



# Preserving Legacies

A local entrepreneur re-creates memories.

BY LISA HEISE  
Contributed photos

**Linda O’Connell is no stranger** to transitions; she spends her days making them. Owner of Take 5 Productions in Onalaska,



Linda O’Connell, Take 5 Productions

O’Connell is an expert at reimagining memories and family histories. Clients from around the Coulee Region and beyond bring her their old photo albums, cassette tapes, VHS tapes and reels of film. O’Connell transitions the old into the new, converting the images and videos to digital files and saving them on CDs or flash drives. A customer favorite is a DVD featuring images or old film set to music that O’Connell selects.

She takes fragile, finite depictions of family connections—of birthdays, dances, weddings, sometimes entire lifetimes—and she renews them so they can be enjoyed for many more generations.

## A career built on rebuilding

Restoring legacies wasn’t always O’Connell’s profession. She began her career as an inside sales manager for a local construction-supply company. When the industry struggled in 2009, O’Connell was laid off. “Every Friday they would call a new group in, and those people would come out and pack up their offices. One Friday, they called my name,” says O’Connell. She had been doing small video conversion and photo restoration projects for a couple of years by then, and she decided to try it full time.

Reimagining her career path has been rewarding. She doesn’t miss

working in a cubicle, says O’Connell, glancing out her home office window at the Brice Prairie countryside. Her daughter, Melissa, was a freshman in high school when O’Connell made the transition to a home office. Melissa often popped in to the office after school to talk about her day, and O’Connell treasured those moments.

## Memories and memorials

She has also treasured opportunities to help preserve important memories, and she has a story to go with every client. “One guy came in and dumped a huge box of photos on my desk and asked me to put together something nice for his wife’s birthday,” she laughs. The challenge was that the photos weren’t in any kind of order and very few had notes on them. O’Connell looked for themes in the photos and turned them into a DVD for the family to cherish.

Sometimes, however, the stories are more somber. She has created memorial DVDs for children who have passed away, and she even made one for an entire family who was killed in a tragic accident. Many times, loved ones struggle with the process of going through old photos and videos after a loss, and O’Connell is a vital aid for them during a time of heartbreak.

Sometimes, people don’t even know what they have. “One lady had reel that wasn’t marked,” says O’Connell. “I sent her a picture of a frame from the reel, and she called me in tears. This was a film of her grandfather, who passed away in 1982. She had never seen the film.”

Her job is rewarding, shares O’Connell, because it touches people on an emotional level. “If I don’t make you laugh and cry, then I haven’t done my job,” she says. [crw](#)

*Lisa Heise is a local freelance writer who lives and teaches in La Crosse.*