

theExchange

NEWSLETTER — Spring 2026

Goodbye and Good Luck to Ben

by Audrey Lucier

Ben Hein, our executive director since September 2023, has left for a new position. Friends of theExchange were invited to drop in on his last day, April 1, to say goodbye. Ben was a good fit for the director's role, having served nonprofit organizations in the La Crosse area for the past 20 years. His work with at-risk youth, disaster response and families in need gave him experience in volunteer engagement, program development and community partnerships – all essential parts of theExchange's mission.

"Even my teenage experience working in furniture stores and with a moving company came in handy in supporting theExchange team," Ben added.

Before coming to theExchange, Ben said he had very little knowledge of the program. "I immediately recognized the importance of theExchange," he said, "because in my previous work I assisted clients in obtaining basic needs items. I tried to connect generous donors with those in need, just as we do at theExchange."

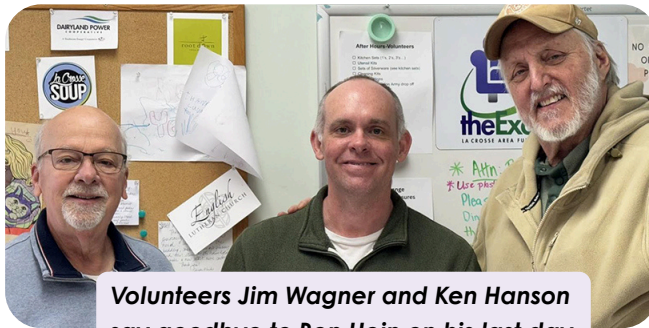
Ben gives a lot of credit to theExchange's founders and supporters. "They had incredible dedication and foresight in identifying an unmet need in the community," he said. "Then they took action, guiding the program to its current form as a community resource."

During Ben's time as executive director, the staff expanded from two part-time positions to four, providing better coverage and support for critical responsibilities. Around 70 volunteers also staff

theExchange. Ben said working with the staff, volunteers and over 30 community agencies who use theExchange has been a privilege.

There have been challenges, too. "Nonprofit leaders can be asked to wear many hats," he said. "Finding a healthy balance between putting the hat on myself versus engaging a team member who wears the hat better than me has sometimes been a challenge – but a rewarding one."

Fortunately, Ben will be staying in La Crosse. He is the new executive director with the Sports, Therapeutic and Adaptive Recreation (STAR) Center. Ben is excited by the organization's vision of health equity, so that all community members are able to enjoy their best quality of life through the benefits of accessing physical activity.



Volunteers Jim Wagner and Ken Hanson say goodbye to Ben Hein on his last day.



FROM MEDICINE TO MAINTENANCE:

Meet Rick Waniger
by Kathie Tyser

Rick Waniger is a vital volunteer at theExchange. Not only is he a regular helper with the morning pickup and delivery crew, he also serves as the organization's go to fix-it guy repairing furniture, maintaining the truck and trailer, and also does a little plumbing and electrical - Rick's technical skills keep things running smoothly!

A long time Family Medicine physician at Emplify Health by Gundersen, Rick now works part-time and is able to devote more time volunteering. When asked what drew him to this volunteer work he replied, "It started when my wife Joan recruited me, but I like bringing both ailing people and ailing buildings back to good working order." Rick is also a regular volunteer at St. Clare Health Mission, the Pump House, and First Congregational Church.

One of Rick's most impactful contributions was converting theExchange's fluorescent lighting to LED. Using a Focus on Energy nonprofit rebate program, he replaced all bulbs in both the warehouse and the office. The upgrades cut energy use dramatically —reducing wattage from 3,900 to 1,040 in the warehouse and from 4,096 to 1,792 in the office —resulting in long-term cost savings and supporting theExchange's sustainability goals.

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From Medicine to Maintenance - cont. from front page

Outside of his part-time work and volunteerism, Rick enjoys golf, singing and spending time at the lake with dogs and family. Rick and wife Joan have celebrated their two children's weddings in the past two years, and he enjoys seeing his two adult children follow similar paths, one in medicine, the other in construction - and both make time for volunteering as well!

As Operations Manager, Erin Lisota says, "Rick is a talented, multifaceted volunteer. He'll be up on a ladder one day and the next, pulling a trailer. He recognizes a need and figures out the best solution. He is a humble, quietly impactful volunteer, and we are so fortunate to have him."

2026 Year to Date Service

- volunteer hours.....665
- households served..104
- individuals served...301
 - 119 children
 - 182 adults

Community Needs

theExchange continues to receive high volume of referrals for our neighbors in need. Through March 31, theExchange has received referrals for 172 households in need of basic household items including beds, dressers, couches and kitchen items. theExchange is grateful for generous community donors who give new life to their gently used household items and support members of our community experiencing homelessness, domestic violence and aging and disability challenges. The need for theExchange services remains consistent throughout the course of the year and we need your support!

As you begin your spring cleaning, prepare for rummage sales, or tackle that remodeling project, please consider theExchange for your donated household goods.

Currently theExchange has the greatest need for:

- loveseats and couches
- recliners
- microwaves and toasters
- kitchen tables



Our Thanks

theExchange is grateful for all members of our community who choose to support our program.

Community Events

theExchange team appreciates the opportunity to be an active member of our community. Join us at these upcoming events as we share the work of theExchange and advocate for those we serve!

**Turtle Stack Brewery
PINTS FOR A PURPOSE**

Tuesday, April 21 at 4 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Thank you to Turtle Stack Brewery for highlighting theExchange during this community fundraising evening!

**Sustainability Institute
EARTH FAIR**

Sunday, April 26 at 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Join us at the Earth Fair as we highlight the sustainability element of our mission!

To volunteer, click link below
[EarthFair2026](#)

To learn more, click link below
www.sustaininstitute.com/earthfairlacrosse

**Safe Families for Children
Western Wisconsin
DONATIONS FOR DONUTS**

*Furniture and
Household Item Drive*

Saturday, May 9 at 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Thanks to our partners at Safe Families of Wisconsin for staffing a donation Saturday event. Safe Families volunteers will be at theExchange to accept gently used household goods to support theExchange.

**Pizza Ranch
COMMUNITY IMPACT NIGHT**

Thursday, May 21 at 4 p.m. -9 p.m.

Join us at Pizza Ranch for food, fun and fundraising to support theExchange. Our thanks to the Pizza Ranch Team for the opportunity to partner together.