

Advance Thief River

Come Home to Thief River Falls



We hope you enjoy this premier publication from Advance Thief River, inviting you to “Come Home to Thief River Falls.” Within these pages, you will read stories about people who’ve built a career, gone to school, or started a business here.

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Leap of Faith

“When I grew up in this town, there were so many things to do. People came to this town to shop, to eat, and to do things,” Jill Stenberg said.

As a young person growing up in Thief River Falls, part of Jill’s experience was shopping at Old Bostwick’s and walking up the grand staircase that led to the junior’s department.

When she saw the Old Bostwick’s building standing empty in 2015, she decided to take a big leap of faith. “I saw this big, historic building on a major corner in downtown Thief River Falls, and I just couldn’t let it stay empty,” Jill said.

With a desire to see her hometown come back to life, she purchased the 20,000 square-foot Old Bostwick’s building on the corner of Third Street and LaBree Avenue.

When the Humane Society heard she had purchased the building, they approached her about forming a unique partnership. Through the partnership Jill established with the Humane Society, people donate items to the store, volunteers staff the store, and in return, the Humane Society receives a percentage of the revenue.

A Shopping Experience

Shopping at Old Bostwick’s is a unique experience. The amount and variety of merchandise is impressive by anyone’s definition. “We get in everything from clothing, to furniture, to books,” Jill said. Community members have been very generous with their donations and some of the donated furniture has been worth thousands of dollars.

 **Shop In-Store or Online**
www.oldbostwicks.com

And it’s not all used merchandise. “Some of the clothes are used and some are new with tags,” Jill said.



Jill Stenberg, owner of Old Bostwicks

In addition to running the store, Jill has a full-time position at Digi-Key Electronics. With her busy schedule, Humane Society volunteers play a critical role. “They do an amazing job,” Jill said. “I come in, in the morning, and I walk around, and they have reset the store. I’m saying to myself, ‘oh my gosh, where did that come from?’ It’s so exciting to see all those new things displayed.”

The store has large display windows all along LaBree Avenue and Third street and is well-known for its eye-catching window displays. “They’re our best advertisement,” Jill said. “We like to showcase different things in the windows so that people who stop at the traffic light have something attractive to look at.”

Building Upgrades

In 2021, Jill did a major upgrade to the building, replacing all the store’s existing large windows, as well as adding windows along the alley.

Up until 2021, only 4,500 square feet of the store was open to customers. Now, Jill is opening up additional areas for shoppers and plans to continue upgrading the building’s interior.

She plans to have the entire first and second floor—a total of 20,000 square feet—open to shoppers. “People want to go upstairs because they have fond memories of shopping upstairs at Old Bostwick’s many years ago,” Jill said. “We want to restore that old staircase, so people coming home to visit family can come here and walk upstairs and reminisce about that time.”

TOTAL BETTY

Family and *Fashion*

“This has been a dream,” said Becca Larson Isaak, speaking about opening her own boutique in Thief River Falls.

Like many entrepreneurs, realizing her dream was a few years in the making. After graduating from Lincoln High School, she went into nursing. “I loved my job,” Becca said. “I worked in mental health for several years but in the back of my mind I always knew I wanted to open a boutique.”

As a child, she played Barbie dolls with her sister for hours and hours. Part of the fun was dressing them in “hundreds and hundreds of clothes.” That love of dressing dolls grew up into a love of dressing people.

She also spent a lot of time looking through family photo albums and always admired how people used to dress “back in the day.” One person who really stood out to her in those old photos was her grandmother, Betty Amiot, who embodied an innate sense of fashion.

When it came to selecting a name for her store, Becca chose “Total Betty,” in honor of her grandmother and as a tribute to her great sense of style. A few of Becca’s favorite black and white photos of her grandmother grace the walls of the store.

The family connection has always been especially important to Becca. “Growing up, I was taught that your family is your team—they’re your rock—so it was fun to incorporate family into my business as much as I could,” Becca said.



Becca Larson Isaak, owner of Total Betty

Before she opened, she went back to school and earned a marketing degree. She launched Total Betty in November of 2018. The store features a great mix of women’s clothing that appeals to a wide variety of ages, offered in sizes small-3X. The concept behind the business is helping women look and feel good.



Becca also has an online shop. “In this day and age,” she said, “I think it is especially important to

have a website and to be in contact with customers that don’t live here in Thief River.” She is constantly adding new merchandise, product images, and updating her website.

What a lot of people don’t know is that everything that’s in the Total Betty bricks-and-mortar store is also on the Total Betty website. If you see something online, you can come in the store and try it on.

Part of the fun for Becca is helping her customers find the right outfit. “People walk in as customers, and they walk out as friends.”

Big Opportunities Close to Home



Shane Zutz, Vice President of Human Resources & Admin at Digi-Key

Shane Zutz is proud to say that he “hasn’t gone very far in life,” referring to the fact that he was raised and educated in Thief River Falls and still lives in the community, decades later.

It doesn’t mean that he hasn’t had an exciting journey. In fact, his career path continues to climb upward after a surprising turn a few years ago.

Things weren’t always super easy for him during his growing up years. “I did not take a straight and narrow path all the time,” Shane laughed.

He credits the community for playing a large and incredibly positive role during his formative years. “I honestly believe that this community raised me,” he said. “I had a lot of adults take interest in me and had some great mentors.”

He attended Franklin Middle School, Lincoln High School, and Northland Community and Technical College, little knowing that he would eventually teach at Franklin Middle School, and ultimately, go on to take an administrative position with Thief River Falls Public Schools.

“The pinnacle of my education career and what I am most proud of,” said Shane, “was to be principal of Lincoln High School for a period of ten years. I’m proud of the growth we had during my time at the district.”

During his tenure as principal of Lincoln High School, Shane developed a strong relationship with Dave Doherty, president of Digi-Key. One day, Dave tapped Shane on the shoulder and said, “hey, you should come work at Digi-Key.”

At first, the thought of leaving education was a crazy one because it was such a big part of Shane’s heart. But he eventually decided to accept Dave’s invitation.

“I would never have left our education system to do this in any other company, but it was the opportunity to do something for a global company in my own hometown. The fun part is a lot of my former students work here and a lot of people that I’ve grown up with and known in the community.”

Shane serves as Vice President of Human Resources and Administration at Digi-Key. “The funny part is that it’s a little bit like being the principal at the high school. I get to be involved in a lot of different things across the business, everything from facilities to strategy, finances, talent, finding new leaders, employee engagement...the list goes on and on.”

Digi-Key is one of several large companies—businesses that have a global footprint and whose headquarters are in Northwest Minnesota. Shane feels that people who grow up in the area often overlook the career opportunities afforded by these companies.

“People need to really know and understand that you can have work that makes an impact, but you can do it in an environment where you’ll have teachers and small business owners that know you and your kids, and they’ll help you with your family as they grow.”

Digi-Key works with big partners like Google and Twitter, and others that are developing technologies that literally change the world. Soon moving into their 50th year, Digi-Key is growing at a pace that is unprecedented for almost anyone in the industry.

“The opportunities here, as we move forward, for all of our employees, are really big.”

A Special Bond

Sara Beger and Beth Peterick,
Nurse Practitioners with Sanford Health Thief River Falls



If you visit with Beth Peterick and Sara Beger, it is easy to see the special bond that they share. The twin sisters were born and raised on a farm near Thief River Falls and went on to pursue careers in healthcare at Sanford Health.

They graduated from Lincoln High School and went on to receive LPN degrees from Northland Community and Technical College, followed by bachelor's degrees from Bemidji State University, and master's degrees in nursing. "We did everything together," Beth said.

Both are Nurse Practitioners, but Beth works in women's health, while Sara works in family practice. "Sanford has been in our lives for a long time," Sara said. "We both started here, and we've always enjoyed our jobs here. Staying here was the only option as far as we were concerned."

Both are enthusiastic about the quality of care that is available to patients at Sanford Health Thief River Falls. "When I tell people how many providers there are here at Sanford, they are always blown away," Sara said. "We have lots of different specialties that are there every day. We have dermatology. We have women's health, family practice, internal medicine. We have a walk-in clinic and a huge behavioral health center. That's a big deal, to have that kind of care here," Sara said.

In addition, Sanford has numerous specialists that come to the clinic regularly, providing services like ENT and cardiology. "I think it's super important that people don't have to leave to get that sort of care," Sara said.

Beth emphasized the quality of care that comes with having a healthcare provider who knows you. "People

often have a hard time opening up to their provider and asking questions, but in a small community like this, your provider knows your family, your kids, your grandparents. The fact that people know us can really help."

Beth and Sara both love the family connections and small-town lifestyle that they've come to know. "My sister lives three miles down the road and she can stop by my house on her way home from work. Our families are really close," Beth said.

"I wanted my kids to grow up like I did, in a rural community, a smaller high school, tons of sports available to them, but that smaller community where you know everyone," Sara said. "That was really important to me."

Both women also appreciate the safety of Thief River Falls. "I've never felt concerned about safety here," Beth said. "I've never locked my car. I don't worry when I leave my house. I don't worry when I go to the store. We're very safe."

Both women envision living in the community for many years to come. "I'm super excited for my kids to go to Thief River Falls school, graduate, and hopefully raise their families here," Sara said. "I envision my grandkids playing in the home I have now, and I hope they stay around here."

Beth added, "Our kids are around the same age, so I think it would be really cool that they get to go to the same school, walk in the hallways we walked in, graduate, and play sports here—all those fun things—and get to live in this amazing and fun community."

Real-World Opportunities *for Students*

Any Goal, Any Opportunity, Any Time, Anywhere

Hometown boy, Carter Rogalla, describes himself as a “husband, father, coach, teacher, and fisherman.”

His story includes athletic success during his high school years in Thief River Falls and going on to the University of North Dakota where he ended up being inducted into their Hall of Fame for accomplishments in college baseball.

Fast forward a few years, and he and his wife moved back to Thief River Falls to teach and to raise their three daughters. The decision to come back was a good one for the Rogalla family. “It’s been a really good experience for my wife and I, and also our kids,” Carter said.

In his role with the school district, Carter is a teacher in the business department as well as head softball coach. If you ask him what he loves about the local school system, he gets enthusiastic about the variety of opportunities that are available to students.

“We have kids who go over to Digi-Key and to Arctic Cat and a lot of the other small businesses and get a chance to job shadow,” Carter said. “They can see what those experiences are like.”

In addition to opportunities at Digi-Key and Arctic Cat, Carter has had students job shadow at Sanford Health and the police department. “We provide so many opportunities for kids to see, to try, and to get that real experience instead of just the classroom setting. It’s tremendous for the kids.”

A great example is the home-building class that provides real-world, authentic learning for local students. “The kids get a chance to build a home and sell it to someone in the community,” Carter said. “That gives them the opportunity to build something that will be standing for the next hundred and some years.”

In addition to having a successful teaching career, Carter has seen a lot of success as a coach in Thief River Falls for the last 23 years. He started out with the boys’ programs and moved to the girls’ softball program in later years when his daughters started playing.

“I’ve been fortunate enough to be the head softball coach for ten years,” Carter said, with a fair amount of humility. Under his leadership, the girls have been to the Minnesota playoffs four times. “It’s been great seeing the success of our girls’ programs,” he added.

“We have 18 different varsity sports and have had a lot of teams end up getting down to the State tournaments, which is pretty cool,” Carter said. “We’re not that big, but we do offer a lot of things for our students.”

Moving Forward

When Donita Stepan was hired as Superintendent of Thief River Falls Public Schools in July 2020, she wanted to increase the number of opportunities for area students. With that goal in mind, one of her first priorities was revising the district’s strategic plan. “I wanted to see some passion behind the plan,” Donita said.



Carter Rogalla, teacher and coach at Lincoln High School

Over the course of several months, numerous meetings were held with community members, school board members, and leadership teams and the result of those conversations is a strategic plan that Donita is immensely proud of.

“We are so thrilled with the strategic plan because it brings opportunities to the community’s children and families,” Donita said. “We want to provide a good quality experience for anything and anywhere that a child wants to go in life.”

The revised strategic plan is built on six pillars that help to personalize the learner experience through real-world opportunities, through voice and choice, and through equitable opportunities. The plan also contains strategies to enhance safety, fiscal management, and staff growth.

Donita is extremely impressed by the level of community support she has seen.

“Throughout my experience in the field of education, I have never seen so much community support,” Donita said. “It’s everything from our Education Foundation—one of the best in the State of Minnesota—to the PTSP parent group, the scholarships, and the support that we (school staff) have for our kids. It’s really unprecedented.”

Carter Rogalla couldn’t agree more.

“Our kids have a good relationship with our staff and can come and talk to them when they are struggling in different parts of their lives,” Carter said.

“It’s a real community... it’s a community from the standpoint of our school, but also the entire community. I think that’s one of the big pluses of Thief River Falls and our school district.”

Sharing a Great Love for the Outdoors

Dana Klos of Thief River Falls has come to be a local legend, famous for the way he has shared his love for the great outdoors with others.

This pursuit of the wild earned him recognition beyond Thief River Falls when he was inducted into the Minnesota Archery Hall of Fame in 2016, a designation awarded to an elite group of archery aficionados who have shown advanced skill or have significantly contributed to the sport of archery in Minnesota.

Locally, he is also well-known for his expertise in hunting, fishing, shooting, and trapping. He is a member of the local Sportsman's Club, and a certified youth firearms and trapping instructor. It is an understatement to say that he has trained hundreds of Thief River Falls youth in outdoor sports.

Although Dana was born and raised in Deer River, Minnesota, he has been a resident of Thief River Falls since the 1970's, when he enrolled in the architectural drafting program at the Thief River Falls Area Vocational Technical Institute, commonly known as the AVTI. After a year at the AVTI, he went into active military duty. After his service, he went back to school to complete a two-year degree at the college.

After college, Dana chose to stay in Thief River Falls. He found good employment, and most importantly for him, the area afforded many opportunities for outdoor recreation.

"There are more than 1,000,000 acres of publicly accessible lands within 70 miles," Dana said, "and over 3,000,000 acres of public waters. Lots of places, you have to rely on the generosity of landowners, but here, you've got a wealth of natural resources that are available to anybody," he said.



Dana Klos with great-granddaughter Aspen Klos and grandson Brenden Miller

One of Dana's favorite destinations is Beltrami Island State Park, Minnesota's second largest State Park. "You can get lost up there," he said. "With a million acres, you'll never set foot on every square foot of it."

Even closer to Thief River Falls is the 7,000-acre Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge, where you might find a variety of migratory birds, moose, deer, and other animals.

As much as he loves everything about the great outdoors, if you press Dana for a hunting or fishing story, he will likely share an account of helping someone else enjoy the outdoors, whether it's the annual youth fishing derby put on by the Sportsman's Club or helping a disabled hunter get back into the woods.

Dana seems to have a natural desire to pass on his skills. "I try to entice kids, even adults, into enjoying the outdoors as much as I can. There are some that never will enjoy it because they're spending too much time on electronics. But, if you want to learn to enjoy nature, go out on your own and see what's to be had. Even though it's a fast-paced world and there are improvements everywhere, it slows down when you're on your own walking around in the woods. A lot of stress disappears."

Both Sides of the *Curtain*

Jane Anderson grew up on a small grain and beef farm, five miles west of Thief River Falls.

She attended school in Thief River Falls, graduated from Lincoln High School, and went on to Bemidji State University, where she majored in vocal music performance. After earning her degree, she traveled for six years, picking up odd jobs and finding work as a performer in Minnesota, Montana, and California.

After six years of what she refers to as a “gypsy life,” Jane decided to come back to Thief River Falls to finish up a second degree in education. Her plan was to finish the degree and move back to California.

She finished her education degree, and although her intention had been to move back to California, she ended up landing a job at Northland Community and Technical College in Thief River Falls.

Even though she was happy to be back with family and friends, she missed performing. “I can’t live in a town without a theater and performance opportunities,” Jane said.

What happens when you put a performer in a small town without a community theater? Jane was about to find out.

Humble Beginnings

It started when Jim and Jan Strandlie approached her about getting a community theater off the ground. “They kept hounding me,” Jane said, “saying, ‘we need a community theater in this town.’ My thought was, yes, you should start one, and then I’ll perform in it and maybe direct a show or two.”

Jane, Jim and Jan Strandlie, and several other like-



Jane Anderson, Executive Director,
Thief River Falls Area Community Theater

minded community members banded together to form a community theater committee. As it turned out, a nonprofit theater organization had already been launched. It only needed someone with a background in performance to bring it to life.

Jane, Executive Director of Thief River Falls Area Community Theater (TRFACT), describes the organization as a true grassroots effort. “We are always thinking about the people in the community,” she said. “We have sprung out of the community and continue to grow and create branches.”

High Quality Shows for Local Audiences

The mission of TRFACT is to provide local performance artists with outlets for creative expression and to provide high quality shows for local audiences.

While TRFACT endeavors to stay current, Jane said “sometimes you have to go backwards.” She learned that lesson a few years ago when the theater board decided to do the Sound of Music. “Don’t get me wrong,” Jane said. “I love that show. I’ve always loved that show, but I’m somebody who has been in the business her whole

(Continued on page 10)



Left to right: Kristen Redd, Paul Tandberg, Scott Pream, Jane Anderson, Robin Stegeman, and Kathy Olson

life, been in the show twice, seen it on stage at least ten times, and I've probably seen the movie a hundred times—I don't ever need to do that show again."

But Jane's perspective changed when the show was announced to the community's high schoolers and middle schoolers. "They were just ecstatic," she said. "Social media blew up. I realized that I had my chance

to do that show in high school. Now, it's our turn to give our kids a chance to do this great show that was written so long ago and let them enjoy it."

In addition to youth performances, they produce larger scale adult musicals and a variety of other shows, including small cast serious plays. They did "Death of a Salesman" in 2019, a play that isn't performed all that often because it's difficult. Although it was a major project, Jane was immensely proud of the outcome. "There were a lot of people in the audience that had read it but had never seen it on stage. It was a show that people really talked about afterwards, how it affected them."

Choosing which shows to produce is an art of its own. "Sometimes, it's for the growth of the people on stage," said Jane. "Sometimes it's for the growth of the audience. We work for people on both sides of the curtain."

Best of the Best

If there is one word that describes how Natasha Reiersen feels about the Thief River Falls community, that word is "amazing."

She moved to Thief River Falls in 2010 with her husband, Jarod Reiersen, a Lincoln High School alumnus, and their children.

Up until that time, Natasha was in a collegiate athletics position at University of Minnesota Crookston. Natasha loved, and still loves, athletics, but when a position opened with the Thief River Falls Education Foundation in 2014, she decided to make a career change. "I wanted to make an impact," Natasha said.

Under her leadership and with strong support from the community, the Thief River Falls Education Foundation has been named among the top five in Minnesota. The Foundation has a \$3 million



Natasha, Jarod, Rylie, and Mariah Reiersen

endowment and provides \$250,000-\$300,000 in local education grants and student scholarships each year.

"We have the best equipment and the best technology," Natasha said, adding, "the programs in our schools are some of the best in the State."

Natasha credits their success to the strong support the Foundation has had from the community. "Area businesses, community members, alumni—everybody



Students Maizy Kraemer and Dominica Bernstein creating designs with new makerspace technology

supports education in Thief River, and they support the Foundation. We can't do the grants that we do without all that support."

When a local teacher gets excited about a new technology and wants to bring it into the classroom, the Thief River Falls Education Foundation provides the funding that is needed to bring that innovation to the students. A great example of that is the Maker Spaces that have been added to both the middle school and high school.

According to Natasha, a makerspace movement has taken hold across the State of Minnesota. Thanks to funding from the Foundation, middle- and high-school students in Thief River Falls have access to makerspaces, located on each campus. Students can go into these makerspaces and create anything they can imagine whether it's an electronic robot or a sewing project.

"We want all of our students, no matter whether they are in eleventh-grade or fifth-grade, to have that exciting and innovative experience. We want them to

be excited about what they are learning every single day."

In addition to numerous education grants which help to bring equipment and technology into local classrooms, the Foundation provides scholarships to graduating seniors, helping them pay for post-secondary education. "We award about \$90,000 in scholarships each year, in over 60 different categories," Natasha said.

The Foundation's impact is evident every time Natasha walks into a Thief River Falls school. "There's not a day that I walk into one of our schools and I don't see one of our grants being used," Natasha said.

Thanks to the Foundation, area students have access to the best of the best and they are excited about math and science.

*"If we don't have it here, we're going to get it,"
Natasha smiled.*



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TRF All School Reunion

August 4th-7th, 2022

Cost: \$15 per Alumni (\$10 for each guest) includes RiverFest Button for both nights

Thursday Zehlans Art & Wine Walk, 4-8pm

Friday Golf Tournament, 10:00am
Registration, 4:00-7:00pm
RiverFest Music at Hartz Park, 6:00pm-12:00am



Saturday Events in TRF
» Farmers Market, 9:00am-12:00pm
» Crazy Days, 9:00am-3:00pm
» Kids Canvas Painting, 9:00am-3:00pm
» Classic Car Show, 11:00am-3:00pm

All School Reunion Events
» Tours of Arctic Cat, Digi-Key, Schools, and District Service Center, 9:00am-1:00pm
» Class Photos, times to be announced
» All School Reunion Tailgate at Old Prowler Field, 1:00-4:00pm
» Decade Socials, 4:00-7:00pm
» RiverFest Music at Hartz Park, 5:00pm-12:00am

Sunday Outdoor Church Service