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ATHLETIC DRIVE: MEET BODYBUILDER CHRISTINE SCHMIEDEN

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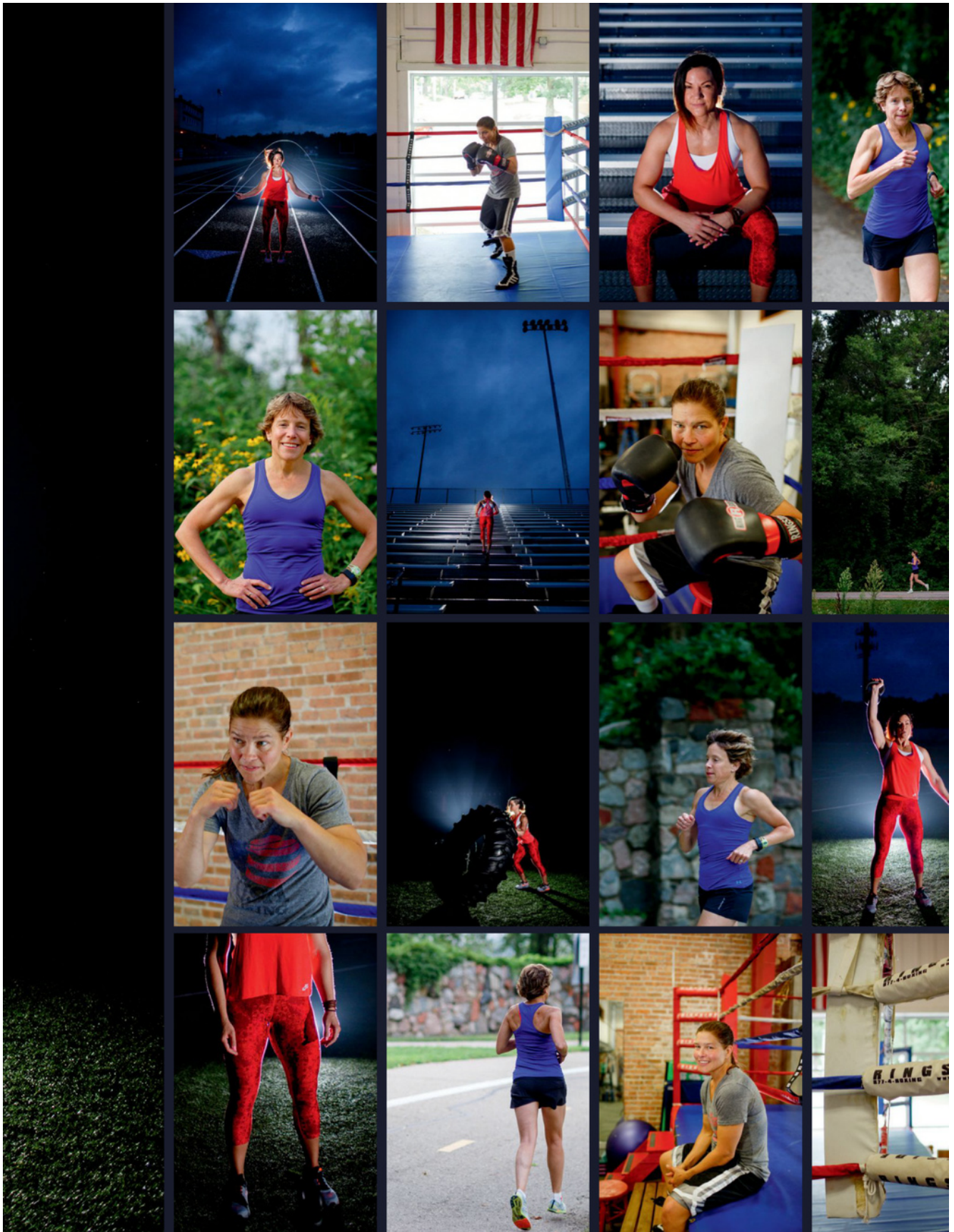
GETTING EXTREME



BY EMILY LEAS // PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOSH WITZEL

WHAT DRIVES a woman to STEP IN THE RING and face down an opponent? RUN 50 MILES, or maybe 100? BUILD A BODY worthy of competition? Three local athletes share their extreme sport experiences, what makes them tick and how we can all STRIVE TO BE MORE.





Tromping through the woods with her dad, cutting down trees, clearing brush. This was how retired professional boxer Andrea Nelson spent her childhood.

“I don’t know if I’d call myself a tom-boy, but I always rebelled against gender roles,” Nelson says. “If something was a little scary, or someone said ‘you probably shouldn’t do that,’ I was drawn to it, just to prove that I could do it.”

This mentality is what lured Nelson to martial arts in her mid-20s (where she earned a first-degree black belt in Okinawa weaponry), and ultimately professional boxing in her early 30s.

Nelson partnered with Bob Lynch, trainer to Olympic and professional boxers, and coach at Ford’s Gym in Madison, and was immediately hooked.

“It’s something about the challenge of it being just you and someone else, toe to toe, in the ring,” she says. “It’s more like you’re fighting yourself. Getting in there and attacking your own demons.”

As the only female boxer in Madison in the early 2000s, Nelson had trouble finding amateur fights. So she trained harder—“almost obsessively,” she says—turned professional and pushed herself to a 9 win, 1 draw and 1 loss record.

Nelson attributes the lack of female fights partially to the promoters and the public. “They were never really sure how to promote it, and the public wasn’t sure they wanted to see two physically strong women fighting,” she says.

From inside the ring, Nelson saw herself as an athlete, but outside the ring, the promoters wanted to sexualize the sport. When Nelson was competing, it was often the former Playboy bunny, fake boobs and tight shorts that got the top billing.

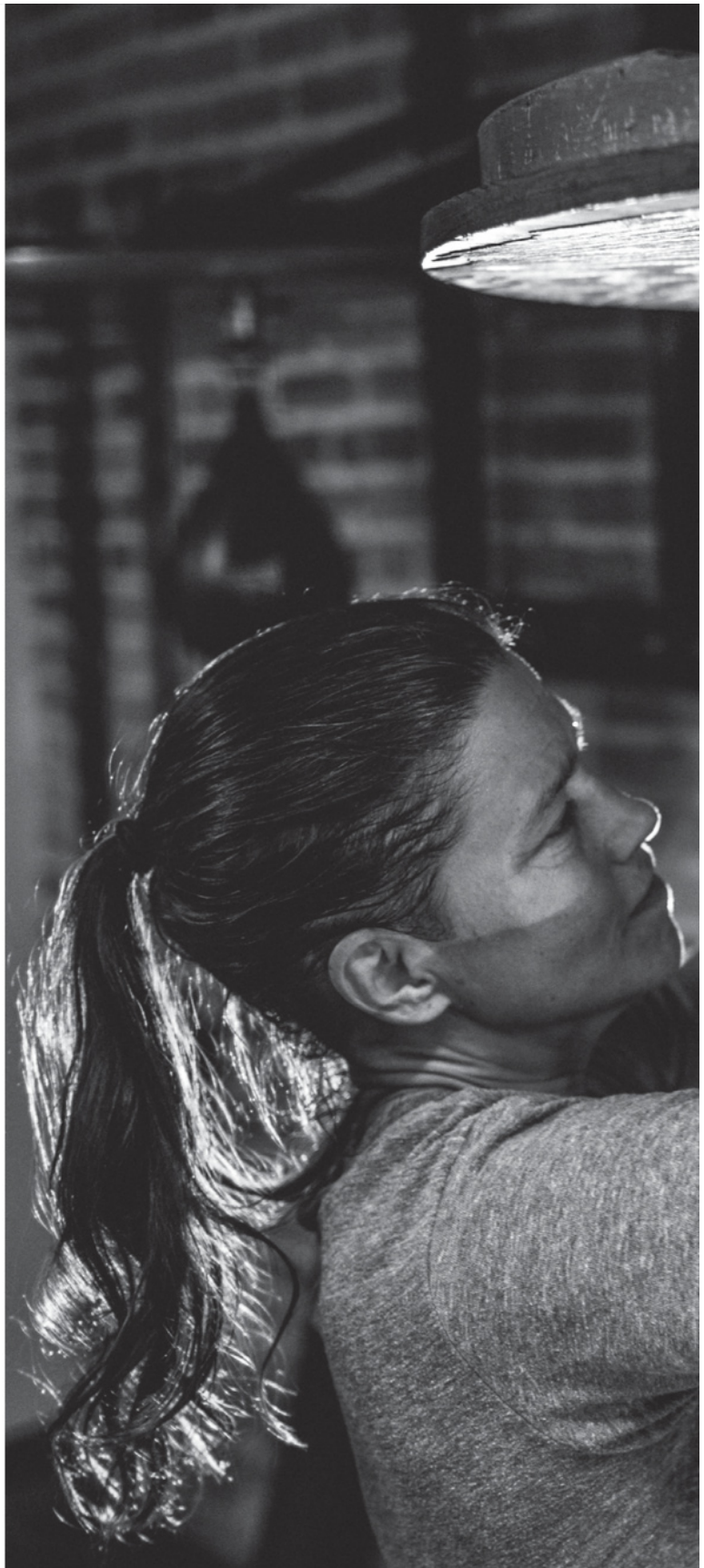
After retiring in 2003, Nelson admits the transition was hard.

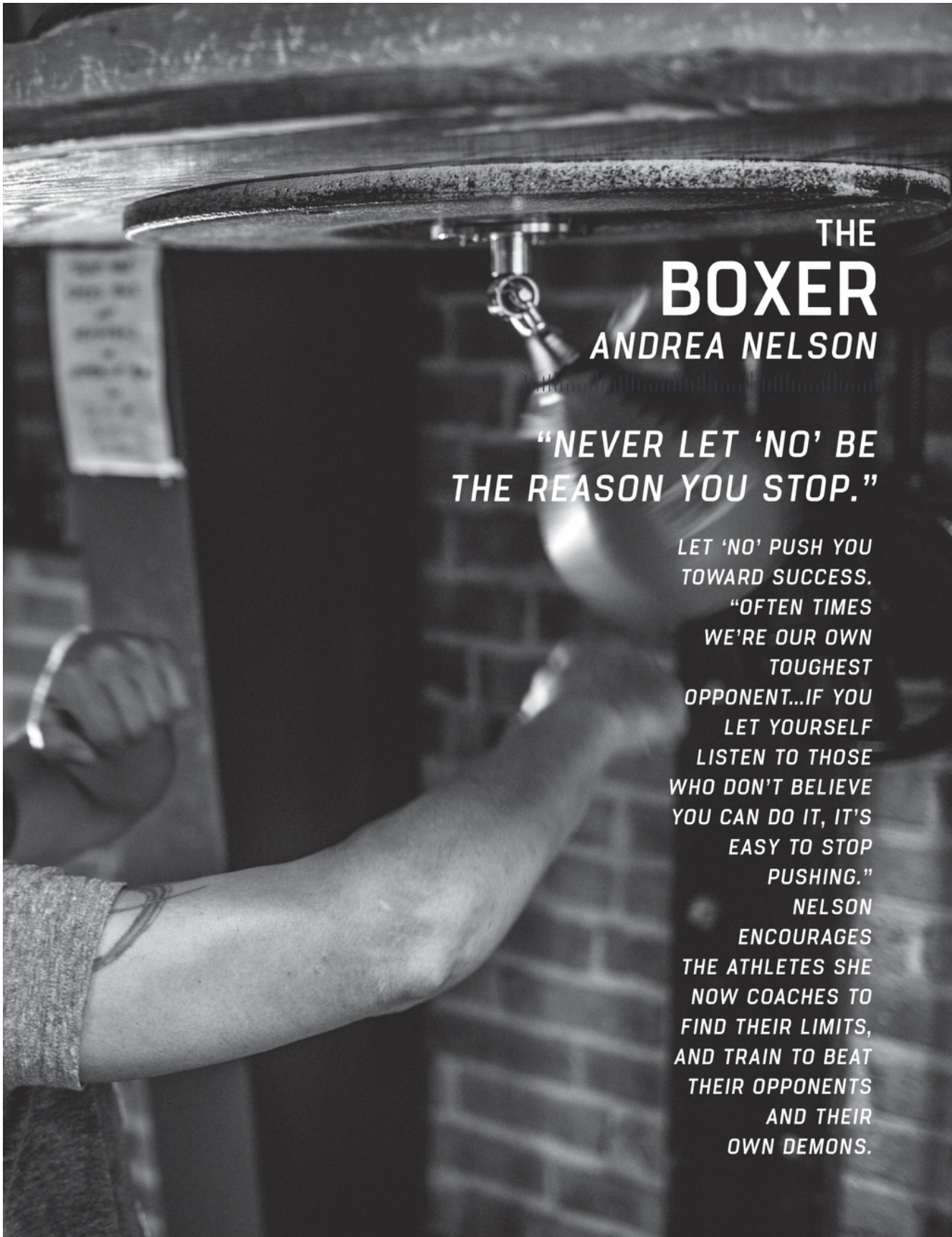
“I was pretty depressed,” she says. “Boxing had absorbed my every waking moment for years. It was really hard to quit.”

Instead of throwing away her years of experience in the ring, Nelson went back to school for a degree in sports medicine, and now coaches classes and private lessons at Ford’s Gym.

On top of that, she had a couple of kids and started her own prairie restoration business.

“I’m always pushing myself,” she says. “When I’m challenging myself, that’s how I know I’m succeeding.”





THE
BOXER
ANDREA NELSON

**“NEVER LET ‘NO’ BE
THE REASON YOU STOP.”**

LET ‘NO’ PUSH YOU
TOWARD SUCCESS.

“OFTEN TIMES
WE’RE OUR OWN
TOUGHEST
OPPONENT...IF YOU
LET YOURSELF
LISTEN TO THOSE
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NELSON
ENCOURAGES
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NOW COACHES TO
FIND THEIR LIMITS,
AND TRAIN TO BEAT
THEIR OPPONENTS
AND THEIR
OWN DEMONS.

THE ULTRA RUNNER

ANN HEASLETT

**“MY BODY
IS MY VEHICLE.”**

GOING THE DISTANCE REQUIRES TRAINING AND SELF-MOTIVATION. KNOW YOUR BODY'S CUES WHEN THINGS AREN'T RIGHT. “EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT. I KNOW THAT WHEN I GET EMOTIONAL DURING A RACE, I NEED SOME GEL, SUGAR, LIQUID, FOOD. SOME PEOPLE GET IRRITABLE OR LESS COORDINATED. KNOWING HOW YOUR BODY REACTS TO STRESS WILL HELP YOU GO FARTHER,” SAYS HEASLETT.





Until she was 32, psychiatrist Ann Heaslett couldn't imagine running longer than the 5K and 10K distance she had mastered at UW-La Crosse. Then she ran a marathon. Then a 50K (31 miles). Then a 50-mile race. Then a 100K (62.1 miles), a 100-mile and a 24-hour race.

To most people, even most runners, these distances sound daunting, and let's admit it, a little nuts.

Heaslett says that before her first 50-mile race at the Ice Age Trail 50 in 1999, she even thought to herself, "I can't imagine running 50 miles. A 50K sounds so far. When I drive in my car that seems really far!"

She earned second place at that event. This unexpected performance catapulted Heaslett to the national stage, and eventually, the world stage when she qualified for the 100K World Championship in 2000, and 2002-2005.

What motivates a person to start running these distances?

"It was a scary transition," says Heaslett. "But I was finding success and it gave me such confidence and motivation to push forward. And I received excellent mentoring from my experienced running friends."

Heaslett says the mentoring and coaching was critical because there is so much preparation for a race that could last eight to 12 hours, from the shoes to the fuel, the right clothing, and ultimately, the mental tenacity to push through to the end.

"During races, I often find myself questioning my training...maybe I should have done more speed work or maybe my longest long run wasn't long enough," she says. "I try to put those thoughts out of my mind, but do use them later to try to motivate myself to get out the door when training for my next event."

Training for ultra distances at a competitive level, often running 70 to 100 miles per week, takes its toll

on anybody, so after the 2005 season, Heaslett took a couple of years off.

As a clinical psychiatrist working with chronic inpatients at Mendota Mental Health, Heaslett now uses running as a way to relieve stress.

"In my job, the pace at which my patients improve is slow and there is very little closure," she says. "I may have spent all day working with a patient that will always need care, but I can escape to my run, do it, and it's complete. It really balances things in my head."

As Heaslett dives into her early 50s, her pace may have slowed, but her competitive spirit has not.

"As I've aged, I've had to change the way I define success and in turn how I define my goals for competition," she says. "It's about knowing that maintaining is just as good as improving."

Now, instead of going for first place in a 100-miler, Heaslett targets other 50 year olds and is crushing age group records across the country.



THE BODYBUILDER

CHRISTINE SCHMIEDEN

**“THE MOST IMPORTANT
THING TO DO IS FIND
SOMETHING YOU LOVE.”**

**“IF YOU TRY TO FIT
YOURSELF INTO A
MOLD, OR TO BE LIKE
A SPECIFIC PERSON,
SUCCESS WILL BE
HARD TO ACHIEVE...
TAKE A STEP BACK
AND ASSESS WHAT
SUCCESS MEANS
TO YOU. WHAT ARE
YOUR GOALS? WHAT
DO YOU ENJOY?
THEN PRIORITIZE IT
IN YOUR LIFE AND
MAKE IT HAPPEN.”**

Check out Schmieden’s “WOW”
Workshops—women only wellness—
the last Wednesday of each month
at the Fitchburg Library, 7 p.m.