

## New honorees to be inducted into Luverne Public Schools Alumni and Educators Halls of Fame

By **Lori Sorenson**

Several additional Luverne alumni and former educators will be inducted this fall into the Luverne Alumni Hall of Fame and Luverne Educators Hall of Fame.

The 2025 Class of the Luverne Alumni Hall of Fame and the Luverne Educator Hall of Fame will be honored in ceremonies Friday, Sept. 19, during Luverne's Homecoming celebration.

The Luverne Public Schools Hall of Fame Committee includes chairperson Craig Oftedahl, Jeanne Bowron, McKenzie Klein, Jason Berghorst, Emily Crabtree, Mark Lundgren, Cory Bloemendaal, Mike DeBates, Gary Papik and staff member Jane Lanphere.

They released the names of honorees this week.

### Alumni Hall of Fame inductees will include:

•**Dr. David Piepgras** – LHS Class of 1958: for excellence in the field of neurosurgery; serving as chair of the Department of Neurology at Mayo Clinic from 1992 to 2004; recipient of many professional awards; and extensive contributions to the field of neurosurgery throughout his career.

•**Richard Wildung** – LHS Class of 1939: for accomplishments in collegiate and professional football including for the University of Minnesota Gophers with national championships in 1940 and 141; selected eighth overall in the 1943 NFL draft by the Green Bay Packers; interrupting his career to serve in the Navy during World War II; playing

in the NFL from 1946 and played through 1953.

•**Timothy Connell** – LHS Class of 1967: for his contributions to the Rock County and Minnesota judicial systems as attorney, county attorney, and district judge; youth sports (particularly hockey); continued involvement in school and community; and regional philanthropy

•**Dyan Ebert** – LHS Class of 1986: for her contributions to the legal profession; serving as civil litigator and CEO of Quinlivan & Hughs, PA; Past President of the Minnesota Bar Association and 2021 Attorney of the Year.

### Qualifications

According to the committee, the purpose of the Alumni Hall of Fame is to “honor former students and graduates who distinguished themselves and contributed to the vision of District 2184: Learn, Live, Lead.”

Qualifications for selection to the Alumni Hall of Fame include the following at a local, regional, state, national, or international level:

- Excellence in their profession.
- Exceptional service, volunteerism or contributions to community.
- Excellence in personal endeavors.
- Exceptional contributions to education.



# Honor Roll of Alumni News contributors

Compiled by Johnna Ahrendt

During this past quarter ending June 30, 2025, the Alumni News received money in the form of memorials, and gifts totaling \$2,195.00. 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, October 2025, for additional names of Alumni News contributors.

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Memorials and contributions may be sent to:  
*Alumni News*  
709 N. Kniss Avenue  
Luverne, Minnesota 56156

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## Financial summary

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

Donations: \$2,195.00

Interest & Dividends: \$ 213.69

Expenses:

Postage: 2,339.83

Printing: 962.39

Database: 925.00

Labels: 885.15

Paypal Fees: 7.26

Balance 6/30/25: \$58,546.16

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## Memorials

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**Gloria (Schlapkohl)  
Siekmeier '50**

Joan (Padilla) Ripley '54

**Donald Abild '52**

Joan (Padilla) Ripley '54

**Elsie (Heiden) Mulligan '52**

Elaine Harms - Teacher

Eugene '56 & Char Heiden

**Hal Wildung '52**

Joyce (Turner) Sexton '53

**Betty (McClure) Hamann '54**

Joan (Padilla) Ripley '54

**Helen (Haggard) Rollag '54**

Joan (Padilla) Ripley '54

**Robert Wiese '54**

Verlyn '60 & Susan (Carter)

'62 VanBatavia

**Twylah (VanNieuwenhuyzen)  
Wildung '54**

Joan (Padilla) Ripley '54

**Vance Kohl '55**

Yvonne (Lind) Halter '55

**Eleanor (Rober)**

**VanGuilder '59**

Joyce (Turner) Sexton '53

**Audrey (Madison)**

**Greene '60**

Garfield '60 & Ellaine

Henriksen

Stanley Bagbey '58

**Bill Johnson '63**

Carol (Ossenfort) Oltmans '63

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## Contributions

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Beth (Gibson) Lilja '82

Carol (Hengeveld) Fawley '61

Elaine Harms - Teacher

Garneta (Slagel) Bear '72

James Gilbertson '52

Mike Frakes '69

Rita (Kafka) Robinson '68

## 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.

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

Applicants for a Luverne Dollars for Scholars award are evaluated on the following criteria: academic performance, scholastic aptitude, work experience, school activity and community involvement. Students are also required to write an essay describing their future aspirations as well as seek a recommendation from someone, whether a teacher or an adult who has worked with the student. These applications are due each year around February 15th. All applications are submitted through an online student profile application located on the Luverne Dollars for Scholars website.

Once all of the information is compiled, the selection process begins. Each application is assigned a number. The Luverne High School counselor verifies each student's class rank, GPA and ACT scores. Only the application number, not the applicant name, is seen throughout the rest of the scoring. Each essay is read and scored by a group of DFS board members. References, work experience, school activity and community involvement are cross checked against the computerized score assigned each applicant. Not all applicants receive a scholarship. Applications who do not reach the minimum score do not qualify for a scholarship award. None of the scholarships are based on financial need.

The total amount of scholarships paid out each year

varies. The DFS Board uses 4.5 percent of the five-year fair market value of its fund assets as a guide when determining the total to be awarded each year.

Students who receive a scholarship award of \$4,000 or less can use it all in one year, while scholarships greater than \$4,000 are divided out over multiple years, with \$4,000 being the max that can be paid out each year. Scholarship funds are not paid out until after the first semester of college has been completed. In order to receive their scholarship funds, students must maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA. Scholarship checks are paid directly to the school.

Luverne Dollars for Scholars wrapped up its 2025 awards season this May. Seventy nine qualifying Luverne High School students from the Class of 2025 were awarded \$562,500. These scholarships ranged from \$2,750 to \$12,250.

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

Wesley '58 & Patti (Kirby) '63 Pierson

### Jim Brandenburg '63

Carol (Ossenfort) Oltmans '63

Gordon "Sam" '65 & Joycelyn

(Aanenson) '65 Hansen

Wesley '58 & Patti (Kirby) '63 Pierson

### Marlyn Roberts '63

Hal '60 & Donna Paulson

Wesley '58 & Patti (Kirby) '63 Pierson

### Rosemary (Mulligan) Moerke '70

Elaine Harms - Teacher

### Vickie (Lass) VanDyke '80

Larry VanDyke '72

### Dwayne Rollag - Friend

Joan (Padilla) Ripley '54

### Tony Brandenburg (son of Jim Brandenburg '63)

Gordon "Sam" '65 & Joycelyn  
(Aanenson) '65 Hansen

# Remembering our classmates

Compiled by Carol Schumacher Serie

## 1940 – 1949

**Audrey (Pritchard) Key '49** of Mankato, died September 16, 2022, in St. Peter, MN. Audrey met her husband at her high school graduation party, and they were married on June 8, 1952. They spent 62 years together, until Robert's death in 2014. Since Robert was a music teacher and school administrator, the couple and their family lived in approximately 10 different small towns. Audrey worked at Nelson's in Luverne, at a bank in St. Paul and another in Brownston, and at the Ben Franklin in Mankato. She enjoyed many hobbies including sewing, reading, gardening and spending time with her family. During her lifetime, she survived two separate battles with cancer.

Audrey is survived by her daughters, Linda (Sue) Key of White Bear Lake and Alison Key (Bob) Nelson of Mankato; 5 grandchildren; 7 great grandchildren; and 2 great-great grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Robert, and many other relatives.

## 1950 – 1959

**Elsie (Heiden) Mulligan '52** died May 3, 2025, in Ellsworth, MN. During and after high school, Elsie worked for Northwestern Bell Telephone. She married Eugene Mulligan in Luverne on July 25, 1953. Elsie worked as the kitchen manager at the Luverne VFW and later became the manager

of the Luverne Country Kitchen where she was known for her homemade pies. She had a passion for card games, especially bridge, and was always ready to join in any game.

Elsie is survived by her children, **Kevin '72** (Diane) Mulligan, of Delano, Margaret **'Peggy' '74** (John Rauch) of Maple Grove, **Kelly '76** (Nita) Mulligan of Eden Prairie, Shannon (Mark) Oye of Luverne, **Sean '80** Mulligan of Buffalo, **Mary '83** (Dwayne) Lundy of Maple Grove, and **Mickey '84** (Michelle) Mulligan of Buffalo; 23 grandchildren; 36 great-grandchildren; brother **Eugene '56** (Charlotte) Heiden of Sioux Falls, SD; in-laws **Bill '59** (Mary Lou) Mulligan, Dale Moerke of Luverne, **Mike '66** Mulligan of Magnolia and Dorothy Mulligan of Pennsylvania; and many nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her husband Eugene; great-grandson Gavin Oye; nephew Bryan Heiden; and in-laws Robert and Mary Jean Mulligan, Donald and Ida Mulligan, Jack and Delores Mulligan, **James '54** Mulligan, **Richard '57** Mulligan, **Carol '62** Van Orden, Jan Mulligan, and **Rosie '70** Moerke.

**Robert 'Ike' Wiese '54** died April 6, 2025, in Sioux Falls, SD. Ike joined the Minnesota Army National Guard where he served from 1954 to 1964. He attended Dunwoody College in

Minneapolis, graduating in 1962. Ike married Doreen Kiffmeyer in 1963 in Waite Park, MN. They moved to Luverne in 1966 when Ike bought the family milk hauling business, where he worked until 1978. In 1978 he bought Napa Auto Parts and worked there in 2002. Ike was involved in the car culture his entire life, from drag racing, to car restoration and building street rods. Ike and Doreen toured the U.S. on motorcycle, logging just under 200,000 miles. They also enjoyed winters in Mesa, AZ during retirement.

Ike is survived by his son, **Dan '81 (Lisa '90)** Wiese, Luverne; two grandsons; and two great-granddaughters.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Doreen, and a grandson, Scott Wiese.

**Vance Kohl '55** died December 21, 2024, in Chippewa Falls, WI. He attended South Dakota State University where he obtained his Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering. On June 29, 1958, he married **Margaret '55** Henningsen. Vance worked for 30 years in the ice machine industry. For over 10 years he owned and operated Tee-A-Way Golf Course in Ladysmith, WI, before moving to Chippewa Falls.

Vance is survived by his wife, **Margaret**; sons, Korey (Nancy) Kohl of Hudson and Trent (Benida) Kohl of Delafield; 7 grandchildren; and 3 great-

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grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his older brother, **James '51**.

### 1960 - 1969

**Audrey (Madison) Greene '60** died on April 27, 2025, in Colorado Springs, CO. Audrey earned a B.A. in Home Economics from California State University, Sacramento. She lived in various locations throughout her life, including Coronado, San Jose, and Sacramento in California, as well as Chagrin Falls, OH. She worked as a bank teller in both Luverne and San Diego. Her passions were herb gardening, collecting miniature dolls and antiques.

Audrey is survived by her husband of 59 years, Captain Kenneth Greene, USN (retired); daughter, Penelope (Richard) Greene Hovey; and brother, **Charles '57** Madison.

She was preceded in death by her two brothers, **Merlin '67** and **Lloyd '63** Madison.

**James Brandenburg '63** died at his Medina, MN, home on April 4, 2025. Jim was an environmentalist, philanthropist, author and filmmaker. He attended Worthington Community College and the University of Minnesota, Duluth, where he studied Art & Art History. In 2006 he received an honorary Doctorate of Human Letters degree from the University of Minnesota. He started his photographic career at the Daily Globe in Worthington. For the next 30 years he worked as a contract photographer for the National Geographic Society, traveling worldwide. He was twice named the "Magazine Photographer of the Year" from the National Press Photographers Association. In 1988 he began publishing 10 of his best-seller books. For his environmental work, Jim received the United Nation's 500 Environmental World Achievement Award, presented to him by the King of Sweden. In 2023 he was awarded the National Geographic Lifetime Achievement Award from his fellow National Geographic photographers. Worldwide, Jim has long been considered one of the most influential nature photographers of his time with awards too

numerous to mention.

Jim and his wife, **Judy '64**, founded the Brandenburg Prairie Foundation and have helped preserve over 1,200 acres of prairie in southwest Minnesota, at Touch the Sky Northern Tallgrass Prairie. They also worked with the Minnesota Land Trust to put a Conservation Easement on Lake Judd in northern Minnesota. They made their home in Medina and Ely, MN.

Jim is survived by his wife, **Judy '64** (Frederiksen); his daughter, Heidi (Nels Pierson) Brandenburg of Ely; 3 grandchildren; and his sister **Judy '58** (Bill) Stanton of Sioux Falls; and many other friends and family.

Jim's son, Anthony Brandenburg, preceded him in death on February 24, 2025.

**Marlyn Roberts '63** died on June 22, 2025, in Luverne. Marlyn built a life rooted in service, tradition, and community. He served honorably in the U.S. Army as part of the First Cavalry Division in Vietnam. Before, during and after his military service, Marlyn worked as a barber for 50 years; his barbershop became a cornerstone of the community. He was a volunteer firefighter in Luverne for 20 years. He coached youth hockey, served as a Boy Scout and Girl Scout leader, supported 4-H, and was a hands-on volunteer who helped maintain the local outdoor rink and build the town's hockey facility. He sharpened skates and owned and operated a small archery shop out of his home. Marlyn was a founding member of the Rock County Snowmobile Club and taught snowmobile safety. He cherished camping adventures in the Boundary Waters and attending rendezvous/buckskinning events throughout the state. He was a bow hunter, trapper, and fisherman. It all was a meaningful way for him to stay connected to tradition and the outdoors.

After his retirement, Marlyn learned to play the guitar and shared his new gift with local nursing home residents and family.

Marlyn is survived by his wife of 58 years, Karen (Weins); their five children, **Seana '86** (Keith) Graber, **Thad '88** Roberts, **Tiffany '89**

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## Remembering our classmates/continued from page 5

(Paul) Snider, **Shane '91 (Heather '92)** Roberts, and **Wade '92** (Lisa) Roberts; seven grandchildren; one great-grandchild with another on the way.

He was preceded in death by many close family and friends.

**Michael Liebbe '64** died on January 24, 2025. Mike attended Muscatine Community College before transferring to the University of Iowa, where he received his B.A. in 1968, and a J.D degree in 1971. Following graduation, he continued work at the Muscatine Legal Aid as a VISTA volunteer. Mike moved to Scott County, IA, in 1972, as one of the first full-time attorneys at HELP Legal Aid. He served as Director from 1973-75. During his career, he was an Assistant County Attorney, had a private practice, was a volunteer Juvenile Court Judge, a mediator, and served for over 20 years on the Davenport Civil Service Commission. Mike was interested in an eclectic mix of people and things; hot air balloons, fountain pens, antiques, architectural history, the New York Yankees, and Democratic politics.

Mike is survived by his wife of 52 years, Vicki Miller Liebbe and their daughter Ann Hazel Thompson; 4 grandchildren; brother Bill (Penny) Liebbe, brother-in-law Mel Freeman, and a niece and 3 nephews.

He was preceded in death by his sister, Sue Dee Freeman.

**Carole (Bowman) Hemme '68** died March 16, 2025, in Sibley, IA. Carole married Robert Dunham in 1969. They divorced in 1987. On July 9, 1995, Carole married **Gordon '66** Hemme and moved to Prior Lake. She worked for various temp services before joining Beckman Coulter in Chaska and working there until her retirement in 2012. After Gordon's retirement, they moved to Arlington.

Carole is survived by her husband, **Gordon**; children Jason, Jacalyn, Jana and Jessica Dunham; 6 grandchildren; stepchildren Troy (Wendy) Hemme and Chad Hemme; 2 step grandchildren; brother **Ronald '58** Bowman; sister-in-law **Jayona '65** Bowman; and in-laws, **Glenn '62** (Glatha) Hemme, **Gary '65** (Susan) Hemme, **Ralph '71 (Lynnette '76)** Wacker; and many

nephews, cousins and friends.

**Steven Granneman '69**, of Lakeville, MN, died on June 8, 2025, at his home. Steve studied chemistry and biology at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, graduating in 1973. He moved to Minneapolis, where he met his wife, Marge. They were married on August 27, 1977, and made their home in Lakeville. Steve spent most of his career in the veterinary pharmaceutical industry. For a time, he ran his own business, New Decade Labs, employing and mentoring teens in the Farmington area, including his daughter and her friends. He also worked at Fagron in Eagan, and in retirement, he worked part-time at the vision center in Walmart. Steve, "the gentle giant", served as a local election judge for many years and volunteered at his church. He took great pride in his daughter, Jenn's, career as a teacher and author, and passed on his love of science to her and his grandson, Apollo.

Steve is survived by his wife of 48 years, Margaret; daughter, Jennifer Lee Granneman; one grandson; siblings **Dale '73** (Deborah), **Joan '76 (Bruce '75)** Fodness, **Mark '77** (Cleo), **Brian '79** (Pam), and **Stewart '80**; sister-in-law, Joni Granneman; and many loving nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his brother, **David '67**.

### 1970 – 1979

**Rosemary (Mulligan) Moerke '70** of Luverne, died May 19, 2025, in Sioux Falls, SD. Rosie attended Pipestone Vo-Tech after high school. On June 17, 1972, she married Dale Moerke in Luverne. They lived in St. Paul, San Angelo, TX, Italy, and Mountain Home, ID, during Dale's military service, then Rushmore and Worthington before settling in Luverne in 1987. During her life, Rosie worked for the Minnesota State Planning Agency, ran an in-home daycare, cooked at Country Kitchen, and made a lasting impact as a teacher's aide at Luverne High School. She found joy in the simple things – tending her flowers, chatting with friends, reading a good book

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## Remembering our classmates/*continued from page 6*

and loving every animal she met. She gave her heart fully to her family.

Rosie is survived by her husband, Dale; four children, **Aaron '93 (Shari '94)** Moerke of Sioux Falls, **Andrew '94** (Teresa) Moerke of Cottage Grove, **Alison '99** (Noel) Benjamin of Luverne, and **Alicia '02** (Rajesh Singh and his children Rohan, Rahul, and Rhea) Engelking of Sioux Falls; 7 grandchildren; brothers **William '59** (Mary Lou) Mulligan of Luverne and **Michael '66** Mulligan of Magnolia; and her sister-in-law Dorothy Mulligan of Pennsylvania.

She was preceded in death by her granddaughter, Amber Ackel; 6 brothers – Robert, Donald, Eugene, John, **James '54**, and **Richard '57** Mulligan; and her sister, **Carol '62** Van Orden.

**David Kellen '78** died May 1, 2024, in Worthington. David was born with cerebral palsy and was physically handicapped. Growing up, David had many surgeries to try and improve his legs. He graduated from Luverne High School at the age of 21 from the Special Education program. He enjoyed swimming, bowling and participating in the Special Olympics. He loved being outside and farm life, driving tractors and managing trailers for his dad. His parents loved him deeply and unconditionally. David moved into a group home setting in Worthington and worked at the Achievement Center and then at the Day Activity Center in Worthington. For decades he lived with men who became his extended family. Tony, Tim and Mike were like brothers to him. He loved his cousins and looked forward to going to the huge Serie family reunions on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

After some health issues, David was placed in a Worthington nursing home. David made friends easily and had a smile and a “good morning” for everyone there.

David is survived by two sisters, Alice (John) Schulte of Olathe, KS, and Judy (Dan) Grunwald of Ventura, IA; and many nieces and nephews and their children.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Leander and Frona Kellen; brother Bob Kellen; sisters Edna Kellen and Patricia Kellen; and nephew Scott Sweeney.

### **1980 – 1989**

**Orlando Pluim '81**, of Pipestone, died March 29, 2025. Orlando graduated from Minnesota West Community and Technical College in 1991. On June 22, 1985, he married Janice Van Ruler in Pipestone. He owned Pluim Construction and later worked at Pipestone Building Materials before retiring. Orlando had a passion for family, camping, fishing and more. He was known for his warmth, resilience, and the ability to strike up conversations with anyone.

Orlando is survived by his children, Nick (Amanda) Pluim of Fort Worth, TX, Matt Pluim (fiancée Gracie Frias) of Dallas, TX, Sean Pluim of Harrisburg, SD, and Jessica (friend, Jeremy Dobernecker) of Sugar Creek, MO; 5 grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Janice; his twin brother, Mark; and his brother-in-law, Richard Kraft.

### **Friend of Luverne Graduates**

Robert 'Bob' Bailey died March 21, 2025, in Luverne. Bob always spoke with pride of being in a racially integrated troop, one of the first under President Truman's orders to desegregate the military. His best Army buddy was Willie and a picture of the two in Korea was always on display. After his service, Bob found his professional home at Northwestern Bell, working there for more than 30 years. He held a variety of jobs thereafter with the common thread of connecting people.

Bob married Darlene Patrick in Lake Benton; they raised their family in many homes across Luverne, Albert Lea, and Mound, MN. At retirement, they upgraded their cabin in Ottertail, MN into a full-time home, though they found their way back to Luverne in 2011.

Bob is survived by his wife of 70 years, Darlene; children **Barry '72** (Carla) Bailey, **Chuck '75** (Cindy) Bailey, **Sue '77 (Tom '73)** Brakke, and **Mike '79** Bailey; 8 grandchildren; 2 step grandchildren; one great-grandchild; and several step-great-grandchildren.

Bob was preceded in death by his sisters Dorothy Orr, Betty Higley and Pat Kellogg.

## Luverne Alumni and Educators Halls of Fame/continued from page 1

The 2023 Alumni Hall of Fame members are the 1964 State Championship basketball team, Quentin Aanenson, Jim Brandenburg, Jerilyn Britz, Warren G. Herreid, Betty Soutar Mann, and Monti Ossenfort; the 2024 honorees are Thomas Getman, Marvin (Whitey) Helling, Kevin Kessler, Gary Papik and Vonda Viland.

### Educator Class of 2025 Hall of Fame inductees will include:

•**Lauren Carroll** –1972 to 2000: High school math teacher for 28 years and head boys' basketball coach from 1972-1990. His teams won two Southwest Conference championships, appeared in ten District 8 championship games, winning seven of them, and placed second in the state tournament in 1983. Overall career record of 429-235 in 29 years of coaching.

•**Gregg Gropel** –1967 to 1999: He developed the Community Education program at Luverne Schools, including the summer recreation programs; organized and established the Luverne Dollars for Scholars program in 1983, which has grown to being the second largest DFS chapter in the United States, and founded the "The Luverne Alumni News".

•**Katie Croes Hemme** – 1963 to 1999: Physical Education and Health teacher with extensive contributions as a pioneer for the development of high school girls' sports as a result of Title IX legislation, as well as adaptive PE and the Special Olympics programs at Luverne Schools. Founder of Cardinal Sports Day, which provided opportunities for athletes of all abilities.

•**Joseph Roberts** –1963 to 2002: Math teacher for 40 years; head baseball coach from 1964-1980, including a State Tournament appearance in 1972; offensive coordinator for Cardinal football for 13 years; coach and manager of Luverne youth baseball for many summers; and longtime caretaker of the youth baseball complex that now, appropriately,



Star Herald file photo

Herb Huhnerkoch of Fort Myers, Florida, takes a picture of his sister's name, Esther Spease Frakes, during the 2024 induction of the Luverne Educators Hall of Fame in Luverne Public Schools.

bears his name.

### Qualifications:

The Educator Hall of Fame is intended to "maintain the rich heritage and tradition of successful academic, extra-curricular, and operations of Luverne Public Schools," according to the committee.

"The Educator Hall of Fame emphasizes the tremendous impact educators have made on the lives of students throughout the years and also the impact educators have on the community," Luverne Superintendent Craig Oftedahl said this summer when 2024 inductees were announced.

To be selected to the Educator Hall of Fame, the teacher or administrator must have been a full-time educator in the Luverne Public Schools for at least eight years.

They must have "distinguished themselves by demonstrating exceptional leadership, character, and achievement during his/her tenure in the Luverne Public School District."

Nominees must also be retired from or not working in the district for a minimum of five years. The candidates are also considered for their

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## School bell returns to be displayed as centerpiece of Luverne alumni garden

**By Mavis Fodness**

The cast iron bell, that was displayed in front of the Luverne Middle-High School for 47 years returned this week to a place of more prominence.

Workers with Oh'Landscapes of Mayer, Minnesota, brought the now refurbished and operational school bell back to Luverne June 23.

The bell, complete with a tower, will be placed in the school's alumni garden.

For the past 18 months, the bell has been at the Dassel-Cokato High School where teacher Steve Ellis and 20 students refurbished it and brought it back to working order.

Ellis was asked to do the project by Warren Herreid II, whose K.A.H.R. Foundation funded the construction of the alumni garden two years ago.

Ellis was in Luverne Monday, assisting with setting of the bell and its tower.

**It is estimated that the bell was first cast between 1865 and 1892, based on the No. 32 stamped on the bell's frame, and it is thought to have been the bell at the former high school built in 1895.**

**It required several repairs to return it to working order. A new damper tension spring (to control the clapper's movement) was fabricated from a World War II leaf spring. It has a rope, so it can be run, but it can be locked so it can't be rung without permission.**

He explained the process took a little longer, due to the school remodeling his classroom last year.

Another element also lengthened the project's timeline.

"It began as just fixing the bell and turned into 'We needed a tower,'" Ellis said.

He estimates that the bell was first cast between 1865 and 1892, based on the No. 32 stamped on the bell's frame.

It required several repairs to bring the bell back to working order.

Students made a replacement for the missing clapper and added new shafts and bushings to the frame. A new damper tension spring (to control the clapper's movement) was fabricated from a World War II leaf spring.

**SCHOOL BELL RETURNS HOME/SEE PAGE 13**

# What we've heard from classmates

Compiled by Jane Wildung Lanphere

## From ROBERT JAMES HELGESON LHS Class 1936 (?)

Bob was born on April 20, 1928 and celebrated his 97th birthday with his daughter. He recently moved to Minneapolis from his home in Nokomis, FL. His daughter shared his change of address and an interesting story about growing up in Luverne.

Bob Helgeson grew up at 631 Cedar Street in Luverne. His parents were Floria Crawford Helgeson and Jens Olaf Helgeson. The story goes like this, due to Floria's Irish heritage, asked the city to change their address as it formerly was 613 Cedar Street to 631. To the Irish, the number 13 is a spooky number.

After high school, Bob worked as a DJ, including working for KELO. He was inducted into the Sioux Falls Rock 'N Roll Hall of Fame in 2009. In 1967, he moved to the Twin Cities where he worked for Northern States Power (now known as Xcel Energy), retiring in 1991 and moving to Florida. Bob has now returned to Minnesota. Welcome home Bob!

## JAMES GILBERTSON, LHS Class of 1952

James Gilbertson is on the search for a high school yearbook for the LHS Class of 1952. If you have one and would like to find a new home for it, please contact James Gilbertson at 7370 SW Culver Highway; Culver OR 97734.

## Attention, Luverne High School Alumni: LET'S STAY IN TOUCH!

*We know you're connected with each other on social media, but this is YOUR newsletter. It's news about Luverne alumni for Luverne alumni.*

*If you enjoy reading information here about your classmates, you can rest assured they will also enjoy hearing the*

*latest about you.*

*Let us know what you are doing and we'll pass it on to other alumni.*

*Include your name, year of graduation, address, phone number and email (also let us know if you would like your email in our directory of alumni).*

Send your news to:

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

Or email your news to:

**luvernechamber@co.rock.mn.us**

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## Luverne Alumni and Educators Halls of Fame/continued from page 8

significant and/or long-term contributions to Luverne Public Schools and the Rock County community.

The 2025 educator honorees will join existing Hall of Famers Harvey Eitrem, Esther Spease Frakes, Gordon Gits, Elmer Menage and Dolly

Talbert.

### **Homecoming induction ceremony Sept. 19**

The 2025 Induction Ceremony will be at 4 p.m. Friday, Sept. 19, in the LHS Performing Arts Center. A public reception will follow

in the LHS Commons. Luverne Education Legacy Foundation (LELF) will host a tailgate meal prior to the Homecoming football game; gates will open at 6 p.m. with kickoff at 7 p.m.

*This story originally appeared in the July 10 Rock County Star Herald.*

# Gordy Hansen, Class of 1984, retires from 35 years of teaching

**By Mavis Fodness**

At 6 feet, 5 inches, Gordie Hansen was a center on the Luverne High School basketball team, an experience that brought the 1984 graduate back to his alma mater to teach for 35 years.

He decided this spring to join his wife, Colette, in retirement. Together they worked a combined 73 years in the district.

Colette, who also announced her retirement at the end of this school year, spent 38 years in staff support positions — her last as activities secretary.

“After lots of conversations about it, we decided it was time to end our educational jobs and move on the next step of vacationing,” he said. “We are really looking forward to taking vacations that don’t have to extend over a holiday.”

Hansen didn’t originally intend to become a teacher when he graduated from LHS in 1984.

Basketball first led him to attend Austin Community College after high school to complete his general course. He later earned his teaching degree at Dakota State University in Madison.

“While at Austin, I started volunteering with youth programs,” he said. “This is when I decided I wanted to be in education. I continued to play basketball while focusing my education on being an elementary teacher.”

Hansen began his teaching career as a substitute teacher at Magnolia Elementary School.

When the Magnolia school district merged with Luverne Public Schools, he joined the middle school as a sixth-grade teacher.

At Luverne Hansen added coaching basketball



and track to his schedule.

“It was exciting to come back to coach at a school where I had been a part of much success,” he said.

As a high school junior, Hansen led the Luverne Cardinals to a runner-up finish at the 1983 state basketball tournament.

Hansen then helped his team reach the regional championship the following year.

Hansen coached basketball at the middle, freshman, sophomore and varsity levels.

He spent 24 years coaching track and field with retired coach Craig Nelson.

“I would like to thank Craig Nelson for taking a chance on a young teacher with little to no knowledge of how to coach track,” Hansen said. “I have had the opportunity to coach for and with some great people.”

He credits his fellow teachers for his three decades of success in the classroom, starting at the sixth-grade level and finally in fifth-grade.

“Thank you to Patsy Amborn and Joe Roberts for starting this off and to Travis Bullerman, Chelsie Wermager and Amy VonHoltum for bringing this to an incredible ending.”

Over the years in the classroom, Hansen said he enjoyed watching middle school students demonstrate learning growth while developing positive independence.

He himself underwent the same transformation.

“In sixth grade I taught math to all the kids. In

**GORDY HANSEN RETIRES/SEE PAGE 13**

# Pam (Eidahl) Christensen, Class of '82, retires from 25 years teaching in Luverne

By Mavis Fodness

Lots of tears were shed on the last day of the 2024-25 school year in third-grade teacher Pam Christensen's classroom.

"My students and I were all sobbing, which led to a heartfelt class hug," she said. "I said a few final words, but no one would leave the room. It is a moment that I will always remember."

Her last day of teaching is among many memories created during the 25 years she spent at Luverne Elementary, 24 of them teaching third grade

One of those memories involved her youngest son, Cody, who took his role in her in her science classroom seriously.

"Cody would put up his name tent just like the rest of his class," she said. "It was a joy to have him as student."

Another lasting memory involved her cursive writing lessons.

"After modeling a new letter, my classes would cheer," Christensen said. "Who else experiences that but a teacher?"

Christensen, an LHS Class of 1982 graduate, knew she wanted to be an elementary teacher when she herself was a student at Luverne Elementary.

She was influenced by her late parents, Konrad and Barb Eidahl, both of whom were teachers in Luverne.

Konrad taught sixth grade and Barb instructed preschoolers.

Christensen attended Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and taught two years in Waukon, Iowa, and three years in Claremont, Minnesota, before returning to her alma mater in 2000.

"Luverne Public Schools were held in high regard as educational leaders in our area," she said. "I was excited to teach in a district that strived for excellence."

For a quarter of a century, her experiences were plentiful and challenging in education as she learned new instruction techniques that came and went through the years.

She and her colleagues also spent months



during the Covid pandemic teaching virtually and then more time with face masks.

Each challenge was met with professionalism and dedication, as her co-workers pointed out when they selected Christensen as their 2023 LEA Teacher of the Year.

"She is amazing," many of the nomination comments read.

Her dedication to her colleagues and students was reciprocated when her husband, Tim, died unexpectedly in 2017 at age 52.

Christensen almost didn't return to the classroom.

"I really didn't know if I would be able to continue teaching," she said. "It turned out to be the purpose I needed."

**PAM CHRISTENSEN RETIRES/SEE PAGE 13**

## Gordy Hansen retires from teaching/continued from page 11

the elementary I only taught half the kids,” Hansen said. “That meant I had to plan everything and teach with someone else — it was new to me, but thanks to some awesome colleagues, I transitioned pretty well.” Now Hansen will transition into

retirement with Colette with extended stays with family. “This is where our vacationing will start,” he said.

*This story originally appeared in the June 19 Rock County Star Herald.*

## Pam Christensen retires from teaching/continued from page 12

A purpose and a career choice she would recommend to others wholeheartedly.

“I would advise anyone going into education to connect with each student, make them feel cared about and valued,” Christensen said.

“Listen, be patient, have a sense of humor and talk to them about their interests. When students know you care about them, they will work harder and have more success in the classroom.”

That caring attitude will now be focused on family members.

Daughter Stephanie Connell, her husband Tim and their daughter, Callie, live in Maui, Hawaii. Son Cody and his wife Madi live in Luverne and son Matt lives in Chicago. “I’m looking forward to not

having a set schedule,” Christensen said. “It will be nice to walk in the morning, have a relaxing lunch and decide how to spend the afternoon.”

She said she’ll also enjoy sharing memories with former students when she is out in the Luverne community.

“It is always meaningful when former students return to thank me or recall a third-grade memory,” Christensen said.

“I have loved hearing students sharing that math is their favorite subject, excitement over building the strongest bridge, and proudly sharing their favorite landmark project.”

*This story originally appeared in the June 19 Rock County Star Herald.*

## School bell returns to be displayed in Alumni Garden/continued from p. 8

“The bell will have a rope so it can be rung,” Ellis said. He also said it can be locked so it can’t be rung without permission.

The bell, which was previously a matte black color, is now powder coated bronze for its final display.

The tower, which is powder coated black, was designed with 3D modeling. and the steel sheets were created with a plasma cutter.

The high school students welded the steel pieces together.

The bell has a history of being forgotten.

The LHS Class of 1972 set the bell in front of the school as a class project.

It was thought to have been the bell at the former high school built in 1895.

In the summer of 2023 when work began on the alumni garden, plans were made to refurbish the bell.

A metal sign, “Luverne Public Schools,” will be added to the tower to complete the project.

*This story originally appeared in the June 23 Rock County Star Herald.*





## LIVERNE 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

# REUNIONS IN THE MAKING



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

**FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 19TH—4 PM**

**Campfire & Conversation at Lynette Kemerling's Ranch**

**SATURDAY—SEPTEMBER 20TH—1 PM**

**50th Reunion Fun at "The Lake" (aka Creamery Pond)**

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

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

CHUCK BAILEY: [Bailey.Chuck57@gmail.com](mailto:Bailey.Chuck57@gmail.com)

## **CLASS OF 1965 TO CELEBRATE 60 YEARS**

**DURING THE 64TH TRI-STATE BAND FESTIVAL**

**FRIDAY | SEPTEMBER 26**

**6:00 pm—Informal gathering at The Bullpen**

**SATURDAY | SEPTEMBER 27**

**9:30 am—Tri-State Band Festival Parade**

**5:00 pm—Gather at the Bowron Warehouse**

*(Lincoln Street Garage at 306 East Lincoln St)*

**6:00 pm—VERY information dinner (BYOB)**

**CASUAL ATTIRE | RSVP to: [jrbowron@gmail.com](mailto:jrbowron@gmail.com)**



To list reunion plans or for help with planning

Contact: **LIVERNE AREA CHAMBER**

[livernechamber@co.rock.mn.us](mailto:livernechamber@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

***1304145***

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***Alumni News***

**709 North Kniss Avenue**

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