



Shanna Yonke enjoys working alongside other community members and investing her time and resources in a number of area organizations. The Business News photo by Jerry Rhoden

Volunteering is a ‘value proposition’

Yonke heavily involved in United Way; strives to help others

By Lori Lodes

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Shanna Yonke didn't feel the tug to return to her roots in Wausau until she began law school in the Twin Cities. Today, the attorney at Ruder Ware law firm is fortunate to have come full circle to work and volunteer in her home community.

Yonke even has a great view of downtown Wausau and the Wisconsin River from her office, as well as something even more special. Her vantage point gives her a great view of MBX Packaging Specialists, her father's employer. While he serves as president of the company

People who make a difference

► **Shanna Yonke,**
attorney,
Ruder Ware law firm,
Wausau

today, she says witnessing how he worked up the ranks in the family owned business greatly influenced her and her passion for working with family-owned and closely-held businesses in her law practice, as well as where she gives back to the community.

“Seeing him work his way up to being a minority shareholder in a family owned business gave me an insight into how those types of businesses work from an early age,” she said.

Interestingly, many of the companies that MBX Packaging caters to are also among Yonke's clientele. “It's a small world, and part of what I like about practicing in a town this size,” she said. “You get to know the clients and their families and realize all these interconnections.”

Yonke has built on that interconnectedness as well as growth and development in Wausau

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Two area communities join WEDC downtown program

The city of Manawa and the Northside Business District in Stevens Point are among five communities accepted into the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's Connect Communities Program, an initiative that works with communities to advance downtown and urban corridor revitalization efforts.

The program is designed to support and complement the Wisconsin Main Street Program, which has supported projects statewide resulting in the creation of more than 2,559 net new businesses

and 13,498 net new jobs since its inception in 1987.

With the latest additions, there are now 66 participants in the Connect Communities Program, which provides access to resources and training to help downtown organizations pursue revitalization and redevelopment efforts.

Since the program was launched in January 2013, participating communities have reported adding 223 net new businesses and more than 1,151 net new jobs, as well as \$60.6 million in private investment.

Prior to being accepted to the Connect Communities Program, applicants had to describe the type of activities they hope to undertake and what assistance they hope to receive as part of the program, and identify a local team that will be responsible for carrying out activities and participating in program events and training.

Connect Communities participants benefit from a variety of assistance and resources simply by being part of a broad-based network of communities with similar objectives.

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Yonke/She is board chair for Emerging Leaders

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in the four and one-half years since she joined Ruder Ware. "There's so much investment in Wausau that makes it the type of community you want to live in," she said. "It's definitely not a stagnant community."

Yonke thrives on working alongside other community members and investing her time and resources in a number of organizations. She is particularly vested in her work with the United Way of Marathon County. In addition to being a member and iLab participant of its Discovery team in 2016, Yonke has had significant involvement in the United Way's Emerging Leaders as well as its Women in Action (WIA) groups.

She serves as board chair of the Emerging Leaders, having served as vice chair in 2016, Connect team member since 2012 and member since 2012.

She was drawn to this young professional group for its focus on service in the community. She began with the Connect team, planning networking events, and quickly entrenched herself further in the organization.

Among her high points was establishing a clear marketing plan to break down the Emerging Leaders' mission into three main

tenets (connect, serve and lead) and then to create a signature event associated with each of those tenets.

For example, for the leader component, the group evolved an existing event into "Ignite the Leader Within," changing up its format to be more like a TED Talk to appeal to the primarily Millennial audience.

"While people of all ages and levels of management come to that event, it was well received and it's the format we're going with in the future," she said. "It was awesome."

When it comes to the United Way's Women in Action group, Yonke became a member in 2012 and quickly got involved as an events committee member in 2013 (of which she is still part), served as vice chair 2014-2015 and as chair in 2016. She was involved in a similar group when she lived in the Twin Cities, and wanted to continue to have access to a dedicated group of professional women. "WIA has been just that for me," she said. "I've developed incredible friendships at the same time that we've done some awesome things."

Since she joined its board, she developed a process for reviewing support requests for financial support. The group needed a responsible way to issue grants while being mindful of keeping enough principal in the coffers. Yonke's plan, termed the Impact

Commitment, is now used to consider all requests for WIA funding from local nonprofit organizations with a mindfulness to how much is available given that the group knows its earnings from the annual Power of the Purse event by August each year.

Much of that money is raised at the WIA's annual Power of the Purse event. Yonke mixed things up with that event as well, given that its fund-raising had begun to wane. In addition to initiating the planning process for the event earlier in the year, she also suggested that the Kings of Personality that volunteer for the live auction portion of the event solicit their own donations. Each of the five personalities signed a contract, committing to obtaining a designer purse and at least \$1,000 in additional donations to put in the purse. "It worked beautifully. We made way more money than we ever did in the past — more than \$25,000 in one night," she said.

The renewed format for Power of the Purse has been going so well that WIA decided to add scholarships to the offerings, available to women who are trying to support their families and themselves with an education at select institutions so they can be self-sufficient.

All told, Yonke estimates she spends at least 15 to 20 hours a month on those two United Way groups.

As a result of that work, she has scaled back a bit on her efforts with the Wausau Region Chamber of Commerce's young professionals group (formerly known as E3YP).

Her other past volunteer involvement in the community includes serving as the program coordinator for the Wills for Veterans through the State Bar of Wisconsin, a takeoff idea she had on the existing Wills for Heroes program, from 2012-2016, instructor for Junior Achievement of NorthCentral Wisconsin in 2014-2015, director and marketing committee chair for Kids Voting USA of Marathon County from 2012-2014, and member of the Marathon County Chamber of Commerce Business Retention & Expansion Committee from 2012-2015 (she now serves as a committee member for the Wausau Region Chamber of Commerce's business retention and expansion committee).

At the end of the (often long) day, Yonke is always glad she makes time for giving back. In addition to having an employer who supports her involvement, she also credits her parents, Gary and Jan, for instilling the desire and impetus to serve in her.

"You can start small; everyone has one hour a month they can give up," she said. "It's a value proposition, and I value other people and their well-being more than many other things."

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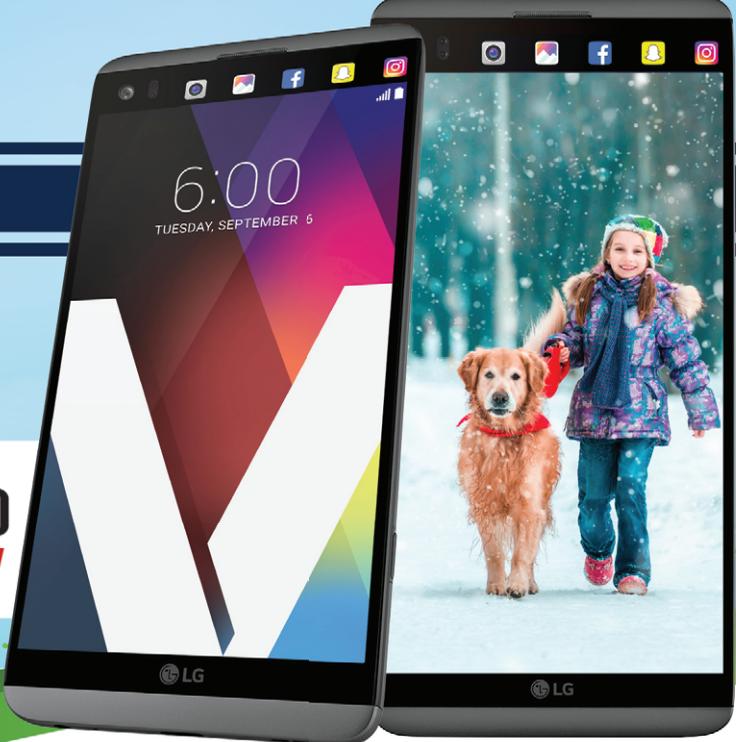
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