

The Farhas, an Active, Outdoor Family

By Cheryl Wooten

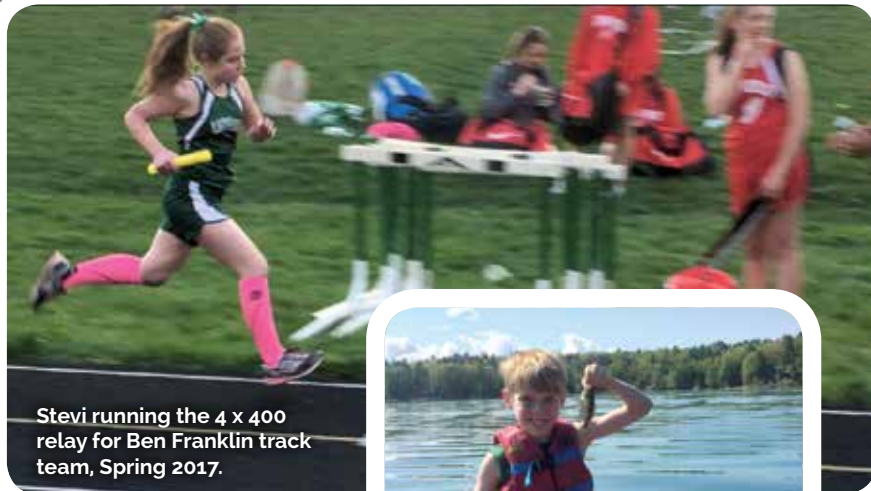
For Darron, Kelli and their three kids, the hardest part of moving from Kansas was having no friends or relatives within 700 miles. But it didn't take long to make new friends in Aberdeen. "Within an hour of moving into our house, the doorbell rang with kids wanting to play and it's never stopped!" laughs Kelli.

They chose Aberdeen because it reminded them of the neighborhoods they grew up in where kids played flashlight tag and ghost in the graveyard. "When we first looked at our house there were about ten children playing in their yards and more rolling through the grass," Kelli shares. The neighborhood pool was another reason. "Our kids love to swim and we can walk to the pool from our house." They also enjoy block parties, grilling and fire pit gatherings with neighbors. Even Halloween involves having friends over for homemade chili and wearing creative costumes.

Over the past eight years the Farhas have discovered and enjoy the local farmer's market, Urschel ice-skating pavilion and Lake Michigan. Their first visit to Indiana Dunes State Park left them impressed. "It looks like an ocean beach and we'd never seen the dunes before. It was unbelievable," says Darron. "Our whole family enjoys jogging and hiking on the trails there." They also found it serendipitous to be so close to Chicago. "We've always loved Chicago," says Kelli. "Once, while staying at a downtown hotel, we found a door open to the roof. We sat up there listening to the city and looking at the stars. It was magical."

It was Darron's career that brought the family to Valparaiso in 2009. "I was practicing law in higher education as General Counsel at Pittsburg State University in Kansas when I accepted my current position as Vice President and General Counsel at Valparaiso University," says Darron. Kelli, a psychologist, began teaching as graduate faculty for the Clinical Mental Health Counseling master's program at Valparaiso University but last month started a new job at Chicago's Jesse Brown VA Medical Center with a duty station at the Adam Benjamin Jr. Clinic where she will serve as the mental health coordinator and staff psychologist.

Kelli and Darron met as freshman at Pittsburg State University in Kansas. "We were introduced by a mutual friend from Darron's high school," she shares. "When we were dating, we liked to run and study together. When Darron's parents saw him studying more and my parents saw me having more fun and studying less, they thought it was a good situation," laughs Kelli. They married five years later and just celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary.



Stevi running the 4 x 400 relay for Ben Franklin track team, Spring 2017.

Sammie fishing in Bear Lake, Kalkaska, MI





Kelli and Darron as the odd couple, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, last Halloween.



The family skiing at Boyne Mountain, Boyne City, MI.

The Farhas are an active, outdoor family. "We all like to run and do anything outside. But we don't camp," laughs Kelli. "That's my fault. I prefer to sleep indoors, but the rest of my family happily sleeps outside in hammocks all night." The family likes to fish, boat, swim, canoe, waterski, wakeboard, tube and stand up paddleboard. They've also fallen in love with northern Michigan and head up there often. In winter, they like to snow ski at Boyne Mountain. Even their dogs, Moxie a Yorkie/Maltese mix and their Shih Tzu Saied (adopted from the Porter County Animal Shelter), tag along for some of the family adventures.

Their son Carlson (14) and daughter Stevi (13) run cross-country and track and their son Sammie (9) plays soccer and hunts bullfrogs. Yes, bullfrogs. Darron's outdoorsman friend introduced Sammie to hunting bullfrogs while on a Michigan canoe trip. "Sammie's really good at it," says Darron. "You catch them at night by shining a flashlight into their eyes which blinds them and then you just pick them up." It's Darron's job to gut and clean them. As for the taste of bullfrog, according to Kelli, "It's a cross between chicken and fish. Anything breaded and fried can taste good," she laughs.

Bullfrogs are occasional fare, but most nights, dinner at the Farhas is more conventional. "Darron is Lebanese, I'm Italian and we both love to cook," says Kelli. "I remember when we were dating in college, Darron would make breakfast and bring it to me then drop me off at class. He still makes my lunches," she shares. "We try to have dinner together every night. I like to make pasta dishes, Italian sausage and polenta and Darron likes to grill.

"In Kansas City, barbequing is big. I do ribs and like to smoke pork shoulders for pulled pork," says Darron. His father and grandmother were great cooks. When Kelli's parents come to visit, it's not uncommon for them to bring a huge stockpile of Kansas beef and Italian sausage to fill up the freezer. Their daughter Stevi also likes to cook and already this summer she's made many of the family's meals.

When they need a break from cooking, their favorite restaurant in Valpo is Meditrina. "Their grape leaves taste like my aunt's and they have great hummus and tabouli," shares Darron. "There's also a restaurant in St. Joseph, Michigan called La Pita that has amazing Mediterranean food like kebi nayee, falafel and lentil soup."

Whether it's eating, running or boating together, the Farhas make it a point at least once a month to dedicate the whole weekend to being together as a family. "We really believe that a key to staying together as a family is to spend time together," says Kelli. "It's getting harder as the kids get older, but it's worth



Carlson running for Ben Franklin XC team, Fall 2016.

giving up other activities for the sake of family."

The Farhas attend St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Students Center near the VU campus where Darron serves as Eucharistic Minister and Kelli has taught children's liturgy and Catholic education classes. "It's a very close-knit church with lots of students and community members," shares Kelli. Darron is also a Chamber of Commerce board member.

Although they miss their family, they still find time to get together with them and they're "thankful to have made so many great friends here," Kelli shares. "They really have become our Indiana family."

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