

# Photographer finds 'Rockwell's America'

Modern photos linked with Rockwell paintings in upcoming exhibition at Woodson Art Museum

By KEITH UHLIG  
WAUSAU DAILY HERALD  
KUHIG@WDHPRINT.COM

It rankles photographer Kevin Rivoli that the work of Norman Rockwell has been criticized as being too idealistic and unrealistic.

Rockwell became an

iconic American painter and illustrator by portraying quaint scenes of American life: the cop with the kid at the lunch counter, the turkey being served at Thanksgiving, the lunch counter guy leaning in to sniff the corsage on the dress of a prom-goer.

They're slices of life, and they make us feel good. And it's that "feel-good" part of Rockwell's work that drew the ire of some critics. It's just too good to be true, they said.

Rivoli learned of those charges in the early 1990s while visiting the Norman

Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass. "I had a lot of images already in my files that I thought proved otherwise," Rivoli said. "I told my wife, 'This is ridiculous.'"

Rivoli, 49, of Auburn, N.Y., didn't know it at the time, but that moment was

the genesis of a project that ended up as "In Search of Norman Rockwell's America," a book that pairs Rivoli's present-day photos with Rockwell's paintings. It also became a traveling art exhibition of the same name, which opens Saturday at the Woodson

Art Museum in Wausau.

The result is a "heart-warming" exhibition that celebrates the "everyday and the ordinary," said Erin Narloch, a curator of education at the Woodson. "There are those milestones in our

See PHOTOS, Page 5A

## Photos: 'Simple moments'

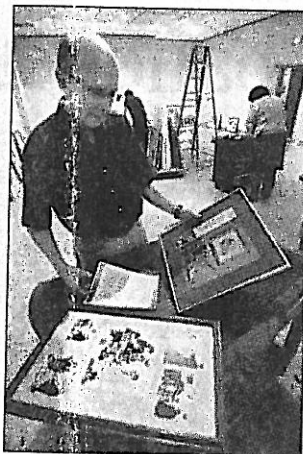
From Page 1A

life that transcend time. They're there, they're simple and they're celebrated in this exhibition."

Rivoli's photos in the exhibition and book were never meant to mimic Rockwell's paintings and illustrations. They were taken as Rivoli worked as a photographer for the newspaper in Auburn, N.Y., and then as a freelancer for organizations such as The Associated Press, The New York Times and USA Today.

But Rivoli always had a "Rockwell-esque style to my work," he said. "I was always drawn to quiet images, drawn to the good news. I always thought these are really important pictures in our lives."

It wasn't until a couple of years ago, when Rivoli and his wife, Michele, were searching for a theme under which to publish Rivoli's photos in book form, that the idea of pairing them with



COTHEY SCHJOTH/WAUSAU DAILY HERALD

**Andy McGivern, curator of exhibitions at the Woodson Art Museum, looks at pictures from Norman Rockwell and Kevin Rivoli.**

Rockwell paintings took hold.

The goal of both Rivoli and Rockwell was to highlight human connection.

"That's another purpose of the book," Rivoli said. "To remind us of these traditions and simple moments and how important they are to

### If you go

**What:** "In Search of Norman Rockwell's America"

**When:** Opens Saturday and runs through Jan. 24. Hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays

**Where:** Woodson Art Museum, 700 N. 12th St., Wausau

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** 845-7010 or [www.lywam.org](http://www.lywam.org)

### You should know:

Photographer Kevin Rivoli of Auburn, N.Y., will be in Wausau for the exhibition's opening. He'll also be the guest on Glen Moberg's "Route 51" radio show, which will air at 5 p.m. Thursday on WLBL-FM (91.9).

us. It brings a smile to your face and leaves you feeling good."