

JULY 2026

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Dear Residents,

Music has never been a big part of my life. As a child, I listened to whatever music was on the radio, enjoying the songs I heard but never putting much thought into how they were made or performed. Even now, I love to put on music in the car or while working, but I rarely think too deeply about the thought behind the music, who made it or why. Instead, it largely served as background noise, something to enjoy but never examine too deeply.

This May, though, I had the opportunity to attend the Milwaukee Community Orchestra's Spring Concert. While there, I saw what it looks like to be the one creating the music, to put your heart and soul into your instrument in the company of others all doing the same. I saw how much time and effort goes into creating each transportive piece, from each musician and their instrument playing a different part to the conductor ensuring the group remains together as a whole. In short, I saw how collaborative making music really is.

This month's feature highlights that group, the Milwaukee Community Orchestra. I had the amazing opportunity to speak with Margery Deutsch, music director of the MCO, and a few of the group's North Shore members. They spoke with me about the importance of music in their lives, showing me that for many, music is not just a form of art, but also a means of connection and community. The MCO offers a home for North Shore musicians. I hope you'll enjoy reading more about them and, if you're like me, learning more about lives guided by music.

We're always looking for more families to feature in our monthly cover story! If you would like your family to be featured or have any pets you would like to spotlight in our Pet Corner, please send me an email at mrossi@bestversionmedia.com.

Until next month,

Melanie Rossi

mrossi@bestversionmedia.com



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Police Department 414-351-8911
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Inspection Department 414-351-8906
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Treasurer/Finance 414-351-8900
Village Clerk 414-351-8900
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RIVER HILLS

Police Department 414-247-2302
School District Office 414-351-7170
Housewatch 414-247-2302
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Milwaukee Community Orchestra



**WHERE
MUSICIANS
FIND THEIR
WAY BACK**

BY MELANIE ROSSI

For Fox Point resident Dawn Bugalski, joining the Milwaukee Community Orchestra (MCO) offered a path back into music after years away.

A dedicated young musician through both high school and college, Dawn stepped away from it after being diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in college. Years later, MCO presented the opportunity to return. "Getting back into music [through the MCO], it's been really fun to play in the orchestra with friends I've had since that time in my life."

Dawn and her longtime friend Nicola de Torre—residents of Fox Point and Bayside—have spent most of their adult lives on the North Shore. It was Nicola who first encouraged Dawn to join MCO, a community orchestra designed to bring together musicians of all ages and backgrounds.



Dawn Bugalski and Nicola de Torre

"We were both a little intimidated since we hadn't played in so long," Dawn said, "but it was great to get back into it and play with other people — MCO is a real connector."

A Musical Community in the North Shore

Founded in 2024 by Fox Point resident Margery Deutsch and co-founder Kari Kraenzler, the MCO is built around the idea that music thrives in community.

"Creating an orchestra that welcomes a wide range of skill levels was very intentional," Margery said. "When musicians of different experiences come together, learning becomes shared, confidence builds, and the focus shifts from perfection to connection. Stronger players naturally mentor, newer players grow quickly, and everyone benefits."

MCO removes common barriers to orchestra participation, with affordable fees, flexible expectations, and, uniquely, no auditions to enter. Holding three affordable concerts each year, the group ensures that live orchestral music remains within reach for audiences across the region.

"Milwaukee is uniquely suited for this kind of ensemble," Margery said. "There's a rich musical heritage here, strong arts education, and a community that values participation as much as performance. MCO really belongs to this city."

Music shaped Margery's life from an early age. Growing up near New York City, she was immersed in world-class music, art, and theater, and began studying flute and singing in choir at age eight. She went on to spend nearly four decades as Director of Orchestras and Professor of Conducting at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

After her unexpected dismissal in 2024, Margery chose to channel that moment into something new and positive.

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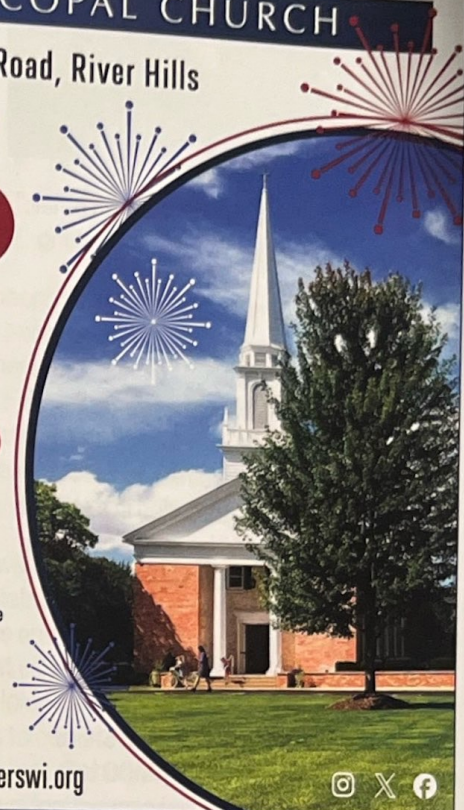
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RESIDENT FEATURE



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"They let me go after 39 years—in an email," she said. "So I decided to build something better."

Together with Kraenzler and a core group of committed musicians, she launched the Milwaukee Community Orchestra. Today, it includes a 160-member full orchestra, a 50-member string orchestra, and a Flute Choir—all of which are grounded in a shared belief that music should be open, inclusive, and lifelong. In 2025, MCO was granted 501(c)(3) status.

"Many of our musicians and audience members live in Fox Point, Bayside, River Hills, and surrounding North Shore communities," Margery said. "MCO is for anyone who values music and connection—whether you're a lifelong player, someone returning after years away, or simply someone who loves live music."

Margery and her husband Eric Weiner, a marriage & family therapist, author, and speaker, have lived in Fox Point for over 30 years. Outside of music, she enjoys gardening, reading, biking through River Hills and Mequon, and spending time with her family.



Margery and her husband Eric

Music for Life

For many members of MCO, like Dawn, joining the orchestra offered an accessible return to music.

Nicola, who first met Margery as a student in the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra, joined MCO in its inaugural season. "It had been decades since I played anything more than little bits with my kids or Christmas music at the holidays, so I was rusty when I started back up again," she said.



Nicola's son Emilio, Dawn, Nicola's sister Sara, and Nicola at an MCO concert last fall.

Nicola enjoyed returning to the rhythm of practice and rehearsals that musicians lived by. "When I get home from work," she said, "I usually run down the list of questions for my kids: 'Is your homework done? What have you eaten since you got home? Have you practiced?' They love to turn that last question around and ask me later in the evening whether my practicing is done! It feels good to play again, and there is a sense of doing something beautiful when part of an ensemble."

Like Dawn and Nicola, River Hills resident Tom Parisi was a musician in his youth and majored in violin performance in college. Before joining MCO in 2025, though, he hadn't been part of an ensemble for years.

He moved to Wisconsin in 2017, after having previously moved all over the country—from Colorado, Boston, and Minnesota—for work. Currently a doctor at the Orthopedic Institute of Wisconsin, Tom valued the opportunity to step back into music with MCO. "I had been in orchestras for a long time," he said, "but when my daughter was born and I was in my early work years, I didn't want to necessarily be away for another night of the week. But now that she's older, I thought it would be really fun to jump back into the orchestra."



Tom Parisi playing at an MCO concert

Joining the group strengthened Tom's ties with the North Shore community. "There aren't any professional performers," he said. "MCO is all about meeting people."

That sense of connection is what keeps members coming back.

"It's been really fun to bring that part of my life back that I thought was gone," Dawn said. "Both orchestras are just so welcoming, and I love that there's such a mix of people and backgrounds. It's just been so much fun."

This summer, MCO will be performing the national anthem at two Brewers games—on June 29 and July 18. Their summer concert is on Friday, July 24 at 7:30 p.m. at UWM's Zelazo Center for the Performing Arts.

True to its motto, Music for Life, the Milwaukee Community Orchestra keeps its doors open—offering North Shore musicians both a place to play, and a place to belong.

For more information about MCO, visit www.mkeorch.org.

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