

She

MAGAZINE

FOR THE WOMEN OF
SOUTHEAST WISCONSIN

LEARN KITCHEN
CLASSICS IN
COOKING CLASSES

BRING THE PAST
TO LIFE WRITING
YOUR FAMILY
HISTORY

SEEK SERENITY
THROUGH
MEDITATION

SHARING HER SKILLS

Diverse career path
helps Salem woman
run food bank

She's worn many hats

Sharing Center director learns
from diverse career experiences

By Deneen Smith

If the world can be divided into "divers" and "scanners," Sharon Pomaville said she is one of the latter.

Divers, Pomaville said, throw themselves into one thing — a career or a hobby — and stick with it. Scanners are interested in everything, and move from one passion to the next.

"I am definitely a scanner, and it's worked out pretty well," she said.

Pomaville, of Salem, is the executive director of Sharing Center in Trevor, an agency that provides food and other aid for people in need living in western Kenosha County. She organizes volunteers, handles vendors and donors, coordinates services with other agencies, writes grants, seeks donations and works with clients. It's a job with a lot of hats. Which works out well, according to Pomaville, because she wore a lot of hats before she came there.

"I did everything from tax accounting to working in the art industry," she said. In between she worked as a baker in a high-end restaurant, in retail sales, as a bar manager for Summerfest, as marketing director for Country Thunder, as a job coach for the disabled, as the organizer of an organic food cooperative, and as an agent and promoter for blues musicians.

"And I did a lot of that all at the same time," she said. The only common thread in her many careers was curiosity and creativity. If an opportunity seemed right, Pomaville pursued it. If a job didn't prove interesting, she moved on. "I always thought I'll try this for awhile, and if it doesn't work out, I'll do something else," she said.

Forging her own path

Pomaville grew up on a small farm in Yorkville. "We were organic gardeners, and we raised goats and chickens," she remem-



PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL SIEL
Sharon Pomaville of Salem is executive director of Sharing Center in Trevor, but that's just one of the many jobs she has held.

KINDRED SPIRITS

bered. "When we walked the dogs at night, the goats would come along with us."

When it was time to graduate from high school, Pomaville's parents urged her to go to college to study for a career in one of the areas that were, in the 1970s, traditional roles for women. "The options for women then were going into nursing or teaching, or working for the phone company," she said. And in those options, she said, she wasn't much interested.

Instead, she parlayed the skills she had learned making food with her family into a job as a baker at a now defunct supper club in Kenosha. She spent her days making meringue pies and wedding cakes. "I loved to cook and this allowed me to be creative," she said. And while the kitchen of a restaurant can be stressful, she didn't find that true for baking. "Everything was pretty and sugary and happy."

Pomaville stayed in baking for several years, then left the workforce for several years to care for and home school her two children until a divorce put her back to work as the breadwinner for her family. "I was a single parent trying to make ends meet," she said. "I was usually working three or four jobs at a time."

Once, Pomaville said, someone asked her at an event where she had gotten her master's degree. "I said I go to the School of Lifelong Mentoring," she said, adding that she finds people she admires personally or professionally and seeks them out for mentorship. The strategy, she said, has allowed her to soak in the knowledge to pursue career after career.

Pomaville finds people she admires personally or professionally and seeks them out for mentorship.

An unconventional life

A favorite career has been in music.

Pomaville always loved music, and she sought out opportunities to see bands live. She began spending time at a small blues club in Pell Lake — "the music was extraordinary" — and got to know the people who worked there. One day while she was at the club, a musician named Michael Coleman approached her and said, "I need your help."

Coleman was a respected Chicago blues musician, but he was having trouble expanding his bookings. He asked if Pomaville would work for him as a promoter. Although she had no experience in the industry, she decided to give it a go.

She said her strategy was to look at the tour dates of artists with similar styles as Coleman, then contact the club owners where those artists were playing to attempt to book Coleman. "I would do 40 calls to a club — sometimes 50 — before I wouldn't call again," she said, saying figuring out each club owner's style was important. "I learned that you can't always be nice. And sometimes you have to be extraordinarily forceful."

That work led to a marketing position at Country Thunder, and to the formation of her own small marketing company working on event promotion. Although Pomaville and Coleman parted ways after he had health issues that limited his ability to tour, she continues to work as a music promoter in addition to her work at the Sharing Center, most recently working on promotions with a jazz musician and his small production company. It's a job she loves.

"I've had what appears to me to be a very unconventional life," she said. "I didn't take my parents' advice and work at the phone company. I followed my heart on a lot of things."

She said she tries to be mindful of the clues in her life that can help guide her forward.

"We often think that our past is the biggest indicator of our future," she said. "But the call of the future is far stronger than the experience of our past."

Finding out what is next, and what experiences and lessons are in her future, keeps her motivated.

"What am I here to become? What lessons are we here to learn? That's what keeps me popping out of bed in the morning," Pomaville said. ☼