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FREE | MAY/JUNE EDITION | 2026



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GIVING BACK

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A Little Fright, A Lot of Fight



THE STATE OF BEING A MOTHER.

I always knew I wanted to be a mother. I knew it the way some people know they want to be doctors at age eight. Being a mother was always my dream.

Actually becoming a mother has been a journey.

From the time I held our first newborn son in my arms, I was changed. And every milestone and hurdle that has come since, with him and our other two boys, has shaped me and grown me in ways I never could have imagined.

There are the big moments and small moments. And, I would argue, it's the small moments scattered between the big ones that are the most precious.

The other night, my middle son told me he didn't want to turn six this year — he didn't want to grow up because he didn't want to move out. That he was going to miss me singing him a song every night and giving him a “secret dream.”

And that is one of those little moments I will treasure forever.

Because someday, he won't feel that way. Someday, he'll be ready to grow up. Someday, he won't need me the way he does now. None of them will.

And that is the heartbreaking beauty of motherhood — it is both a joy and a heartbreak to watch them grow.

The time we have been given here to nurture is a gift.

And maybe how we show up for our children changes with time, but I promise we will still show up. I know,

because my mother still shows up for me. And I still need her, even if it's in different ways than when I was young.

We all need to be nurtured and cared for — no matter how old we get. There is a profound human desire to be needed, to be chosen, to be heard. And because we need it, we often desire to give it as well.

So maybe you aren't a mother from giving birth. Perhaps instead you are an adoptive mother, a mother-to-be, a mother trying to conceive, a mother to other family members, a mother of a pet, or a mother in spirit.

As women, we are often nurturers in many different circumstances. To our friends, to our family members, to our colleagues. We are looked to as a soft place to land — a mentor, a comforter, a caretaker.

So this Mother's Day, let us remember that honor.

Your heart is important to every person impacted by your kindness.

You are needed. You are valued. You are important.

Biology alone doesn't define us; the selfless ways we impact the world do.

The state of being true.

Warmly,

Kari Nielsen

EDITOR'S NOTE

meet our

you've
read the
stories,
now
meet the
women
behind
them.



KRYSTAL BRESNAHAN

Krystal Bresnahan believes building a career is a lifelong journey made easier with a strong support network. She earned her PhD studying communication at the University of South Florida, and she brings 10+ years of experience working across industries to her writing. One of her favorite jobs is sharing stories about the unique career journeys of badass women living in West River South Dakota. In her free time, you'll likely find her at the public library. Her goal is to connect people with opportunities to learn, grow, and build community. Her greatest challenge is "the word count."



AVERY PORCH

Avery grew up in Frederick, Maryland, and graduated from Belmont Abbey College in 2024. Currently residing in Rapid City, she works as an event coordinator and freelance writer. She began writing during her college gap year and quickly discovered a passion for sharing local stories. In her free time, she enjoys trying new recipes, listening to podcasts, and tackling home improvement projects with her husband.



MIRANDA O'BRYAN

Miranda O'Bryan is a South Dakota native and storyteller based in Rapid City. A graduate of South Dakota State University, she has built her career around sharing meaningful stories through her work as a news anchor, children's book author, Miss South Dakota 2023, and current master's student with Harvard University's Harvard Extension School. In her free time, she enjoys movies, books, and life with her husband, Josh, and their fur babies, Jericho and Millie.



KELSY PETERSON

While most of her days are spent wrangling a wild toddler, this Rapid City local has a deep love for traveling, the outdoors, and home renovations. Her passion for storytelling sparked during her years working in the tourism industry, where she uncovered stories about the Black Hills area and the people who call it home. Now, she takes great pride in crafting untold stories and shining a light on our community.



MADIGAN SCHMITZ

Originally from Spearfish, South Dakota, Madigan Schmitz is honored to represent her community and tell stories from incredible women throughout the Black Hills. Madigan has been a writer for BHW since 2023, when she interned for a summer while earning her undergraduate degree in journalism at the University of Montana. This publication became the perfect creative outlet in between reporting assignments. Madigan is still living in Missoula and finds it a joy to stay connected to her hometown and the phenomenal people who cultivate the culture of such a special place. When she's not writing, you can find her reading a good book, traveling, and searching for her new favorite song.

writers

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Dr. Anderson and Dr. Finley are among only six board-certified allergists in South Dakota — and the only two in western South Dakota and the surrounding region. These providers, along with Mallory Wipf, PA-C, specialize in diagnosing allergies, asthma, and immunological diseases in both adults and children. They develop comprehensive management plans tailored to you, using evidence-based medicine and the latest advancements in the field.

Dr. Toyoda, Dr. Kelts, Dr. Stanley, and Lanesse Purtell offer a compassionate approach to families and individuals. Their goal is to provide unwavering support throughout all life stages — addressing well-child checks, acute care needs (injuries, illnesses, etc.), women's health, and the emotional and mental well-being of their patients. Dr. Toyoda, Dr. Kelts, and Dr. Stanley are all board-certified in family medicine, ensuring that their patients' needs are always their top priority.

This team of experienced professionals is dedicated to helping patients and the community thrive. They are actively involved with community boards, coaching teams, participating in school PTAs, and more — creating an inviting atmosphere that encourages authentic interactions.

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THE LOCAL EDIT

BY KELSY PETERSON

Longer days, warmer nights — hello sweet, sweet summer. Find the perfect excuse to get outside or spend a night on the town with these fun events happening in the area.

MAY

Dakota Country Dance Night

RAPID CITY | MAY 1

Toe-tapping fun awaits at the 707 Night Club in Rapid City during the Dakota Country Dance Night. Join in for a night of great music, drinks, and line dancing. Presale tickets are available online or at the door. If you'd like a guaranteed place to sit, be sure to grab the reserved tier seating ticket.

Custer State Park Open House & Free Fishing Weekend

CUSTER STATE PARK | MAY 15-17

Enjoy free entrance and free fishing during Open House weekend in Custer State Park. As their first celebration of the season, the park is also offering discounts on other incredible experiences like 20% off a Buffalo Safari Jeep Tour and the Chuckwagon Cookout.

Hops and Hogs

DEADWOOD | MAY 15 & 16

Bacon and beer join forces at Deadwood's Hops and Hogs! This festival pairs craft beers with unique bacon dishes at different locations in town.

FRÜHLINGSFEST

RAPID CITY | MAY 30

Fruhlingsfest marks the start of the event season in Downtown Rapid City. Located at Main Street Square, this event features a spring street market full of local vendors, live music, and great locally sourced beers!

Elements:

Immersive Dinner Series

BOX ELDER | MAY 21

Earth, fire, water, and air inspire the latest immersive dinner series at The Box. Taste bold flavors in this imaginative culinary experience that begins with the four elements and concludes with a fifth from the cosmic space between them.

JUNE

Spring Volksmarch at Crazy Horse Memorial®

CRAZY HORSE MEMORIAL® | JUNE 6

Only twice a year is the top of Crazy Horse Memorial® open to the public. During the spring and fall Volksmarch, hikers are allowed to trek up and out onto the arm of Crazy Horse to admire not only this incredible mountain carving but also the stunning views that surround the memorial. The hike is 6.2 miles, and registration starts at 7:00 a.m.

The Mickelson Trail Summer Trek

MICKELSON TRAIL | JUNE 19-21

Explore one of the most iconic trails in the Black Hills during the Mickelson Trail Summer Trek. This annual three-day bicycle ride covers all 109 miles of the Mickelson Trail in a fun group atmosphere!

Wild Bill Days

DEADWOOD | JUNE 19-21

It's time to celebrate the life of Wild Bill Hickok on the streets of his favorite lawless town — Deadwood. Enjoy live concerts, shop vendors, and witness the ways of the Old West with demonstrations and reenactments. You'll even have the opportunity to learn how to gold pan from Northern Hills Prospectors.

West Boulevard Summer Festival

RAPID CITY | JUNE 20-21

Wilson Park is brimming with locally made goods during the West Boulevard Festival. Enjoy a summer day as you shop from a large selection of unique treasures in this beautiful park setting.

Black Hills Renaissance Festival

STURGIS | JUNE 27-28

Hear ye, hear ye, the Black Hills Renaissance Festival is back! Taking over the grounds of the Kickstands Campground in Sturgis, don't miss out on two full days of good old-fashioned merriment.

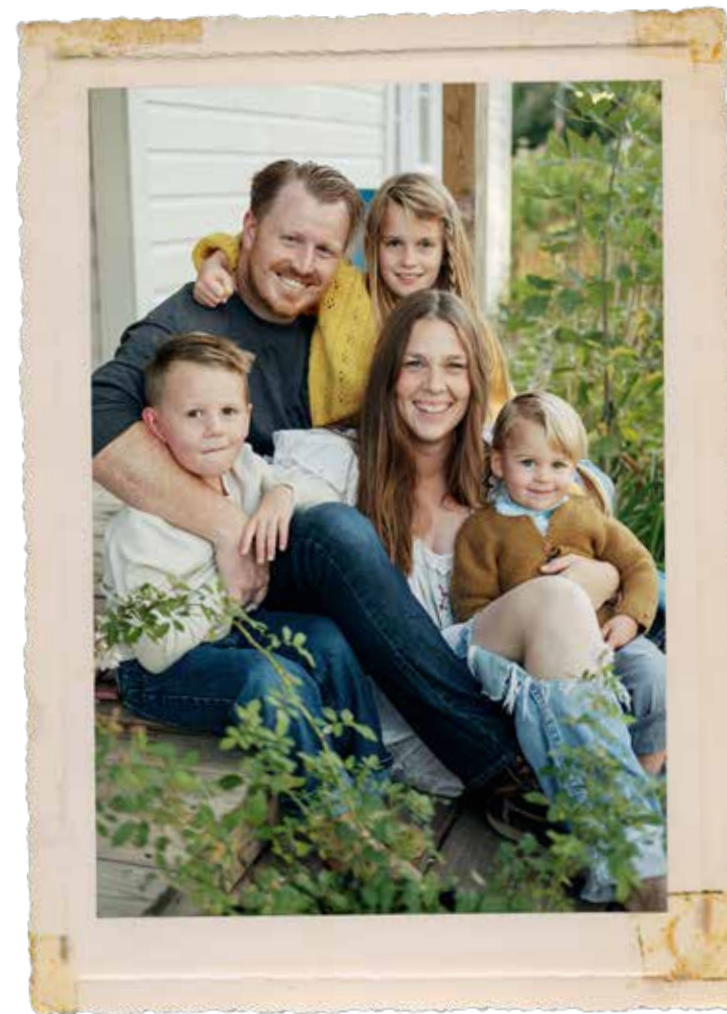
The Art of Being a Neighbor

FLATLANDER COFFEE & FLOWERS

BY MADIGAN SCHMITZ

Redefining the "Flatlander" Spirit

IN THE HEART OF SOUTH DAKOTA



Being a business owner extends beyond typical entrepreneurial skills. Many people can start their own businesses, but true success requires a combination of heart, soul, and an unwavering desire to give back to the community that gave to you first.

For Lisa Siemonsma, that desire has always been rooted in people. A California native, Lisa has spent most of her life learning what it means to truly serve a community. She poured herself into owning and operating her flower shop and saw the immense value in giving back to the place that grew both her and her business. When the pandemic reshaped the landscape of her hometown — and much of the country — Lisa and her husband saw it as a sign that a new season was on the horizon.

"We came here looking for opportunity — for our kids, for the next generation. A good economy, good people," says Lisa.

The Siemonsmas arrived in Rapid City nearly five years ago. They purchased a tiny 1908 home in Wasta — a town of roughly 85 people situated just outside of Wall — and threw themselves into renovating it. On a small plot of land next door, Lisa returned to her roots, and began growing flowers.

What started as a side gig she could do while homeschooling her kids blossomed into something more, for both her and her community. Homestake Flowers, as she called it, became a gathering place. Lisa hosted U-pick events and floral design workshops for folks all over western South Dakota. Word began



FLATLANDER COFFEE & FLOWERS

to travel through the hills and so did Lisa — hauling bouquets into Rapid City to pop up at local shops in town.

It was Laura Fullerton of Alter Ego Fashions who first planted the seed for what would eventually become Flatlander Coffee & Flowers. When a neighboring storefront in her building became available, she saw the vision before Lisa did.

"She kept asking and I kept thinking about it," says Lisa. "In my brain, I was automatically shutting the door — I've owned a brick and mortar before. I know the good, the bad and the ugly that comes with it." But the doors kept opening anyway. By last September, Lisa and her husband had sold the Wasta property and were back in Rapid City to begin growing something new.

The name Flatlander is one that Lisa wears with intention. Back in California, it was a term locals used — not always kindly — to describe the Bay Area visitors who flooded their mountain town every summer. When she arrived in South Dakota, she found herself on the other side of the moniker.

"We weren't the hometown heroes anymore. We didn't know people for the past five or six generations like back home," she says. "So we chose that name in the sense of, we've been both of those people. It shouldn't really matter. We're all kind of flatlanders to somebody."

We're all kind of flatlanders to somebody.

For Lisa, the name is a gentle, cheeky call to set down the labels and lean into something simpler: being a good neighbor. It's a phrase she keeps coming back to, and one that shapes everything about how she's designing the Flatlander experience.





We really want people to feel valued, seen, and known.

"I really love the idea of slowing down. It comes down to how we share life with one another," she says. "We really want people to feel valued, seen, and known."

The shop hopes to bring together specialty coffee and locally grown flowers under one roof. Lisa's husband will take the helm in terms of the coffee program — informed in no small part by his brother in the UK, a seasoned coffee roaster who gave the couple an immersive education during a trip to London. Lisa, meanwhile, will direct the floral side, sourcing blooms from fellow flower farmers across the region during the growing season.

"There's something really, really special about it," she says, speaking highly of the opportunity to partner with local farmers and artisans. "We're kind of reaching back 50 or 100 years and saying, what can I make with my little world? And how can I share that?"

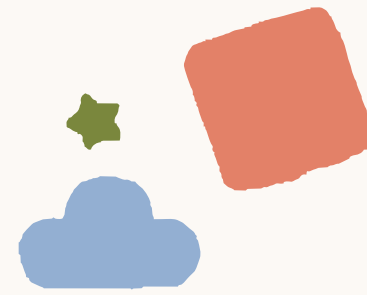
Beyond coffee and flowers, Flatlander will also feature community spaces available to rent out, a reflection of Lisa's deep-seated appreciation of a "third space" for those who need it. Whether it's for homeschool lessons, study sessions and everything in between, it's a space that invites people to connect.

"We want a chill, welcoming vibe — not a get in, get out vibe," she says. "We want to be a hub for that."

And as for what she's most looking forward to on the menu? A double shot of espresso, pulled well.

"That's the crown jewel," she says. "If the espresso is good, everything else follows."

Flatlander Coffee & Flowers is expected to open in June in Rapid City. For updates, follow along on instagram @ftlndr, as Lisa and her husband continue sowing something worth waiting for.



NURTURING

beautiful minds

BY KRISTAL BRESNAHAN



Monika Haffner has been that parent navigating evaluations, advocating for her kids, and searching for answers. Now she's helping more families access the care they need through her own practice, Beautiful Minds — a nurturing place for early learning, behavior support, and family growth.



Finding Purpose

“My journey started in a special education classroom. I took that job to coordinate my schedule around my children's and my husband's, because motherhood has always been my priority,” Haffner explains.

As a mother of two children on the autism spectrum, opening her own practice wasn't part of her plan. She was gaining experience in the field, learning, growing, and loving the work, until she kept seeing the same gap... over and over. Families who needed services couldn't access them.

“When my son was diagnosed, we were on Medicaid, and I couldn't find a single provider who accepted it. That changed everything for me.”

Through her own research, she discovered Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), which is an approach to understanding why people behave the way they do, and using that understanding to help them learn new skills and reach their goals. This approach looks at the relationship between a person's environment and their behavior. Understanding the triggers for a behavior and what follows it can empower meaningful, lasting changes in someone's life.

In practice, this might look like teaching a child to communicate their needs, helping someone develop daily living skills, or reducing behaviors that are getting in the way of learning and connection. Every plan is individualized, data-driven, and adjusted over time based on what's actually working.


Haffner earned her Master's degree studying ABA and is working on a doctorate in clinical psychology. She built her own practice focused on family-centered, high-quality ABA therapy, because there are still families who can't access the care they need, and she wants to reach more of them.

“Families wait a long time for services, and some have never heard of ABA before connecting with me. Watching their skepticism turn into hope as they see their child's progress is one of the most rewarding things I've done professionally.”

Providing Care

At Beautiful Minds, Haffner and her team create an environment where exploration feels safe and exciting. “Play is how children make sense of the world. Teaching a child to play isn't just about the playground; it's laying the foundation for a full life,” she explains. “It's how they learn to communicate, solve problems, handle frustration, and connect with others. For kids who struggle socially, missing early play experiences can create a gap that touches everything from school to friendships to self-esteem.”





"PLAY IS HOW CHILDREN MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD. TEACHING A CHILD TO PLAY ISN'T JUST ABOUT THE PLAYGROUND; IT'S LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A FULL LIFE."

She follows the child's lead, builds on what already lights them up, and then gradually expands their world from there. When a child feels successful and engaged, curiosity follows. Imagination develops the same way.

"What my kids have taught me can't be found in any textbook or certification program. They've made me a better clinician... more patient, more creative, more committed to seeing the whole child and not just the behavior in front of me," she says. "They remind me every day why this work matters."

The biggest challenge in Haffner's work is that there's no one-size-fits-all approach, and parents often come to her at different stages. "Some are freshly diagnosed and still grieving the vision they had for their child. Others have been fighting for years and are just worn down. The work looks different for each of them. The way I overcome that is by listening first."

Haffner's learned how capable parents are when someone actually believes in them. "A lot of times, parents don't need another person telling them what to do. They need to feel heard. Once that trust is there, the coaching becomes a partnership rather than a prescription. We figure it out

together. Watching a parent go from overwhelmed to confident is honestly just as rewarding as the progress I see in the kids."

Holding True

As work and life continue to change, Haffner says her why remains the same: It's always about helping kids and their families.

"Somewhere in between raising two children with autism, earning two Master's degrees, and navigating everything life threw at me, I just kept going," Haffner shares. "Everything I have, I built myself slowly, intentionally, and with a lot of sacrifice. But if I'm being honest, what I'm most proud of isn't the degrees or the business. It's that my kids are growing up watching their mom refuse to quit."

And for women balancing big career goals with raising a family, especially a family that comes with its own unique challenges, she wants you to know: "Your personal experience is not a setback. It's your greatest qualification. The hard things you've lived through are exactly what make you good at what you do."



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A SHARED TABLE

SKOGEN & HJEM A.M.

TWO SISTERS,
TWO RESTAURANTS,
AND THE COMMUNITY
THAT BROUGHT THEM
BACK TOGETHER.

On any given day in Custer, it's not unusual to be greeted with a wave, a familiar face, or a quick conversation that turns into something longer. Inside two restaurants just blocks apart, that same sense of connection is served alongside every plate — whether it's a carefully crafted dinner at Skogen Kitchen or a warm, welcoming breakfast at Hjem A.M.

Behind both spaces are two sisters whose past, present, and future have woven together — finding their way back to each other in this small Black Hills town.



SKOGEN KITCHEN: A LEAP WORTH TAKING

One block off Mt. Rushmore Road in downtown Custer, Skogen Kitchen has been a community staple for nearly a decade. The restaurant began as a dream of Eliza Raney's husband, one she encouraged them both to pursue.

"One day I was like, come on, babe, let's just do it," Eliza said. "It was one of the scariest things we've ever done... but it was the best."

Just nine months after moving to the Black Hills from Southern California, the couple opened Skogen Kitchen. What started as a space serving both breakfast and dinner has since evolved into an evening destination for locals and visitors alike.

Open Tuesday through Saturday evenings, Skogen Kitchen blends global flavors into a menu that feels both elevated and approachable, creating, as Eliza describes, a small-town space with a European spirit. The menu shifts regularly, but standout dishes include roasted bone marrow and beef tartare, seared Hokkaido scallops, and veal osso buco.

At its core, though, Skogen isn't just about the food.

"Our mission statement is to be unpretentious, making people feel like our friends," Eliza said.

It's a philosophy she and her staff bring to life when greeting guests at the door before they ever see a menu.

"I'm kind of the positive person that comes in and cheers everybody up, but also keeps everybody in line," she added with a laugh.

Originally from Lindström, Minnesota, Eliza said Custer reminds her of the small-town life she grew up with.

"We've become very close friends with a lot of our patrons and other local business owners. It's all just very special and genuine," she said. "The nicest people, the community members, are willing to help you. A lot of them would take the shirt off their back for you. They're just kind of like family now."

For Raney, family in Custer is both figurative and literal.



"IF IT AIN'T GOING,



WE GIVE IT A PUSH."

SISTERS COMING TOGETHER AGAIN

During the pandemic, Eliza's younger sister, Camillia Hjortnaes, moved to Custer for what was meant to be a temporary change of pace.

At the time, her life looked very different.

"I used to be a cobbler; I made designer shoes," Camillia said. "I did that for about eight years, but obviously nobody was wearing [those] shoes during the pandemic."

What was supposed to be a short stay quickly turned into something more permanent.

"I came out to help for a couple of weeks," she said. "And that was almost six years ago."

For these sisters, the reunion marked a return to something they hadn't experienced in over a decade: living life side by side.

"She's my best friend," Camillia said. "We're only 16 months apart."

"It's really fun," she added. "Everybody's always like, 'Oh, it's the sisters!'"

Their bond runs deeper than proximity. Raised in a family of entrepreneurs in Minnesota, Eliza and Camillia grew up

surrounded by hard work and customer service. Their grandfather founded an auto mechanic shop, where the family spent years learning not just the business but also the importance of treating people well.

"To see the kind of customer service my grandfather gave to everybody, it really stems from that," Camillia said.

That foundation continues to shape both of their approaches today.

"If I need help with something, she's always there," Camillia said. "And if she needs help, I'm always available."

In Custer, that support system extends beyond family and into the broader community. A place where, as Camillia puts it, a simple trip to the store turns into a series of friendly waves and conversations.

HJEM A.M.: FINDING HOME

Not only did Camillia reconnect with family in Custer, she built one of her own.

"I pulled into their house, this guy came out, and he's hauling in my bags for me," she recalled arriving in Custer during the pandemic. "I was like, 'Wow, the help out here is great!'"

She laughed. "I tried tipping him five



bucks... and now he's my husband."

For a time, both Camillia and her husband worked at Skogen Kitchen before deciding to take on a new challenge: creating a space of their own.

"If life throws you a curveball, you either swing at it or you strike out," Camillia said. "I think everybody should just take a swing at it."

That swing became Hjem A.M., a breakfast restaurant located on Mt. Rushmore Road. Rooted in Danish and American traditions with Norwegian and Asian influences, the menu reflects both creativity and connection. Current offerings include a French toast sourdough Monte Cristo, ahi tuna sashimi deviled eggs, and fried Norwegian waffles with chicken — a dish inspired directly by customers, in the form of a handwritten recipe sent from across the world.

"This gal came in from Norway. We got to chatting as we do, and just hit it off," Camillia said. "A couple of months later, I received a letter in the mail. She had translated her grandmother's recipe for Norwegian waffles."

"I cried when we received it," she added. "It was so touching, and just what an honor."

For Camillia, those moments are what define the restaurant.

"We're not just selling food. We're selling an experience," she said.

That experience begins the moment someone walks through the door. "We want everybody to feel right at home. I try to touch every table. Sometimes you just have to give a hug —

and for some people, it changes their whole day. A smile or a hug can really do wonders."

THE PHILOSOPHY THAT STARTED IT ALL

While Skogen Kitchen and Hjem A.M. offer different menus, atmospheres, and dining experiences, the foundation behind them is strikingly similar.

Both are built on connection.

Both are rooted in community.

And both are shaped by a willingness to take a chance.

That mindset traces back generations.

Growing up, the sisters watched their grandfather build his business from the ground up, guided by a simple philosophy:

"If it ain't going, we give it a push."

Today, that same mindset lives on in both of them — whether it was Eliza encouraging a leap into restaurant ownership or Camillia trading in a career in shoe design for a new path in hospitality.

Together, they've created something unique in Custer: two distinct spaces that complement rather than compete, each reflecting their individual personalities while sharing a common purpose.

"It's amazing to have my little sister here," Eliza said. "I try to let her lead her own way, but she calls me for advice."

In a town where relationships matter and community runs deep, their story has become part of Custer's fabric.

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ENDLESS LOVE.



Dear Mom,

I am so blessed to have you in my life. I am writing this to tell you how much you mean to me and have impacted me. The relationship we share is something I truly treasure. You've always been there for me. From when I was a baby, to when I missed you at picture day in preschool, and now at every dance event. You have shown up for me every day of my life, and your love has never wavered.

Your kindness shows in everything you do and say. Whether it's the way you listen when we are talking or the little things you do to help me in my busy days. It never goes unnoticed. You have such a generous heart. You are always putting others before yourself, and it's so inspiring.

I admire your strength, patience, and generosity. When life is hard or problems arise, you handle everything with so much grace. You have taught me what it means to care for people deeply and to treat others with compassion and respect. You have always reminded me that you never know what others are going through and that I should be a light in their life even when it's hard. I have learned all of this from watching you. Because of you, I am and continue to be the best version of myself.

I find your relationship with God incredibly inspiring. The way you trust in Him, lean on your faith during difficult times, and live out your beliefs with such sincerity shows me what true devotion looks like. Thank you for giving me a home where I can see this devotion and grow in my relationship, too.

Thank you for loving me unconditionally. Your encouragement gives me confidence, and your love gives me strength. I love you, and I am grateful for everything you do.

Love, Camryn



Dear Camryn,

Long before I held you in my arms, I held you in my heart. From the very first day I knew you would be mine, I have constantly prayed for you.

The joy I have felt since you came into my life has been overwhelming! Your smile, your giggles, and your hugs and kisses have been such a joy!

You immediately fit right into our family of eight and have been showered with love and affection since day one.

I can hardly believe how fast these years have flown by. I've loved every moment from hiking in the Black Hills with you in a backpack to teaching you to read and write. The first sentence you wrote was "Cam Cam Happy." That suited you perfectly and still does. From dance to gymnastics, science fairs, surfing at the lake, and still more dance, I've watched as you've blossomed into such a beautiful young lady, inside and out.

Now, Dad and I are facing our empty nest as you are our last child to take off on your life adventure. I have tears of sadness and tears of joy. I definitely will miss your daily presence in our home, yet I am so excited to see where you will go in life!

You are so kind-hearted, loving, generous, forgiving, smart, ambitious, and adventurous. You have selflessly poured out all of these traits in your relationships with your siblings, friends, and eleven nieces and nephews who absolutely adore you. Most importantly, I have watched as your walk with Christ has become your own. I know He is going to use all your amazing, sweet gifts to change the world.

Thank you for being my daughter, you are such a tremendous blessing, and I will always be your biggest fan!

With all my love, Mom



Dear Amika,

You know how much I love to tell the story of when you were born, because your birth mother chose me to be your mom. It was not easy; we had 15 minutes to learn everything about you, and we were off and running. To say we were overwhelmed on the drive from Minneapolis back to Pelican Rapids was an understatement.

Our road has had more challenges than most, but I always knew what you needed. I doubted myself many times because your journey was so different from how I was raised. The learning curve of trauma from adoption to the discovery of Type 1 Diabetes and finally the isolation of COVID all shaped you. It was so hard, but I never gave up. I prayed and loved you with all of my heart.

You became more than I ever knew possible. Conversations with you the last two years have blown me away. You are wise, kind, smart, loving, and so worldly. Even though you feel anxious and never ready to do things, you do them. Your courage in taking piano lessons and performing in recitals, joining the Bell Choir and performing, completing Confirmation, singing in the Chancel Choir, all things I never dreamt you would do. Now you are tackling CrossFit with that same determination. You inspire me. I love how you are real and honest about things going on around you. You think about how they will affect you and the ones you love.

Amika, you have been my teacher, too. The love and light that you shine now will be a beacon to your success. As Mrs. Westby said, you truly have the best smile. The smile that comes from the tips of your toes and draws others to you without fail. Be confident in your light and shine bright.

I love you so much, Mom

Mother & Daughter
CAROLE & AMIKA SKALSKY



Dear Mom,

I don't think I say this enough, but I truly don't know who I'd be without you. You've helped me become the strong, independent person I am today, someone I don't think I could've become without your guidance and patience. You've also taught me so much about the kind of person I want to be. You always told me to be kind to everyone, and that's something I carry with me every day.

I still remember all those times I didn't know how to say what was wrong, but somehow you just knew. You always understood even when I couldn't find the words to explain how I was feeling. There was a time when I was really struggling, and I know I wasn't easy to deal with. I had a lot of anger, and I wasn't okay. But even then you never gave up on me, and I'll always be grateful for that.

You are the true definition of my best friend. You've never stopped showing up for me; you're always there for me. You listen when I need to vent, you make me laugh when I feel sad, and you always know how to make me feel better. You work so hard for all the things you do in life, and I admire that more than I probably say. I'm so grateful I get to be your daughter and see how you continue to grow into a beautiful, kind-hearted, independent woman.

Out of everything in my life, being your daughter will always be one of the things I'm most proud of.

Love, Mika



My lovely Lauren,

Being a mom to both you and your sister has been the most fulfilling experience of my life. God definitely knew what I needed when he gave me my girls! From day one, you have been uniquely YOU! I've enjoyed every stage of your life up to this point. I've loved watching you grow into the young woman you are today. To say I am proud of who you are as a person is a complete understatement. Your work ethic, determination, and willingness to always push forward say so much about your character. You have never opted for the easy road, and that is something that will carry you far in life. You are such a driven, kind, funny, smart, beautiful, and incredibly loving daughter. I always said they broke the mold when you were made, and that still holds true today. Your future is so bright, and I am so excited to watch and support you through the many adventures you will have. There will be amazing and challenging times ahead, but I know you will navigate them with grace and strength. Never sell yourself short; know your worth — you are so valuable. I love your creativity and love of giving gifts to others. You have a way of making people feel special and cared for. You are also so very generous; I love that about you. I hope you always remember that who you are is always enough — you don't have to prove your worth to anyone. Surround yourself with people that also appreciate you for you. As you move ahead into the next chapter of your life, I have no doubt that you will find success, but give yourself time and space to learn along the way. No matter where life takes you, you can always come home. I will always be here for you — cheering you on, supporting you, and loving you unconditionally.

I love you more than words could ever fully express. Thank you for being you and also loving me the way you do.

Mom



Dear Mom,

You are my day one, quite literally. You have been there for me from the second I took my very first breath into my lungs and opened my eyes to see the world. Growing up, I've always heard kids say that they have the "Best Mom in the World" or that their mom has qualities that stand out above the rest. But I know for a fact that you are the mom above all others. There is no one in my life that I have ever seen work as hard as you. You can be under the maximum amount of stress and pressure, and yet still put on a smile for me when I come home after school and kindly ask me if I need anything or if you can get me anything. I've never met such a genuinely caring person who puts others above themselves in any situation. Even when I'm in a bad mood or if I've gone through a bad day, you are always there to comfort and support me. I cannot begin to express how much I love you. I would be absolutely lost without you. You aren't just my caregiver or the person who takes care of me because you have to; you are so much more to me. You are my best friend, my comfort, my heart, my source of happiness. You are the first person I call anytime I have something exciting happen or if I just need someone to talk to. If I'm going through a rough patch, you will sit in the rain with me until the sun comes up. There is so much that I have to say, my love for you could go on for pages. I will strive to be the mother to my future children the way that you are to me. I am eternally grateful for the love and the effort that you have poured into me to see me grow. I will never be able to express the right words to show just how much I love you. But I thank God every day for giving me such an amazing mom. I don't deserve you, but I know I am so blessed to call you mom.

Love, Lauren

Dear Mom,

Thank you.

Thank you for always being there for me, no matter the time or place. Thank you for never putting yourself above others and for always showing kindness, even when it's hard. Thank you for cheering so loudly for me that it drowns out all the negativity around me. Thank you for giving me strength and guidance when I feel like I'm falling apart.

You've taught me so many things that I know I'll carry with me for the rest of my life. You've shown me how important it is to care for other people and try to understand what they're going through. Because of you, I've learned how to be more patient, more loving, and more open-minded. I look up to you in ways you probably don't even realize. You guide me every day, especially in my faith, and you're always there when I need advice, answers, or even just someone to laugh with.

You've shown me what it truly means to be a good and genuine person. And honestly, it makes me feel so comforted knowing that whenever I feel lost or unsure, all I have to do is look at you to remember who I want to be.

I get told all the time, "You look just like your mom," and every single time, it makes me smile even bigger. That is, without a doubt, the best compliment I've ever received. If I can grow up to be even a little like you, I know I'll be doing something right.

God couldn't have given me a better role model, teacher, cheerleader, best friend, and Mom. I thank Him every day for you, and I don't say it enough, but I love you so much.

Your daughter, Josie



Mother & Daughter
SUZANNE & JOSIE THOMPSON



To my sweet daughter Josie,

As your senior year unfolds, I find myself reflecting on just how incredibly blessed I am. Being your mom has been the greatest gift of my life and one I cherish more with each passing day. Watching you grow into the strong, beautiful, and faith-filled young woman you are today has truly been an honor beyond words.

You are determined in a way that inspires everyone around you. When you set your mind to something, you become unstoppable. I've seen it in your academics, where your hard work and discipline have led you to achieve so much. I've seen it on the softball field, where your dedication, grit, and passion have shaped an amazing career you should be so proud of. You never back down from a challenge, and that strength will carry you far in life.

But what makes you truly special goes far beyond your accomplishments. Your deep faith grounds you and gives you a quiet confidence that shines so brightly. You are kind in a way that can't be taught. You care deeply, love genuinely, and make others feel seen and valued. That is a rare and beautiful gift.

And oh, your humor, your jokes, your laughter, your positivity — those are gifts I treasure more than you know. You have a way of lifting others up, of finding joy even in the little things, and of reminding us all not to take life too seriously. Those moments, those laughs we've shared, will always mean so much to me.

As you step into this next chapter, hold tight to who you are. Keep your faith strong, your heart open, and your determination fierce. The world is waiting for someone exactly like you.

Thank you for being such an incredible daughter. It will always be my greatest honor to be your Mom, and I am endlessly proud of you.

With all my love, Mom



Sheri Merchen uses Executive Styling to create connection and enhance self-esteem.



Sheri Merchen isn't just helping people get dressed; she's helping them see themselves differently.

Through her business, Executive Styling, Merchen works with clients of all backgrounds to curate wardrobes that reflect not only their schedules and lifestyles, but their sense of identity. For some, that means saving time. For others, it means stepping into confidence they didn't know they had.

"That's really my heartbeat for this business," said Merchen. "It goes way deeper than just styling... It's saying, 'This is who I am,' and feeling confident in that. We're not just picking out clothes, it's about helping people feel confident in who they are and how they were created."

That transformation is something she's

dressed in confidence

BY MIRANDA O'BRYAN HERTEL

witnessed firsthand.

One client, preparing for a job interview, hesitated when Merchen suggested a lavender lace top.

“She said, ‘I can’t wear that, I can’t pull it off,’” Merchen recalled. “I told her, just try it on for me.”

What happened next stuck with her.

“To see the transformation — in her face, how she just came alive... it was amazing,” she said.

The client not only bought the top, but wore



it to the interview — something she never imagined herself doing without Merchen’s help.

A Foundation in Style and Counseling

Merchen grew up in Rapid City and recently moved back after nearly three decades away.

She and her husband called Wyoming home for several years, where her journey into Executive Styling began. Originally called The Closet Stylist, the business combined Merchen’s love of fashion with her background in counseling.

“I use my counseling background even in styling; it really plays into helping people see themselves differently,” she said.

“We all have parts of our bodies we don’t love, but there are ways to style that so other parts can shine.”

For many clients, that confidence begins with understanding what works for them in their everyday lives, whether they’re a CEO in back-to-back board meetings or a stay-at-home parent running between the park and errands. Merchen does this through personal shopping, color analysis, and image strategy sessions.

“I basically do all the work; they just come home and pick what they love,” she said. “Some people just don’t have the time — or they don’t know how to work with their body type or coloring.”

Color analysis is a technique that determines the most flattering colors for a person based on their unique natural skin undertones, hair color, and eye color. She uses color theory, categorizing people into seasons — Spring, Summer, Autumn, or Winter — to help them find shades that make skin appear more vibrant, healthy, and radiant.



“I decided I wanted to add another dimension to what I do,” Merchen said. “It’s not just for women; it can be for anybody who wants to feel confident and put together.”

In one of the image strategy sessions, Merchen walks clients through a personalized process that includes the color analysis, body shape evaluation, and a closet assessment. Together, they identify what’s already working, what’s missing, and how each piece can better reflect the person wearing it.

“I want to know what their goals are, how they want to show up in their life,” she said. “Whether that’s at work, at home, or for a special event, it

all matters.”

From there, the experience can become as hands-on as the client needs. Some walk away with a clearer understanding of how to shop for themselves, while others rely on Merchen to take the lead on curating outfits, sourcing pieces, and even handling returns.

But no matter the level of service, the goal remains the same: to remove the overwhelm and replace it with clarity.

We're not just picking out clothes, it's about helping people feel confident in who they are and how they were created.

“Some people hate shopping, some people don’t have time, and some people just don’t know where to start,” she said. “I get to step in and make that process easier, and even enjoyable.”

She hopes every client leaves with a sense of ease and a renewed sense of self.

Styling with Purpose

As Merchen builds her business in Rapid City, she’s reconnecting with the community that first shaped her. After years away, she sees her work not just as a service, but as a way to give back — helping people feel seen, capable, and confident in

their day-to-day lives.

“I never really appreciated the Black Hills until we moved back. I just love being here now,” she said. “It’s not just about styling, it’s about building relationships and friendships with the people I work with.”

In those moments, whether it’s a bold new color, a redone wardrobe, or a single piece someone never thought they could wear, the change is about more than appearance.

“It’s really fun to see someone step into something they love,” she said. “And have the confidence to wear it.”



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- ✓ Kitchen co-pilot
- ✓ Hostess insurance policy
- ✓ Chef’s night off hero



Gourmet to Go...and a few other things
nellsgourmet.com

A photograph showing a woman's hands from the waist down. She is wearing a white t-shirt and blue denim jeans. Her hands are resting on her lap, and she is wearing several rings: a diamond ring on her left ring finger, a diamond ring on her right ring finger, and a diamond ring on her right middle finger. In the foreground, two pink tulips with green leaves are visible.

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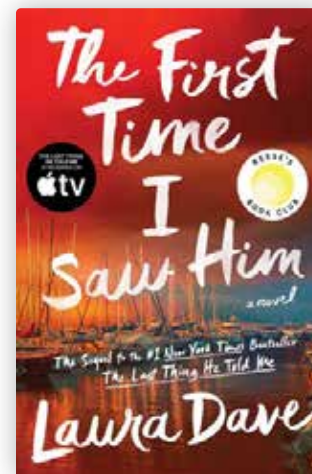
CLUB

what's on our shelf

CHANTEL'S PICK

The First Time I Saw Him by Laura Dave | Literary Suspense

This sequel from the Reese Witherspoon Book Club is a must-read. After reading the first book, *The Last Thing He Told Me*, I couldn't resist rushing to the store to grab this one. You can't wait to discover what unfolds in this captivating love story filled with obstacles and uncertainties that culminate in an extraordinary and exhilarating narrative.



BRIEF SYNOPSIS: This book continues the story of Hannah Hall and her stepdaughter Bailey Michaels after Owen Michaels disappeared in *The Last Thing He Told Me*. Hannah and Bailey are on the run again after Bailey's grandfather is killed, which was the only reason they were not on the run for five years. Owen reappears to Hannah and Bailey in a shocking way, forcing feelings and a thrilling ride to bring their family back together. This book focuses on the importance of family, forgiveness, love, and trust. The best part is you do not know where this book is going to take you and this family.

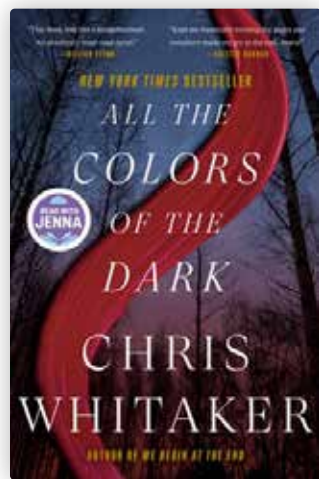
KARI'S PICK

The Things We Cannot Say by Kelly Rimmer | Historical Fiction

I'm a sucker for historical fiction, particularly WWII. And while they don't always live up to the hype, this one is a definite must-read. Both beautiful and heartbreaking, this story centers on the powerful connection of family and sacrificial love. Told in dual narratives — present day and 1942 Poland — both Alice and Alina are characters you'll fall in love with as the connection between them starts to unfold. This is an emotional story of resilience, driven by strong female leads that will make an impact long after the last page.



BRIEF SYNOPSIS: Alina Dziak always knew she was going to marry Tomasz. When the chaos of WWII separates them, she waits patiently for his return while coping with the changes of normal life and the loss of family. In the present day, Alice Davis, a mother, faces the daily challenges of raising her autistic son alongside her gifted daughter. These challenges are compounded by her grandmother Hanna's stroke. When Hanna requests Alice's assistance in finding closure for her past, Alina's story and its profound impact on the family are revealed. This uncovering of Alina's story sheds light on the generational gap that can exist before the truth is finally revealed.



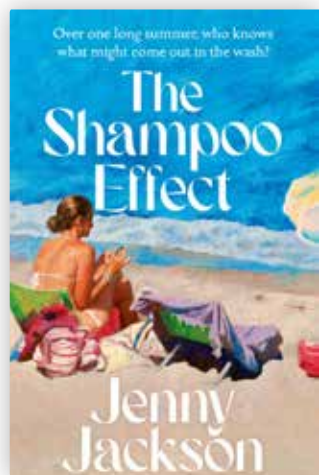
KAYLA'S PICK

All the Colors of the Dark by Chris Whitaker | Thriller

If you're looking for your next great read, this is it. *All the Colors of the Dark* is a decades-long story centering around best friends Patch and Saint. It's part mystery, part love story, part thriller. Early in the story, one moment changes everything — when Patch steps in to save a girl from being abducted, but is taken instead. The book follows the aftermath of that fateful day. It's gripping from the start, and the short chapters make it nearly impossible to put down. Highly recommend.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS: Set in Missouri in 1975, this thriller follows thirteen-year-old Joseph “Patch” Macauley. He saves a kidnapped girl named Misty Meyer but is then taken himself. During his captivity, Patch is kept in a dark room and comforted by a girl named Grace. After his rescue, led by his best friend Saint, Patch becomes obsessed with finding Grace again. This book delves into the themes of trauma and obsession, while also exploring the enduring impact of friendship and the lasting bonds formed between the characters.

saving a spot for...



The Shampoo Effect by Jenny Jackson | Contemporary Fiction

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 30, 2026

“An absolute DELIGHT. This book has everything I love in a beach read: a coastal setting, multiple points of view, compelling storylines, and a delicious specificity to the writing that makes every single sentence feel fresh and alive. Jenny Jackson’s *The Shampoo Effect* is a must, must, must for your summer reading list.” —Elin Hilderbrand

BRIEF SYNOPSIS: How else can you kick off the summer than with a fast-paced beach read? Set in the seaside town of Greenhead, Massachusetts, this story follows Caroline Lash, a newcomer who sets out to infiltrate a close-knit social circle. This insightful story, centered around midlife millennials, offers a sharp portrayal of modern friendships and the challenges of breaking free from established patterns. While it maintains the breezy feel of a beach read, it also delves into emotional depth, making it a truly engaging read.

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Story by Eric Zimmer
Illustrations by Ellen Devine

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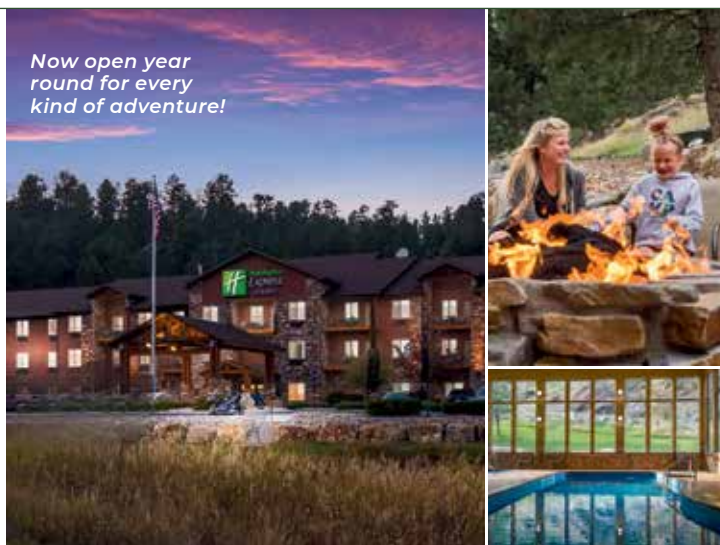


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CUSTER, SD



BY KRystal BRESNAHAN

This spring and graduation season, let's raise a glass to Amy Graham — the Mad Scientist at Lost Cabin Beer Co. who made her own way from a STEM degree to the Black Hills beer scene.

Staying Curious in STEM Education

After earning her degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Amy Graham wasn't passionate about traditional post-graduation career paths for STEM students like medical school, pharmaceutical research, or PhD programs. Nothing quite clicked... until she started brewing beer.

"What ultimately piqued my interest in brewing was the unique application of my degree, without being an overly stuffy, high-stress research or post-graduate environment... So much about this job can be self-taught by reading books, on-the-job training, and tinkering with homebrews in a garage. Nothing matters more than a passion for beer and a good work ethic, and I like the inclusivity

"Nothing matters more than a *passion* for beer and a good *work ethic*, and I like the inclusivity that implies."

that implies."

Graham's favorite STEM class was Biochemistry of Metabolism, because it brought together chemistry and biology with an emphasis on practical applications like how cancer develops, how diabetes affects the body, and how we digest food.

"It's also the class I use the most to this day. There's significant overlap between the science of our own cells and yeast, and a big part of my job is keeping yeast happy and healthy with the right nutrients and environments," says Graham.

She believes one of the most valuable things her education gave her was a framework for how to think. "STEM teaches skills like adaptability, time management, organization, and problem solving that are useful far beyond science. These skills set me up for success in any industry, but especially brewing where the variables are

constantly changing."

(Re)starting a Brewing Career

Early on, Graham moved to Ohio with her husband for his dental schooling, which was supported by an Air Force scholarship. Next, they were stationed in Mississippi for his military service, and then settled here in South Dakota at



Ellsworth Air Force Base. Moving around every few years was challenging for Graham, because it meant starting over just as she was trying to build a career of her own.

At the start, Graham lacked confidence. "I was a nervous grad who had only been allowed to legally drink for about two years. Now I was expected to learn the science of beer on a professional level." On top of that, her first job was competitive, and her new (all male) coworkers were older than her with more experience. She had to learn on the job and adapt quickly. Luckily, the collective energy of the workplace spurred her passion for the industry.

Leaving her first job in beer-making was hard, and her next position wasn't a good fit. Now looking back, she believes the frequent change forced her to become more flexible. "I am proud that with each move, I found opportunities to continue my professional growth," she shares.

Ultimately, Graham and her husband decided

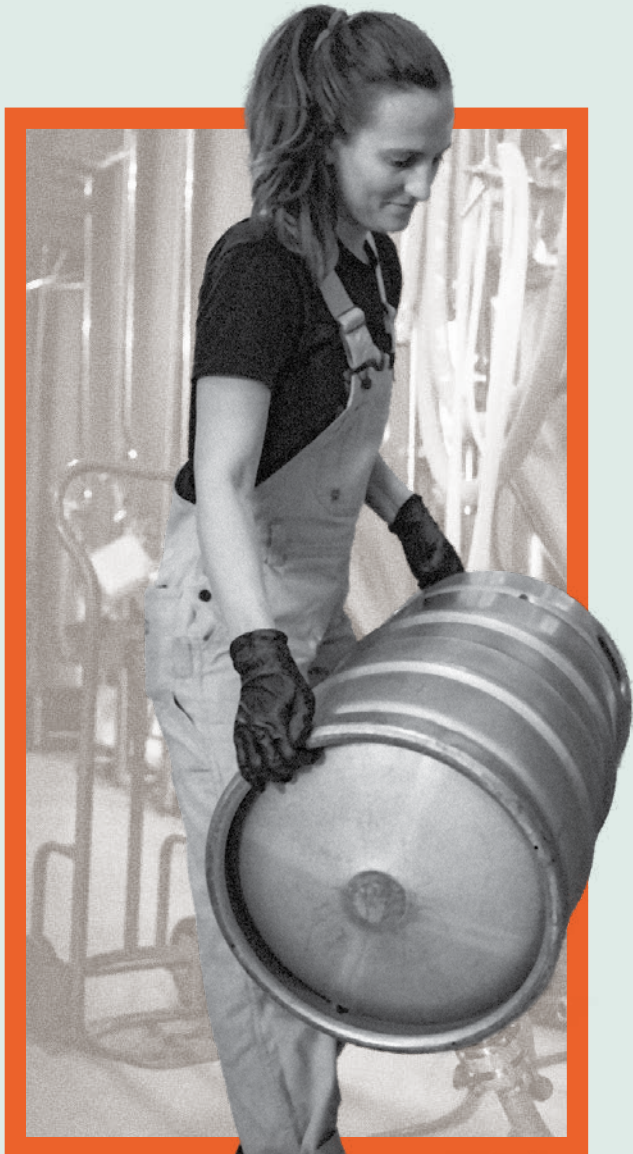
instead of a third placement they would separate from the Air Force and stay in Rapid, so they could spend more time experiencing everything this area had to offer.

That's how she became Lost Cabin's Production Manager (aka Mad Scientist) brewing beer in Rapid City.

Landing at Lost Cabin Beer Co.

Lost Cabin's vision, values, and growth opportunities created the right place for Graham to continue to build her career. When she joined the team, the local brewery had just expanded out of the small Omaha Street taproom and into a new production facility. While this growth brought new challenges, she was able to bring big brewery experience to help in that transition.

"I started off working in a brewery lab with a lot of resources. I learned about the other facets of the brewery, including brewing, packaging, and management, but once I left that role, my perspective shifted along with



my role and responsibilities. I still focused on science, but with fewer resources, I had to be more creative and adaptable in solving the same problems. Over time, I've moved away from wanting to operate solely within the lab to wanting to contribute to the bigger picture."

At Lost Cabin, the menu of new brews is always changing, and Graham gives most of the credit to her teammates, head brewer Cyril, and owner Tom, who come up with wildly creative beers. "They are great at turning a crazy-sounding idea born out of an afternoon of banter at the taproom into something actually available on tap," says Graham.

"I've learned the importance of getting the right team built around you. I love the concept of getting the right people on the bus, and only then figuring out where to drive it. That's something I think Lost Cabin has done well. We have a really strong sense of community within our team, and it makes steering the bus easier."

Graham's main role in logistics sounds a lot like steering: Build new ideas into the brew schedule, get yeast and raw materials on time, and make sure everything is on track for the release date. She also enjoys developing beers based on her favorite flavors from the East Coast that aren't (yet) available here (sample Sweata Weatha for an example).

Science on Tap

Science is evolving in the brewing industry to create new and improved ingredients, which requires curiosity and continuous testing. This is another place where Graham thrives.

"Some strains of yeast we use are genetically engineered to prevent off-flavors, which not only improves flavor but can speed up fermentation time. Another improvement we've made is with hop oils. Hops are mass-produced in pellet form, which includes a lot of plant material that decreases our yield. But newer products extract and concentrate the flavorful oils from the plant matter, and we've found a smoother taste with increased yield," she explains. "I love getting to experiment with how we can change our beers for the better."

"I love getting to experiment with how we can change our beers for the better."

Supporting Women in STEM, Brewing, and Beyond

Although change is brewing, the beer industry remains a male-dominated field. "I won't pretend it's always been easy. While I've seen meaningful progress during my time in the industry, it still feels like a boys' club," Graham says. "When I tell people I work at Lost Cabin, many assume I'm behind the bar. There is nothing wrong with that role, but the assumption is discouraging."

As a woman, she feels additional pressure to prove she belongs. "This pressure molded me in a way I didn't expect; I got better at speaking up and not backing down in uncomfortable situations. That confidence came from experience and knowledge. I read a lot of brewing books, watch online seminars, and take every opportunity for continuing education. The more I learn, the more confidently I can speak in an intimidating room."

Graham encourages women to support each other and stay connected: "I am lucky to have several female coworkers and role models in the industry, and connecting with that group is really powerful."

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to be a *woman*

BY DONNA ASHWORTH

'What's it like to be a woman?'
a little bird whispered in my ear.
'Is it just like being human?'
oh it is so much more, my dear.

We are the holders, we are the keepers,
of the secrets and the truth.
We are the safe place in a storm,
the creator of all youth.

We are the place where life is softest,
we are the colour in the story.
We are the wisdom and the instinct,
Mother Nature in all her glory.

We are the taker of all worry,
we keep it deep within our hearts
So that others may unburden,
so that great new lives may start.

We are the makers of the home,
not just the walls but of the spirit.
Bringing everyone together,
letting love and laughter fill it.

We are sisters, mothers, wives,
so many things in every day.
We are the start of every life,
we are the reason, we are the way.

We are fuelled by intuition,
call it magic, if you like
We are women, so much more,
than any words that I could write.



from recruits to role models

BY AVERY PORCH

What makes a good police officer?

According to Alexcia, the Recruitment Manager for the Rapid City Police Department, it takes all kinds — including all kinds of women.

Alexcia has worked for the department for over three years, undertaking a female recruitment campaign called EmpowHer. “We chose the word ‘empower’ because there were so many different factors that were empowering women to enter this field, and the career itself can be empowering to females,” Alexcia shares.

Several years ago, the Chief of Police approached Alexcia to discuss creating a stronger campaign to attract more female officers. “We decided to move away from the ‘strength



and toughness' narrative; it didn't reflect what was drawing women to a career in law enforcement,” she explains.

As a part of the campaign, the department produced a commercial that ran as web ads on Hulu and ESPN. The commercial features female officers on and off duty, transitioning between work and their personal lives. It follows several women throughout their day, as each one explains why they feel empowered in their career. “Empowerment is about lifting others up,” one detective shares. “I use my skills to protect,

to serve, and to inspire the women around me.”

Alexcia hopes that the commercial helps humanize the women who work in law enforcement. She recounts that, on the day of the shoot, her daughter came up to her and said, “Maybe I can be a cop one day.” This unexpected moment reaffirmed what Alexcia had set out to accomplish. “It just goes to show that representation matters, and that truly was the intention behind this. We're doing everything we can to better represent our community, and we want women to envision themselves at RCPD and

see that they have a place here.”

RCPD is well-known for its comprehensive benefits package, including student loan reimbursement, quarterly wellness days, and a sabbatical leave program. The department supports women across the span of their careers, offering accommodations for pregnant and postpartum officers. Often, women adjust their careers depending on changes in their personal lives; some officers pursue certain positions within law enforcement to accommodate their growing families, while others apply for specific positions that align with their interests.

Rachel Pi, a school resource officer at Pinedale Elementary, has worked at the police department for over six years. Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Rachel decided to settle down in Rapid City after an 11-year stint in the military. She always knew she wanted to be a police officer, even from a young age. “As cliché as it sounds, I was drawn to helping people, and I wanted to give back to the community,” Rachel says. After three years on patrol, Rachel pursued a position as a school resource officer. She enjoys working in a school setting, bridging the gap between law enforcement and local youth. “Kids need to see positive role models in their lives —

people they can trust, look up to, and know are there to help,” she explains.

Several factors deter women from pursuing careers in law enforcement, including stigmas about their physical and mental capabilities. Rachel points out, “Being a police officer is not always about being the strongest — there's so much more to policing.

And I think women need to know that we bring more to the table than just our physical abilities.” Women have an innate ability to communicate well, de-escalate situations, and facilitate community outreach. In domestic violence or sexual assault cases, female victims often feel more comfortable discussing their experiences with

a woman. Female police officers play a crucial role in public safety — though perhaps not in the ways that most people expect.

Speaking from personal experience, Rachel describes the challenge of maintaining a healthy mindset, especially when faced with job-related stigmas. “Don't let anybody or anything discourage you from pursuing a career in law enforcement, especially as a woman. You are strong enough, and you can do the job if you put your mind to it,” she says.

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and you can do the job if you
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Luckily, the last several hiring classes have all included women, “something that used to be few and far between,” according to Alexcia. Through several grants, the RCPD has been awarded 12 additional positions for the department. “We would love for women to make up a large number of those new employees,” Alexcia says, encouraging those interested to apply.

Many women are drawn to law enforcement by a desire to serve their communities, apply their talents, and pursue fulfilling work. Female officers play a vital role in policing, contributing to a safer society. Through a new recruitment initiative, the Rapid City Police Department is empowering women to step up, lead with confidence, and make a meaningful difference in the community.

"Being a police officer
is not always about
being the strongest—
there's so much more
to policing."



a little fright, A LOT OF FIGHT

BY AVERY PORCH

The Black Sheep Parlour is different from most barbershops. “We’re a little edgier. Our shop definitely has a horror movie vibe,” owner Aimee Nonnast explains, referring to the spooky posters, decorative skulls, and candelabras.

Aimee opened her salon and barbershop in September 2020. Before striking out on her own, she worked at a few places around town and built a strong clientele while renting a booth at a local studio. But her end goal always involved opening a place of her own. “It was my dream,” she says. “I wanted something more, and I wanted to share my talent and knowledge of the industry with others.”

As she honed her craft, Aimee discovered that she excelled at men’s grooming services and decided to launch a female-owned and operated barbershop. She wanted to create something that felt like her; she didn’t want a modern, cookie-cutter salon with white walls.

Soon after opening The Black Sheep Parlour, Aimee felt a growing pull to give back to the community in a bigger way. To her, it even felt necessary. “If you own a local business, you have to be involved in the community somehow,”



"YOU CAN SAVE AN ANIMAL FROM A KENNEL OR FROM BEING EUTHANIZED. IT'S NOT A LONG-TERM THING — JUST UNTIL THEY FIND THEIR FOREVER HOME."

Aimee insists. “It shows that you can be helpful beyond your business.”

From there, “Friday the 13th Fundraisers” were born. Leaning into her salon aesthetic, Aimee turned the traditionally superstitious day into something positive. “Friday the 13th is a holiday for us. On those days, we accept walk-ins only. Whatever we raise, we donate to a shelter or animal rescue.” Aimee has raised money for the Crisis Intervention Shelter, Border Paws Rescue, Black Hills Humane Society, and STARS Rescue. At their most recent fundraiser, they hosted a tattoo flash event and gathered toiletries, clothing, and cash donations for the Sturgis shelter.

Aimee claims that her hard work ethic comes from her experiences as a young adult. She became a single mom at 21, which led to the realization that she needed to turn her life around. “I wanted to be successful and work hard for my son,” Aimee says. As she found success in business, she wanted to give back to the community on a personal level, too.

Caring deeply about foster animals, Aimee started opening her home to pets in need and advocating for their care and placement. She began fostering for the Humane Society several years ago and quickly realized how many animals experience abandonment and neglect. She wishes that more people would

consider fostering. “You can save an animal from a kennel or from being euthanized. It’s not a long-term thing — just until they find their forever home.”

She occasionally brings foster puppies to work, allowing clients to hold them during their appointments. More often than not, the puppies get adopted by regulars. “I have a hard time letting fosters go, but it’s always special when one gets adopted by a client. That way, I can keep in touch with them and hear how the puppy is doing.”

As an entrepreneur, Aimee has learned that building strong connections is vitally important for the long-term success of any business. “It’s about who you know, not what you know. Ask around, and figure out what you can do to be more involved in the community; talk to clients and ask them questions.” Aimee believes that small questions can lead to big opportunities, both professionally and philanthropically.

From navigating parenthood to opening her own business, Aimee has fought hard to make her dreams a reality. She has turned challenging circumstances into opportunities, championing the causes closest to her heart along the way. As Aimee will tell you, giving back is simple — it just starts with a question and a willingness to help.



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