the YMCA.

When initially taking on the role during the pandemic, Larson led with a vision of stability for staff and the community. Over time, her priorities shifted to sustainability, "so the YMCA can remain strong for generations," she said. "Systems matter because they create consistency, resilience, and adaptability."

Despite her vision changing and growing, at the heart of everything she does is a passion for people. Every decision Larson makes aims to develop future leaders.

"At our core, we are about access and belonging – ensuring no one is turned away and everyone has an opportunity to thrive," she said. "If we invest in people, we ensure the Y's mission lives far beyond my tenure."

But her work doesn't come without challenges. In a space where the needs are constant and personal, the weight of leadership can be heavy. For Larson, it's in those moments that she turns back to the people at the center of it all.

"When the work feels heavy or the challenges stack up, gratitude helps me pause and reframe," Larson said as she reflected on some of the moments that have kept her going as CEO. "Sometimes it's stepping in to cover for a camp counselor, leading a hike, and watching kids discover wild raspberries for the very first time and realizing how big their world just became. Other times it's standing on the pool deck and seeing a child finally put their head in the water during swim lessons — not

because they were told to, but because they trusted the instructor beside them. Some days, when I need a break from paperwork, I'll slip into one of our childcare classrooms and read a story to a group of children. Their questions, their laughter, their curiosity — it instantly recenters me."

Larson also reflected on moments with the adults who call the YMCA home away from home, when a member shares progress from their health journey or she sees staff members develop and grow into their roles.

"I could go on and on. These moments are small on their own, but together they tell the story of why this work matters. People. Always. Even on the hardest days, I'm reminded why this work matters by a conversation, a breakthrough, or a moment of hope. That's fuel enough."

Outside of her role at the YMCA, Larson's life is grounded in family and the moments that come with it. She is a mom, grandma, sister, and a "fiercely loyal" friend.

"Family is everything to me," she said. "Saturday morning coffee is basically mandatory."

It's in those quieter moments — time spent with her grandchildren, laughing with friends, and being outdoors — that Larson finds balance to lead.

"This role has deepened my empathy in ways I couldn't have fully understood when I started. Leading the YMCA — and navigating life alongside it — has reinforced my belief that every struggle and every experience continues to shape who we are becoming."

That approach to life has impacted how Larson views the YMCA's role in the Black Hills community.

Beyond a fitness center or childcare provider, she sees the Y as a place where connection happens across generations and backgrounds.

"We're a hub for youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility," she said. "Community isn't optional. Belonging is essential to well-being for every person, no matter the age."

Whether leading a strategy meeting or reading to children, Larson strives to make people feel seen, supported, and valued.

"I don't take time, people, or connections for granted," Larson said. "And it looks like remembering something very simple: Be a good human. That idea guides everything we do."



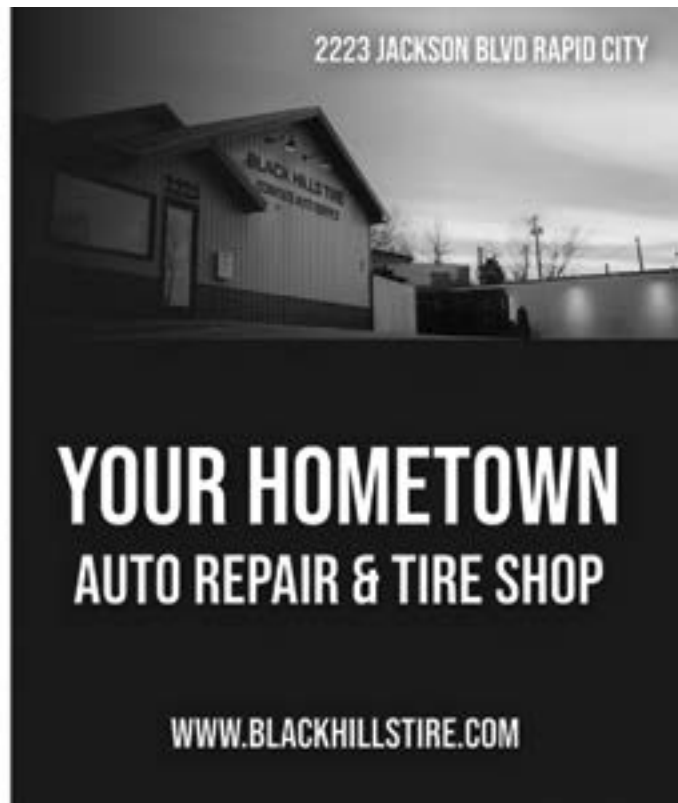
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# CREATING HAPPILY EVER AFTER

## GENERATIONS WEDDINGS

Debie Palmer had seven days to make a decision. The property in front of her farm had just gone up for sale, and she knew that whoever bought it would determine the future of everything around her. Without covenants to protect the land, anything could go up next door. She needed to act.

"I thought about it for about seven days," she says. "And then I thought — weddings are recession-proof."

That seven-day leap of faith is what became Generations, a wedding venue nestled in the Black Hills that has grown into something neither Debie nor her daughter-in-law, Christina Gabrielson, could have predicted. Along the way, the partnership has fostered a close bond between the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law duo.

Debie has spent most of her life building things that last. For 25 years, she worked alongside her husband at Three Sons Landscaping, a family business that grew from a 1967 flatbed truck and a wheelbarrow into a thriving commercial landscaping company. She knows what it takes to start from nothing.

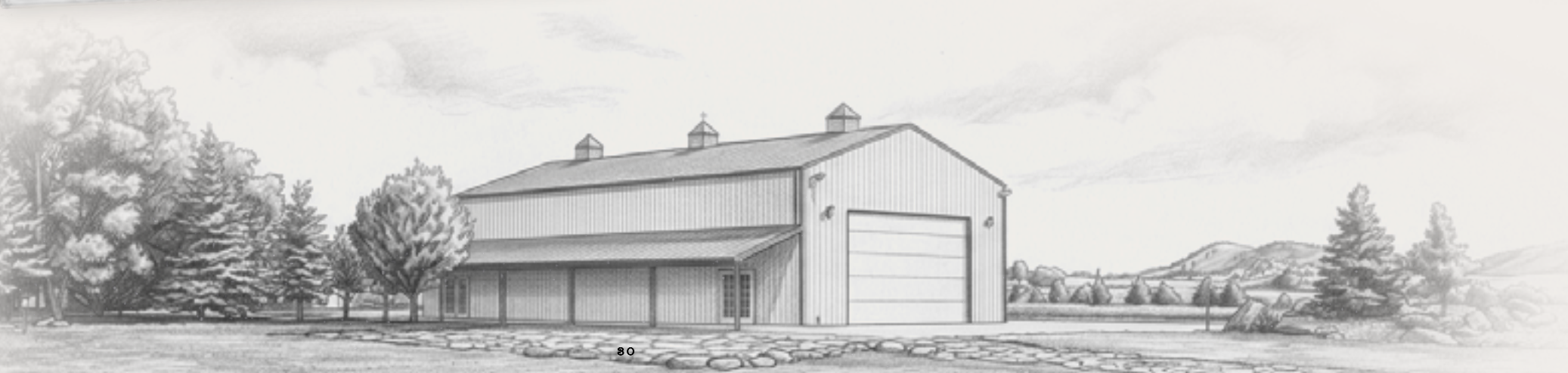
So when the property went up for sale and she started turning the wedding venue idea over in her mind, she also knew something else: if she was going to do this, she wanted to do it with Christina.

Christina had extensive fundraising experience, where she was able to raise a significant amount of money for local organizations. This drive and determination caught Debie's attention.

STORY BY MADIGAN SCHMITZ



"IT TRULY DOESN'T  
FEEL LIKE BUSINESS.  
IT FEELS LIKE FAMILY."



"I just saw how Christina worked," Debie says. "How organized she was, her work ethic. I felt like she and I were just 100% on the same mindset."

When it came time to build Generations, the choice wasn't a question.

Christina, for her part, had been working at an insurance company — a nine-to-five that kept her at a desk. The flexibility that came with co-owning Generations changed that completely, and she relished in being able to be more part of her children's day-to-day lives.

Last spring, her son took first place in the state high jump, clearing six feet eight inches. Christina was there.

That kind of presence is something Debie made a priority from the beginning, drawing on her own years of coaching youth sports and never missing a debate or a football game while raising her three boys. She wanted the same for her children's families.

"That's the whole reason why I wanted to do this together," Debie says. "So she could always be there for the children's functions."

Building Generations was not a glamorous undertaking. It was, by both women's description, three years of trial-by-fire and sheer determination.

They cleared tree lines with excavators. They stained every board and painted every surface of the venue themselves. A chandelier arrived in 5,000 pieces, and they assembled it. They hauled lumber in Debbie's Enclave and plant material in Christina's Durango, loading up both vehicles until neither had an inch to spare.

Christina, who had never operated heavy

equipment in her life, learned to drive a dump truck — stick shift, on a hill — with Debie as her instructor. The lesson may have gone a little less than smoothly.

"It was terrible," Debie says, both women laughing at the memory.

What they built is a venue that reflects both of their tastes.

Christina handles the couples throughout the planning process, and Debie has her eye on the broader market, staying aware of what other venues in the growing Black Hills wedding scene are offering. Together, they've made it a priority to keep pricing accessible — because making someone's dream wedding possible is always the end goal.

"It was really important to us to make their dreams come true," Debie says.

And the name? Generations goes much further than the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law duo.

Debie and her husband built Three Sons Landscaping with their boys woven into everything — the company name, the labor, the legacy. Generations follows that same logic. From the time the grandchildren were young, Debie let them help out around the venue by washing windows, planting flowers, mowing, and staining boards. Now some of them are in their late teens.

"They'll walk in and go straight to me," she says, "and they'll say, 'What can we do to help?' Every single time."

The familial nature of this endeavor permeates the entire venue, making it easy to tell that the team of people keeping things running is bound by



more than just employment. The mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dynamic, albeit unconventional, has only allowed the two to grow closer.

Christina admits she sometimes catches herself off guard by the reaction, still not fully internalizing just how rare their dynamic is, because it feels like the way things have always been. She's never known any other type of love from Debie.

"My favorite part about being in business with Debie is that it truly doesn't feel like business," she says. "It feels like family. We get to build something meaningful together while also being present for the big and small moments in each other's lives. We've both poured our hearts into this, and I think people can feel that when they walk into Generations. It's a big part of why I love what I do."

They spend more time with each other than they do with their own husbands and kids. They scramble through

last-minute venue prep in work clothes, then go home, shower, put on their dresses, and come back ready to host someone else's most important day.

They wear, by their own count, about fourteen different hats, and love every bit of it.

Debie didn't set out to build a wedding venue. She set out to protect what she already had. But in the process, she built something she couldn't have planned — a business, a legacy, and a partnership with a woman who has become, by every measure, family.

"We take care of each other's souls," she says.

Leaning on each other, they're a partnership that offers prosperity for the family's generations to come, and a relationship that goes much deeper than blood.

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STORY BY MIRANDA O'BRYAN HERTEL

## How Hope & Health grew from a personal journey to a community one

“That was the point where I decided I would do whatever it took to get my life back.”

Working as a dental assistant, Hope Weber thought she'd found her calling, but it wasn't until something as routine as wearing gloves began to change her path. What started as mild skin irritation quickly escalated into something far more painful, leaving her dependent on prescriptions just to get through the day.

“The itching was overwhelming, and I remember thinking how limiting it felt to rely on something just to function normally,” she said.

Initially diagnosed as eczema, her condition was treated with topical steroids that only masked the issue. Later, after discovering she had a severe allergy, Weber started her real recovery.

That realization marked a turning point. With newfound determination, Weber began thinking not just about what she was putting on her skin, but also about what she was putting into her body.

She began with her lifestyle: cooking from scratch, focusing on whole foods, and discovering how internal health is reflected by external symptoms. Gradually, skincare became her next step. That's how Hope & Health, her Black Hills-based business that supports

skin with simple, intentional ingredients, took shape.

“My approach is simple — less is more,” Weber said. “Fewer ingredients, but higher quality and intentional purpose behind each one.”

Hope & Health products are handmade by Weber in small batches, a process that allows her to maintain quality and stay closely connected to every ingredient. That connection extends beyond her own work and into the local community.





*my approach  
is simple -  
less is more*



“I personally render and purify the tallow myself, so I know the full process from start to finish,” she said. “To me, closing that loop strengthens not only the quality of the product, but also the connection to the community and the people producing those ingredients.”

Weber works closely with producers across the area, like Red Water Meats, 3 Queens Honey, and

Sage and Cedar.

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Weber didn’t set out to start a business. Instead, a personal solution gradually evolved into something much bigger, shaped by her experiences and the encouragement of those around her.

“I had been using tallow personally for years before starting the business,” Weber said. “In the beginning,

it was just a hobby — something fun to experiment with.”

For many of her customers, their connection begins with a shared frustration, feeling like they’ve tried everything without finding lasting relief.

“My favorite thing is hearing that my products have truly helped people, especially when someone has tried many other things without success,” she said.

And that’s where her approach stands apart. Rather than offering a quick fix, Weber focuses on helping customers understand how ingredients interact with their skin and why simplicity can often be more effective.

As interest from friends and family grew, so did the possibilities. What began in her home kitchen eventually led to a dedicated workspace, marking a new chapter for her business and family.

Alongside this business growth, Weber embraced another important role: motherhood.

“I’m now able to be a stay-at-home (and work-from-home) mom to my young son, which I’m incredibly grateful for,” Weber said. “It

*"You're not alone.  
Our bodies are incredibly  
resilient, and there is a real  
possibility of healing"*

allows me to be present with him while also building something meaningful."

For Weber, that balance is part of what defines success — not just building a business, but creating a life rooted in intention, where her work, values, and family are all closely connected.

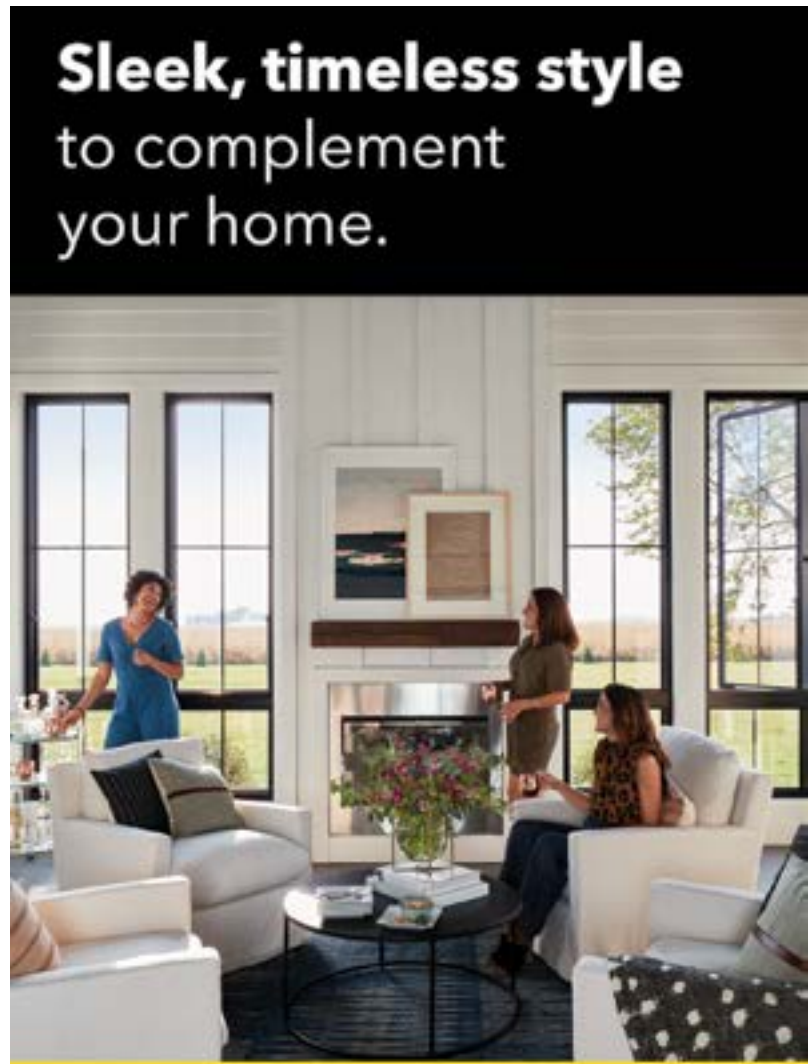
"I want people to feel like they aren't compromising by choosing natural skincare," she said. "I want them to genuinely enjoy using the products and feel glad they made the switch."

While it's often women who seek out Hope & Health, Weber's products are for anyone.

"It's also meaningful to hear when husbands, boyfriends, or sons end up using and loving the products too," she said. "I feel like that's such a win."

Those relationships, as well as the ones built through Hope & Health, remind her of the value of her business.

"You're not alone. Our bodies are incredibly resilient, and there is a real possibility of healing," Weber said. "Because I've personally gone through such a difficult season with my own skin, there's a deep connection in knowing I've been able to help someone out of that same place."



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# *why* QUALITY NEVER *goes* *out of* STYLE

## RETRO REIMAGINED

BY KELSY PETERSON

**A** side hustle born out of necessity is now blossoming into a booming local business, all thanks to the passion of one local woman. Brenna Williamson is the owner and artist behind the incredible trinkets and treasures found inside Retro Reimagined. But that's not all she takes on. In fact, you might be surprised to learn her day-to-day career is actually a land rights agent for an engineering firm— all while growing Retro Reimagined on the side.

Located on 7th Street in Downtown Rapid City, Retro Reimagined is the place to go if you're seeking mid-century modern pieces that tell a story. You'll discover everything from stunning refinished furniture to vintage barware and decorations. Brenna clarifies that her store isn't for the thrifter or reseller. "It's for those who love the look, soul, and style of vintage design but don't have the time—or desire—to dig through thrift stores, haul pieces home, clean them, or refinish them." Here, all that work has already been done for you. Brenna and her staff take the time to care for each item so it can continue to be admired and loved for years to come. The carefully curated inventory is "part gallery, part living space," Brenna states, "designed for those who choose to live on the





colorful side of life and who truly value craftsmanship.” Notably, most of the furniture within Retro Reimagined was crafted decades ago in America by skilled artisans using solid materials. In many cases, these pieces are truly one-of-a-kind.

But how did she discover this skill and more importantly — how does she have the time? Brenna says she’s been somewhat of an artist for as long as she can remember. “I’ve always had some kind of workshop—a place where I could make a mess, experiment, and teach myself new ways to create across different mediums. That trial-and-error approach has always been how I learn best.” Her skill set and love for refinishing furniture, however, was discovered during a time in her life when she had to start over. Unable to spend a lot of money on furnishing her home, and not loving what she was finding in department stores, Brenna went another direction. “I turned my way of thinking around and decided to get creative, spending

time in local thrift stores looking for inexpensive pieces to fill my space. In doing so, I began noticing furniture that was incredibly well built. Solid, heavy pieces with beautiful details hidden beneath scratches, bad paint jobs, and years of neglect. They weren’t pretty on the surface, but they had so much potential.”

As her interest grew, Brenna immersed herself in the world of mid-century modern design, studying its unique history and key furniture manufacturers. The shift in mass-produced furniture from overseas caused many of the domestic furniture companies to close their doors. Much of what you buy on the market today is made in China and won’t stand the test of time. “When design trends fade, these once-beautiful pieces are often discarded and end up as landfill waste, which honestly makes me sick to think about. I realized I wanted to offer people an opportunity to furnish their homes with the same quality products that were made in this country decades ago.” After years of hobby searching “in the wild” for these pieces, Brenna has developed a keen eye for spotting mid-century furniture and decor. Once her own space was filled,

she moved on to refinishing pieces for friends. Eventually, it grew into vendor fairs, online markets, and now Retro Reimagined.

Making the time to fill a store, though, takes a team. After encouragement from so many around her to offer her work on a bigger scale, Brenna took the leap to open her store. However, with a full-time career, she doesn’t have as much time to hunt for pieces. To curate the store, she relies on pieces that people bring into the shop, as well as the strong relationships she’s built with collectors. “I do all types of consulting and procurement with folks who just don’t know what to do with it all and at times are overwhelmed by it. I do estate clean outs and help people find peace with that process.” Brenna shares that while she has the eye for the pieces themselves, Retro Reimagined wouldn’t be what it is without her staff. She’s trained her team in the art of curation when it comes to staging the store, and they’ve excelled in their ability to create visual harmony with shapes, heights, and placement.

Brenna spends most of her weekends in the shop listening to customers fall in love with pieces or pausing in awe of the space, both of which are some of her proudest moments. “The support, friendships, and trust I’ve gained through this journey have been the most gratifying and humbling experiences of my life. I value every customer who walks through the door, and I’m endlessly grateful to all who continue to be part of this adventure.”

What started organically and without a grand plan has turned into a space that celebrates well-made, thoughtfully restored, mid-century pieces. Brenna and her staff at Retro Reimagined work to honor the craftsmanship of these pieces and give them a second life. Which Brenna shares has “always mattered most to me.”





*at*  
**WORK**  
*in the*  
**WILD**

STORY BY AVERY PORCH

**S**ome stumble into meaningful careers by accident, while others find fulfilling work after years of trial and error. Then there are the rare few; those like Maggie Engler, who discover their calling from a very early age. “My role in this world is to get people excited about nature. It’s what I’ve dedicated my life to,” she says.

Maggie was born and raised in Eastern Minnesota, growing up in a small town called Stillwater.

She attended the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and earned a degree in natural resource management with a specialty in environmental education and interpretation. Following graduation, she accepted a position as a naturalist at Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary in Green Bay, Wisconsin. She ran their interpretive and educational programs, gaining valuable, hands-on experience. “It was a wonderful, wonderful place to start,” she recalls.

After several years in Wisconsin, she finally landed in Western South Dakota. Maggie felt drawn to the vast landscape, diverse wildlife, and towering ponderosa pines. “To me, home is the Black Hills,” she says. Maggie worked for Custer State Park for several seasons, and then she unexpectedly landed a position at the South Dakota Division of Wildlife.

However, after working for the division for nearly ten years, Maggie realized she needed additional skills to advance her career. She accepted a job at the Rocky Mountain Foundation in Missoula, Montana, to learn



the art of fundraising. “I knew that if I was going to achieve the goals for my life, I was going to have to learn to raise money. I was terrified,” she admits. But like with most things, Maggie was determined to learn how — and learn to the very best of her ability.

Raised in a supportive, tight-knit family, Maggie was often told that she could do anything that she set her mind to. “That message has kept me going for all of these years,” she says. Both her parents were highly driven individuals, instilling in her a strong work ethic and a passion for living life to the fullest.

Finally, after four years in Montana, Maggie found her way back to the Black Hills. She took the helm as

**“I’ve been able to bring together all the parts of me that need to be fed.”**

executive director of the Black Hills Raptor Center, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting native birds of prey and their natural habitats. “Raptors had my heart from the very beginning,” she says. “They’re a great way to get people excited about the outdoors.” The center provides over 100 educational programs a year, presenting at schools, libraries, and community events.

They also offer raptor rehabilitation services throughout the region and have treated birds from North Dakota, Nebraska, Montana, and Wyoming. Not everyone understands the important work that they do, however. “There are times when people will say, ‘Well, rehabbing red-tailed hawks—what difference does it make? There are so many.’ It helps that one red-tailed hawk. It also gives me a chance to teach—the people, the kids, the volunteers.” Maggie believes in the importance of adding to the scientific body of knowledge and conducting research to aid future conservation efforts.



In addition to her duties at the Raptor Center, Maggie also works at Rapid City Dyslexia Care, where she has tutored students for over 15 years. Shortly after joining the organization, Maggie realized that she was dyslexic herself. She never knew that the unusual things that she did, particularly with spelling, were a part of how the dyslexic brain functions. What some view as a disability, Maggie views as an advantage; it helps her relate to her students better, and she often shares tips that have helped her navigate challenges in her own life.

She loves her job as a tutor. It allows her the flexibility she needs for her work at the Raptor Center while also providing her with the opportunity to do what she loves most — teach. “I’ve been able to bring together all the parts of me that need to be fed,” she says.

Often, her work as a tutor intersects with her work at the Raptor Center. “When they’ve reached a milestone, sometimes my kids choose to see the birds at the Raptor Center or request that we bring a bird to their house, and that’s always special to see,” she shares.

Maggie is known for forming strong, caring relationships with her volunteers and students. She coordinates a team of 90 loyal volunteers at the Raptor Center, and she still stays in touch with many of her former students. She jokingly tells them, “You’re stuck with me; you have an extra grandma now!”

To those who know her, Maggie is many things —welcoming, funny, kindhearted, determined.

But Maggie views herself as a teacher, first and foremost. Through her work at the Raptor Center and Rapid City Dyslexia Care, she intends to keep doing what she does best: sharing her love of education and her deep appreciation for the natural world.

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