

# ‘Full Circle’: Nonprofits Expand While Embracing Roots

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter  
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**SEE VIDEO:**



WOOD RIVER - Riverbend Family Ministries is a group of eight local nonprofit organizations operating under one roof to help “families in crisis” - those experiencing violence, addiction, homelessness and/or poverty. That roof is about to get bigger as the group moves into a larger building with a backstory rooted in their own history.

The story of this new building begins in a former Wood River coffee and bagel shop, at the time known as T.R.'s Café. Then-owner Tammy Iskarous decided 15 years ago to close the café and begin her journey in the nonprofit world by moving operations across the street and founding Riverbend Family Ministries.

Iskarous said the idea behind their collaborative model is to pool resources to ease financial burdens on local nonprofits.

“There are some small nonprofits that are doing some great work, but yet they can’t afford the brick and mortar, so they’re not being as impactful as they could,” Iskarous said. “What if we all came together, what if we shared the brick and mortar, we shared utilities ... what if we all did this work together?”

As more nonprofits joined and services expanded over the years, Iskarous told her board to start searching for a new building. One day, after meeting at a potential location that didn’t pan out, they stumbled upon one Iskarous was quite familiar with.

“One of my board members pointed across the street, which was our old T.R.’s building. They said, ‘Wouldn’t that be cool, if we could move into that space?’ I said, ‘Yeah, that’d be super cool, it would be full circle’ ... but there was a tea room in there,” Iskarous said. “It was up and running.”

Their luck would soon turn around in what Iskarous considers a case of divine intervention.

“Two weeks later, they put a sign on their door that said they were closing at the end of August,” Iskarous continued. “I am a woman of faith, and I’m like, ‘God’s in the details, you just know that you know’ ... it’s come full circle. We are now back in the building that we had our café in when we first started out here in Wood River in ‘95.”

However, Iskarous said, “the inside is going to look nothing like it did when it was T.R.’s.” They’ve just completed Phase 1 of the project: renovating the building’s lower level and moving the nonprofits in, a process that was lengthened by the pandemic. Phase 2 will be completing the upper levels for existing nonprofits to move into, with some room for additional ones to join.

The new building’s 17,000 additional square feet will also give the nonprofits room to expand their services. For example, at their old location, they were only able to offer one shower and one washer and dryer set - all connected to the same small water heater - to the area’s homeless population. This new location will allow them to eventually open two full showers with lots of hot water and much more.

“There wasn’t enough hot water to heat for your laundry and to do a shower, so you showered first and then did your laundry in cold water,” Iskarous said. “Here in the new building, that was a priority of mine. I said, ‘We will have plenty of hot water - and not only that, we’re going to have two large showering units that will have a sink and a mirror in each one of them, and then we’re going to have two sets of washers and dryers ... this way, we’re just going to be able to offer that to some of our most vulnerable population, and I’m so excited about that.’”

The new showering units will be housed upstairs, along with their [Amare](#) and [SOAR](#) programs. Riverbend Family Ministries hopes to have Phase 2 completed by late this summer or early fall, depending on funding, contractors and supplies. Iskarous said she’s been grateful for the contributions from the community thus far.

“I say it’s about community serving community,” Iskarous said. “Many of our trades across Madison County have come in and poured in time, talent, resources into getting this first phase completed, with the promise of helping in Phase 2 once we get it started. We’re so thankful for our community and how they’ve wrapped around Riverbend for the last 15 years, and it’s because of the community that we get to serve our families that are in crisis - and with the new space, it just means we get to offer more services and serve more families.”

To learn more about Riverbend Family Ministries and their programs, visit [riverbendfamilyministries.com](http://riverbendfamilyministries.com) or visit their [Facebook page](#).

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