



# Women of Wells MAGAZINE

»» **A Wells County woman was once 'Miss Victory'**

*by Kayleen Reusser*

»» **Joy Is Still There**

*by Jill Baughan*

»» **A Mission to Honor Veterans**

*by Mark Miller*

»» **Leading From Where You Are**

»» **Women's Mental Health in Wells County and Beyond**

*by Lane Sander*

»» **Women in Leadership**



# Ladies, have you heard about LiGHT?

## Do you know what LiGHT is all about?

### Well... in case you're wondering....

Light stands for Ladies Initiating Giving – an Honored Tradition

LiGHT is a women's giving group sponsored by the Wells County Foundation with a mission focused on supporting women and children in Wells County. Here's how it works:

**We Volunteer!**



Putting finishing touches on a room at Grace and Mercy Transitional Housing

## We Party!

Every spring ladies (new members, past members, never before members) all get together to

**"LiGHTEN UP!"**

It's a free evening of desserts, fellowship & fun.



## We Join!

Women from anywhere can join by making a minimum contribution of \$25 by August 15th. Contributions are split between the LiGHT Fund, for immediate grants, and the LiGHT Endowment Fund to be invested for long term sustainability.



## We Vote!

Agencies apply for LiGHT grants in September.

In October, members are invited to cast a vote at the annual business meeting to determine which agencies will receive a grant.

In 2022, LiGHT members voted to award \$16,000 to seven agencies that serve women and children in Wells County. That's food, heat, camperships for kids fighting cancer, safe housing, parenting classes and more!

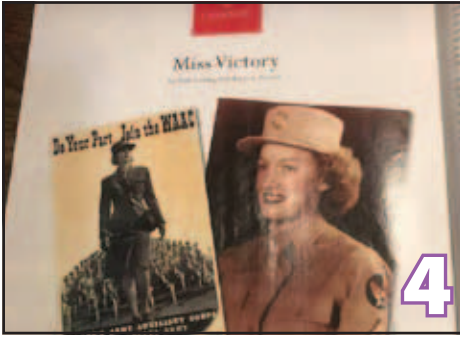
**We Give!**



## And that's what LiGHT is all about!

If you want to learn more and join the mailing list, just visit the Wells County Foundation's website [www.wellscountyfound.org/light](http://www.wellscountyfound.org/light) or call us at 260-824-8620.





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# A Wells County woman was once 'Miss Victory'

By Kayleen Reusser

"I felt like God made me to be a soldier."

Among the 260 World War II veterans I had the privilege of interviewing from 2012 through 2019, mostly from northeastern Indiana, this statement would seem to have come from a male. But it was, in fact, Ruth Cooper Licking from Bluffton who uttered these amazing words.

My project of interviewing World War II vets began in 2012, due to a request by Mark Miller of the News-Ban-

ner. For more than a decade, I wrote a weekly column for the Sunrider News, focusing on stories of people from northern Wells County. Mr. Miller thought an interview with Carl Mankey of Craigville would be a good addition.

I knew little about World War II. Thankfully, Carl Mankey was patient as he told me about serving as a Marine in the Pacific, island-hopping with thousands of other soldiers against the Japanese. Sitting in his living room, I felt like I was listening to a piece of liv-



Ruth Licking posed for this picture with her wedding portrait in her River Terrace apartment. She died in 2018. (Photo by Kayleen Reusser)

ing history!

That interview caused me to search for other World War II vets to interview to preserve their stories.

Ruth Cooper Licking of Bluffton was one of only 20 women I would interview. At the time we met, Ruth lived at River Terrace Retirement Community (then River Terrace Estates). She agreed to be interviewed and began by telling me she was born in Marion, N.C., in 1921. When Congress declared war on Japan, following that country's attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, Ruth, like many other women across the country, wanted to do something for the war effort like young men were doing by serving in the military.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, 350,000 were women.

In 1942, Ruth told her mother she wanted to show her patriotism by working in a factory in Detroit (many

*(Continued on page 5)*

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**Becky Goshorn**

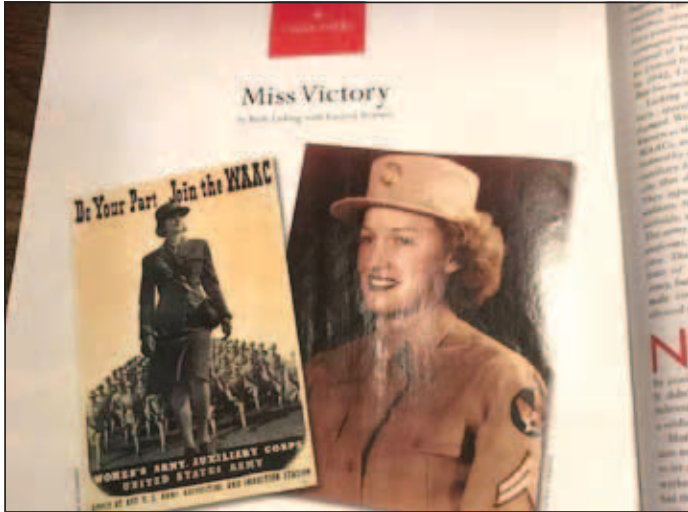
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*(Continued from page 4)*



Wells County's Ruth Licking was featured in nationally-distributed magazine, written by Bluffton's Kayleen Reusser. (Photo provided)

American factories converted to making munitions and other items for the war). Her mother said a firm no — it was too far from home and too big of a city. But Ruth was of age and decided to do the next best thing — she joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). I don't imagine her mother was happy with that decision either.

In 1943, the WAAC would be re-organized as the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and Ruth re-enlisted.

With the war encompassing various continents, mainly Europe and Asia, women were recruited in every branch and trained in hundreds of jobs from clerk to pilots to fill the vacancies created by men sent overseas.

Ruth told me that after passing her physical exam, she traveled by bus to Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia for basic training. Just like the men, she and thousands of other new female Army recruits rose at six o'clock each morning for calisthenics. After breakfast and making their cots so a quarter would drop when bounced, the women completed classes to learn Army protocol, how to march and salute, and a myriad of other Army-related practices. Everything had to be done "the Army way."

Ruth's new life from morning to night was filled with new experiences and new people. She loved it all. After graduating from basic training, Ruth was assigned as a clerk in an office at Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas, where she earned \$78 a month. Her room and board and uniforms were provided.

Ruth's positive attitude caused her to receive special recognition. In 1943, the Army, in an effort to increase interest among American women to enlist, held a contest. One woman from each base would be voted by her peers as the best example of a soldier — someone willing to work hard, sacrificially, and with little fuss. The woman would hold the title of "Miss Victory."

Ruth Cooper impressed her co-workers and friends so much that she was chosen as "Miss Victory" at Kelly Field.

*(Continued on page 6)*



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**(Continued from page 5)**

In December, she and women from neighboring bases (Hondo, Brooks and Randolph) were treated to a ball held in their honor. The women were escorted by generals. The talented Andrews Sisters provided entertainment.

Hearing about this special recognition in Ruth's military career gave me an idea. At the time, my husband John and I subscribed to a magazine entitled "America in World War II." Having noticed there were not many stories about women, possibly because the editor didn't have any available, I pitched the idea of a story about Ruth.

He was interested and asked for more details, which meant more visits with Ruth. She recalled more details about her time in the Army, including when she was married to Tech Sergeant Bill Licking, a soldier from Greensburg, Ind., in the base chapel in February 1945. The couple moved to Greensburg for a few years after being discharged in 1945 following the war's end. In 1956, they moved to Bluffton where Ruth

and Bill owned and operated Licking's Menswear until 1983 when they retired and closed the store. They were parents to four children. Bill died in 1991.

Ruth's statement about believing God had made her to be a soldier (she had attended a Presbyterian Church while growing up and continued with her Christian faith as an adult) stuck with me. Years later, I used it as the title of a book: "Born To Be Soldiers: Those Plucky Women of World War II." A condensed story about her military service was included in Book 1 of my four-volume World War II Legacies series, "We Fought to Win: American World War II Veterans Share Their Stories."

Ruth's shining example of patriotism at a time when opportunities for women in the military were opening has never left me. She was born at the right time and was brave enough to take advantage of opportunities to serve her country.

The time Ruth and I spent together for the magazine article and a subsequent one for the News-Banner caused us to become friends. Since Ruth's death



Ruth Licking in uniform during her service time.

in 2018, I have missed her. I like to think she would approve of my telling people about her and other women in the book with her quote in the title.

"I might not have done as much for my country as an American soldier stationed overseas," she said, "but I filled a gap. As little as it might have been, I helped. If anybody would ask me to do it again, I would."



**Kristin L. Steckbeck**

**DH DALE, HUFFMAN  
& B BABCOCK  
LAWYERS**

Kristin received her undergraduate degree Magna Cum Laude from the University of Notre Dame in 2004, and graduated Cum Laude from the Indiana University Maurer School of Law in 2007. Kristin is certified as a specialist by the Indiana State Bar Association's Trust & Estate Specialty Board since 2017, a member of the Board of Directors of Indiana Legal Services, a member of the Indiana State Bar Association's Trust and Estate Specialty Board of Directors, and a past President of the Board of Directors of the Allen County Bar Association. She is also a member of the Allen County Bar Association, Wells County Bar Association, Indiana State Bar Association, and the Bluffton Rotary Club. She has focused on estate planning, guardianships, long-term care planning, and special needs planning, as well as probate, estate, and trust administration and related areas of the law since 2007.

Law School: Indiana University School of Law

Undergraduate: University of Notre Dame

Practice Areas: Asset Preservation Planning | Probate, Estate, and Trust Administration | Estate Planning | Guardianship | Special Needs Planning | Long-Term Care Planning

I am passionate about serving my clients, their family, and their business with a comprehensive legal perspective. I am happy to answer clients' personal and business legal challenges with a solution that is comprised of equal parts excellence, integrity, and compassion. No two clients share the exact same vision or challenge. I don't have a one-size-fits-all approach to our legal services. I adapt my approach to service the unique needs of my clients.



# Helping Others Find Home

Rebecca Newman, is the property manager at Capri Meadows in Bluffton. In March of this year, she was selected by the Fort Wayne Apartment Association of Northeast Indiana as the Property Manager of the year. This award is voted on by her peers with it the group, and was bestowed to her based on her efforts during the Capri property fire that destroyed the back building.

She not only assisted all residents in finding a temporary home, but also helped to manage the rebuilding of the structure and was able to help almost all residents return to the building upon reopening.



Rebecca Newman



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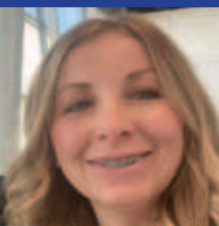
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# Jolin Whicker's Recipes:

## Hot Chip Beef Dip

### Ingredients:

2 - 8 oz. Cream Cheese  
2 - small jars chopped dried beef  
4 tbsp. Milk  
1 cups Sour Cream

Approximately ½ cup sweet peppers

Directions: Soften cream cheese and mix all ingredients together. Pour into baking dish. Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 30 minutes or until bubbly and hot.

Helpful Hint: Dried beef is easily cut into small pieces using kitchen scissors.

Hot chip beef dip can be kept warm in a small crockpot.

Serve with your favorite crackers.

## Chicken Pasta Salad

### Ingredients:

2 broasted Chickens from the grocery store

1 - 12 oz. box bow tie pasta  
1 - 16 oz. Box Rotini Pasta  
2.5 cups chopped Celery  
2 cans - sliced Water Chestnuts  
4 to 5 cups grapes sliced and cut in half

2 cans - Mandarin Oranges

### Dressing:

1 - 30 oz. jar Mayonnaise  
1 cup sour cream  
2 tbsp. vinegar  
3 tbsp. sugar  
2 tbsp. dill

Honey mustard to taste.

Directions: Boil pasta. Cut up chicken into small pieces. In large bowl, mix pasta, chicken, celery, grapes, and water chestnuts. Salt and pepper to taste. Mix dressing ingredients in a separate bowl. Depending on your preference, you may not need all the dressing. Add amount you prefer. Arrange mandarin orange slices over the top. Chicken pasta salad can be served over spinach, your favorite lettuce, or blend of greens.



Jolin Whicker

rin orange slices over the top. Chicken pasta salad can be served over spinach, your favorite lettuce, or blend of greens.

Family and friends often request this dish for carry-in dinners or luncheons. It is good served with blueberry muffins, hot bread, or your favorite rolls.

## Shrimp Scampi

### Ingredients:

1-2 packages 12 oz. shrimp  
1 lb. white slice fresh mushrooms  
1 bunch of Asparagus  
1/2 box of angel hair pasta  
4 tbsp. butter  
3 tbsp. olive oil  
Grated parmesan cheese  
3 tbsp. dried onion bits  
3 tbsp. minced fresh garlic

Dry white wine - Chardonnay or Pinot Grigio

### Directions:

Heat 2 tbsp. of olive oil and 2 tbsp/ butter in skillet. Add mushrooms, dried onion, and garlic. Sauté until slightly browned. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese and lightly salt and pepper. Pour into a bowl and set aside.

In same skillet add 2 tbsp. butter and 1 tbsp. olive oil. Heat. Sauté 1 to 2 of the 12-ounce packages of shrimp. Add 1.5 tbsp. dried onion bits and 1 tbsp. garlic. Near the end of sauteing the shrimp, sprinkle with salt and pepper. Then sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese to taste. Add 1/3 cup white wine (more

*(Continued on page 9)*

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# Crafts from Karen Nash



## Colored Ice Cubes:

Make three different flavors of kool-aid in three different ice cube trays and freeze.

Put into a glass of clear beverage to flavor and add color.

Kids love this!!

## *(Continued from page 8)*

or less according to taste). Simmer a few minutes, until shrimp is completely cooked if using raw shrimp.

To roast asparagus, you will spray your cookie sheet with olive oil and lay asparagus out on the sheet. Spray asparagus lightly with the olive oil to coat. Lightly salt and pepper. Sprinkle with a little garlic powder and some parmesan cheese. Roast at 400 degrees to desired taste — approximately 10 minutes.

Boil 1/2 box angel hair. Drain and pour into serving dish. Add 2 tbsp. butter.

To serve plates, layer angel hair, mushrooms, and shrimp on top. Sprinkle top with Parmesan cheese.

Optional: I melt 1 tbsp. butter in small dish and add a half cup of breadcrumbs and then top shrimp lightly with the breadcrumbs.

Serve with asparagus on the side and favorite hot bread or rolls.

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# Joy Is Still There



## Biography

Jill Baughan is an author, podcaster and speaker who helps people find joy, no matter what else is happening in life. Born in Bluffton, she was most recently reminded that joy and tough times can coexist when riding the Tilt-A-Whirl at the annual Street Fair, and learning that it is indeed possible to laugh and throw up at the same time.

A former English instructor at Virginia Commonwealth University, she is the author of three books: "A Hope Deferred: A Couple's Guide to Coping with Infertility", "Born to be Wild: Rediscover the Freedom of Fun", and "Find Joy No Matter What: 90 Devotions for Experiencing Deep Delight in Tough Times" (to be published early in 2025).

Connect with her here:

Website: <https://jillbaughan.com>

Instagram: @jillbaughan

Facebook: [facebook.com/jill.baughan](https://facebook.com/jill.baughan)

Podcast: <https://jillbaughan.com/podcast/> (or wherever you listen to podcasts)

## By Jill Baughan

A while back, my husband, Ben, and I were at a basketball banquet that was catered by Chick-fil-A. That night, the featured mascot was a person in a cow suit, who bounded in, high fiving kids and cavorting around the gym in fun fashion.

I turned to my husband, Ben, and said, "That looks like a good time. I could do that." To which he replied, "Yeah, you should."

And then I didn't. Sounded like a lot of trouble, and a job requiring skills I probably didn't have.

But a couple months later we were eating at a Chick-fil-A, when my daughter said, "Hey Mom, why don't you go up there and ask the manager about putting on that cow suit?"

Busted.

How could I not, and risk being a poor role model for my own offspring? So I approached the counter, asked for the manager, and when he appeared, I said, "Could you tell me exactly what it takes to be able to put on that cow suit and do a couple gigs?"

"What does it take..." he repeated thoughtfully, and looked at me like no one had ever asked such a question before. Finally he responded.

"A pulse," he said. "It takes a pulse."

So I told him I'd like to apply, and he handed me an application that was clearly intended for an adolescent looking for a part-time job. A few days later the human resources representative called and asked if I could meet her for an interview.

Really excited and anxious to have a little fun, I pulled together my college transcripts, a resume, and some references into a most professional portfolio.

Then I dressed to kill, and met her at the mall. We talked, and after a few

minutes, ever the professional, she stood up, shook my hand and said, "I am delighted to offer you the position of area market cow for Chick-fil-A."

I was ecstatic.

My first gig was a couple weeks later at the mall. From there I went on tour to a couple of shopping centers, a baseball diamond, and a random party. My favorite, though, was my last appearance at the same basketball banquet that had spoken to my restless heart a year before. As I stood behind a door, waiting to make my entrance, I had no idea how life-changing my swan song was going to be.

It was at this moment I felt my hormonal furnace revving up inside me (ladies of a "certain age" will totally understand this), sending the temperature inside that suit into the stratosphere.

"Oh no, God, please no!" I thought.

This was an actual prayer.

(Ladies of a "certain age" will totally understand this also.)

But it wasn't just because of the heat. It was a fresh reminder of personal sorrow that I was experiencing. You see, Ben and I had dealt with infertility for most of our married life. Against the odds, we finally had a beautiful daughter, and we enjoyed her so much that for fifteen years we tried to have another child.

It never happened.

At that point in my life, then, every "personal summer" was a fresh reminder that my reproductive years were coming to an end, and "no more babies" was the final answer.

And for a long time, I felt profoundly sad. Getting up in the morning was really hard; facing the day and everything I was supposed to be doing was really hard.

*(Continued on page 11)*



**(Continued from page 10)**

You see, I had always been a deeply joyful person, but I was struggling to find that joy. It came to the point where couldn't decide if I was still a joyful person just going through a season of sadness... or if I was actually turning into a sad person.

That very thought broke my heart.

You, too, know what this feels like:

When God says "no," and it doesn't make any sense,

When there's something in your life that you wish were different,

When you desperately want some-

thing you don't have.

But that particular night, at that particular moment of escalating temperatures, I had a thought that revolutionized my approach to tough times:

"Wow," I said to myself. "This is a perfect picture of joy and sorrow in the same place — me having a hot flash in a cow suit!"

I had to laugh, and in that moment I came to realize that it's possible for joy and sadness to walk side by side in the same life.

It's just up to us to access the joy while we're going through the tough stuff.

It's up to us to be intentional about finding joy.

And so, dear reader, may you come to know that your sorrow shouldn't be denied, but neither should it be your address.

And when the hot flashes in your own life — whatever reminds you of your own sorrow — threaten to send your spirit underground,

May you find your own version of a cow suit to remind yourself that joy is still there, all around you, over you, beside you and beneath your feet. No matter what.

# Some very busy Bees



**By Halley Edington**

Bee Happy Quilters are a local group of lovely creative people who all love to quilt, and help out the community any way they can. The Bee Happy Quilters met ever second Thursday a month at 6:30 p.m. Meeting are held at Christian Care North Shores Activity Center, 1111 W. Shore Dr. in Bluffton. All meeting are open to anyone who wants to come.

The leader of Bee Happy Quilters is Betty Johnloz. The club has 44 regular members. The club member donate \$1 each meeting to buy backing for charity quilts.

The meeting start with going over things they are doing got the community. Then they have a lesson given to the by one of the member. (Example on page 26) Followed by decide on a day to have Sew Days. Sew Days are a day that whoever is free can show up and help work on the community outreach projects. Finishing off the night with a

Show and Tell of all the projects anyone had brought to show off.

**Community Projects:**

- 30+ dog beds made from extra fabric and stuffed with scraps from Wells and Adams County Animal Shelters.
- 300+ masks
- 36+ Drawstring bags for Christian Care.

**Donation Quilts:**

- Helping hands
- The Closet
- Wells County Food Bank
- Veterans
- Wells and Adams County Animal Shelters
- State Police



Front row: Melanie Spalding, Allison Krinn, Karen Hirschy, Julie Phend, Sharon Woods. Second row: Betty Johnloz, Nancy Johnson, Judy Braden, Kris Decker, Pam Owens, Marlene Risser, Sue Harris. Third row: Kay Furfaro, Susan Lambert, Connie Frauhiger, Rita Snider, Jean Lemler, Molly Bauer, Norma Sweeten, Jo Wiedelman. Forth row: has Carol Riley, Sue Yake, Jane Meshberger. (Photo by Halley Edington)



Connie Frauhiger with 26 drawstring bags for Christian Care. (Photo by Halley Edington)



Norma Steeten with 10 more drawstring bags for Christian Care. (Photo by Sharon Woods)

# Bringing light to Wells

A women's giving circle is a group of like-minded individuals who pool their resources to collectively decide where those funds will be distributed.

Early in 2011, a group of local women began meeting to develop a new initiative for all women in our community. As a result of these meetings, LiGHT (Ladies Initiating Giving – An Honored Tradition) was born. The purpose of LiGHT is simply to improve the quality of life for women and children in Wells County by collectively fund-



ing grants to charitable projects with the same purpose. A steering committee is responsible for oversight of the

LiGHT program which is administered under the auspices of The Wells County Foundation, Inc. With the Foundation underwriting the administrative costs of LiGHT, 100 percent of the contributions collected are used for projects and programs benefitting women and children in Wells County.

LiGHT is made up of donors who contribute annually. Contributions



Tammy Slater

are split between the endowment and the non-permanent fund to be granted at the annual fall business meeting, where grants are determined by membership vote. LiGHT has awarded \$95,778 to 32 organizations who serve women and children in Wells County. In addition, the LiGHT Endowment Fund has grown to more than \$118K. The endowment fund provides a perpetual source of supplemental income for grants and special initiatives.

The LiGHT steering committee assists with assembling weekend food bags through the Wells County 4-H program and recently assumed administrative and coordination responsibilities of the Wells County Prom Dress Exchange.

In 2023, LiGHT concluded its membership drive with an all-time high of 289 members.

The LiGHT Steering Committee members are: Terri Ehle, President; Jessica Beste, Secretary; Tammy Slater, Treasurer; Tammi Daugherty, Gwen Drayer, Laura Gerber, Kim Gentis, Kristin Prible and Pat Trant (Emerita).

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# The Daisy Flowerbed

**By Brenda Sagstetter**

I looked at my new flower bed, trying to decide where to plant my marigolds and petunias. Then, I bent to the task of pulling the weeds that had fought their way up through the soil. My four-year-old son was right beside me, ready and excited to help by getting his hands dirty. He was quiet as we pulled the daisy fleabane, crabgrass, and mugwort and tossed them to the side.

After 20 minutes or so, my son, Daniel, stood and asked in a puzzled voice, "Mommy, why are we pulling up the pretty flowers?" I turned to see him clasping one of the daisy fleabane plants I has cast away. I responded to him, "It's just a weed. We need to make room for the flowers I bought at the store." I then bent back to my task of clearing the flowerbed.

As I continued to work, I realized that my son was quiet . . . too quiet. I turned to find him kneeling in the flowerbed, his dirty, pudgy hands pushing a daisy fleabane plant back

into the soil. He had already replanted (as only a four-year-old can) two other daisy plants. As I looked at the delicate wildflower still in his hand, with each sunny yellow center surrounded by

wispy white petals, I melted a little . . . and saw the "pretty flower" as a four-year-old might.

The episode with my four year old  
**(Continued on page 14)**




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*(Continued from page 13)*

began my love affair with Indiana's native plants. Reading about daisy fleabane led me on a journey concerning the value and importance of planting flowers, plants, shrubbery, and trees that belong in Indiana. It was surprising (and disturbing) to read about the connection between the plants we consumers choose and the growing disappearance of biodiversity in Indiana and elsewhere. The "circle of life" truly exists in nature. Human activity has aided in the dwindling of biodiversity due to pollution and encroachment on wildlife habitat. However, each homeowner can aid in being part of the solution to this dilemma.

Homeowners need to be willing to "let go" of the idea of a perfect yard. All that green may be beautiful (and the grass, more than likely non-native), but that particular beauty is not lending itself to support Indiana's ecosystem nor growing its biodiversity. That expanse of green yard requires water, uses pesticides, chemical treatments, and fertilizers ... none of which is environmentally friendly. But a homeowner can aid in the "Grow Native" cause through simple modifications.

Choose to let a corner of the yard grow. Beautify the corner with native plants. Do some research to discover what may grow, depending on shade and sun exposure. Add a birdhouse. Add a birdbath. Place some stepping stones

around to make it attractive. It is surprising to see how colorful and attractive native plants, shrubs, and trees can be. You may find that each year, you extend the area devoted to native plants because it is attractive and enjoyable. Educate yourself by researching native Indiana plants (though you may become hooked, as I have). Read an Indiana wildflower book. Follow the Indiana Native Plant Society online. Insist that your landscape company stock Indiana native plants.

Download a plant app to discover what you already have in your yard!

I want my grandchildren to experience nature as I have. I want them to be able to chase and catch fireflies on summer evenings. I want them to see the variety of butterflies and birds that I have always enjoyed. I don't want them to only view parts of wildlife in a book or at a museum because it no longer exists in nature; that thought is frightening and incredibly sad.

Daniel and I did replant the daisy fleabane that had been carelessly tossed aside. My son then pointed out some other fleabane plants along the woods, so we moved those to their new "home" with the others in my flowerbed; the marigolds and petunias ended up elsewhere. The tall, graceful branches of the fleabane waved in the breeze, with their clouds of snowy white crowns and yellow centers of delight. The "daisy flowerbed" was spectacular that summer!



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Jayde Ketring, Agribusiness Banker (left)  
Erica Bennett, Branch Manager (right)





# A Mission to Honor Veterans

**By Mark Miller**

As far back as Kayleen Reusser can remember, she loved to read. And she always wanted to be a writer.

“Mom was a teacher and she got her hair fixed every Saturday morning,” she recalls. The salon was located close to what was then referred to as the Carnegie library. “I would walk over to the library and get a pile of books each week and take them home, then bring them back the next week.”

She believes her reading habits even got her in trouble at times — “instead of doing my chores.”

“And I always thought that writing a book — being an author — had to be the best thing in the world,” she continues. She envisioned an “author” as being “fun.” She added, “I’d make lots of money and people would rave about you.” But most important, she dreamed, “you’d be doing something you love to do.”

But she never felt like she had what she thought was needed. She struggled in early, teen-aged attempts. After graduating from Bluffton High School in 1978, she enrolled at Taylor University to study psychology. When she married fellow BHS grad John Reusser in 1980, she transferred to Indiana Purdue Fort

Wayne and earned a degree in psychology with a minor in Spanish.

Meanwhile, life happened. The couple soon had two children and Kayleen decided to be a stay-at-home mom. She used what spare time she had to try to learn how to write, a process she describes today at “laborious, very difficult.”

But then she saw her first byline. “I’d just turned 30,” she says. It was a brief story — which she cut out and framed — about a Sunday school teacher at their church that was published in the denomination’s monthly magazine. She knew it wasn’t much but “it got me to thinking that maybe this could happen.”

When their youngest entered third grade, Kayleen joined the work force, taking a job in the library at Bluffton-Harrison Middle School. She was surrounded again by books, and credits this period as helping her take another important step towards her young dream.

“I learned what school librarians were looking for and what kids like to read,” she recalls. She tried her hand at some children books, and would eventually publish 16 different titles. A couple of her submissions were published in the Chicken Soup for the Soul series. She was also working part time in the kitchen at River Terrace Estates. She found



Bluffton writer Kayleen Reusser with two of her more recent books of profiles of veterans. (Photo by Mark Miller)

that she enjoyed talking and visiting with the residents and remembers meeting several World War II veterans. That knowledge would soon come in handy.

Kayleen was also working to improve her writing, joining a Christian writing club. When an opening popped up for a part-time writer at the Bluffton News-Banner, she enquired and submitted several writing samples. In short order,

***(Continued on page 15)***

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*(Continued from  
page 15)*

she had quit her two jobs and was responsible for a feature article for the front page of the weekly Sunriser News.

It was an assignment in 2012 that really changed things.

She had been given the name and phone number of a World War II veteran who had agreed to being interviewed about his experiences. Afterwards, driving away from Carl Mankey's house, "I wondered how many other World War II veterans there were locally," she says. She began to put the word out, went back to River Terrace to check on those she'd met. The effort quickly became a mission.

"I wanted to share what these very brave young men went through," she says. That would quickly expand to include women, who eventually got their own book. The mission came with an unknown deadline: World War II veterans were dying off in increasing numbers each year.

The interviews led to a three-year relationship with the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel. Her every-other-week veteran profiles were often on the front page. Those and the articles in the Sunriser often produced more leads to more veterans.

"And I think the Honor Flights (which began in 2009) also helped open the doors to these veterans," she adds. "I think they felt that people were once again interested in honoring them."

Reusser's articles and the Honor Flights became a natural fit. She has helped promote the program and has accompanied two veterans on their flights.

"I took a 95-year-old Navy veteran in 2016," she shares. He was a resident in the same Fort Wayne nursing home where her mother was living. She was interviewing him for a story and mentioned the Honor Flights.

"But who would take me?" he asked," she says. "None of his kids lived around here so I said 'How about me?' I was so thrilled to do that. I honestly think I was more excited about it than he was." She would also accompany another veteran



WOWO radio's Pat Miller has had Kayleen Reusser on his show several times to talk about her series of books. (Photo provided)

of the Battle of the Bulge.

"They both became good friends," she continues.

Her husband also became involved and accompanied Bill Sawyer of Bluffton on a flight. "Our whole family got to be really close to Bill, including my daughter," Kayleen says. "Whenever she would come home, she would have to go for a visit."

Meanwhile, the more interviews that were published, the more she began



John and Kayleen Reusser stand in a fox-hole that had been used during the Battle of the Bulge, near Bastogne, Belgium. It was part of a 10-day tour the couple took in 2017. (Photo provided)

*(Continued on page 17)*





*(Continued from page 16)*

to hear that she ought to put them all together into a book, something that “honestly had not occurred to me,” she says. She credits Alan Daugherty and Ed Schwartz with helping her navigate those waters. Her first book appeared in 2014; the most recent, her ninth, in 2022.

Although she will not use the term, the books have made her a celebrity of sorts. She has become a frequent lecturer at the History Center in Fort Wayne and at the Allen County Library, has been interviewed by the Fort Wayne television stations, has conducted Zoom seminars about World War II and will be teaching a continuing education class through Purdue Fort Wayne this fall about local veterans.

She and her husband took a 10-day World-War-II-focused tour of Germany, Belgium and France in 2017, on which she met a librarian from Fairfax, Va. Kayleen was soon giving remote classes for their senior citizen patrons about her research and writings.

“Baby Boomers are the biggest audi-



Bluffton’s Kayleen Reusser has become a frequent speaker at Allen County Library events, including this gathering at the Aboite branch. (Photo provided)

ence for me,” she acknowledges. “They are curious about what their parents went through or what their dads did during the war.”

She does feel that she may have exhausted sources for her series and is currently taking bit of a break. She is considering options for some future writing, perhaps some stories about people on the home front during World War II, perhaps a biography.

She has been called a “historian,” which puzzles her, and she still doesn’t see herself as a “talented writer.” However, it’s pretty hard to deny her the title of “author,” fulfilling a very old dream.

“I often think of a line from the movie ‘Chariots of Fire,’” she shares. “The main character said at one point: ‘When I run I feel God’s pleasure.’ That’s the way I feel about writing. I just feel that this is why God made me.”

## Kayleen Reusser’s books on veterans

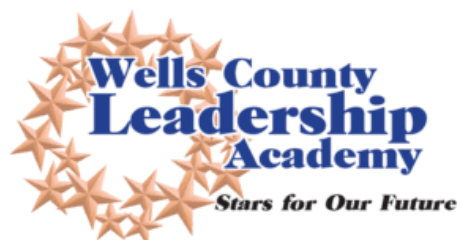
- We Fought to Win: American World War II Veterans Share Their Stories (Book 1, World War II Legacies, 2014)
- They Did It for Honor: Stories of American World War II Veterans (Book 2, World War II Legacies, 2017)
- We Gave Our Best: American World War II Veterans Tell Their Stories (Book 3, World War II Legacies, 2018)
- D-Day: Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Tell about Normandy (World War II Insider, 2019)
- It Was Our War Too: Youth in the Shadows of WWII (2019)
- We Defended Freedom: Adventures of World War II Veterans (Book 4, World War II Legacies, 2020)
- Captured! Stories of American World War II Prisoners of War (2020)
- Women of World War II Coloring Book (2020)
- Battle of the Bulge: Stories From Those Who Fought and Survived (World War II Insider, 2021)
- Men of World War II Coloring Book (2022)
- Born To Be Soldiers: Those Plucky Women of WWII (2022)
- Voices From Vietnam: Stories of War (2022)

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# Leading From Where You Are: The Impact of the Leadership Academy

Since its inception in 2008, the Leadership Academy has been a beacon of hope and transformation for individuals seeking to enhance their leadership skills. Founded by Dr. Tim Elmore, the program has graduated 267 individuals, empowering them to become better leaders in various facets of life. The cornerstone of this program is the use of image-based learning, inspired by Dr. Elmore's Habitudes curriculum, which instills crucial leadership habits and attitudes in its participants.

The Habitudes leadership curriculum is a powerful tool that introduces adults to essential leadership principles using images that resonate with real-life experiences. These visual aids serve as a catalyst for engaging conversations with facilitators, resulting in memorable and transformative encounters. The program



is designed to be an ongoing process that gradually builds leadership habits and attitudes over time.

One of the remarkable aspects of the Leadership Academy, it welcomes individuals from diverse backgrounds, professions, and sectors of business. The program recognizes that everyone has the potential to be a leader, whether at home, in the workplace, or within their community. Erin Prible, the Wells County Leadership Academy Coordinator, emphasizes, "We really are looking for individuals that want to empower themselves and their team and understand the importance of why relationships are important in your growth."

One of the most beautiful outcomes of the Leadership Academy is the strong bonds and friendships that participants form throughout the program. These connections persist long after graduation, creating a valuable support network for individuals as they continue their leadership journeys. Prible described this by saying, "Each year new and great friendships are formed, and after the completion of the program, they have created a sounding board for one another. It truly is an awesome sight to see each year."

Within the program, several key Habitudes are taught, each offering valuable insights into leadership. "Emotional Fuel" reminds participants of the importance of self-care in leadership. Life's stresses can be overwhelming, and this concept serves as a reminder to refuel emotionally. Another Habitude, "Rivers and Floods," explores how individuals can navigate the challenges and overwhelming moments in life effectively.

The significance of character and integrity in leadership is highlighted through the "Iceberg" Habitude. Like an iceberg, a leader's character runs deep



beneath the surface, influencing their actions and decisions. These Habitudes may seem simple at first glance, but they hold profound meaning and relevance to every individual embarking on this leadership journey.

The Leadership Academy operates on a monthly basis, with each session spanning four hours. These sessions are led by various community leaders who generously contribute their time, experience, and expertise to the program. Prible emphasized the dedication of these leaders, stating, "The Habitudes are led by over 20 volunteer community leaders, who have graduated from Leadership Academy since 2008 or have gone through training to become a Facilitator. The time, energy, and dedication of what each individual brings to the program is priceless."

In conclusion, the Leadership Academy, guided by Dr. Tim Elmore's innovative Habitudes curriculum, continues to make a profound impact on individuals from all walks of life. It empowers them to lead with integrity, empathy, and self-awareness, both in their professional and personal lives. As participants graduate from the program, they not only become better leaders but also contribute to the growth and well-being of their communities. The Leadership Academy stands as a testament to the idea that leadership can be cultivated and nurtured from wherever you are, inspiring positive change in the world, one leader at a time.



# Wonderful Women of Wells

## By Jen Whicker

Ginny Vogel is a true leader and woman of inspiration in our community. She is a woman who I admire and have great respect for. Ginny is a woman of purpose who believes in what she is doing and shows such empathy and encouragement to others. She has a deep passion for the children in our community. She is a voice for them and is making an immeasurable impact on their lives. Ginny worked as a teacher/coach/school counselor for 36 years with most of those years spent at Bluffton-Harrison Metropolitan School District where she was selected as Bluffton-Harrison Metropolitan School District Educator of the Year in 2019. After retiring from Bluffton-Harrison Elementary in May of 2020 Ginny researched and established CASA of Wells County to advocate for abused and neglected children. CASA consists of volunteer special advocates trained and assigned to "Child in Need of Services" or CHINS cases going through the court system. As program director for CASA, Ginny recruits, screens, and trains volunteer child advocates to work in the court system in collaboration with other key agencies, legal counsel, and community resources to represent the best interests of children in juvenile court proceedings. CASA volunteers make recommendations regarding appropriate protective and rehabilitative services necessary to ensure a safe and permanent home for every child adjudicated as a child in need of services within the county. CASA volunteers help judges develop a fuller picture of each child's life. Their advocacy helps judges to make a well-informed decision for each child. Ginny and her CASA volunteers are working hard as advocates to ensure that these children are thriving and that their voices are heard. I truly cannot imagine where these children would be without Ginny and her CASA volunteers. I am so thankful Ginny has established and is directing the CASA program in Wells County. She is a blessing and continues to make such a positive impact on our community. Ginny is truly a remarkable woman.



Ginny Vogel

Julie Quinn, Branch Manager at 1st Source Bank, has been serving the community of Bluffton for 28 years. As a Wells County native, she believes in the community's future and supports its businesses and residents' financial needs/goals.



Julie Quinn

Julie enjoys spending time with her two children, their spouses, and her five grandchildren. She has a passion for supporting local economics. Julie currently serves on the board of directors for the Wells County

Chamber of Commerce and participates on several committees for the Chamber. She is currently serving her 7th year as treasurer for the Kiwanis Club of greater Bluffton of which she has been a member since 2015.

Julie values the trust of her clients and their relationships that have been built over nearly three decades of service to the community. She is grateful to serve generations of local families, farms, and businesses.



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# Women's Mental Health in Wells County and Beyond



By Lane Sander, Mdiv,  
MA, LMHC

I don't believe that we can talk about women's health without talking about mental health. This is perhaps the hot-button topic of the day, and I believe it is much more than simply a trend in the field of health, pop culture, psychology, etc. There has been a perfect storm of events and actions for some time that has led us to where we find ourselves today. Let's get the bad news out of the way first — in the current world in which we live, people in general, and women in particular, are more stressed, anxious, worried, depressed, and feel busier than ever before. The question that we should be asking ourselves is, what do we do about that? Because thankfully, we do not have to simply drown in the current that is rushing all around us. Here are a few practical things we can do to improve the state of our mental health, which, as holistic people, thus improves our overall health as well.

## 1. Be Mindful

A majority of stressful feelings are focused on things that are outside of our control. Whether we are worried about our health or the health of our loved ones, the future of our country, the stock market, our finances, the weather, what other people may think or say about us, or a whole host of other what-if situations or scenarios, the result is the same: we do not control the outcome. When we are able to practice mindfulness, we can filter out the unhealthy, negative thought spirals and instead focus on what is true and what is real and what is certain. While this may be a much smaller list, we are typically left with the moments we are able to enjoy as we go about our days and our lives, as well as meaningful



Lane Sander

encounters with people, and our deepest held beliefs and values related to our existence. This then gives us clarity as we choose which emotions we want to allow ourselves to experience and which thoughts we want to devote our energy to, and which ones we do not want to allow to take up any room in our minds and in our hearts.

## 2. Reduce Your Emotional Burden

Studies in recent years have shown an uptick in increased emotional burdens, specifically among women, which impacts mental health and overall health in far-reaching ways. This can lead to chronic fatigue, burnout, and exhaustion, physically, emotionally, and mentally. It may feel as though all burdens that are currently on our plates cannot easily be removed, but the reality is, there is always something, generally several things, that we can do to ease the emotional burdens that we carry. Sometimes this means saying no to things that we have overcommitted to, or to free up

life coach to help us work through some challenges or difficulties that have been plaguing us for some time, to get some much-needed relief.

## 3. Reduce Your Screen Time As Much As Possible — and Start With Social Media

In regards to worry, as well as with anxiety and depression and other negative emotional factors, technology often feeds and breeds these issues, turning them into much more complex and much larger concerns than ever before. Screen time in general can be problematic from the standpoint that it can lull us into a mind-numbing pseudo-reality, where we think we are resting or relaxing when our minds, as well as our emotions, are still on overdrive. Social media in particular has a way of bringing out the worst in us, both from a societal perspective and also on a more personal level, as we can find ourselves living in echo chambers where we are being spoon fed information that leads us down rabbit holes that cater to our individual likes and dislikes, while further distorting the reality of the world in which we actually live. This can further lead to negative groupthink, comparison and jealousy concerns, and further lead to feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and mental fatigue. The more we can be proactive in reducing, or even eliminating, the time we spend on social media and other similar content mediums, the more time that is then freed up to focus on more meaningful pursuits and endeavors.

## 4. Pursue Hope

Depression is a multi-dimensional problem with many factors and contributors that result in the emotional state described as such. Depression can involve, but is not limited to, feelings of hopelessness, isolation, sadness, melancholy, regret, and a lack of trust or belief in one's situation or circumstances improving in some meaningful way in the present or

*(Continued on page 21)*



some much needed time in our schedules. For others, this may mean adding some much needed boundaries in our lives to reduce the amount of time we are spending engaging with toxic and emotionally draining people. Sometimes this means saying yes to much needed things that we have been putting off, such as a day away with our spouse or a best friend, taking part in a retreat or a conference, or reaching out to a counselor, therapist, or



*(Continued from page 20)*

future. While there is not one path that leads to a state of depression, there is also not one path that leads out of it, however, there are many factors that can contribute to one rising above and overcoming feelings of sadness and depression. Meaningful social and spiritual factors can contribute to a reduction in feelings of hopelessness and isolation. Reaching out in an intentional way to one's support network, or seeking to strengthen or create a support network, is a vital step forward in this process. Choosing hope, and choosing to believe that one's situation or circumstances can change and improve for the better are important and purposeful ways to begin taking steps forward in venturing beyond a state of depression.

### 5. Slow Down

This can seem like a very hard thing to do, as we can often feel pressure from all sides to get more done in less time. While we still have the same 168 hours in any given week that people have had throughout human history, there are more options to fill that time than ever before, so the most important things, such as spending time with family, living lives of purpose, pursuing meaningful relationships, giving back, serving others, living out our faith, practicing meaningful self care, and being aware of the needs of those around us often get lost in the shuffle of trying to do more, keep up with those around us, and pursue mindless indulgences that don't truly satisfy us. But when we intentionally slow down, rest, breathe, and simply exist, we can take time to collect our thoughts and focus, or refocus, on what is most important in life.

In closing, the challenges are all around us, but so are the opportunities. It is important for us to be intentional and purposeful in our thoughts, actions, and decisions. Regardless of where we find ourselves in life, our mental health and the present state of our emotions are a crucial part of our holistic health and wellbeing. Whatever positive and proactive steps that we can take forward matter tremendously as we seek to live lives filled with meaning and purpose, as we seek to not simply survive in this world that we find ourselves in, but to thrive.

*Lane Sander, MDiv, MA, LMHC is the Director and founder of Renovate Counseling Services (est. in 2016) and is a licensed mental health counselor in the*

# For a love of learning

Nina was a perpetual student and a perpetual teacher. If there was something she wanted to do, she got busy and learned how, and then she loved to teach others.

She grew up on a farm in Randolph County and at age 5 was making dresses for her paper dolls.

Always a student, Nina attended courses at Purdue, Ball State, Indiana-Purdue Fort Wayne, and at both Parsons and Traphagen Schools of Design in New York.

Becoming Mrs. Indiana in 1964 and again in 1965, Nina traveled all over Indiana, teaching and learning, representing her own Wells County.

When judging 4-H clothing in Wells County, in nearby counties, and at the State Fair, she never failed to make notes for each student, giving both their good points, and how to improve their work. Taking an interest in each one, she taught along the way to help students succeed.

With a love of design and fabrics, she developed the "petal dresses" for young girls under her Rittenhouse Square label. Our granddaughters modeled her designs at the Javits Center in New York and her dresses were sold in stores in several states, including Hawaii.

When we purchased the old Victorian house at 218 S. Main St. in Bluffton, she soon agreed to do a retirement banquet for Dr. Cook, even though all we had was a big old empty house. So, we borrowed electric roasters from Heyerly's Grocery, chairs from Howard Rich (at then Thoma/Rich) and she put together a successful banquet menu including roasted Cornish Hens for 90 people attending.

She covered the walls in upholstery fabrics, a nod to her love of fabrics and design, and we opened the Ritten House for parties and banquets with so many friends sharing memories there.

At our Bluffton Pharmacy, 312 S. Main St., this busy lady also trained employ-



ees, and assisted customers who still remember her to this day.

For three years, she represented Bluffton and Wells County, doing a regular cooking show at Access TV, a local station at the Fort Wayne Library. The entire TV staff would always gather around afterward to enjoy her delicious menus. She was dedicated in her love of books, and was active in both Foltz-Bayview Literary Club and Friends of the Library for many years.

Nina maintained a resolve and a commitment to happiness, and we shared 69 years of marriage.

In our lives together, I observed her strong but gentle character, and she invigorated herself with her own "self-therapy." She might create in the kitchen with a new recipe, or in her shop with a new project (she had many) and would often come away with problems solved.

We lived in Wells County for well over 50 years, where we raised our family of four kids, Kent, Linda, Greg and Brock. A model for our grandkids and great grandkids, she always carried a love and a smile for each and every one.

She was young at heart and she was ageless and she now lives in our hearts and in so many stories.



# Women in Leadership: Empowering women to learn, lead, and leave a legacy

In the heart of our Wells County community, there exists a vibrant and empowering group that is changing the narrative for women. Women in Leadership is not just another organization — it's a supportive network that fosters connections, personal growth, and the empowerment of women from all walks of life. Women are witnessing how this group has transformed lives, encouraged self-care, and helped others find their voices as leaders.

## Connecting with Passionate Women

One of the most remarkable aspects of Women in Leadership is the diverse array of women it brings together. We come from different professions and backgrounds, each making a unique impact in our community. Whether we're entrepreneurs, stay-at-home moms, or CEOs, we all play vital roles in shaping our society. What's truly inspiring is that we're uniting to create a stronger community together. We're breaking down barriers and celebrating the value of our individual contributions.

## Prioritizing Self-Care

In a world that often glorifies endless work and constant hustle, Women in Leadership stands as a beacon of a different message: the importance of rest and self-care. By attending conferences and luncheons, we collectively emphasize the significance of taking time for ourselves. We understand that self-care is not selfish but essential for our overall well-being. This group encourages us to embrace this concept together, reminding us that we can be hardworking leaders while still valuing our own health and happiness.

## Inclusivity and Empowerment

Women in Leadership intentionally emphasizes that it is open to any woman. This inclusivity reflects our belief that every woman is a leader, making an impact in her own unique way. We've come a long way in challenging stereotypes and societal expectations. Women should have the freedom to pursue their passions, whether it's a career, motherhood, or both. This group is all about acknowledging the hard work we do, celebrating our individual paths, and underscoring the importance of self-care to sustain our efforts.

## Recognizing Women as Leaders

This group signifies a significant shift in recognizing women for the leaders they have always been. Women have led in their homes, churches, communities, and workplaces for generations. Women in Leadership urges us to see ourselves as leaders, to acknowledge our worth, and to embrace our roles in shaping our world.



Back row: Alicia Hill, Hattie Wondercheck, Tammy Slater, Beth Singleton, Kylie Tomlin. Front row: Kim Gentis, Alyssa Brown, Beth McConn, Stacey Duncan, Julie Thompson, Erin Prible. (Photo provided)

## Prioritizing Self and Asking for Help

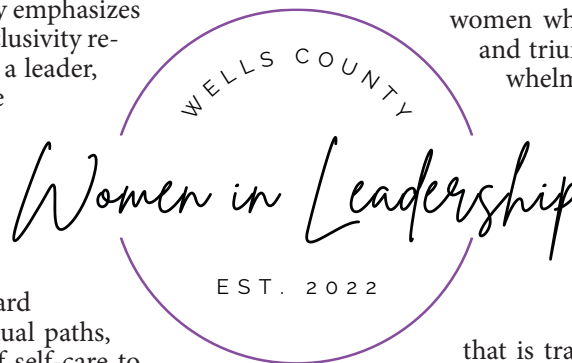
The purpose of this group is clear: it empowers women to see their value and potential. It encourages women to strive for promotions, pursue dream careers, and balance motherhood — all without being afraid to ask for help. By prioritizing self-care and rejecting the urge to constantly compare ourselves to others, Women in Leadership teaches us to say no when necessary and to put our well-being first.

## Building a Supportive Community

Women in Leadership is building a community of women who understand each other's challenges and triumphs. It's okay to feel burnt out, overwhelmed, or in need of a break. This group reassures us that we're not alone. It reminds us that we are all amazing, regardless of where we are in our journeys, and that our efforts are seen and appreciated.

## Conclusion

Women in Leadership is more than just a group; it's a movement that is transforming the lives of women in our community. It's about connections, self-care, inclusivity, and empowerment. Through this group, we are rewriting the narrative for women, celebrating their leadership, and encouraging them to prioritize themselves. Together, we are creating a legacy of strong, confident women who can do hard things and make a lasting impact on our world. Women in Leadership is an opportunity to connect, learn, and grow, and it's a beacon of hope for all women in Wells County and beyond.





# Mrs. Indiana: A recipe for adventure

## By Nina Rittenhouse

The contents of an envelope in my mail one morning marked the beginning of a series of experiences in my life — some amusing, some spiritually rewarding — all unforgettable.

The one letter, which so filled me with joy and anticipation, was a congratulatory letter from Mrs. America, Inc., telling me that I had been chosen as a finalist in the “Mrs. Indiana” state competition. I was overwhelmed. It had been two months since I had completed all of the preliminary requirements and I had dismissed the contest from my mind. Now, suddenly, I had to be prepared for the state competition in five days.

The letter could not have arrived at a more inopportune time. My husband, George, had been in the hospital with an acute infection for a week and was to come home on the following day, Saturday. Since he had not been allowed visitors while he was hospitalized, I expected a deluge of friends and relatives from various parts of the state on Sunday. Monday, I had committed myself to be a co-hostess at a luncheon, and Wednesday was the contest. When on earth would I prepare?

I seem to possess an affinity for painting myself in to a corner. For even as I tried to arrange my thoughts and arrive at some logical plan of action, another problem further complicated the situation — I had not told George that I had even entered the contest! What would be his reaction when I told him suddenly that I was supposed to vie for the “Mrs. Indiana” title the following Wednesday. For a brief moment I wished I had remained single!

Although George was released from the hospital Saturday morning, I waited until evening to break the news. There was a motive.

Dinner is a very special part of the day in our household. George and I have endeavored to produce a dinner table atmosphere conducive to pleasant conversation. Our four children came to the table eager to recap the day’s activities and unpleasant subjects are taboo. With my family thus primed, relaxed, and receptive, I told them about the contest.

The children immediately set up a chorus of approval and poor daddy couldn’t say no.

The task before me now seemed staggering. The information I had received stated that the state contest was to be a series of events covering a variety of homemaking skills. These skills included: menu planning, baking and icing a cake, coordinating a menu, centerpiece, and table setting, submitting an article of handcraft, participating in personal interviews, personal grooming for day and evening, and appearing on stage to answer impromptu questions. The contest instructions further stated that originality counted heavily in the judging. Originality? The only way I knew how to be original was by trial and error and that took time!

During the next three days, my “trials and errors” produced twenty different cakes — each one original in some

respect. That was one time we had our cake and ate it too! As it was impossible for my family to consume so much cake, I started carrying cakes to neighbors, each cake minus a large slice, which had been removed for testing. Since (with the exception of my immediate family) I was maintaining secrecy about the contest, and could not readily explain the missing slice, I’ve often wondered if my neighbors believed they were receiving a cake, which my family refused to finish after their first sample!


By Monday, my family had voted in favor of a chiffon-like cake with a pineapple filling and sour cream topping. That left a day to prepare for the rest of the contest. One by one, I tackled each event, making mental notes and gathering all the necessary equipment I would need for each area of competition. By mid-afternoon on Tuesday, all that re-

*(Continued on page 24)*

The

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### *(Continued from page 23)*

mained to prepare for was the table setting event. Here I was stumped. I combed through all available magazines in search of unusual table settings, but each new idea was promptly squelched when my cabinets revealed nothing even remotely similar to the exquisite settings, which were pictured.

Having exhausted my supply of magazines, I reached the end of that avenue of “original” thoughts on table settings. There was nothing left for me to do but try to be inventive with my whatever linen and china closets disclosed. My linen drawer produced a long rag rug my grandmother had made for me some years before. The rug was so beautiful I had made a place for it in my linen closet instead of on the floor and had even used it occasionally to cover the buffet for an informal supper. Predominantly black, white and grayish-blue, an occasional streak of hot pink gave the rug certain flair. I had made hot pink napkins to match. Further digging disclosed large black wrought-iron candelabra, two boldly painted ceramic chickens, black and white Dansk dishes and stainless steel utensils.

Taking a cue from the hot pink accents I decided to call my party a Spanish Supper and serve lamb ragout, tossed salad with bright red tomato wedges, hard rolls, and a magnificent pink raspberry mousse.

Presenting my coordinated menu and table setting the next day during the contest, I had misgivings concerning the judges’ reactions to such an unconventional setting. The candelabra was Spanish; the rag rug, Early America; the hand painted chickens, Portuguese; the Dansk tableware, Modern; and the dessert, French. Although I loved the setting because of the interplay of color and texture, a judge, schooled in proper display of foods, quite possibly would disagree.

Later I learned that the table setting had made a hit with the judges and it taught me a couple of lessons. One, to use with confidence whatever I have available, and two to have courage to use and develop my own ideas. Entertaining is like living — it should always be approached in a spirit of adventure.

It was late in the evening before the contest was completed and I had been selected “Mrs. Indiana.” I telephone George immediately to tell him the exciting news then started the long trip home.

As I drove home from Indianapolis that night my head spun. I had actually won a state contest! A trip to Florida! I was filled with a sense of triumph! I was on top of the world! What fun I would have telling my family every minute detail of the day! My daughter would be wide-eyed when she saw my crown, the boys would be impressed with my new title, and George would welcome me home with open arms. Past midnight and in this state of euphoria, I drove in to our driveway just outside of Bluffton. I could hardly wait for the car to stop before I dashed in to the house expectantly. My entire family was asleep!

How true-to-life was this incident, for the moment we become all conquering, God produces someone or some event to illuminate our insignificance.



One of the duties I was asked to perform during my reign came from my own hometown at the time of the annual street fair. Bluffton holds the franchise for the “Jr. Miss Indiana” contest and the pageant committee had asked me to crown the new queen.

Thinking that this would be a relatively simple matter of placing a crown on the head of a pretty girl, I readily agreed. As a huge crowd gathered for the crowning the night of the pageant, the Master-of-Ceremonies came to me to review the procedure of the show. Outlining my part of the program, he ended by saying, “Then we’d like for you to step to the microphone and say a few words.”

In less than 10 minutes we were to be on-stage and I was without a speech!

In vain I tried to keep calm. I wanted desperately to think, but the room was crowded and people kept talking to me. I fled to the ladies’ lounge. It was cramped also. I had to find a corner to be alone. Fortunately, a ladies’ lounge is also equipped with nice, neat, extremely private little cubbyholes. I hurried to one of these, closed the door, and leaned against it.

I knew there would be other speeches. The contestants would be honored - the audience would be honored — the town would be honored. What could I possibly say that would not sound redundant?

Now I believe in prayer and as I stood learning against the door of that “John,” I prayed.

“Lord, this is an unsophisticated prayer from an unsophisticated place, but I’ve just painted myself into another corner. What can I say that will help those nervous contestants and their more-nervous parents relax?”

The tension of the moment had left me exhausted so I sat down on that appliance most commonly found in a cubbyhole of this nature. Now it’s impossible for a lady to sit in a floor-length sheath without exposing her feet, and my feet protruded in front of me, it was as if the Lord had pointed a finger directly at me. Of course! I was to tell the story about my feet.

Since that night, I’ve been asked to repeat the story many, many times. I’ll share it once again.

Contestants participating in the Mrs. America contest are not permitted to reveal their personal measurements. In this particular contest, the emphasis is on homemaking ability and not on physical attractiveness. Shortly after I had won the Indiana state contest, I ran into a reporter who was bent on writing an article with a bathing beauty angle. Specifically, he was interested in my vital statistics. (I’ve never been able to understand his reason — it’s quite obvious that my statistics aren’t very vital!)

Anyway, he kept pressing me for information of a personal nature until finally I said in jest, “If you really want to give your readers something personal about me, you can tell them that I wear a 9.5 AAA shoe!” You know, he did just that!

The national finals that year were held in St. Petersburg, Fla., and one of the first things my husband and I did upon arrival was to visit the Mrs. America headquarters. Here we found a room lit

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erally plastered with newspaper articles extolling the virtues of the various Mrs. America candidates. Eagerly I searched for an article about the contestant from Indiana. Surely somewhere in the mass of publicity there would be an article saying something flattering about me. As I was about to give up finding even the tiniest clipping, my eyes rested on a familiar sub-title, it read, "Mrs. Indiana wears a 9.5 shoe!"

As the days passed during the nation finals, I continued to paint myself in to corners. When we baked caked, I forgot to turn the oven on; when we ironed, I neglected to turn the iron off; and when I tired to show my dexterity at the wheel of a car, I ran in to a stop sign! Not only was I unable to perform even the simplest household tasks efficiently, every time I opened my mouth I stuck that size 9.5 foot right in.

One Sunday, during the national finals, together with three other couples, we attended a large Methodist church near our hotel. Since we were required to wear our official Mrs. America badges wherever we appeared, attention was immediately focused upon us as we entered the church. Then during the service, the minister graciously invited us to come to the front to be introduced. As he introduced each of us, he asked the people in the audience to indicate by raised hand if that candidate represented their home state. When he named the Hoosier state and introduced me, a couple directly in front of me raised their hands. Eagerly I leaned toward them intending to say "I'll see you after the service." What came out however, was "I'll see you after the show!"

One of my favorite stories connected with the contest is about my father. Dad has always been a farmer, but several years ago he became interested in Registered Shorthorn cattle. Starting with a few head, he studied bloodlines and feeding techniques and ultimately developed a herd of top-quality cattle. Dad is so proud of the Shorthorn pictures, prizes, and trophies, which line the walls of a hallway in his home that we have dubbed this hallway the "Shorthorn Hall of Fame."

Another facet of my dad's personality is that he is a man of few words and fewer compliments. He always felt a little suspicious about the person who gave compliments freely. Recognition had to earned and he expected his children to

produce before he patted them on the back. But because Dad's compliments were rare, when they did come it was like a shower of crown jewels. The result was that we worked hard for those showers.

So it was that, following my selection as Mrs. Indiana, Dad said very little. I couldn't really tell whether he approved or disapproved. Then one day one of those rare showers fell when he said to me, "Nina, if you'll bring me your picture, I'll hang it in the Shorthorn Hall".

To have been given the honor of having my picture hung beside Dad's prized Shorthorn Cattle! I knew I had reached the pinnacle!

In my new capacity as Ms. Indiana, invitations to speak began to pour in from all parts of the state. Cornered again. I was terrified of an audience, terrified of making grammatical errors, and terrified of the criticism, which assuredly would accompany any attempt on my part to express myself publicly.

Fortunately, at this time, I had the privilege of hearing a prominent attorney quote a poem, which helped me overcome my fears. I can't tell you when or where it was written since attempts to find the identity of the author have been

fruitless, however, the poem's valuable message is timeless.

*Then take this honey  
or the bitterest cup  
There is no defeat  
save in giving up  
No real hard knocks  
as long as one still tries  
For seeming setbacks  
make the strong man wise  
There is no failure  
save from within  
Unless you're beaten there  
You're bound to win*

With renewed confidence and enthusiasm, I began to write speeches and face audiences two and three times a week. I also began to believe that my "failure" in the Mrs. America pageant was, in reality, an asset, for if failure or trouble avoids you too long, you become complacent and careless and self-satisfied. This setback, disappointing through it was at the time, caused me to face my limitations squarely and to take steps to overcome them.

Today, though my picture may only be found in the "Shorthorn Hall of Fame", I'm proud to have been a contestant from Indiana.

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# Easy LeMoyne Star Block

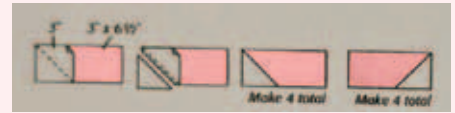
Finished Block Size 12"x 12"

- Cut:**  
 Assorted cream prints  
 8 spares 4"x 4"  
 8 spares 3"x 3"  
 Assorted pink prints  
 8 Rectangles 3"x 6½"

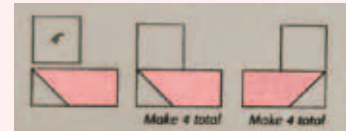


Kris Decker, Bee Happy Quilter, showing her LeMoyne Star Block (Photo by Sharon Woods)

Step 1



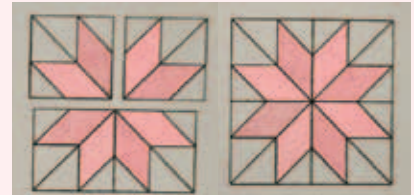
Step 2



Step 3



Step 4



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