



## BEER RELEASE



**WEDNESDAY | JULY 9**

Take 16 Brewing's  
"WOODEN WARRIOR"

5:30 pm

First 50 get a free beer!

## SOUNDS AT THE MOUND

*Featuring:*



**FRIDAY | JULY 11 | 8 PM**

At Redbird Field

"Top Country Cover Band"

Free Admission

Beer Garden & Food Trucks

## 63RD HOT DOG NITE



**THURSDAY | JULY 10**

Events begin at 5:30 pm

Serving: 15,000 FREE HOT DOGS

Wiener Dog Events

Kids & Family Events

Live Band begins at 8 pm

## DUFFY'S NUTCRACKER HALF SATURDAY | JULY 12 | CITY PARK

Half Marathon Run: 6:30 am start

Half Marathon Walk: 5 am to 6 am start

Half Marathon 4 Person Relay: 6:30 am start

Half Marathon 3 Person Relay: 6:30 am start

Kids 1/2 mile (ages 9-14): 9:00 am start

Kids Short 1/2 Mile (ages 2-8): 9:20 am start



Registration includes a t-shirt and post-race snack.

<https://runsignup.com/Race/MN/Luverne/NutcrackerHalf>

## NUTCRACKER BASE RACE



**FRIDAY | JULY 11 | 5:30 PM**

**REDBIRD FIELD**

Luverne Redbirds host Windom  
playing with themed uniforms  
to win the 1st Base Race Trophy!

## NUTCRACKER DEDICATION



**SATURDAY | JULY 12 | 11 AM**

At Those Blasted Things

Celebrate with "Just For Nuts" when  
they dedicate the world's largest!  
65 foot tall nutcracker on 8 foot base

# Honor Roll of Alumni News contributors

Compiled by Johnna Ahrendt

During this past quarter ending March 31, 2025, the Alumni News received money in the form of memorials, and gifts totaling \$2,365.00. In the memorial section below, the individual being memorialized is printed in bold print, followed by the individual or individuals who made the gift. Contributions given by graduates and friends follow the list of memorials. THANK YOU, READERS!

## NOTE:

If you have recently made a contribution to the Alumni News and your name does not appear on this page, please let the staff know. Chances are your contribution was received after this page was compiled. Please watch for the next issue, July 2025, for additional names of Alumni News contributors.

Memorials and contributions may be sent to:

*Alumni News*  
709 N. Kniss Avenue  
Luverne, Minnesota 56156

## Financial summary

Balance 12/31/24:

\$61,975.96

Donations: \$2,365.00

Interest & Dividends: \$972.40

Expenses:

Postage: 2,356.38

Printing: 962.39

Labels: 718.08

Paypal Fees: 19.41

Balance 3/31/25: \$61,257.10

## Memorials

### Vance Kohl '55

Alice (Henningsen) Phillips  
'61

Margaret (Henningsen) Kohl  
'55

### Douglas Peterson '56

LHS Class of 1956

### James Wiese '57

Paula (Gerike) Jolley '57

### Bill Braa '58

LHS Class of 1958

### Marilyn (Kiebach) Carlson '58

Delores (Madison) Walters '58

### Melvin Viessman '58

LHS Class of 1958

### Eleanor (Rober) VanGuilder '59

Fred '59 & Judy (VanOtterloo)  
'59 Smeins

### DyAnn (Olson) Emery '61

Hal '60 & Donna Paulson

### Edgar VerMeer '61

Carol (Ossenfort) Oltmans '63

### Bill Johnson '63

Wesley '58 & Patti (Kirby) '63  
Pierson

### Stan Sasker '63

Carol (Ossenfort) Oltmans  
'63

Fred Vegge '63  
James '59 & Gloria

(Aanenson) '63 Rolfs

Wesley '58 & Patti (Kirby) '63  
Pierson

### Marlene (Kindt) Mann '64

Gene Salzman '54

### Michael Liebbe '64

Vicki Liebbe

## Contributions

Beth (Eberlein) O'Dea '70

David Mohler '65

Donald Dibbern '52

Garneta (Slagel) Bear '72

Jeffrey Eberlein '67

Keith Loger '69

Patricia Teclaw '76

Susan (Wethor) Wineland '95

Yvonne (Atkinson) Janning '58

## Thank you for your support

There are expenses incurred with printing, mailing and database support, and these costs are paid for with generous contributions from our alumni and readers.

ALUMNI NEWS DONATIONS/SEE PAGE 6



## LUVERNE AND ROCK COUNTY TO CELEBRATE AMERICA'S 250<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

*Activities in Rock County are planned for the last week in July – 2026*

On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The journey toward this historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond.

THE CELEBRATION IS  
CALLED: AMERICA250.

AMERICA250 – ROCK COUNTY will be a county-wide celebration worth happening and held during the annual Rock County Fair, the last week of July 2026.

Exact dates will be announced as soon as possible. Special events, activities and programs will be held throughout the week culminating in special events like: America250 Parade, America250 Party in the Park, Fireworks, and etc.

Specific dates, times and

details to be released within the next calendar year.

We invite you to make plans to join us to celebrate Rock County – our past, present and future.

Plan your class reunions, get-togethers and family reunions when there are lots of things to do...people to meet and places to be! It's going to be the RED, WHITE AND BLUE celebration of the century ... right here in your hometown!

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### **Are you getting more than one (1) Alumni News at your house?**

*If so, please call Patti Pierson at  
507-669-2371 or email her at  
[piersonprp@alliancecom.net](mailto:piersonprp@alliancecom.net)  
with the correct postal and  
email address of your children.*

*Thank you*

### **Attention snowbirds:**

If you are not going to be at the address that you got your July issue during the months of October, January, April issue if you could email me your alternative address I would appreciate it and will change it back and forth according to what month you will be gone so that we can save some money on the "temporary away" returns....thank you...

Patti Pierson [piersonprp@alliancecom.net](mailto:piersonprp@alliancecom.net),  
1-507-920-5186

or 1562 201st ST Hardwick MN 56134

# Remembering our classmates

Compiled by Carol Schumacher Serie

## 1950 – 1959

**Harold “Hal” Wildung** '52 of Golden Valley, MN, died on February 18, 2025. Hal graduated from Macalester College in 1956 with degrees in music, English and education. Later he received his master's degree in choral music from the MacPhail College of Music. He married Twyla Van Nieuwenhuyzen on November 27, 1956.

Family, friends, music and arts education were the passions of Hal's life. After teaching music in Arizona and South Dakota, he joined the Robbinsdale School District in 1959, becoming the Music Department Chair and head of vocal/choral music at Cooper High School in 1964. He moved to Armstrong High School in 1979 and taught music there until 1983, then served as Coordinator of Comprehensive Arts and Language Arts from 1984 until his retirement in 1992.

Hal is survived by his daughter, Lauri, many relatives, friends and former students.

He was preceded in death by his daughter Cathy and his former wife, Twyla.

**Daryle Schuetts** '53 of Brandon, SD, died March 3, 2025, in Canton, SD. Daryl served in the U.S. Army after high school. He married Esther Ormseth on September 15, 1957. Daryl worked as a hog buyer and commission buyer for cattle, sheep and hogs at the Sioux

Falls Stockyard and as part of the livestock inspection agency. In retirement he continued to spray weeds for local counties and test soil for CHS. He is remembered for his contributions to the horse industry in South Dakota and neighboring states as a breeder, trainer, judge, farrier, and 4-H club leader.

Daryl is survived by his wife, Esther of Brandon; daughters, Beth Ann (Bill) Marlatt of Spearfish, SD, Marcia (Chuck) Hendrickson of Chancellor, SD and Jill (Dan) Bergemann of Storden, MN; four grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; his brother, **David** '54 (Dianne) Schuetts of Des Moines, IA; and other relatives and friends.

He was preceded in death by brothers **Jim** '61 Johannsen and two in infancy; sisters Ivalene Schuetts and **Beverly** '46 Schmuck; and grandson John Daryle Schell.

## 1960 - 1969

**DyAnn (Olson) Emery** '61, of Inver Grove Heights, MN, died November 26, 2024. DyAnn married her high school sweetheart, **Wayne** '62 Emery. They moved to Inver Grove Heights where they raised their family. DyAnn did various administrative assistant jobs and was a para educator in the local schools for many years. She enjoyed reading, scrapbooking and game time with her family.

DyAnn is survived by her two children, Chad (Jackie)

Emery and Heather Emery; seven grandchildren; sister, **MaReese** '51 Cragoe; sister-in-law Martha Olson; along with many other relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her husband **Wayne**; brother **Arlen** '53 and a brother-in-law.

**Stanley Saker** '63 died February 13, 2025, in Luverne. In 1965 Stanley enlisted in the U.S. Army and served as a field radio repairman in Vietnam. He was discharged in 1968. He farmed and then worked at St. Paul Dress Beef. Stan was united in marriage to Marilyn Bieringer in Sauk Centre on January 31, 1970, and in 1971 the couple moved to Tama, IA. The couple then moved to the Saker family farm in Luverne where Stan returned to farming full time. After 30 years, they sold their dairy business. Stanley served on the Rock County Dairy Board and with the County Honor Guard, while also serving on the SWMN Pro-life board.

Stanley is survived by wife, Marilyn; three children, **Jeff** '89 (Tammy) Saker of Brandon, SD, **Tammy** '91 (Paul) VanDeBerg of Brandon, and **Randy** '94 (Lisa) Saker of Luverne; 13 grandchildren; one great-grandchild; three siblings, **Robert** '58 (Julie) of Chancellor, SD, **Clifford** '60 (Marlis) of Onamia, and **Sharon** '63 (**George** '58) Meinerts of Luverne; and other relatives and friends.



**William “Bill” Johnson ’63** died February 11, 2025, near his home in Chula Vista, CA. Bill attended Saint Mary’s College at Winona and South Dakota State University at Brookings. In 1967 he married **Sandra ’66** Block.

The couple moved to Santa Barbara, CA, when Bill was accepted into Brooks Institute of Photography. While there, Bill worked at the Sheriff’s Department as a photographer, crime scene investigator and deputy sheriff. In 1973 the couple moved to Chula Vista, where Bill was an evidence technician with the Police Department.

He subsequently trained at the FBI Academy and earned two master’s degrees, one in forensic sciences from National University, and another in human resources management from Chapman University.

Bill had a distinguished 34-year career as a crime laboratory manager and was also an educator at Southwestern College Police Academy and in the Criminal Justice program at National University. He was an avid hiker, exceptional photographer, harmonica enthusiast, and supportive father and grandfather.

Bill is survived by his son Eric (Tiffany); two grandchildren; sisters **Jean ’65** Riendeau, **Joyce ’66** Luedke, Trish Johnson, Mari Johnson, Carisa (Matthew) Kuntz, and their mother, Patt C. Johnson.

He was preceded in death by his wife, **Sandi**, in 2004.

### 1970 - 1979

**William “Bill” Frahm ’70**, long time resident of Manilla, IA, died January 8, 2025. No obituary was available.

### 1980 - 1989

**Vickie Van Dyke ’80** died February 23, 2025, at her home. After graduation from high school Vickie worked at Worthington Electric. On November 23, 1985, she was united in marriage to **Larry ’72** Van Dyke in Luverne.

The couple moved to a farm near Hardwick. Vickie was employed as an insurance underwriter at Tri-State Insurance which became Continental Western Group from 1983 to her retirement in 2015.

After retirement she worked part-time for the Luverne Ethanol Plant for a couple years. Vickie was active in her Hardwick community as Club treasurer, events organizer and participant.

Vickie is survived by her husband, **Larry “Hoke” Van Dyke** of Hardwick; children, **Mark ’05** (Jocelyn) Van Dyke of Mitchell, SD, and **Christy ’08** Van Dyke of Marshall; three grandchildren; mother, Dorothy Lass of Luverne; brother, **George ’78 (Susan ’78)** Lass of Hardwick; and many relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her father, **Roger ’55** Lass; mother-in-law, Alice Van Dyke; and father-in-law, Ronald Van Dyke.

### 2010 – 2019

**Trey “Jimmy” Phillips ’18** died on March 11, 2025, in Jackson, MN. On August 1, 2019, Trey joined the South Dakota Army National Guard, serving in the 155<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company.

He received the South Dakota service Medal, the ARCAM Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the National Defense Ribbon, and a Qualified Marksmanship Award.

Trey completed a deployment to Romania. He was an avid outdoorsman and had a passion for collecting everything and anything. He had an outgoing personality, big heart, and contagious laugh, leaving a lasting impression on those he met.

Trey is survived by his mother, Crystal Phillips of Sioux Falls; his daughter, Kinsleigh Ann of Heron Lake; Adam Whiting of Estherville, IA; many half-siblings; and numerous family members and friends.

He was preceded in death by his great grandparents; his great-uncle, Monte Phillips; his uncle, Ronny Vorakummanne; and his brother, Lucas Ove.

# Luverne Dollars for Scholars ... Did you know?

The Luverne Dollars for Scholars Chapter is a non-profit organization involving local volunteers who are interested in providing local students with financial assistance to pursue higher education.

All of the funds raised by Luverne Dollars for Scholars remain in the community and are awarded to Luverne High School graduates.

The purpose of the program is to raise money for a permanent endowment fund and to annually disperse its income in the form of scholarships to Luverne High School graduates.

Since its origin in 1983, Luverne Dollars for Scholars has awarded a total of \$7,138,475 to 2,215 LHS graduates.

It is not just the big donors who are the heart and soul of this organization.

It's the countless individuals, including LHS Alumni, who have given donations ranging from \$5 to \$50,000 who have filled the organizations coffers.

Since its inception, the Luverne Dollars for Scholars program has been the benefactor of 308 perpetual scholarships with a total endowment of over \$9.7 million.

The uniqueness of an endowment gift is that it allows a scholarship to be given each year

and every year, forever, to a fresh qualifying LHS graduate.

Gifts of \$249 or less are placed into the general fund. No designation is made on a scholarship. Gifts that are greater than \$249, but less than \$2,000, are also placed into the general fund.

With this type of gift, the principal amount is dispersed as a one-time scholarship, and the name requested by the donor is attached to such a scholarship.

A gift of \$2,000 or more becomes a perpetual scholarship. With a perpetual scholarship, only the earnings during a one-year period of time are awarded each and every year thereafter to a most recent LHS qualifying graduate.

Incidentally, additional amounts may be added to a perpetual scholarship at any time.

If you would like to contribute to, or receive more information, please write:

Luverne Dollars for Scholars  
PO Box 822  
Luverne, MN 56156

Email: [luvernedfs@gmail.com](mailto:luvernedfs@gmail.com)

Call: 507-227-4030 (Johnna Ahrendt)

Or visit: [www.luverne.dollarsforscholars.org](http://www.luverne.dollarsforscholars.org)

## Alumni News donations/continued from page 2

### Steve Ellsworth '64

Alan '73 & Dixie (Cooksley) '75 Aanenson  
Bob & Kaylene Aanenson  
Dale '60 & Lorna (Forrest) '61 Hansen  
Darlene Forrest '58  
Dave '64 & Randa (Smith) '65 Gangestad  
Greg '64 & Judith (Anderson) '65 Thone  
James '66 & Carol (Aanenson) '66 Hatting  
Jane Nelson  
Joan (Aanenson) Berry '75  
Karajo (Kopp) Schneckloth '97  
Neil & Jean Hoven  
Pam Kopp  
Rebecca (Hamann) Husen '65  
Richard '64 & Cammy (Martin) '64 Iverson

Sharlene Hillstad  
Tom & Marlene Kopp

### Judy (Mann) Gort '66

Gene Salzman '54

### Vickie (Lass) VanDyke '80

Gordon '65 & Joycelyn (Aanenson) '65 Hansen  
Hal '60 & Donna Paulson

### George & Gladys "June" Mann

Gene Salzman '54

### Pat (Hamann) Mann - Jasper Class of '70

Gene Salzman '54

# VETERAN BANNER PROJECT

## APPLICATIONS ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED FOR THE 2025 MAIN STREET VETERANS BANNER PROJECT

Applications for this project are accepted first come, first serve through May 1, 2025

**84 spots along Main Street are available annually**

Banners will be up prior to the 4th of July and will remain through the fall.  
Banners will be returned to the veteran or their sponsor when the banners come down.

**The cost of the 2025 VETERANS BANNER PROJECT is \$125**

One side of the banner will have the photo and info of the veteran and  
the other side of the banner will say "Thank You for Your Service."

Any veteran with ties to Rock County (past & present) are eligible to participate!

**LHS GRADUATES ARE ENCOURAGED TO APPLY!**

**HONOR THE BRAVE MEN & WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED OUR COUNTRY  
WITH A BANNER ON LUVERNE'S MAIN STREET!**

**Applications & info: [Www.LuverneChamber.com](http://Www.LuverneChamber.com)**

**For help or assistance: 507.283.4061**



# *Think you grew up on the best place on earth? Maybe you did!*

*Study finds Rock County among best places to raise a family*

**By Lori Sorenson**

A 2024 study lists Rock County as the second-best county to live in Minnesota, which is the No. 2 state in the nation for raising families.

This is based on data about education, housing, recreation, affordability and other factors.

According to the study by SmartAsset, a financial technology company, Rock County is the second-best county in Minnesota to raise a family, based on four criteria:

- Housing equity: the study looked at how housing prices have changed over the past five years to determine how much home values have appreciated in each county.

- Students' academic performance: the study used standardized test scores of math and reading/language arts proficiencies to measure school districts.

- Recreation and community centers per 1,000 people to measure access quality-of-life amenities.

- Child care costs to measure expense for families.

"Based on the criteria above, we created an overall index," the company stated in a news release. "The highest-ranking counties in this scoring were the best places to raise a family."

The Top 10 highest-scoring counties based on this scoring index are:

1. Lincoln County
2. Rock County
3. Douglas County
4. Murray County
5. Yellow Medicine
6. Cook County
7. Wabasha County
8. Grant County
9. Stevens County
10. Otter Tail County

Research data came from the 2022 U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Labor and Zillow

## **Minnesota No. 2 best state to raise a family**

Meanwhile, a January report from WalletHub compared the 50 U.S. states to determine which one is the best place to raise a family.

The states were evaluated across five key dimensions: family fun, health and safety, education and child care, affordability and socioeconomics.

WalletHub used 50 relevant metrics to determine

which states had the most favorable conditions for family life. Those metrics included shares of families with young children, pediatricians per capita, quality of public schools and housing affordability — each graded on a 100-point scale.

The top states have a good balance of these metrics and were ranked as follows:

Massachusetts  
Minnesota  
North Dakota  
Nebraska  
New Hampshire  
New York  
Illinois  
Wisconsin  
Maine  
Connecticut

Massachusetts topped all other states by overall measures, but it's also the most expensive state to raise a family, according to the 2024 SmartAsset study. A family of four would need to earn at least \$150,578 to make ends meet there.

The No. 2 best U.S. state in which to raise a family is Minnesota, which has the second-lowest poverty rate and the ninth-lowest wealth gap between the lowest and highest earners.

Minnesota also has the sixth-best public hospitals in the country and the fifth-lowest separation and divorce rate in the nation.

Chip Lupo, writer and analyst at WalletHub, said Minnesota has a good blend of safety and job prospects, among other positives, but these might be offset by harsh winters.

"By harsh winter, I'm talking about several weeks of sub-zero temperatures and lots of snow," he said. "But if you can withstand it, Minnesota has good schools, good hospitals and an overall good environment."

A family of four needs an annual income of \$122,387 to make ends meet in Minnesota, according to the 2024 SmartAsset report.

The cost of living in Minnesota is 4 percent lower than the national average, while housing costs are 15 percent lower.

*This story originally appeared in the March 13 Rock County Star Herald.*





Participants in the “FIT25: Becker’s Love Health and Fitness Challenge” donated \$1,200 to the Luverne Hockey Association in memory of the late Craig Becker, a 1987 LHS graduate and hockey player. In February several of Becker’s classmates and hockey teammates were part of a check presentation at the Blue Mound Ice Arena. Pictured are (from left) Steve Smedsrud, Brian Arends, Josh and Syndey Benda (Becker’s son-in-law and daughter), Julie Becker (holding her husband’s LHS hockey jersey), Fitness Challenge coordinator Tashia Klosterbuer, Jeff Wieneke, Mark Opitz and rink manager Dave Van Batavia.

## Fitness challenge raises \$1,200 in memory of 1987 LHS graduate

**By Lori Sorenson**

The Blue Mound Ice Arena received a donation in February from participants in the “FIT25: Becker’s Love Health and Fitness Challenge” in memory of the late Craig Becker.

Each year Tashia Klosterbuer organizes a fitness and weight loss challenge to raise money for a local cause.

This year participants supported the Luverne Hockey Association in memory of Becker, who died Dec. 13, 2024. He was a 1987 LHS graduate who played hockey.

In January Klosterbuer challenged her friends on social media to start out 2025 healthier and by supporting a good cause.

“With the blessing of Julie Becker, the challenge for ‘Becker’s Love’ is taking shape,” Klosterbuer wrote about the FIT25 challenge.

“Recently Julie lost the love of her life, Craig, to heart complications. She spoke lovingly of her husband and how he was one of the first hockey players in the Luverne Hockey Association. Let’s help Julie and her family carry on Becker’s Love by getting healthy and fit.”

Klosterbuer encouraged participants to improve their health and spread love and kindness in 2025.

At the end of the six-week challenge, participants gave \$600, and Julie Becker matched it with another \$600 for a \$1,200 donation to the hockey program in her husband’s memory.

On Sunday several of Becker’s classmates and hockey teammates were part of a check presentation at the Blue Mound Ice Arena.

Klosterbuer later shared another post about Becker on social media.

“Craig had many memories of playing hockey on the outdoor rink, but his favorite was when he skated coast-to-coast and scored the winning goal for a regional hockey game,” she wrote.

She said Craig believed in good character on and off the ice and that he will be remembered for “his big hugs, smile and being the life of the party.”

Julie Becker thanked the participants in the fitness challenge for their donations.

“Our family will continue to keep Craig’s legacy alive through our love for him and through random acts of kindness,” she said.

*This story originally appeared in the Feb. 27 Rock County Star Herald.*



Mavis Fodness photo/0109 Third LHS TnT House 2024

Luverne High School seniors enrolled in Today and Tomorrow's Tradesmen, a vocational education program at Luverne Public Schools, are constructing the program's third house at 409 N. East Park Street in Luverne in a partnership with the city of Luverne.

## City, students partner to build third house

**By Mavis Fodness**

A third house is under construction in a city-school partnership called Today and Tomorrow's Tradesmen that began in 2021.

The Luverne Public Schools' yearlong vocational education class trains interested seniors in the home construction process from the ground up.

The city of Luverne provides the residential lot and covers the construction expenses for the nine-month program.

Once the homes are sold, the city is reimbursed its expenses, and profits are forwarded to the school to support the program.

"The TnT program has been a great collaboration between the city and school," said Luverne City Administrator Jill Wolf.

It has provided students with hands-on opportunities in the construction trade, as well as added to the city's tax base with the addition of new houses."

Senior students provide the majority of the labor, and Darrel Van Aartsen oversees the school's TnT program.

He guides the students through the various construction phases as well as manages the needed subcontractors. "We try to keep the classes small — no more than 12 students," Van Aartsen said.

This year's class consists of eight seniors including Landon Ahrendt, Jesse Aning, Jack Gangestad, Jaden Reisch, Tucker Remme, Layne Saker, Coulter Thone and Marcus Vortherms.

Some of the career areas they experience include computer-aided design, wall construction, concrete work, electrical, plumbing, sheet rocking, roofing, landscaping, and ultimately the sale of the home.

The first home at 409 E. Dodge St. sold for \$295,500. The four-bedroom, one-and-a-half story house was previously used as office space until it was moved and set on a city-owned lot.

Students also designed and built the detached double garage.

The second home, 414 N. Spring St., was the students' first house that was constructed from the ground up. The two-bedroom, two bath home is currently on the market for \$335,000.

Van Aartsen said floor plans for each of the constructed houses have been similar: two bedrooms and two bathrooms with unfinished basements.

"Unfinished basements have the potential for family room, two bedrooms and a bathroom," Van Aartsen said. "The basement bathroom has plumbing rough-ins."

The current house is under construction at 409 N. East Park St.

"It's very similar to last year's new build but the (two-stall) garage is in the front of the house," he said.

Students work at the construction site during the school from 1:10 to 3:10 p.m., weather permitting.

*This story originally appeared in the Jan. 9 Rock County Star Herald.*





Mavis Fodness photo/1121 TOY 2025 Graber

Seana (Roberts) Graber **LHS '86** (holding plaque) is the 2025 Teacher of the Year for Luverne Public Schools. The grades 6-12 vocal music instructor has taught for 35 years, 30 of those years in Luverne. Pictured with Graber are (from left) Anne Tofteland, Quinn Graber, Keith Graber (holding Walter Degerness), Kira (Graber) Degerness, Karen Roberts and Marlyn Roberts.

## Graber selected as 2025 Teacher of the Year

### By Mavis Fodness

Seana Graber, an LHS graduate and longtime educator, is the Luverne Education Association (LEA) 2025 Teacher of the Year.

She was selected by her peers, and the announcement was made in November in the middle-high school commons, along with the Friend of Education, the Rock County Star Herald.

The announcement kicked off LEA's celebration of American Education Week.

Becky Rahm, LEA co-president, announced the Teacher of the Year nominee.

"Mrs. Graber teaches so much more than music. She teaches how to approach challenges, how to try new things, and how to work together as a group to meet high standards and reach their goals," she said. "It is clear her passion and commitment is appreciated by the community, her students and her colleagues."

Graber (nee Roberts) began teaching vocal music in Luverne 30 years ago, starting with elementary music in the fall of 1995.



The 1986 LHS graduate attended Concordia College in Moorhead, graduating in 1990 with a degree in vocal music. She later received a master's degree in leadership from Southwest Minnesota State

**GRABER IS TEACHER OF YEAR/SEE PAGE 12**

## Seana (Roberts) Graber named Teacher of the Year/continued from page 11

University in Marshall in 2010.

Her teaching career began five years before coming to Luverne in 1995. Her first teaching position was K-12 vocal music at Edgerton Public School.

Graber now teaches vocal music in grades 6-12.

“She is passionate about music and the life lessons that music participation teaches students,” Rahm said. “She has continued to enhance the strong music tradition in Luverne Schools, and her choirs are known throughout the region for their size and quality.”

In an interview after the TOY announcement, Graber said she knew since high school that her career would be as a vocal music teacher.

Her own high school music teachers helped solidify her choice.

“Pete Olson made learning an instrument fun, and Dolly Talbert gave me an opportunity to be really good at something,” Graber said. “I had always loved singing, but Dolly gave me outlets that helped me see I would love being a choir director.”

As Graber begins her 35th year in teaching, her classroom is packed with students. She has 279 students in four separate choirs.

The number is the most students she’s taught at one time since becoming the middle and high school choir director.

“Mrs. Graber creates an environment where all students, including those with special needs, feel valued and can participate meaningfully,” Rahm said. “She teaches that if something is worth doing, it’s worth doing well, and she holds students to a high standard while also being positive and appreciative with her students and parents.”

Several of Graber’s family members and her best friend attended the Monday Teacher of the Year announcement.

Parents Marlyn and Karen Roberts, husband Keith, son Quinn (2019 LHS graduate), daughter Kira Degerness (LHS 2014), and best friend Anna Tofteland attended the event. Son Mitchell (LHS 2017) was unable to attend.

Graber held grandson Walter Degerness as she accepted the Teacher of the Year award.

“I try my best every single day with the kids. I love them,” Graber said. “They are my kids. I do hold them to a high standard because that’s the way I was raised by my mom and dad. If you’re going to do something, you do it right, and so you just put your all into it and see what happens.



Mavis Fodness photo/1121 TOY 2025 Graber Teacher of the Year Seana Graber thanks her peers on Nov. 21, 2024, while holding her grandson, Walter.

*“I try my best every single day with the kids. I love them.*

*They are my kids. I do hold them to a high standard, because that’s the way I was raised by my mom and dad. If you’re going to do something, you do it right, and so you just put your all into it and see what happens.*

*“It’s really a lot of my students, too, because, I always tell them: If they weren’t the way they are, I wouldn’t teach here.”*

“It’s really a lot of my students, too, because, I always tell them: If they weren’t the way they were, I wouldn’t teach here. Thank you so, so much. I love teaching in Luverne. I loved being a student here, and I love continuing that excellence in the music department.”

*This story originally appeared in the Nov. 21, 2024, edition of the Rock County Star Herald.*





Lori Sorenson file photo/Terry Vajgrt in 2005

Terry Vajgrt retired Dec. 31, 2024, after nearly 13 years as district court judge in the Fifth Judicial District in Rock and Pipestone counties.

## Rock County District Court Judge Vajgrt retires

**By Lori Sorenson**

The honorable Terry Vajgrt retired Dec. 31 after nearly 13 years as district judge of the Fifth Judicial District.

He said his 35-year career in law has been both challenging and rewarding.

“From Day 1 I’ve thought about how fortunate I am to have been able to do this. I’ve enjoyed it,” Vajgrt said.

“I’ve had an opportunity to make an impact. That could be through consequences, but it can also mean encouragement or positive feedback for those who are doing well.”

He said presiding over two drug courts, Pipestone-Murray and Nobles-Rock, has been particularly satisfying.

“For those who are succeeding, you really see a transformation,” Vajgrt said.

“You see them redevelop relationships and sometimes get their kids back who might have been in protective custody.”

He said the program brings to light the role of chemical addiction and mental illness in criminal behavior.

“To address those issues with a team of

professionals I think is much more effective than catch and lock ‘em up,” Vajgrt said.

“There’s a time and place for incarceration ... for violent people obviously. But drug court is one of the more satisfying things I do with my responsibilities.”

### **Started in Luverne in 1990 at age 26**

His retirement marks the end of his service on the bench in Rock and Pipestone county courthouses, but Vajgrt’s career in law dates back to January 1990 when he started practicing in Luverne at 26 years old.

Don Klosterbuer hired him when the law firm was “Skewes and Klosterbuer,” and three years later it became “Skewes, Klosterbuer and Vajgrt.”

During the 16 years with the firm, he was also assistant county attorney and prosecuted local cases.

“I recognized pretty early on that I wanted to be in the courtroom, as opposed to doing transactional law or real estate or taxes,” Vajgrt said. “It’s exciting. It’s challenging. It can be nerve-wracking. But it’s rarely boring.”

He left the firm in 2005 to become a public defender. During this time he also had a private practice

**TERRY VAJGRT RETIRES/SEE PAGE 14**

## Terry Vajgrt retires as District Court Judge/continued from page 13

focusing on criminal defense work and contracts with Rock, Pipestone and Nobles counties to represent parents in child protection cases and respondents in adult civil commitment matters.

"I especially liked the child protection work," Vajgrt said, again noting that it was an opportunity to help people.

It also provided valuable experience for his next career move, becoming a judge.

### Appointed judge 2012

On Feb. 15, 2023, Vajgrt was appointed by Gov. Mark Dayton as district judge of the Fifth Judicial District, serving in Rock and Pipestone counties.

He was elected in 2014 and 2020, and after announcing his retirement in October, Gov. Tim Walz will appoint his replacement.

In announcing the vacancy, the application process opened for the Commission on Judicial Selection.

"The commission is searching for fair, experienced and civic-minded individuals to serve on the bench," the press release stated.

"The commission will consider the following qualifications for judicial office: integrity, maturity, health, judicial temperament, legal knowledge, ability, experience, and community service."

Vajgrt said of all those qualifications, temperament is among the most important.

"You're often in a stressful environment in the courtroom," he said. "So, it's important to remain calm."

Also, he said he'd add empathy to the list of qualifications.

"It's important to make every effort to ensure that people know you hear them," Vajgrt said, when asked what advice he'd have for the judge replacing him.

"Even if you rule against them, make sure they feel as though they've had an opportunity to be heard. They may dislike the result, but they should feel as though they were treated fairly."

### People to thank

Vajgrt said he's had the opportunity to work with quality people over the course of his career, and he thanked several by name.

- Attorney Don Klosterbuer "for hiring me and supporting me back then."

- Judges Tim Connell and David Christensen for their positive influence.

- Court administrators Anna Huiskes, Sandy Vrtacnik Denise Brandel and Natalie Reisch and court

reporters Monica Braa (now retired) and Lynn Dengler. "They are huge help for a judge."

- Law clerks Joe Baustian, Eli Dooyema, Ethan Rozeboom, Amanda Delany, Brittany Sandager and Natalie Llamas.

"Law clerks are hugely important," Vajgrt said. "For a lot of them it's their first job out of law school and it's an opportunity for them to really have a hands-on experience and watch other attorneys and other judges."

Just as other attorneys and judges were influential in his own career, Vajgrt said he took his role seriously guiding the law clerks.

"You can hopefully be a good influence on them and create an ethical environment and a respect for the law," Vajgrt said.

- Of all the people to thank, Vajgrt said he's grateful for the members of the public who have served on juries over the years.

"It's a very difficult and often stressful civic duty, but my impression has always been that jurors are taking those responsibilities seriously," he said.

"Obviously the justice system couldn't function without private citizens being willing to come in and sit as jurors."

While people often complain about serving on a jury, Vajgrt said many learn a new respect for the civic duty. "Most of them walk away thinking, 'That was interesting. I'm glad I had an opportunity to participate as a juror.'"

For this reason and others, Vajgrt said he's grateful to have served in southwest Minnesota.

"Locally, the system is working for the public," Vajgrt said. "I think we have good attorneys. We have dedicated personnel in the court system and my sense is that we deliver quality for the public."

### Family time and lake time in retirement

His wife, Michelle, retired in April after 34 years as a nurse anesthetist at Sanford Sioux Falls, and Vajgrt said they both look forward to spending more time with family and leisure.

They will continue living in their home near Luverne but will spend time at their lake home up north near Ely. Their three sons are graduates of LHS.

Joey (Class of 2013) and his wife, Claire, in the cities recently had a baby. John (Class of 2014) is in southern California and Tommy (Class of 2015) and his wife, Katie, are in Luverne.

*This story originally appeared in the Jan. 2 edition of the Rock County Star Herald.*

# REUNIONS IN THE MAKING



## **CLASS OF 1970 TO CELEBRATE 55 YEARS!**

**FRIDAY | JUNE 6, 2025**

**Enjoy Buffalo Days Cruise In on Main and gather at Take 16**

**SATURDAY | JUNE 7, 2025**

**Buffalo Days Parade | Main Street | 10 AM**

Those with convertibles or classics can join in the parade; classmates can walk alongside vehicles;  
Class of 70 T-shirts will be on sale at Print Express on Main Street; line up at 9:30 am

**Reunion Dinner at The Bullpen | Time TBD**

Mary Connell Steerman ([mbsteerman@msn.com](mailto:mbsteerman@msn.com))

Tanya Leicher Light ([tshirts\\_on\\_the\\_beach@yahoo.com](mailto:tshirts_on_the_beach@yahoo.com))

## **CLASS OF 1985 TO CELEBRATE 40 YEARS!**

**JULY 10-12, 2025**

**THURSDAY | JULY 10TH | HOT DOG NITE**

Gathering Downtown & Ending at Take 16

**FRIDAY | JULY 11TH**

Tour of Luverne Public Schools | 11 am | Meet at M-HS Main Door

Socializing & Fun at the Howling Dog Saloon starting at 7 pm

**SATURDAY | JULY 12TH**

Reunion Socializing & Meal | Green Lantern Bar & Grill | 6 pm

More info to follow: Connie Vande Velde ([cjvande1@hotmail.com](mailto:cjvande1@hotmail.com))

## **CLASS OF 1975 TO CELEBRATE 50 YEARS!**

**SATURDAY | SEPTEMBER 20, 2025**

**1 PM | AT LYNETTE KEMERLING'S RANCH**

**Watch for More Information to Follow!**

Anyone interested in being part of the planning or questions contact:

**JONI PETERSEN:** [jonipete@iw.net](mailto:jonipete@iw.net)

**KRIS WAKNITZ:** [krystalclear63@gmail.com](mailto:krystalclear63@gmail.com)



To list reunion plans or for help with planning

Contact: **LUVERNE AREA CHAMBER**

[luvernechamber@co.rock.mn.us](mailto:luvernechamber@co.rock.mn.us) 507-283-4061

The Chamber/CVB offers a **FREE MAILING** with  
reunion information for your class!

***Alumni News Staff:*** Cindy Arends, Jane Wildung Lanphere, Carol Schumacher Serie, Lori Sorenson  
Johnna Bowron Ahrendt, Patti Kirby Pierson and Rock County Opportunities

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***Alumni News***  
**709 North Kniss Avenue**  
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