

ATLAS

Your Local Guide to Arts, Dining & Entertainment



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Ultimate Daycation

Cruisin' Tikis Tours brings taste of the tropics

By Cassidy Johnson

Cruisin' Tikis Oshkosh has brought a tropical vacation experience feel to Oshkosh.

The cruises are considered the first of its kind in Wisconsin and the "ultimate daycation" spot for fun with friends and family this summer.

A family-owned business, Joe and Tammy Lefebber started the company in 2022 with the help of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh's (UWO) Small Business Development Center (SBDC) after getting the inspiration from seeing one in Key West, Fla. COVID hit shortly after, and with the extra time working from home, Joe began forming a plan and slowly "building an empire in his mind," as his wife described it.

"I decided I would only do it if the city of Oshkosh allowed us to run a business off the water," Tammy said. "I came [originally] for college at UWO and never left. [Now we have] a unique business in the city that we love."

As suggested by the name, Cruisin' Tikis are floating tiki bars that combine the quintessential summer experiences of boating, watching the sunset and drinking at a tiki bar.

The tiki boat fits up to six people at about \$50 per person, and every trip is two hours long. Docked at Fox River Brewing, boat-goers can also feel free to grab a bite before or after setting sail.

"We typically like to go about an hour toward Lake Winnebago and get a little more of that local, scenic city tour," said Tammy. "Then we come back, stop at Fox River brewing in case anyone wants to do a restroom stop [or] grab a drink."

Next, the captain will take passengers down Lake Butte des Morts and underneath the Highway 41 bridge.

McKenzie Moore, an Oshkosh resident and UW-Oshkosh student, said this was one of the highlights of the tour.

"One of my favorite parts was when we went under the highway bridge and the captain showed us all of the murals of fish we could catch in those waters," Moore said. "It was cool to be able to



see parts of Oshkosh I've never seen before."

Beyond showing guests neat and otherwise hidden history, the surrounding nature also provides a beautiful view.

"It's a lot slower and scenic, it's really beautiful," Tammy said. "[It's] probably the most Instagrammable place in Oshkosh."

While the route is the same, Cruisin' Tikis offers four different types of two-hour cruises based on the vibe guests want for their get-together or event.

For those looking to start their daycation sooner rather than later, they can choose the "Sight Sea-ing" tour from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. or the "Why Limit Happy to an Hour" tour from 2-4 p.m.

Otherwise, they can get the party started at the "It's 5 O'clock Somewhere" cruise from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., or experience the Sunset Cruise, perfect for anything from a pregame to a romantic proposal.

Regardless of which tour is picked, the Lefebbers said personable customer service stays the same.

"I always tell people; I'm your DJ, I'm your bartender (A.K.A. Tiki Tender, as named by the owners' youngest son), I'm your captain..." Joe said. "I can do everything you need, and you can just enjoy the trip."

Truly a one-stop-shop, Moore personally felt the hospitality described while on the cruise.

"The people who did it were very welcoming and tried to make us comfortable," Moore said. "[They] made the experience very relaxing by offering to grab drinks and taking photos for us." One difference with this tiki bar versus other experiences is that this one is BYOB, or bring-your-own-booze.

"I think it's an advantage," Tammy said. "Instead of us trying to make \$20 blender drinks, you can literally bring whatever you like."

She said another advantage is that the speakers are bluetooth-

See Tiki Tours, page 4

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TIKI TOURS

from page 3

capable, allowing passengers to play whatever music they desire.

"[Bachelorette] parties tend to come with their own, like, music. So that's always fun," Tammy said. "They have a playlist ready." Another way the owners said they create a customizable experience for their guests is by adding decorations and by going above and beyond whenever they can.

"One time a girl flew her husband's parents in as a surprise for his 40th birthday," Tammy said. "She called and asked if she could decorate the boat, and we brought and put [the parents] in the Tiki shirts and the captain's hats and had them standing with their backs to the dock. [When] they turned around, it was his parents."

As it turns out, going above and beyond makes the experience better not only for the guests, but also for the owners.

"We all started crying, including me," she added. "It was so cute being able to be part of people's memories like that and their special moments and helping make things a little extra special."

Whether guests are looking for a relaxing cruise with friends, a chance to reconnect with family or a party on the water, Cruisin' Tikis has something for all needs and all ages.

"Our tagline [and goal] is, 'putting smiles on people's faces one cruise at a time,'" Joe said.

Visit cruisintikisoshkosh.com for more information and to book a cruise.



Spent a beautiful summer night cruising around the lake with a Tiki Tour.

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ATLAS

Your Local Guide to Arts, Dining & Entertainment

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Electric Energy and Excitement on Stage

Waterfest Rocks On: Supporting local artists & the community

By Cassidy Johnson

The sunset spills over the Fox River, and as visitors meet with a friend, drink in hand, a breeze that brushes past their face carries an electric anticipation and excitement from the stage.

Waterfest has been bringing this electric energy and excitement to the stage, and to the overall city of Oshkosh for almost 40 years.

With the idea stemming from the 1986 economic recession, Waterfest has brought a lot more than just awesome vibes to the city of Oshkosh. It has also brought great economic revival to the city.

"We wanted to remind the communities that this is a great place to live, work and play," Waterfest president Michael Dempsey said. "What we wanted to do was to create an atmosphere of positivity and confidence that was eroded as a result of the economic situation."

Waterfest was seen as a way to help invigorate the riverfront and downtown area in an attempt to endorse the city as a desirable place to live, and they used the area's biggest natural asset to help promote it.

"The community [decided to] accentuate our most significant natural resource as a differentiator, our waterways," Dempsey said. "So they said, well, let's accentuate the waterways. The motivation at the core is community and economic development."

From there, Waterfest was born. To this day, Waterfest still continues to revitalize the city through its energetic live music performances.

June 12 is opening night, and the band Hairball is launching the festivities with big hair, pyrotechnics and high-energy '70s and '80s rock n' roll.

With gates opening at 5:45 p.m., tickets are \$30 for standing-room only VIP, \$20 for general admission and \$10 for fans who get in line before 6 p.m. Teachers can also get in free on opening night with a school ID. Ticket prices may vary depending on the show.

Australian-based band The Cat Empire will be playing their Caribbean and Latin-inspired pop-ska fusion music perfect for summer listening.

"If you like something a little less nostalgic, come on [June] 26

for the Cat Empire. You'll go crazy," Dempsey said. "It's killer music, and it's a great live show."

Fans can also check out Copper Box and Kate Voss and the Hot Sauce on June 26 to listen to and support some local artists from Wisconsin.

Next up is award-winning Marcia Ball accompanied by the Jimmy's, another Wisconsin-based band, with some New Orleans swing and jazz on July 10.

Earlier that day, there will be performances by Rising Phoenix, an Oshkosh-based band, and Alex McMurray band with Paul Sanchez.

"It's an all-star band with all-star



See Waterfest, page 23



Crowds gather at the Leach Amphitheater on Thursday nights in the summer for the Waterfest music series.

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Sovereign State Days celebrates the lost village of Winneconne

By Cassidy Johnson

It was a bitter winter day, and a travelling salesman from Milwaukee was getting colder— and more lost— by the second.

He was trying to make his way to Winneconne, but couldn't seem to find the humble fishing community anywhere on the map, just a dot where it used to be.

Eventually finding it somewhere between Omro and Butte des Morts, the guy (a printing salesman, ironically), told the townspeople that the newly-printed highway maps had forgotten Winneconne.

Led by Vera Kitchen, Winneconne's Chamber of Commerce sent letters to Gov. Knowles and the map makers. "[They] basically said, 'hey, we demand to be put back on the map. How is this little fishing community going to stay afloat if people can't find us?'" said Jordan Dunham, Winneconne local and longtime President of the Sovereign state board.

The Governor denied this appeal on account of all the maps already being printed and sent out, and the townspeople realized that they had to take bold action.

On July 21, 1967, the village of Winneconne declared a seces-

sion from Wisconsin.

With the governor finally taking them seriously, they agreed they would add extra signage on highways 41 and 110 to make up for the loss of tourism.

The village celebrated their victory with their first-ever Sovereign State Days the next day, complete with a parade, pancakes, and even a flag-raising ceremony.

They even created their own flag with their own "state" animals and plants and their "state" slogan, "Winneconne: We like it Where?"

"[It's] because the 1967 map that left us off was titled, 'Wisconsin: We like it here,'" Dunham said. "That's our little joke."

Fifty-eight years later, Winneconne still celebrates their community's boldness and their "little claim-to-fame" as Dunham calls it with the same parade and pancake breakfast during what they call their 'Sovereign State Days.'

It really just celebrates Winneconne's uniqueness of being left off the state highway map and our little claim to fame," Dunham said.

While Winneconne works hard to keep the celebration true to its origins, the event has evolved with its residents throughout the years, and they've added a lot more events and festivities since to make the celebration bigger and better for its residents.

"Today, we put on about a \$60,000 event," he said. "Everything happens through local donations from very generous people and businesses."

In addition to the historical parade and pancake breakfast, Winneconne's Sovereign State Days has since added concerts, an artisan fair, a steak cookoff, a petting zoo, and many more activities and events spanning from July 17 to July 20.

On Thursday, they have "Family Fun Night" at Waterfront Park starting at 5 p.m., complete with food trucks and meal vouchers for kids 17 and under, an archery range, and the Winneconne school district FFA's 'Good Dairy Golf,' which is a "mini putt-putt golf they set up for the kids," according to Dunham.

Friday, July 18 the Winneconne Pyrotechnics team will light up the sky, but before that, TBD performances will light up the stage at Waterfront Park, courtesy of the Winneconne Men's Club and the StoneRidge Piggly Wiggly Round Up.

Saturday is the day of the iconic parade, starting at 10:30 a.m. on Main Street.

"Our parade is very well known to surrounding communities," Dunham said. "We probably draw in about 10,000 people into our community throughout the weekend."

There will also be food trucks available all day at Marble Park, where they will also have an artisan fair with homemade goods and crafts, a petting zoo, a tractor pull, and much more.

For their third year in a row, they will also be holding their steak-cookoff in Marble Park hosted by the State Cook-Off Association (SCA), but they're adding something new this year.

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Family and friends line up to enjoy the iconic annual parade.

"We're going to have up to 40 tents set up right after the Artisan Fair that people can walk down and ask questions," Dunham said. "It's a really unique competition. We draw people in from different states for this."

The day's festivities will music on the Beiser Realty Stage later in that afternoon.

A perfect way to kick off the last sovereign state day, they will have the nostalgic pancake breakfast at Marble Park and followed by a visit from Mischief and Magic to entertain the youngsters.

After a tasty breakfast, feel free to stick around, grab a beer, and enjoy the live music by 4 North Acoustic under the Beiser Realty Stage.

During music intermission, you can also participate in their meat raffle. Otherwise, families with children can head over to Wolf River Resort for the Kids Fishing Contest.

For some much-needed relaxation and reflection after the crazy weekend, attendees of all denominations and religious backgrounds can head over to the ecumenical Sunset Worship Service at Lake Winneconne Park Gazebo at 7 p.m.

"It doesn't matter what your belief is, just come to worship the Lord," Dunham said. "A [church leader] preaches and does a service for everyone right at sunset. It's really beautiful."

While the point was, and still is, to create it bigger and better for Winneconne locals, the growing event has also caught the eye of surrounding areas, and they welcome residents from surrounding communities to check it out.

No matter how much it grows, however, Dunham says the event will always be, at its core, for the local community. "It's really about the community, that's why we do it. That's why I do it," Dunham said. "I don't do it for the pat on the back, but to see everyone smiling, having a good time, talking to their friends and family that they haven't seen in a while, enjoying the music, and enjoying the atmosphere of Winneconne."



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Choose Your Farmers Market Vibe

Big & Bustling or Small & Scenic?

By Cassidy Johnson

Winnebago County has two vibrant summer farmers markets in Oshkosh and Neenah to check out.

Kicking off Saturday, June 7 from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. is the Oshkosh Downtown Farmers Market on the 400 and 500 blocks of Main Street, featuring over 100 vendors.

"On any given Saturday, including early season and late season, we'll have 80 to 90 vendors," market manager Michelle Schmid-Schultz said. "Last year, we ended up right at 100. We never got below 100 after the third week of June, and peak season we'll hit around 140."

The market has a wide range of vendors, including farmers, food trucks, coffee roasters, bakers, crafters and more, as well as having live music every Saturday with a variety of different genres.

The Oshkosh Farmers Market will have many of the same fan-favorite vendors, such as Aviator Coffee Co. and their specialty coffees and over five different egg roll vendors, but they've also added a lot of new vendors this year.

"I'm really excited for our food trucks this year," Schmid-Schultz said. "It'll be like a trip around the world every Saturday."



An aerial view of booths set up for the Neenah Farmers Market.

Visitors can snack their way around the world and try out food from Indian Peaks, Moray Gelato, Gigi African Neighborhood, a new Parm food truck and more.

Afterwards, they can burn off some calories and browse the many crafts and goods from local artists of all ages, a perfect way to get unique pieces while also supporting the community.

"Everyone at the market who vends has a reason," Schmid-Schultz said. "They're not just there for fun. I mean, they're paying for college or making ends meet or supplementing retirement or trying to save the family farm."

Sponsored by a grant from the Oshkosh Rotary this year, the Oshkosh Farmers Market has a "Youth Entrepreneur Program" dedicated to providing kids with the real-life opportunity and experience of owning their own business beyond a lemonade stand on the street corner.

Kids sell a variety of items including bracelets, granola and even lemonade.

Beyond providing kids with this entrepreneurial opportunity, the farmers market has found many ways to give back to the community.

One way is through their harvest program, in which the vendors donate still-fresh produce they won't be able to sell by next week's market.

Another is through their EBT program. "Our EBT program is one of the 14th largest in the state," Schmid-Schultz said. "Last year, we generated \$32,000 in revenue for our food vendors at the market, both agricultural and homemade food vendors."

They also work with the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and the Winnebago Literacy Council to provide immigrants with resources to encourage them to come to the market.

"We have a lot of immigrants and refugees in the community, and outdoor shopping and looking for fresh food daily is part of a lot of their cultures," Schmid-Schultz said. "What we find is there's language barriers and service barriers, so we have different programs that [help] bring them down to the market."

A non-profit organization, they do all this and more while operating the entire farmers market solely on vendor fees, sponsorships and donations.

Being an independent organization, however, allows the organizers to have more freedom at the farmers market.

"Because we have more control over what we can and cannot do, I think that's what sets us apart from other markets," she said. "We can do what we feel makes a successful market. We focus on agriculture, but we also [like to] focus on community."



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Farmers Markets in both Oshkosh (left) and Neenah (right) are popular places for an array of shoppers.

Doing all this is no easy feat, but Schmid-Schultz says the people make it all worth it.

"I mean, essentially my job is to make 10,000 people happy every Saturday morning," she said. "9,900 of them usually are, and that's really cool. It's the people, the vendors. I get to be a part of people's businesses, [and] seeing all the smiles is amazing."

Future Neenah Farmers Market - The next weekend, Neenah will open their farmers market on June 14 from 8 a.m. to noon at Shattuck Park on East Wisconsin Avenue, an event that the nonprofit organization Future Neenah has been putting on for over 30 years.

Due to the growing market, they will also be expanding this year to the west into the parking lots nearby.

While the larger farmers market in Oshkosh is great for an all-day excursion, organizers said Neenah's more quaint market is perfect for a more chill outing.

"We're right by the water, so you can pull up on your boat and buy all your fresh produce for the week which I think is pretty awesome," said Michelle Dunning, outreach and development

director for Future Neenah.

With over 50 vendors, Dunning said the market is a good size without being overwhelming.

"Some people just zip in, get what they need, and they're done for the day," she said. "I think that's definitely what sets us apart and what makes it unique and fun."

Something else Dunning said that sets them apart is that everything in their market is handmade and home-grown.

"I think that's what's awesome, too; you're not going to find stuff there that isn't homemade," Dunning said.

Future Neenah is bringing back fan-favorites such as Allen's Produce, but they also like to make sure the market has a lot of variety.

"It's a good mix of things," she said. "Our events coordinator, Meredith [Rathe], does a really nice job of lining up a good variety of foods, crafts and produce."

The event also features live music every Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon, adding an ambience to a morning stroll through the market. They also have "Kid's Days" June 28 and Sept 27, complete with bouncy houses and face painting.

To reward loyal customers, they have a Farmer's Market loyalty card in which patrons can check in at the info booth and receive stamps. After 5 stamps, patrons receive a free gift, and after 10 they receive \$5 in tokens to spend at the market.

"It's just a fun way for us to reward our frequent local shoppers," Dunning said.

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See What's On Stage

Attic Theatre continues long community theater run

By Cassidy Johnson

A masters graduate in speech and drama unknowingly started a legacy 75 years ago this March after identifying the need for community theater in the Fox Valley.

In June 1950, Zoe Clark and her family founded Appleton's first community theater troupe in the attic of their house, naming it the Attic Theatre.

Several decades later, the Attic Theatre, Inc. is still going, making it the longest-running community theater in the Fox Valley.

Pam Saulnier, head of marketing for Attic Theatre, said that "75 years is a rare and amazing lifespan for community theater," so achieving this was no easy feat, especially without ever having a permanent home.

In the beginning, Attic Theatre did not have a designated place at all, but instead played at multiple different venues throughout the community.

Now 75 years later, these humble beginnings have come full circle with the closing of the University of Wisconsin Fox Cities campus in June, and subsequently the theater group's venue at the campuses' Arts & Communications building.

According to the group's website, they've "embraced this challenge, and are excited to announce a new partnership with businesses across the Fox Valley" for their 75th anniversary.

The Attic Theatre will be presenting *The Book of Will* with showings at 7 p.m. on June 12-14 and 18-20 and 2 p.m. on June 21 at Xavier High School in Appleton.

Written by Lauren Gunderson, *The Book of Will* is a play about the true story of two of William Shakespeare's friends attempting to save his work post-death for posterity.

"They work to compile the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, but have to borrow, beg and band together to do it," Saulnier said about the play. "It's a story of love and loss, and of laughter and friendship."

The Attic will next be showing *Kiss Me, Kate* at 7 p.m. July 17-19 and July 23-25 and at 2 p.m. July 26 at Neenah High School. Based on the book by Bella and Sam Spewack and paired with the music and lyrics by Cole Porter, the show is a lively and comedic metadrama about a theatre troupe performing a musical version of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*.

Drama ensues when two bickering— but secretly smitten— ex-lovers are both cast as leads in the musical.

"With music, dancing, romance, misunderstandings, and behind-the-scenes chaos, *Kiss Me, Kate* is a hilarious and high energy show," Saulnier said. "It originally premiered on Broadway in 1948 and has been successfully revived several times over the years."

Despite venue challenges, the Attic Theatre has also managed to keep ticket prices affordable at only \$25 a ticket per person. "Attic Theatre is dedicated to creating live theatre that is affordable," said Saulnier. "That's an important but challenging mission, considering the reality that ticket prices never cover all the expenses of producing a play."

Attic Theatre is able to keep ticket prices low through the help of local donors and sponsorships, such as the Wisconsin Arts Board and the National Endowment for the Arts.

"Our audiences, and those who participate onstage/backstage, are all 'neighbors'."

"Community theatre, by definition, is created by and for the community," she said. "Our audiences, and those who participate onstage and backstage, are all 'neighbors' in a sense."

It's this community that organizers said makes the Attic Theatre so magical.

"Residents of Northeast Wisconsin [get to] come together to create theatre productions," the group said, "which gives them the wonderful opportunity to take part in live performing arts and also build friendships and memories that will last well beyond the end of the show."



ATTIC THEATRE PRESENTS



The Book of Will
BY LAUREN GUNDERSON

June 12-20
7:00 pm

June 21
2:00 pm

Xavier High School
Appleton



**KISS ME,
KATE**

July 17-25
7:00 pm

July 26
2:00 pm

Neenah High School



Music and Lyrics by Cole Porter
Book by Sam and Bella Spewack

KISS ME, KATE is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Tams-Witmark LLC. www.concordtheatricals.com

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Oshkosh Farmers Market • 8am-12:30pm
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Future Neenah Farmers Market • 8am-12pm
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JUNE

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- June 4 **"Elsewhere in Bloom" Fresh Flower PopUp Bar** • 7am-3pm
Elsewhere Market & Coffee • 531 N Main St, Oshkosh
- June 5 **Patio Summer Music Series Kickoff Party** • 5-8pm
featuring Big and Tall
Batley's Grill & Bar • 1010 Cameron Way, Neenah
- June 6 **Food Truck Friday** • 4:30pm
South Park • 1035 W South Park Ave, Oshkosh
- June 6 **Brad Emanuel** • 6-9pm
Fin 'n Feather • 22 W Main St, Winneconne
- June 7 **Atomic 78** • 6-9pm
Fin 'n Feather • 22 W Main St, Winneconne
- June 7 **June Art Activity Day – Mosaic Coaster** • 10-2pm
Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass
165 N Park Ave, Neenah
- June 7 **MJ The Musical** • 2pm & 7:30pm
Fox Cities Performing Arts Center
400 W College Ave, Appleton
- June 7 **14th Annual Veterans Benefit and Ride** • 10am
Winnebago Detachment #357
Marine Corps League, 4715 Sherman Rd, Oshkosh

- June 8 **MJ The Musical** • 1pm & 6:30pm
Fox Cities Performing Arts Center
400 W College Ave, Appleton
- June 9-12 **Art Camp for ages 8-11** • 12:30-4:30pm
Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass
165 N Park Ave, Neenah
- June 11 **The Glam Band** • 6-9pm
Downtown Neenah, Wisconsin Ave
- June 11 **"Elsewhere in Bloom" Fresh Flower PopUp Bar** • 7am-3pm
Elsewhere Market & Coffee • 531 N Main St, Oshkosh
- June 12-14 **The Importance of Being Earnest** • 7pm
presented by Oshkosh Community Players
The Grand Oshkosh • 100 High Ave, Oshkosh
- June 12-20 **The Book of Will** • 7pm
Xavier Fine Arts Theatre, 1600 W Prospect Ave, Appleton
- June 12 **Waterfest HAIRBALL!** • 6pm
Leach Amphitheatre • 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh,
- June 12 **Kit Menagerie** • 5-8pm
Batley's Grill & Bar • 1010 Cameron Way, Neenah
- June 14 **RINGS Band** • 5-8pm
Batley's Grill & Bar • 1010 Cameron Way, Neenah
- June 14 **Udderly Euro 2025 Car Show** • 1:30-5:30pm
Shattuck Park • 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah
- June 14 **Jay Edward Band** • 6-9pm
Fin 'n Feather • 22 W Main St., Winneconne
- June 14 **DC Villars Foundation Fundraiser** • 11am
Barly & Hops • 663 N Main St, Oshkosh
- June 14-15 **Battle on Bago Summer Edition Fishing Tournament**
Menominee Park
Oshkosh battleonbago.org
- June 16 **Our Cause of the Monday** 4-8pm
Benefit for Christine Ann Center
Vines & Rushes Winery • 410 County Rd E, Ripon



Summer Music Series at Batley's Grill & Bar! Thursdays (and a few bonus Saturdays!) | 5-8PM

- June 5 - Big & Tall
- July 24 - Second Hand Stereo
- June 12 - Kit Menagerie
- July 31 - Patty & Jeff
- June 14 (Sat) - Rings Band
- August 7 - Tim Dorsey
- June 19 - Sundae & Mr. Goessl
- August 9 (Sat) - Rings Band
- June 26 - Jim & Nancy
- August 14 - The Gentleman Grifters
- July 10 - Ross Catterton
- August 21 - DC Trio
- July 17 - Amelia Ford
- August 28 - Big & Tall

Batley's Grill & Bar Patio – Your go to summer hangout spot!

CALENDAR of EVENTS

June 17	The Importance of Being Earnest · 2pm & 7pm presented by Oshkosh Community Players The Grand Oshkosh · 100 High Ave, Oshkosh
June 18	A-Town Unplugged · 6-8pm Shattuck Park · 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah
June 18	"Elsewhere in Bloom" Fresh Flower PopUp Bar · 7am-3pm Elsewhere Market & Coffee · 531 N Main St, Oshkosh
June 19	Sundae and Mr. Goessl · 5-8pm Batley's Grill & Bar · 1010 Cameron Way, Neenah
June 19	Waterfest George Thorogood and the Destroyers · 6pm Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh
June 20	Chicago Live - In Concert · 7:30pm Fox Cities Performing Arts Center 400 W College Ave, Appleton
June 20	Oshkosh Parks Movie: Inside Out 2 · Dusk Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh
June 21	The Book of Will · 2pm Xavier Fine Arts Theatre · 1600 W Prospect Ave, Appleton
June 21	Hotel California - A Salute to the Eagles · 7:30pm Fox Cities Performing Arts Center 400 W College Ave, Appleton
June 25	Avenue 55 · 6-8pm Shattuck Park · 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah
June 25	"Elsewhere in Bloom" Fresh Flower PopUp Bar · 7am-3pm Elsewhere Market & Coffee · 531 N Main St, Oshkosh
June 26	Waterfest, The Cat Empire · 6pm Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh
June 26	Jim and Nancy · 5-8pm Batley's Grill & Bar · 1010 Cameron Way, Neenah
June 26	Art After Dark Renaissance Faire · 5:30-9:30pm 165 N Park Ave, Neenah
June 27	Wish you were Floyd - Pink Floyd Tribute · 7:30pm The Grand Oshkosh · 100 High Ave, Oshkosh
June 28	Announcement of the 2025-2026 Performance Season The Grand Oshkosh · 100 High Ave, Oshkosh, see website

JULY

July 3	Parade of Lights · 9pm Neenah
July 3	Fireworks over Fisk · Dusk Downtown Fisk
July 4	4th of July Parade · 9am Downtown Main Street, Oshkosh
July 4	4th of July Parade PitStop · 7am-12pm Elsewhere Market & Coffee · 531 N Main St, Oshkosh

July 4	Community Fest · 11:30am-10:30pm Riverside Park, Neenah	
July 4	Independence Day Parade · 12pm Scott Park · E Main St, Downtown Omro	
July 4	Fourth of July Community Fireworks · Dusk Over the Wolf River · Downtown Winneconne	
July 7-10	Art Camp ages 12-15 · 12:30-4:30pm · Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass · 165 N Park Ave, Neenah	
July 9	Star Six Nine · 6-8pm Shattuck Park · 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah	
July 10	Ross Catterton · 5-8pm Batley's Grill & Bar · 1010 Cameron Way, Neenah	
July 10	Waterfest: Marcia Ball - The Jimmys · 6pm Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh	
July 10-13	Lifest Sunnyview Expo Center · 3450 Vinland St, Oshkosh	
July 10-13	Waupaca Boatride Volleyball Tournament Brighton Acres · 4057 Fisk Ave, Oshkosh	
July 11	Elsewhere sponsors The Mom Walk Collective · 9am Elsewhere Market & Coffee · 531 N Main St, Oshkosh	
July 11	Christmas in July Sale · 7am-3pm Elsewhere Market & Coffee · 531 N Main St, Oshkosh	
July 16	Jet Pack Stereo · 6-8pm Shattuck Park · 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah	
July 17-20	Sovereign State Days Parade July 19 · 10:30am Waterfront Park, Marble Park · Winneconne	
July 17-25	Kiss Me, Kate · 7pm Neenah High School Performing Arts Center 500 Rocket Way, Neenah	
July 17	Waterfest: Big Bad Voodoo Daddy · 6pm Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh	
July 18	Oshkosh Parks Movie: WISH · Dusk Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh	
July 21-27	EAA Airventure 3000 Poberezny Rd, Oshkosh	
July 23	STEEM · 6-8pm, Shattuck Park · 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah	
July 24	40th Annual Cemetery Walk · 6-8:30pm Oak Hill Cemetery · 211 Walnut St, Neenah	
July 25	ABBAFAB · 8pm, The Grand Oshkosh · 100 High Ave, Oshkosh	
July 26	Kiss Me, Kate · 2pm Neenah High School Performing Arts Center 500 Rocket Way, Neenah	

July 27 **Minus One** · 3pm
Bee Hive Barn & Grill (outdoors) · 6897 Hy 76, Neenah

July 30-Aug 3 **Winnebago County Fair / Fairgrounds**
500 E County Rd Y, Oshkosh

July 30 **The Britins** · 6-8pm
Shattuck Park · 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah

July 31 **Waterfest Vic Ferrari Encore Performance** · 6pm
Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh

July 31 **'Anastasia - The New Broadway Musical'**
Presented by Inspiration Theatre · 7 p.m.
Winneconne High School Performing Arts Center
100 Wolf Run, Winneconne

AUGUST

August 1 **Integrity Automotive 3rd Annual Car Show** · 5pm
112 Langley Blvd, Neenah

August 1 **'Anastasia - The New Broadway Musical'**
Presented by Inspiration Theatre · 7 p.m.
Winneconne High School Performing Arts Center
100 Wolf Run, Winneconne

August 2 **Oshkosh Children's Parade** · 10am
South Park · 1035 W South Park Ave, Oshkosh

August 2 **Oshkosh Humane Society Fundraiser** · 11am
Barly & Hops · 663 N Main St, Oshkosh

August 2 **'Anastasia - The New Broadway Musical'**
Presented by Inspiration Theatre · 6 p.m.
Winneconne High School Performing Arts Center
100 Wolf Run, Winneconne

August 3 **'Anastasia - The New Broadway Musical'**
Presented by Inspiration Theatre · 2 p.m.
Winneconne High School Performing Arts Center
100 Wolf Run, Winneconne

August 6 **Arilya** · 6-8pm
Shattuck Park · 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah

August 7-9 **XRoads 41 Music Festival**
4125 S Washburn St, Oshkosh

August 7 **Waterfest: Steely Dane** · 6pm
Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh

August 13 **Murphy's Law** · 6-8pm
Shattuck Park · 210 E Wisconsin Ave, Neenah

August 14 **Waterfest: Loverboy** · 6pm
Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh

August 15 **Oshkosh Parks Movie: Moana** · Dusk
Leach Amphitheatre · 303 Ceape Ave, Oshkosh

August 18-21 **Art Camp** ages 5-7 · 10-12pm · Bergstrom-Mahler
Museum of Glass · 165 N Park Ave, Neenah

August 18 **Kenny Wayne Shepherd Band and Bobby Rush** · 8pm
Fox Cities Performing Arts Center
400 W College Ave, Appleton

August 23 **Oshkosh Food Pantry Fundraiser** · 11am
Barley & Hops · 663 N Main St, Oshkosh

August 27 **Boogie and the Yo-Yoz** · 6-9pm
Downtown Neenah, Wisconsin Ave

August 28 **Theresa Caputo** · 7:30pm
Fox Cities Performing Arts Center
400 W College Ave, Appleton

August 31 **Beatles vs. Stones - A Musical Showdown** · 6pm
The Grand Oshkosh · 100 High Ave, Oshkosh

August 31 **The "Happy Together" Tour** · 6pm
Fox Cities Performing Arts Center
400 W College Ave, Appleton



JUNE 2025	
2	Retrograde - The Spirit of 70s Rock Returns <i>Presented by Jennifer Lyn & The Groove Revival</i>
12-14	The Importance of Being Earnest <i>Presented by Oshkosh Community Players</i>
27	Wish You Were Floyd: Pink Floyd Tribute <i>Presented by Fearless Productions</i>

JULY 2025	
25	ABBAFAB <i>Presented by Entertainment Events</i>

AUGUST 2025	
31	Beatles vs. Stones - A Musical Showdown Featuring Abbey Road and Satisfaction <i>Presented by La Jolla Booking Agency</i>

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WHERE PAST MEETS PRESENT

Fun At The Fair

Winnebago County Fair celebrates 170 Years of making memories

By Cassidy Johnson

Celebrating their 170th anniversary, the Winnebago County Fair is coming to town July 30-Aug. 3, and it's bringing family fun, food and fair rides along with it.

Located at the Sunnyview Exposition Center in Oshkosh, this year's theme is "Carnival Lights, Action-Packed Nights."

Kicking off the carnival on July 30, the CC Bucking Bulls Rodeo will start at 7 p.m. followed by Zach Thomas from American Idol performing at 8 p.m. The entertainment continues July 31 at 7 p.m. with a County Tractor Pull and Dig Deep bluegrass band at 8 p.m.

The line-up on Aug. 1 includes the polka 2/5s Party Band from noon-4 p.m., music by the Delrays at 3 p.m., Badger State Tractor Pull at 6:30 p.m. and Star Six Nine taking the stage at 8 p.m.

The options on Aug. 2 include music by Jet Pack Stereo at 2 p.m., Hollywood Motorsports Demolition Derby at 6 p.m. and Spicy Tie Band at 8 p.m.

A sensory friendly day will be from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Aug. 3 with the fair closing at 4 p.m.

"We offer a lot more of the family entertainment," Fair Board President Mike Domke said. "A lot of fairs have big acts, but don't

have a lot for the kids. [The kids] are a lot of what the fair is for and about."

Daily entertainment options include Whimbubble face and body painting, Bear Hollow's wood carving shows, Hot Glass Academy, The Miller and Mike Show featuring Otis Miller and Mike Lorenz, Pleasure Valley pig, goat and duck races, the Mischief & Magic show, the High Flying Pages thrill show and Nick's Kids Show. Go to the event website winnebagoountyfaironline.com for updated schedule information.

"[My favorite part] is seeing the kids have fun and seeing some of the new acts and stuff that are unique to the area that you don't typically see otherwise," Domke said.

Thrill-seekers can always check out Mr. Ed's Magical Midway Rides in the late afternoon and evening for an adrenaline rush.

The fair also pays it forward to the community through a variety





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FRIDAY AUGUST 8TH 7:00PM



TICKETS & INFO



ONE NIGHT OF QUEEN

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of initiatives, including “Endless Adventures,” which offers 20 kids from 4:30-6 p.m. Aug. 1 the experience of showing an animal at the fair.

“[It’s] a special needs show where special needs kids can come in [and] get paired up with a youth,” Domke said. “They can show a sheep, a swine, a calf, or a goat under the leadership of one of the other youths.”

The show was started a few years ago by Domke’s daughter, Hailey Domke, in honor of their late family-friend Josh Perry, a boy who loved showing animals at the fair who had Asperger’s Syndrome.

According to the website, “Josh was a boy who had a heart of gold and found that showing dairy cattle at the county fair and spending time with animals made him the happiest kid ever.” They also have a similar initiative called “Farmer for a Day,” in which anyone can be paired with an exhibitor, and try their hand at exhibiting.

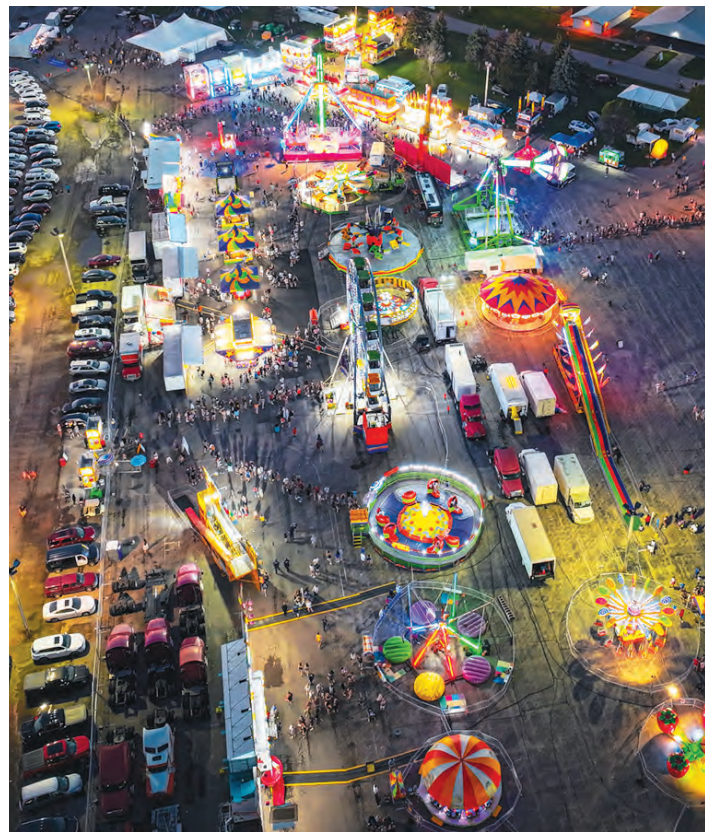
While the Winnebago County Fair gives back to the community, the community also pours back into the fair via sponsorships and donations, namely the Winnebago County Board of Supervisors.

The rest of the fair is funded through fundraisers, vendor fees and ticket sales.

Tickets are all-inclusive and \$12 in advance and \$15 at the gate. Admission includes parking, admission, and midway rides.

On Aug. 1, seniors can get in for \$5, and veterans can get in for free. For those interested in going on rides, they’ll just need to pick up their ticket ahead of time at the Winnebago County Veterans Office.

“My vision would be for it to continue for many, many years and just have more and more people come to the fair and enjoy the time,” said Domke. “They’ll build memories with their kids, whether their child is an exhibitor or just there to visit the fair.”



Whether it’s the rides, the animals or the food, there are many ways families can make lasting memories at the Winnebago County Fair.

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A Hotbed Of Live Music

Future Neenah's Summer Concert Series celebrates 20 years of music, community

By Cassidy Johnson

Anyone looking forward to listening to live music this summer is invited to grab a lawn chair and head to Shattuck Park for Future Neenah's Summer Concert Series for free music, parking and family-fun for all ages by the water from 6-8 p.m. on Wednesdays.

Celebrating their 20th anniversary this summer, they're starting the series off with the Glam Band for the Summer Kickoff Concert from 6-9 p.m. on June 11 in downtown Neenah.

"We run out of room at the park when we try to host bigger bands like that, so we moved it downtown," said Michelle Dunning, outreach and development director for Future Neenah. "It's cool because then people that come [for the concert] can also enjoy and support the bars and restaurants downtown. It give[s] the downtown a little boost."

Another way they like to support local businesses is through their temporary Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) for the two big street concerts downtown.

"We have that in effect for the street concert so people can go to one of their favorite bars in the downtown district [to] get your beverage to go," Dunning said. "It's a great way for people to support the local businesses down here while also enjoying a beverage while listening to some good music."

While the kickoff concert downtown is sure to be big and bustling, Dunning said the rest of the concerts at Shattuck Park are just as fun without being too chaotic.

"The Shattuck Park concerts are fun because they're super family friendly," Dunning said. "We have rotating food trucks that are there [for] some good eats, and then we have the water [right there] so you can pull up on your boat and listen to the music from your boat if you'd like."

Following the Summer Kickoff Concert, local Fox Valley band Avenue 55 will be performing high-energy rock classics on June 25.

Also new to the concert series, popular husband-wife pop-rock duo and company Arilya from Green Bay will be performing on Aug. 6.

"Neenah favorites are always Steem, The Britins and Murphy's Law," Dunning said. "We can be sure that the grounds will



A large crowd gathers in Shattuck Park for Future Neenah's Summer Concert Series last year.

be packed [when they perform]."

On July 23, Neenah-favorite STEEM from Oshkosh will be playing funky R&B-rock-jazz fusion alongside food vendors such as The Wandering Table, Rolling Taco and Kona Ice.

For those looking to delve into Strawberry Fields Forever, The Britins on July 30 are scheduled for a fun and interactive performance by Wisconsin's best dedicated Beatles tribute band.

Feel free to enjoy some authentic cuisine from Lucia's Cocina and

Luigi's and listen to "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds."

Also on July 30, there will be a build-your-own sundae bar, courtesy of Dairy Queen and Simplicity Credit Union.

Since it's Future Neenah's 20th anniversary, this is a nod and nice, full-circle moment to the giant sundae bar they had years ago at the first-ever summer concert series.

Punk-rock band Murphy's Law from New York City will take to the stage on Aug. 13.

The summer concert series will end where it started downtown, this time with performances Aug. 27 by Boogie and the Yo-Yoz.

To get kids excited to "Boogie back-to-school," Future Neenah is partnering with the Neenah Joint School District to make it a community celebration.

"It'll be lots of family fun from different schools, clubs, activities and sporting groups [at the Neenah school district]. We have a good amount of fun bands that [are] new to the Neenah lineup this summer," Dunning said. "We try to do a good mix of music to cover different genres and have a good variety for all people."

Out to Lunch Concerts

Future Neenah also hosts "Out to Lunch" concerts from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursdays creating an ambience for passersby, park patrons and the business person on their lunch break.

"There's a lot of businesses in the downtown district," Dunning said. "It's a nice opportunity for business people to come outside and get some food from a food truck, have their lunch, listen to

See Summer Music, page 23

FUTURE NEENAH

Let the summer fun begin. *We'll see you there!*

Downtown Neenah Street Concerts



Summer Kickoff Concert
June 11 from 6-9pm
with **The Glam Band**



Boogie Back to School
August 27 from 6-9pm
with **Boogie and the Yo-yoz**

Wisconsin Ave. will be closed for the street concerts. Food & beverage will be available for purchase from the businesses of Downtown Neenah. Please bring a lawn chair. Free parking available in the Church St. ramp and surrounding lots.

2025 Summer Concert Series

Evening Concerts

Wednesdays
6-8pm

June 18 - A-Town Unplugged
June 25 - Avenue 55
July 9 - Star Six Nine
July 16 - Jet Pack Stereo
July 23 - STEEM
July 30 - The Britins (20th anniversary celebration)
August 6 - Arilya
August 13 - Murphy's Law

All concerts are located at Shattuck Park unless otherwise noted and are free to attend thanks to our generous sponsors. Food and beverages available from rotating food trucks. Please bring lawn chair or blanket. No alcohol allowed in the park.



Out to Lunch Concerts

Thursdays
11:30am-1pm

June 12 - Isiah
June 19 - Barefoot Americans
June 26 - Tim Dorsey*
July 10 - Mr. Billy and Friends* (kids' concert)
July 17 - Jacob Fannin
July 24 - Seth Brown Duo
July 31 - Randy Peterson (kids' concert)
August 7 - Kyle Megna Duo
August 14 - Jim 'n' Nancy

• Concert located at The Plaza

Future Neenah Farmers Market

Saturdays, June 14 - October 12
8am-12pm
Shattuck Park

Start your weekend off right at the Future Neenah Farmers Market, nestled along the scenic Fox River in charming Shattuck Park. Every Saturday morning from June 14 through October 12, this open-air market brings together over 50 local vendors offering the very best in homemade, homegrown, and handcrafted goods.



Visit neenah.org or follow Future Neenah on Facebook for more summer fun!

Get Your Swing On

FORE! X-Golf Oshkosh adds to simulator boom in area

By Cassidy Johnson

While green-grass golfing may have been par for the course at one point, golf simulators have gained popularity, with the National Golf Foundation reporting over 6.2 million Americans using virtual golf systems in recent years.

This recent golf simulator boom has made its way to the Winnebago County area, with businesses such as Clubhouse Indoor Golf & Sports Bar and Fairways in Oshkosh along with Appleton Indoor Golf.

The newest addition to the golf simulator businesses in the area is X-Golf Oshkosh.

"Our sims at X-Golf Oshkosh are really the next generation simulators," said Brian Jankowski, head PGA professional and part-owner of X-Golf Oshkosh. "[That's] because you're playing every shot in the game of golf from full swing to putting, and all of it with 98% accuracy."

Each simulator displays 8 different metrics including ball speed, height, distance, swing speed and more, allowing players to adjust their form in real-time as they play.

"It offers the experience of golfing on a golf course while also showing all the statistics within my swing so I can adapt my form



Play courses from around the world in Oshkosh at one of the indoor golf simulators.

accordingly," said Jacob Kremer, an Oshkosh resident and golf enthusiast. "I'm a big numbers guy, so seeing the stats is especially interesting to me."

Whether a professional golfer is looking to polish their swings or a newbie is weary of causing lines at the links, Jankowski said X-Golf is a great way for players of all skill types to refine their game.

"Golf is really a very diverse game," said Jankowski. "I love seeing kids and everybody, it's just awesome. No matter what level of golfer you are, it can be fun."

With seven simulators and two private bays, rates start at \$30 an hour per simulator (not per person) on weekdays, and \$40 an hour on the weekends and after 4 p.m. Fridays. Participants can choose a 30-minute session perfect for the working person trying to squeeze in a session on a lunch break, or they can golf the day away with a group of friends or family.

For only \$10 more an hour, they can also book private simulators and get complimentary access to a lounge in between the bays.

X-Golf also allows customers in private bays to control the screen and sounds, making it perfect for anything from a game day watch party to a business meeting.

For those who get tired after all that golfing, Jankowski said they can fuel up at X-Golf Oshkosh with their wide variety of food and drinks.

One of their most popular menu items are pit sliders, which are three warm pretzel buns topped with barbeque beef brisket and melted provolone, each finished off with a different sauce from J's BBQ in Ripon.

"[The sliders] are probably my favorite menu item," Kremer said. "The meat's very tender, and I like the variety of sauces."

To wash it all down, guests can also check out the happy hour from 3 to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday where they can try sand trap paloma, a pink cocktail rimmed with pink Himalayan sea salt.

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MUD ON MAIN CLAY CAMPS

Guests can also try out the signature old-fashioned. "It's a Bulleit Bourbon with maple syrup instead of sugar," Jankowski said. "Gives it a great flavor."

This and more can all be delivered by servers called 'caddies' as they make their 'loops.'

"We don't want our customers to have to necessarily leave their sims to come get anything," Jankowski said. "We're out there consistently, if not just to say hello and make sure they're having fun."

While the statistics can be helpful, learning from an actual golf professional can be a game-changer.

Taught by the general manager and Head PGA professional of X-Golf, Jankowski got into golf late in high school and graduated from the Golf Academy of American in Southern California a few years later.

"I love showing people how to potentially do something that they didn't think they ever could," Jankowski said. "A lot of it is really [a] lack of knowledge, I'm just imparting that knowledge of how to do it differently."

Jankowski enjoys taking a personalized approach to his coaching, having those interested in lessons complete a "swing evaluation" so that he can determine what type and duration of training works best.

"It's such a joy to help somebody improve," he said. "When they come in and say, 'I'm so glad that I decided to work with you' - that's it right there for me."

This summer, they are also looking to turn the traditional golf scramble "outside-in," with X-Golf being the perfect venue for, "any



For those not into playing a round or after getting in 18 holes on the simulator, getting a good drink and some food is on the menu at X-Golf Oshkosh.

business owners or charity operators that want to host an outing [but] don't want to have to worry about the weather," according to Jankowski.

He said the simulators are also perfect for individuals looking to avoid the typical weather restrictions of outdoor golf courses, or those who are tired of dealing with overbooked and overpriced courses.

Whether guests are looking to skip the hassle, looking to improve (or acquire skill) or just looking for some leisurely summer fun without the hassle of outside courses, Jankowski said X-Golf can fulfill their needs regardless of age or skill set.

For those new to X-Golf, Jankowski said to make sure to arrive 10-15 minutes early for a quick demo on how to use the simulators.

For more information or to book a tee time, visit <https://playxgolf.com/locations/oshkosh/>.



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For more info visit www.oshkosharena.com



OSHKOSH'S FUNNIEST COMEDIAN
JUNE 20
Round 2 Preliminary Qualifying Round
7-9 p.m. (doors open at 6 p.m.)
10-12 comedians competing for the title



FOX CITIES ROLLER DERBY
JUNE 28
Season 18 Women's Flat-Track
5-9 p.m. (doors open at 4 p.m.)
Double-header of flat-track derby action



OSHKOSH'S FUNNIEST COMEDIAN
JULY 11
Round 3 Preliminary Qualifying Round
7-9 p.m. (doors open at 6 p.m.)
10-12 comedians competing for the title



OSHKOSH'S FUNNIEST COMEDIAN
AUG 15
Round 4 Preliminary Qualifying Round
7-9 p.m. (doors open at 6 p.m.)
10-12 comedians competing for the title



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The Hidden Gem of Fox Crossing

Xe54 Cocktail Lounge

boasts undeniable chemistry

By Cassidy Johnson

Xe54, or Xenon, is a colorless, odorless and tasteless noble gas. However, when electrified, the gas begins to glow a beautiful purple-blue hue.

Much like its name, Xe54 Cocktail Lounge is seen as a hidden gem that may take effort to uncover, but rewards visitors with its undeniable chemistry and electricity when uncovered.

Bringing a glow to its Fox Crossing neighborhood through their personable customer service, elevated cocktails and charcuterie, and their upscale, moody vibe, Xe54 has updated their ownership.

Originally opened in October 2018 by Pamela Barnes, the sister duo of Laura and Nicole Spranger have officially taken over as of April 1.

The pair has over 40 years of collective experience in the service industry in Long Beach, Calif., Denver, Colo. and Wisconsin, adding a fresh and trendy perspective to both the bar and the community.

"That's what we [bring] here, being in bigger cities and just knowing trends that were happening and knowing what people are looking for," said Nicole Spranger. "We just have a vast knowledge of different types of service industry, all the way from waitressing, to bartending, to management."

Having worked in almost every type of bar in every type of position across the United States, they have used this experience to their advantage to curate a cocktail bar that is true to themselves and their vision.

"Our vision [is] to just maintain that moody, vibey wine and cocktail lounge, have really good wine, [and] really good craft cocktails," Laura Spranger said.

One way they've achieved this is through their seasonal food and cocktail flights and their constantly revolving menu.

While bringing their own vibe and vision to Xe54, they have also maintained many of the bones Barnes left, including a desire for the business to focus on both philanthropy and community.

One way they like to support the community is through their "pay-it-forward" cocktail program.

"Every month we pick a local nonprofit, customize a drink for them, and donate a dollar of every one of their drinks [we sell]," Laura said. "It's just about using our platform to bring awareness [and money] to the nonprofit."

They also started a monthly women's networking event called **20 • ATLAS Your Local Guide to Dining, Arts & Entertainment**



"Women of the (happy) Hour," an event that's "really for anyone with aspirations of meeting other like-minded, strong-willed women," according to Laura.

"It's not like any of the other networking groups; we don't ask for a fee, you don't have to pre-register," she said. "It's just a cocktail hour; we find two women business owners from the valley to be our speakers to host it."

Xe54 has a variety of other events meant to engage with and give back to community individuals and businesses every week this summer.

"We really try to curate everything from the menu to the experiences to the customer interactions," said Laura. "We're very personalized and event-heavy."

On Tuesdays, they are collaborating with Cranked Bike Studio in Neenah to create a bike group in which every time somebody comes in and takes a ride, they are entered into a drawing for an e-bike.

On Wednesdays, they will have their food truck series with local food trucks and vendors in the parking lot of Xe54.

On Thursdays, they have "Cocktail Creations with Laura," in which participants will make three different cocktails fit for the season, perfect for a host around the holidays or somebody just looking to learn.

It's \$50 to sign up, covering the cost of the class, ingredients and the "starter-pack," complete with a shaker, stirrer, recipe card, and everything you may need for the class.

They will also have live music from 7 to 10 p.m. every Friday, and Jen's Piano Bar on the second Saturday of every month.

"[We're] not just a destination, but a place to forge connections," Nicole said. "That's what makes these events so cool, because people know we're invested in it and they know that we spent the time curating the experience."

In addition to the multitude of public events, they also do many private events such as bridal showers, baby showers, and birthday parties.

One customer who opted for this option for her 22nd birthday is Oshkosh resident Shaely Hoch.

"I thought it would be a great idea to have a private cocktail making class for my birthday with some friends," Hoch said. "I reached out to Laura and we worked together to figure out a theme for the cocktails and what I wanted [on] my charcuterie board. She came up with a red velvet chocolate martini, lavender lemon drop and spicy mango margarita."

"[It] was in a beautiful, private room with everything set up for us," she said. "Laura walked us through how to make each drink while we shared many laughs; she is such a fun spirit who truly loves what she does."

They can host a party at the lounge, like Hoch's birthday party,

or they can meet customers where they're at with mobile bartending.

"We are licensed to take it on the road," Laura said. "[If] you wanted to have a party at your house, I'd give you a list of what you need to supply and then show up with the rest, and we can make it happen."

While Xe54 certainly makes a great cocktail lounge, it is much more than that. The sisters' combined experience, passion and philanthropy shines through their many events and their elevated and intimate atmosphere.

"What's cool is that [with our] combined knowledge, we don't really feel limited," said Laura. "We literally just come up with an idea, and we build it. Our possibilities are really endless around here."

Nestled in the Fox Crossings neighborhood and chalk full of endless opportunities, the owners said Xe54 is truly a hidden gem.



Great food and drinks mixed with a perfect atmosphere, whether outdoors on a warm summer evening or inside at the bar, Xe54 Cocktail Lounge brings a unique and electric hotspot to the Fox Crossing area.

"[Xenon] is rare, and it's only seen when there's lots of excitement and energy," Nicole said. "When it's energized, that's cool. Otherwise, it's just gas. It is invisible."

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Pete's Garage Bar: Not your typical dive bar

By Cassidy Johnson

"'Questionable townies gather here,' says one guy named Mitchel . . . you have been warned," reads one of many signs embracing one-star reviews on the back porch of Pete's Garage Bar.

With its garage-theme, dim lighting and bar top as crowded as the walls enclosing it, Pete's Garage Bar at 1514 Oregon St. in Oshkosh doesn't just embrace one-star reviews, but also their dive-bar persona.

One way they embrace the dive-bar nature is through not only welcoming in the "questionable townies," but also by providing them with sarcastic, yet personable customer service.

"I'm not the typical bar owner," owner Pete Haferman said. "I'm the weird bar owner. I bought a bar because I like to talk to people, and I like to serve people drinks and food."

A natural bartender and people-person, Haferman used his experience from Mabel Murphy's (and the agitation he got from his previous job) to motivate him to launch a new bar 20 years ago.

"I literally bought a bar so I could keep bartending," he said. "I know that my biggest asset is to be a bartender."

His unapologetic and playful personality has created an unpretentious culture at Pete's, garnering a loyal customer base that contributes back to Pete's incredibly strong — and hilarious — bar culture.

This exact sentiment is mirrored in a story from loyal regular Tim Diers, also known as "Ten Beers." Wishing not to disturb Pete, and realizing he could make his own drink, Diers went behind the bar to grab a vodka soda. When he caught Diers, Haferman was appalled. "[Pete said to me], 'I've never poured a drink that short in my life, put more vodka in there.'"

To be clear, he said this definitely isn't an invitation to try and make your own drink behind the bar. Not that anyone will ever need to, as Haferman can "hear an empty glass hit [the bar] from Omro."

"In this town, he is truly, unequivocally, hands down, the best bartender," said Diers. "It's like a second nature to him."

While originally cultivated for the customers, this strong culture has inadvertently created a cult-like following, minus the kool-aid: They have rail mixers instead.

"It's a pretty great feeling, not that we won this thing, but the fact that people support us so much," Haferman said after winning #1 Dive Bar nationwide this past April. "The support and the sheer craziness of the people that follow us outweigh the victory in my eyes."

Besides voting for Pete's Garage in the "March Dive-ness" tournament put on by the organization, Dive Bar Road Trip, they have also shown their support in other ways.

"We've won Best Burger for the last eight years in Best of Winnebago County," Haferman said. "We beat Red Robin, who has never been beaten by anybody."

While the support from loyal customers likely helped, the

victory was certainly warranted.

"They definitely have one of the best burgers in the state," said Oshkosh resident Jacob Link.

For those not in the mood for a burger, maybe they'll have an appetite for valve caps or air bags, Haferman's version of cheese curds and jalapeno bacon mac & cheese bites.


"It's a dive bar atmosphere. But then the amount of people are like, yeah, I don't even drink," Link said. "I go in there all the time because they have good food. It's crazy to me."

Beyond being known for its food and service, Pete's also does their part through donations and programs, most notably their Christmas toy drive for kids in the Head Start programs in Oshkosh.

For a decade, they've spent around \$10,000 each year from their own pocket and from customer donations in order to provide gifts to underprivileged youth.

"Our core people are people from Oshkosh or the surrounding community. If we don't have them, we don't have a business," Haferman said. "For me to give back is a no-brainer. It makes no sense for me not to give to a community that's literally making me a business."

Anyone looking for a laugh, a cheap rail drink, a great burger or just looking to meet fellow "questionable townies" can count on Pete's Garage Bar for an eventful summer night.



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WATERFEST

from page 5

musicians from New Orleans that have all won awards and run their own bands," said Dempsey. "It's really neat, they'll be cool [to watch]."

For those interested in listening to more jazz, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy will be bringing their swingin' music to Waterfest July 17 with their retro-inspired music from the 40s.

On the same day, the Cigar Store Indians, a "hidden gem" of Waterfest, will perform.

"They're kind of a rockabilly meets Jazz I would say," said Dempsey. "They're absolutely fantastic [and] hilarious. Some real good music."

Another hidden gem will make its way to the stage July 31; an authentic Earth Wind & Fire show called Shining Star, "one of America's best Earth, Wind & Fire tribute bands," according to Dempsey.

"One of the byproducts of [the festival] is that we've been able to provide an introduction to Wisconsin-based artists that might not have had access to those fans, and vice versa," he said. "Both the artists and the general public discover one another here, and that really helps the music scene here in the Fox Valley and beyond."

Ending the music festival with a sha-bang, the last two Thursdays are packed with popular performances from Steely Dane, The Producers, and Lover Boy.

On Aug. 7, Steely Dane, a Steely Dan cover band, and The Producers, a popular band from the '80s that specializes in new-wave power-pop, will be playing.

"The charm of Waterfest lies in the sense of community, the affordable ticket prices and the lively atmosphere created by the interaction between the performers and the audience."

Finishing the season off on Aug. 14 is Loverboy, the iconic classic rock band from the '80s. With four of the original members still remaining and 40 years together under their belt, the band is sure to bring excitement and nostalgia to the stage.

While Waterfest was built on giving back to and revitalizing the city of Oshkosh, the city has also given back to the non-profit in the form of sponsorships, donations, and local volunteers.

"The motivation and the core [of Waterfest] is community and economic development," Dempsey says. "The charm of Waterfest is the sense of community that radiates on any given evening where people [can] visit [with] one another and reconnect."

With versatile and affordable live music spanning genres (and generations), Waterfest has something for everybody in the community.

"The charm of Waterfest lies in the sense of community, the affordable ticket prices and the lively atmosphere created by the interaction between the performers and the audience," Dempsey said. "There's a sense of joy that emanates as a result of getting outside, enjoying a Wisconsin summer evening with some great music in a wonderful venue. All these things come together to create a wonderful live music experience for friends and family."

SUMMER MUSIC

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some music and take a little break."

These concerts will also take place at Shattuck Park, although they are experimenting with using The Plaza in Gateway Park as a venue June 26 with Tim Dorsey and July 10 with Mr. Billy and Friends.

"It's right in the heart of downtown, so it just seemed like a natural space to try and bring some music to," Dunning said.

All of this and more is made possible by sponsorships and donations from local businesses and people.

"We live in a very philanthropic city, so we have a ton of generous sponsors that put these [concerts] on," Dunning said. "Without the support of our sponsors, we wouldn't be able to put these things on."

With Future Neenah being a non-profit, Dunning said this series and all of its concerts, events and food vendors was created for the community, by the community.

"Neenah is a small community, so you end up running into lots of friends and neighbors," Dunning said. "It's just a great community gathering place, and it's super fun to be down by the water on a warm summer evening enjoying great music."



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