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The Art of Community

How the Steenos Make Their City Shine

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Met the Steeno family, a dynamic trio based in Milwaukee with roots stretching back to Green Bay and Pulaski, Wisconsin. James and Heidi Steeno met during their college years at UW Oshkosh, where they both completed their education. Their love story began at Henri's Music in Green Bay, where they worked summer jobs together, a serendipitous meeting that laid the foundation for their journey as a family.

James, who grew up in Green Bay, and Heidi, originally from Pulaski, have raised their daughter Simone to embrace education, ambition, and compassion. Now 18 and a senior at Divine Savior Holy Angels High School (DSHA) in Milwaukee, Simone is at the cusp of exciting new chapters as she prepares for life beyond high school.

The Steeno household also includes two beloved four-legged family members: Dickens, a terrier mix, and Clarice, a spirited chihuahua. Both

pups were adopted from a local rescue organization that transports animals from Texas, adding an extra layer of heartwarming chaos to their home.

From shared memories that began in a college music store to their current life filled with family, school, and furry companions, the Steenos exemplify the balance of love, laughter, and togetherness that makes a family truly special.

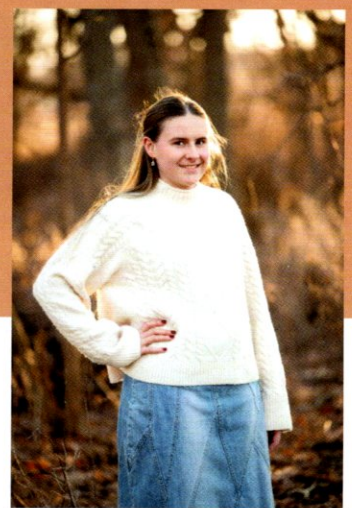
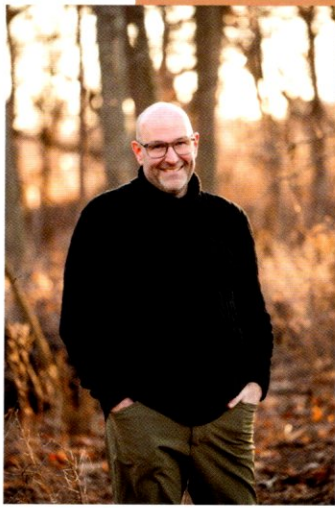
Family Talents: Creativity, Partnership, and World-Class Running

For James Steeno, childhood dreams of becoming an artist or illustrator weren't just flights of fancy—they were the seeds of a lifelong passion. Growing up surrounded by comic books, cartoons, richly illustrated storybooks, and art history books, James was captivated by the timeless power of art. He admired how artists from centuries past seemed to speak directly to future generations, and he wanted to be part of that enduring tradition.



Today, James has turned that dream into a vibrant career. As an artist and illustrator, he works primarily with pen, ink, and watercolor, creating pieces that range from whimsical and fun to deeply detailed depictions of local landscapes. His art is available in shops, boutiques, and galleries, and he participates in popular events like Tosa's Art 64. You can also find his creations online via his Etsy shop or by following him on social media.

James's wife, Heidi, is his business partner at the James Steeno Gallery. As a creative entrepreneur and advocate for the visual arts, she's passionate about supporting local businesses and fostering community connections through their shared work. Together, they've built a gallery that's not only a showcase for James's talent but also a reflection of their shared love for creativity and the local arts scene.



Their daughter, Simone, has carved her own unique path. A competitive long-distance runner, she recently completed her first half marathon in November 2024. Beyond her athletic pursuits, Simone is an accomplished sewist with a passion for exploring the world. Her creative and adventurous spirit perfectly complements the artistic

foundation her parents have built.

Pedals, Puzzles, and Personal Bests: The Steeno Approach to Hobbies

When it comes to hobbies, the Steenos know how to stay active and creative. For James, biking and cycling top the list, closely followed by competitive jigsaw puzzling—a unique and focused pastime that exercises both patience

and problem-solving skills. When he's not tackling a puzzle or out on his bike, James enjoys reading, though he jokes it often depends on how tired he is!

Heidi shares James's love of biking and cycling, and together, they logged an impressive 3,000 miles in 2024, exploring the streets and trails throughout Milwaukee

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ROOTED IN Wauwatosa

The roots of our family tree run deep in Wauwatosa. As a lifelong resident now raising my family here, nothing feels more at home than helping **YOU**. I grew up in a lively household along four sisters and wonderful parents—especially my mother who to this day still leads the way with integrity and strong values.

Double Boldt Real Estate's philosophy is not any different—focus on family, community and the principle belief that people matter most. This at the true core of our business model. We feel truly blessed to be able to practice my personal core values in the neighborhoods we love most by delivering results, going the extra mile for you and always doing the right thing.



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County. Their favorite routes include the scenic Oak Leaf Trail and the Hank Aaron State Trail, where they enjoy the blend of nature and city life. Heidi's other passions include flower gardening, with an enviable collection of both outdoor blooms and indoor houseplants, and vegetarian cooking, where she brings creativity and flavor to her meals.

One of their most cherished traditions takes place each March when James and Heidi embark on a 10-mile walk along the Oak Leaf Trail, starting from their home in Washington Heights. Every year, they challenge themselves to beat their previous time, and in 2024, they clocked their fastest yet at 2 hours and 38 minutes. As March approaches, they're already gearing up for the 2025 walk, ready to tackle the trail and aim for a new personal best.

Whether it's cycling thousands of miles, nurturing a flourishing garden, or competing with time on the trail, the Steenos embody the perfect mix of activity and artistry in their everyday lives.

Finding Beauty in the Everyday: James Steeno's Passion and Resilience

For James Steeno, art is more than a career—it's a calling and a responsibility. His passion lies in creating artwork that invites people to see the world around them in a new light. Whether it's a familiar local landmark or a common theme, James believes art can transform the ordinary into something extraordinary. "We can all become acclimated to things we see from day to day and stop noticing them," James explains. "But when these familiar places and themes are presented through art, they become extraordinary and beautiful again."

This passion for art and the local community is deeply rooted in James's journey. One of his greatest challenges came during the Great Recession of 2008–2009, when the marketing company he worked for as a creative director shut down. With job opportunities for creatives scarce, James faced an uncertain future. Fortunately, this hardship led to a turning point in his career. Around the same time, Etsy emerged as a platform for artists to share their work with a global audience.

James took the leap, establishing himself as an independent artist through Etsy and by participating in local art shows and special events. Over time, his talent and perseverance paid off, allowing him to build a thriving business from his home studio. Today, James's story is a testament to resilience, creativity, and the ability to turn challenges into opportunities.

Adventures and Traditions: The Steeno Family's Vibrant Life

The Steeno family has made spring break travel a tradition, exploring new destinations each year. This year's adventure will take them to Paris, adding to an impressive list of past trips that includes Puerto Rico, Hawaii, St. John, St. Croix, and the Bahamas.

Simone shares her family's love of travel. Through school and work, she's visited Washington, D.C., Italy, Costa Rica (upcoming), and Wyoming's Yellowstone and Teton National Parks. Her summer jobs at the Urban

Ecology Center, Schlitz Audubon Nature Center, and Milwaukee Kayak Company reflect her adventurous spirit.

At home, the Steenos embrace festive traditions. Each October, they transform their yard into a Halloween wonderland, joining their neighborhood's colorful, spooky energy. Another cherished tradition is the annual Father/Daughter Dance. James and Simone have attended together since her grade school days, including high school events at the Pfister Hotel. This year's dance will be especially meaningful as it marks their final one before Simone graduates.

A Family That Gives Back: The Steeno Spirit of Community

The Steeno family stands out for their unwavering commitment to their community, always ready to lend a hand. Whether picking up trash, organizing events, or rescuing animals, their dedication shines. A memorable example came in February 2021 when they teamed up with Billy's Posse to search for and recover a lost dog in Washington Park, reuniting it with its grateful family after several weeks. In another heartwarming act, Heidi volunteered with Rescue Gang in January 2019, driving to Abilene, Texas, to transport 27 rescue dogs on their "freedom ride" back to Milwaukee.

Their family motto reflects their ethos: "*Lend a hand and make a difference.*" As owners of the James Steeno Gallery, James and Heidi have been in business for 17 years, transforming James's passion for art into a thriving career (as detailed earlier). Beyond their business, the Steenos are deeply connected to Milwaukee's west side, which they've called home for over 20 years.

Since the disruptions of the pandemic in 2020, they've found creative ways to foster community through art. From hosting arts events in front yards and parks to collaborating with neighborhood organizations and businesses, the Steenos are passionate about activating spaces and bringing people together. Their work with non-traditional creative businesses has added a unique thread to the fabric of their community, ensuring its charm and individuality continue to thrive.

Building Community Through Volunteerism and Creativity

James and Heidi Steeno are deeply involved in their community through extensive volunteer work, particularly with the Washington Heights Neighborhood Association (WHNA). Heidi serves as WHNA's president, edits the *Washington Heights Highlighter Magazine*, and organizes the beloved *Spooktacular*, Milwaukee's longest-running annual nighttime trick-or-treating event. Celebrating its 37th year in 2025, *Spooktacular* has become a cherished tradition for local families.

James contributes his creative talents as the designer for the *Highlighter* magazine and assists with various WHNA initiatives throughout the year, including the much-anticipated *Spooktacular*. The Steenos also volunteer at their daughter Simone's school and the clubs, organizations, and sports teams she's involved with.



For Heidi, volunteering is a way to shape the community she loves. "It's the best way to get involved and create the neighborhood you want to live in," she shares. As an unofficial ambassador of Milwaukee and Washington Heights, she finds joy in sharing her love for the area wherever she goes.

One of their most rewarding projects is the *TOSA Locally Made Pop-Up* series. Since the pandemic in 2020, the Steenos have collaborated with Friends of Hoyt Park to transform The Landing at Hoyt Park into a vibrant outdoor arts event. These creative hikes, held three times a year, showcase local artists, makers, bakers, and crafters in a unique beer garden setting. Upcoming 2025 dates include May 3, October 4, and December 6.

The Steenos believe these events honor the vision of Milwaukee County's green spaces as places for renewal and connection. By fostering active placemaking and creative expression, they continue to enliven their neighborhood and inspire others to participate in community life.

Home Sweet Tosa: A Community to Celebrate

For the Steeno family, Wauwatosa—and specifically Washington Heights—is more than just where they live; it's home. They describe their neighborhood as a "city within a city," where neighbors are quick to lend a hand, share a smile, and wave hello. "We might be biased, but we think our block in Washington Heights is the best block in the whole city," they admit with pride. Having lived here for over half their lives, James and Heidi wholeheartedly embrace and cherish the city where they live, work, and play.

Their message to neighbors is simple but heartfelt: *"Get out, get involved, support local artists, makers, and small businesses, and take advantage of the parks, trails, and green spaces that make our community unique."*

The Steenos are avid supporters of local restaurants like Wy'East Pizza, Le Reve, and Hector's. They enjoy exploring the Oak Leaf Trail and Hank Aaron State Trail and attending art fairs, street festivals, and makers markets like Milwaukee Makers Market, TOSA Fest, and Make Art MKE. Shopping local is also a priority, with favorite spots including Spruced on Vliet Street, Happy Buddha Boutique, and Rainbow Booksellers.



In the summer, you'll often find them strolling through the TOSA Farmers Market or West Allis Farmers Market, supporting vendors like Sugar Studio and Clario Farms.

To learn more about James's art, including his latest projects and upcoming events, visit his website at www.jamessteeno.com. Whether it's through his vibrant artwork or their family's active community involvement, the Steenos embody the spirit of Wauwatosa—a city full of heart, creativity, and connection.

