

BRANDON VALLEY CLASS

Leaving Lasting Paw Prints

BRANDON VALLEY COMMENCEMENT
SUNDAY, MAY 14 • 2 PM

Good things must end for better things to come

Megan Erkonen, BVHS Class of 2023

Graduation Day. It is something we as the Class of 2023 have been looking forward to since August 21st, 2019, the first day of freshman year. For four long years, everything we have worked so incredibly hard for has led up to this moment. It wasn't always easy, and it wasn't always fun, but we did it.

As graduation comes and goes, we begin a new chapter in our lives, a chapter of uncertainty. We leave behind the routine of high school—the periodic ringing of bells that has dictated our lives for the past four years, the various high school activities we have put our heart and soul into, and the friendships that have meant so much.

Before we all go our separate ways, I want to remind the Brandon Valley High School Class of 2023 of a couple things. I want to remind us that we

are young, that we still have a lot of growing up to do, and it's OK to not have it all figured out. This is the time in our lives where we can make mistakes, learn from them, and most importantly, grow from them. So, if you are unsure of what your future holds, know that you are not alone. Know that our future plans are not meant to scare us or intimidate us; they are meant to excite us. Most importantly, they should make us hopeful for a new beginning, and not sad for the end.

Finally, I want to remind us all that graduation day is a major milestone, so slow down, take a breath, and cherish it. We get so caught up in the sadness of the "lasts"—the last game, the last performance, the last day of school—that we forget what this is all about. It's about celebration. A day of recognition for our achievements and a chance to be all together one last time, May 14th is not a day of

dwelling in sadness, but carrying on in happiness.

So, as we move forward, look at this day not as one of grief, but as a day of triumph. I truly hope that each and every one of you, my fellow classmates and friends, have created memories you will forever cherish in the halls of Brandon Valley High School. While this may be a bittersweet day for students, teachers, families, and the community, I hope for the Class of 2023 it is simply sweet. Thank you. Thank you, Class of 2023 for the jokes, laughs, and smiles that have heavily outweighed the stress and exhaustion that high school brings. Although not all of us may be ready for graduation, good things must come to an end for better things to come.

Remember, we did it together.
We did it as a family.
We did it as Lynx.

Twenty twenty three... A year of joy & glee



(Above) Brandon Wheeler reacts to his very first blood donation. (At right) Josey Wickersham extends her reach to keep the play alive. Ryan Presler delights the audience during the BV Fine Arts variety show lip sync to "Man or Muppet".

Class flower

Red rose



Class leadership

Riley Katz, president
Isaiah Barton, Andrew Bunkers, Allison Ebbing, Meredith Guggenmos, Mary Kolbeck, Dylan Langerock, Ava Mitzel, Jared Zerr



Class motto
"Do not go where the path may lead,
go instead where there is no path,
and leave a trail."
— Ralph Waldo Emerson



(Left) Sam Dixon as the clock in BVHS's spring musical, "Beauty and the Beast." (Above) Isaiah Peters and Coral Gonseth practice taking blood pressures.



(Top right) The seniors perform a dance number during coronation festivities. (Above) Kelsi Sylliaasen uses her body to shield the ball from her opponent. (Above) Shayna Trevino addresses the crowd at the state championship dance team's welcome home celebration. (Left) Tyler Groen runs the McHardy Park cross country course. (At right) Lynx quarterback Lucas Slack is positioned to throw the ball.

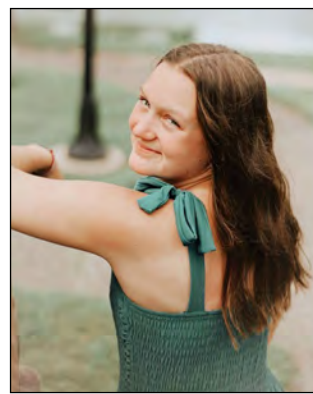


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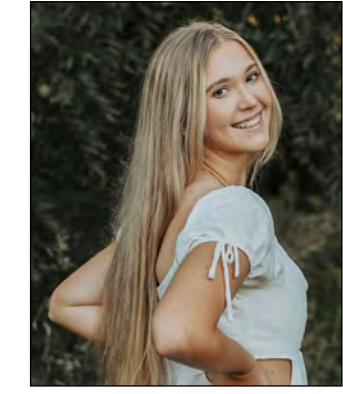
Shelby Ackerman
Mount Marty University
Forensic Science

Xander Ackerman
South Dakota State Univ.
Undecided

Connor Akin
Grand Canyon University
Medical field
Honor Graduate

Shalena Alexander
South Dakota State Univ.
Psychology & Pre-Law

Sydney Alexander



Samuel Alpers

Isabela Anders
South Dakota State Univ.
Dentist or Doctor
Highest Honor Graduate

Isaac Anderson

Leah Anderson
Undecided
High Honor Graduate

Nathan Andresen

Nicole Andrews
University of South Dakota
Criminal Justice



Dareck Anthony
High Honor Graduate

Bradyn Arens
Military

Hayden Ask
South Dakota State Univ.
Undecided

Reagan Askdal
Creighton University
Pediatric Physician
Highest Honor Graduate

Abraham Baba

Bryce Backer



Teya Badger
Undecided
Science research
Highest Honor Graduate

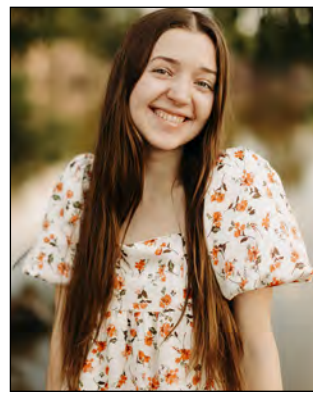
Daniel Bangasser
Southeast Technical College
Welding/Mechanics

Mia Bannwarth
Minnesota State
University-Mankato
Physical Therapy
Honor Graduate

Amelia Barr
Augustana University
Undecided

Natalie Barrick
Work

Aspen Bartek
South Dakota State Univ.
Physician Assistant
High Honor Graduate



Isaiah Barton
Serve the Lord
High Honor Graduate

Kate Bebensee
Augustana University
Education/HS English
Highest Honor Graduate

Wyatt Beck
South Dakota School of
Mines & Technology
Metallurgical Engineering

Hilary Behrens
South Dakota State Univ.
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or Labor & Delivery Nurse
High Honor Graduate

Ashton Benson
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& Work

Chantel Bickler
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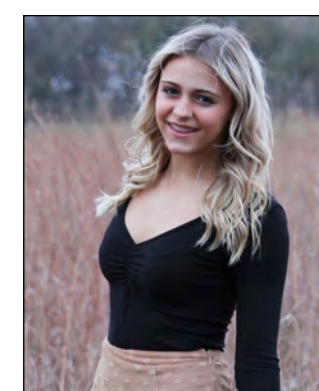
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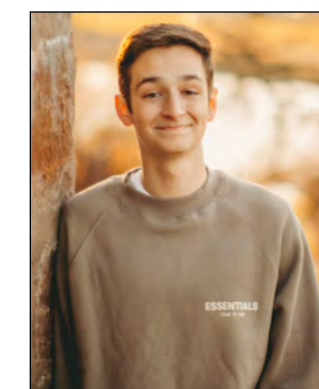
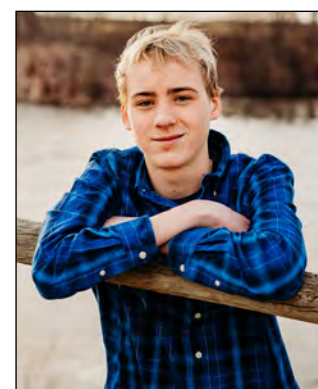
Savannah Bilben
Military

Grayden Binger
Undecided

Hailey Bingham

Lea Biren
Undecided

Tristan Bisbee
North Dakota State Univ.
Dietetics
Highest Honor Graduate



Krista Bjorum

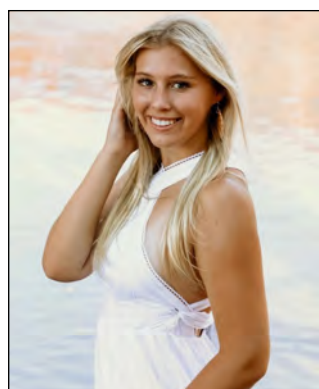
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Honor Graduate

Treyson Boesch
Waldorf University
Communications

Nolan Bolcerek
Southeast Technical College
Commercial Pilot
High Honor Graduate

Tanner Boltjes
Military/Southeast
Technical College

Jack Bommersbach
University of South Dakota
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Highest Honors Graduate



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University of South Dakota

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Lea Biren	Ellie Goetzinger	Emily McCain	Madeline Reisch	Lily Simonson
Tristan Bisbee	Amber House	Cole Murray	Megan Reiser	Jared Zerr

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Emma Burch	Brooklyn Schroeder	Camryn Bonestroo
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Give a yell, give a cheer!

Lady Lynx cheerleaders 'tumble' into Division 1 programs

Jill Meier, Brandon Valley Journal editor

Two Brandon Valley senior cheerleaders aren't ready to toss their pom-poms aside just yet.

Last week, Simone Kane and Julia Hemelstrand both signed letters of intent to be cheerleaders at Division I schools. Kane cemented her future at South Dakota State University, while Hemelstrand will cheer for the University of Minnesota Golden Gophers.

Katee Lane, who coached both girls in her final competitive cheer season, said both Lady Lynx are "well-rounded students."

"I know both of these amazing young women will do incredible things after high school," Lane said. "I am so proud of both Julia and Simone and wish them the best of luck in all they do."

Simone Kane

South Dakota State University
For Simone Kane, the sport of cheerleading was a game-changer.

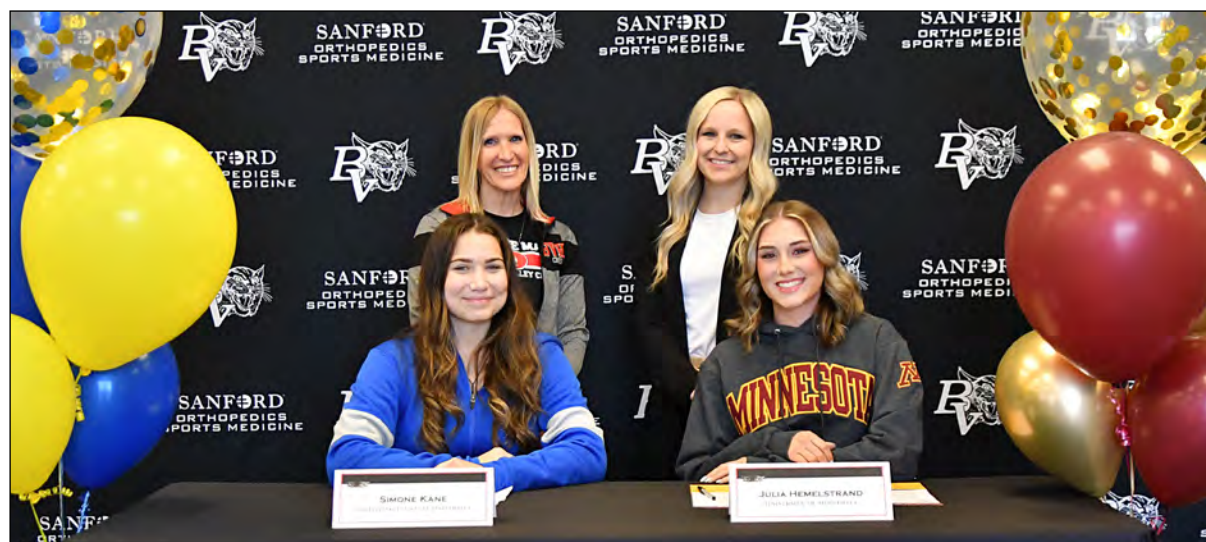
When she was younger, Kane said she had severe social anxiety, prompting her mom to enroll her future college daughter in competitive cheer.

"It really helped to change who I was," she said.

Kane moved to Brandon Valley her sophomore year – the pandemic year – which made getting to know her classmates difficult.

But when she decided to return to cheerleading her senior year, Kane said that, too, was a game changer.

"I was finally part of the group



Jill Meier/BV Journal

Simone Kane (left) and Julia Hemelstrand are both going on to be cheerleaders at Division I schools. Kane is headed to South Dakota State and Hemelstrand is going to the University of Minnesota. They are pictured with BVHS competitive cheer coaches Katee Lane and Mariah Koch.

and I was welcomed. All of these girls and the coaches have been amazing to me, it's really meant a lot to me," she said.

It was also her senior season that inspired Kane to pursue the sport at South Dakota State University, where she will major in psychology and minor in mental health services.

Kane blazed through tryouts – typically a four-step process – with flying colors. She was excused for half of the tryout process, which happened to coincide with prom.

Despite the "fast pass," Kane said she was shocked to learn that she was selected, noting she was post-surgery by just two months.

"I didn't think it was going too well for me, but I saw my number on there, and I couldn't actually believe that I was going to be a D-I athlete. It was like a fever dream that I didn't think would come true," she said.

Lane was elated to learn that Kane chose to join BV's competitive cheer team for her senior year.

"For that, I am thankful," Lane said of the Metro All-Conference selection. "Her drive, personality and commitment to her team and her own personal growth proved to be a perfect addition to the BV cheer team."

In her limited time at BVHS, Kane was also on the sidelines as a football cheerleader.

Her love for the sport comes down to "stunting and the relationships that you make," she said. "You get really close with those girls, so it builds life-long friendships."

She looks forward to the challenge of cheerleading at the collegiate level.

"I don't expect it to be that much more different, but I know the stunts are going to be a lot more difficult and the expectations are going to be a lot

higher, and I'm excited to really push myself," said the daughter of Lauren and John Kane.

Julia Hemelstrand

University of Minnesota

Julia Hemelstrand fired off a message to the cheer coach at the University of Minnesota one weekend after she decided where to continue her education after high school.

By the next weekend, Hemelstrand found herself on campus trying out for the cheer team.

And two days later, she was notified that she made the team.

"It means a lot to me," Hemelstrand said moments following her signing ceremony last week. "I'm really excited to go to the University of Minnesota. I kind of decided later than most people did, but I went on a tour there and I really just fell in love with the campus."

Coach Lane said she had the

pleasure of sharing the cheer gym with Hemelstrand all four of her high school years.

"Her athletic ability, dedication and work ethic are unmatched," she said. "Julia's leadership skills and compassion are two additional qualities that will ensure her continued success at the collegiate level."

Cheerleading became a passion for the biology major. She said the sport offers a "family aspect."

"Your job is to cheer on the other sports and to cheer each other on, so you get both aspects," she said. "You get to be on the sidelines and be encouraging others but you also get to compete and work toward your own skills. There's a lot of work that goes into it."

Hemelstrand is already getting acquainted with her new teammates via practice sessions. She said the team has been "welcoming and fun."

Her long history in cheerleading began in middle school with All-Star Cheerleading. She stepped into the competitive program her freshman year, and by her sophomore year she was involved in competitive, football and basketball sideline cheer.

"It was a lot of cheering, a lot of different styles, a lot of different coaches and teammates," says Hemelstrand, whose long-term goal is to go to dental school and pursue a career in orthodontics.

The daughter of Sherida and Jared Hemelstrand also landed Metro All-Conference and All-State honors following her senior season.

Heavy lifters

Johnson, Olson 'muscle' their way to BVHS records

Jill Meier, Brandon Valley Journal editor

Isaac Johnson and Kellen Olson both had similar goals when they began their senior powerlifting seasons. But while their goals were very much the same, Brandon Valley powerlifting coach Adam Bobzien said there are visible differences between the two 2023 state powerlifting champions.

"Isaac is definitely more of just straight power," Bobzien said of the 308-pound-plus competitor. "When you watch Isaac powerlift, he wows the entire crowd. He can shut-down the entire meet so that everybody watches the weight that he puts up and they're just amazed what he can do. That's just his style. It's just so much weight, so much power and people are amazed with that ability."

As for Olson, the 148-pound lifter heads the list of BV's "most decorated" weight class.

"We had our first state champion in that weight class many years ago in Riley Frantzen, and then Nick Hanson was amazing and kind of rewrote the record books after Riley had graduated. Then we had Carson Beyer last year who won every award possible

in that weight class and now Kellen," Bobzien said. "We've had so many state champions and so many lifters that just stand out in that weight class, and Kellen is absolutely just another one of those."

Kellen Olson

Olson got somewhat of a late start in the sport. He was a sophomore when some of his friends starting lifting together and he joined in. As a junior, his buddies encouraged him to get on the team.

"I've always wanted to be the big muscular kid and I always thought lifting heavy things was a cool thing," he says, "but I mostly did it for my confidence and to make myself feel better. It's addicting."

Olson achieved his goals by pushing himself "to the limit every single day."

"Every time you're in the gym, you just want to go as hard as you can, and that really excited me," he said.

Although he tips the scale at just 148 pounds, Olson's dedication to the sport is clearly visible in the numbers he's put up. He started out squatting 115 pounds, and this year raised that poundage to



Isaac Johnson (left) and Kellen Olson both established multiple powerlifting records at both Brandon Valley and the state during their high school careers.

415 pounds.

"In three years, that's crazy," he says.

Olson's starting weight in the deadlift – his favorite of the three lifts – hit 185 pounds. He last lifted 465.

"It's a simple thing. Just pull it up. There's technique – you just got to pull it," he tells.

As for bench, he remembers hitting one plate – 135 pounds – four reps his first time in the gym. At this year's state meet, he benched 225.

After placing third at state his junior season, Olson set his sights on claiming the 148-pound title his senior year. He did just that by setting new records in squat,

deadlift and total.

"My friend last year broke all those state records and I told him I was going to come for him. We just joke around and stuff all the time, and he came and watched me do it. He was a little 'mad,' but it was all fun and games," Olson said. "When I first did it, it was like 'It's no big deal,' and then when I got home and I sat on my couch, I was like, 'Oh wow, I really did that.' I couldn't believe it. It took a few days for it to really sink in."

Bobzien points out that Olson lifted over seven times his body weight to earn state champion status.

"The thing about Kellen



is that he was just so focused. He knew exactly where he was with every lift. I tell kids that are kind of approaching – the ones that know they should be state champions – the real difference is that you can narrow your weight down and have just a small window, and Kellen was able to do that. All those guys that I listed could do the same thing. Their starting weight was only 15 pounds less than the most that they are going to do. Some lifters jump 20 to 30 pounds in between each lift, but these guys are so focused in on that weight. They know exactly what they can do. They know

where the next lift is going to take them, and Kellen was one of those people."

Olson plans to continue to lift, and will compete July 22 in Omaha at a USA Power Lifting event.

Isaac Johnson

Isaac Johnson wished that he would've been introduced to powerlifting sooner than his sophomore year. And like Olson it was a trio of friends that lured him to the weight room.

"I really didn't want to compete. I just wanted to get stronger on my own without having the burden of competing against

continued on page 14B



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Nursing
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Aaron Burchill
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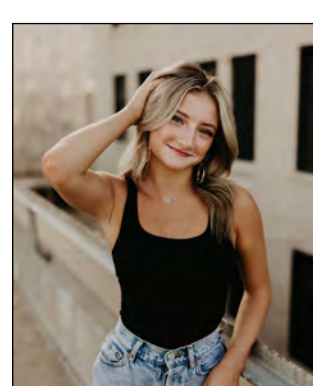
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Landyn Cassady

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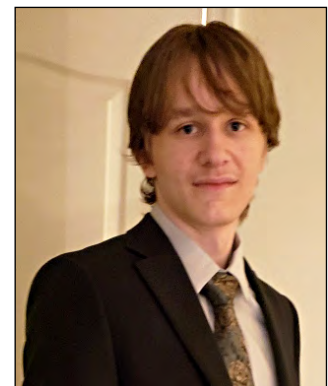
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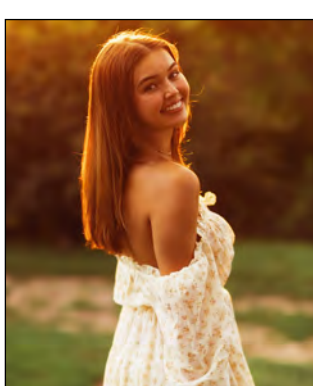
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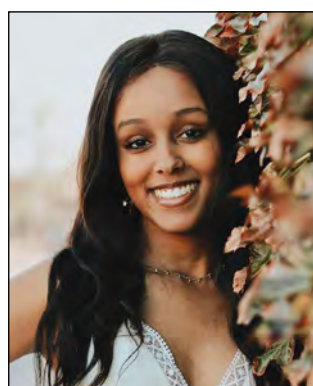
Diego Eisma
Work

Shelbi Engler
Highest Honor Graduate

Connor Erickson
High Honor Graduate

Matthew Erkonen
South Dakota State Univ.
Engineering

Megan Erkonen
High Honor Graduate



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Congratulations to all graduating band seniors

BRANDON VALLEY BAND

Lilley & Misti

Student-teacher relationship goes beyond the classroom

Jill Meier, Brandon Valley Journal editor

Lilley Lehfeldt and Misti Becker banter back and forth like an old married couple.

Lilley is a serious Raiders fan. As for Misti, well she loves the Minnesota Vikings.

And neither gives the other any grace when they're talking football.

But one thing the two can agree on is their relationship – now 14 years strong – has gone above and beyond student and teacher.

"I'm your best harasser, right?" Misti teases.

"I wouldn't say that," Lilley tosses right back.

Misti was first paired with Lilley when she was just 4 years old. But their relationship might never have been if Misti hadn't agreed to go back to school to get her Braille endorsement. The 20-year special education teacher first worked with Lilley on tactile things, such as how a cup or a toothbrush feels. As Misti learned the world of Braille, she also had to learn to teach it to Lilley.

"It took me out of my comfort zone," she admits. "It took me a few years to get through it, it was tough."

Misti said she considered throwing in the towel.

"Then I started working with her and I knew I couldn't give up," she said.

Instead of giving up, Misti followed the kindergarten curriculum in teaching Lilley the letters and their sounds and how they felt in Braille. Eventually, she taught her to read Braille.

"Braille was a little more complicated, because certain words mean the same as certain letters, but she caught onto that real quick. She can read Braille way better than I can," Misti said. "She's unique at doing Braille because she also has cerebral palsy, so she can't use her right hand, and a lot of Braille readers use two hands and she uses one



Submitted photos

Brandon Valley High School special education teacher Misti Becker and Lilley Lehfeldt's relationship has grown beyond the classroom. The two were first paired together when Lilley was 4 years old. Becker went back to school to learn Braille to assist Lilley, who has cerebral palsy.

finger while she's reading. The things that she has mastered has been amazing to watch her grow throughout the years."

With her assistance, Misti exposed Lilley to many things that she didn't necessarily want to try or want to do. In middle school, Lilley wanted nothing to do with having plaster put on her face to make a mask.

Misti delighted in the process, even joking with Lilley that she could go home and tell her parents, "You got 'plastered' in art!"

Lilley, however, didn't find the humor in that.

Since the two joined forces, Misti

said she's done her best to have Lilley in the classroom learning alongside her peers.

"I've challenged her to do the same thing that everybody did. We tried it first and if it didn't work, then I would modify it to her, but she's always been in the classroom with the kids basically doing all the same things," she said.

They went on class fieldtrips, finger-painted in Karo syrup, gone sledding, and had some fun in a bouncy house. Misti even brought her along to Yankton to watch her daughter, Brooke, play softball.

When she entered high school, those experiences elevated.

"She just whipped through Spanish I and Spanish II. We took biology and physical science and in high school we've taken every regular class that all the other kids were in," Misti tells. "I had to think outside the box every day, all day to come up with ideas to include her the best possible way keep her engaged because she wants to learn. To be able to explain it at her level and get her to kind of see it through her hands, I made a lot of creative tactile things and gone the round-about way of teaching her things."

"We've always said I was the Billy Madison, right?" she asks Lilley. "Yep," she answers.

Misti said that if Lilley studied, she knew the material.

"Thanks to me, you're a straight A student," Misti teases. "Good thing I'm smart!"

Unlike Lilley, Misty says she won't cascade across the stage on Sunday to receive a diploma.

That prompts a laugh from Lilley.

Misti describes Lilley as a "major rules follower."

"I just keep trying to get her to break the rules," Misti teases, citing a planned field trip to a vocal rehab center as her "senior skip day."

"I don't ever want to skip school," Lilley corrects, which coaxes a chuckle out of Misti.

As their days together as student and teacher come to an end, Lilley says she's excited for graduation, but yet, a bit sad, too.

"I'm going to miss my friends," she says.

She's also going to miss her daily interaction with Misti, her teacher – and her friend.

Following graduation, Lilley will attend the Thrive program at Teachwell in Sioux Falls. Beyond assisting through the transition, Misti and Lilley's relationship changes from teacher and student to that of friends.

"I'm sure I'll swing by her house," Misti assures.

The many smiles of Lilley & Misti



Misti Becker's collection of photos of she and Lilley together clearly show the bond they formed. They often dressed in matching T-shirts for the holidays, like Christmas, or Halloween costumes. The photo of the two in their Hawaiian garb is from Lilley's eighth-grade year Brandon Valley Middle School. With Misti's assistance, Lilley took part in biology units, like dissecting a worm.



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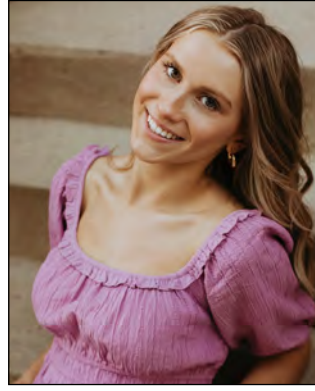
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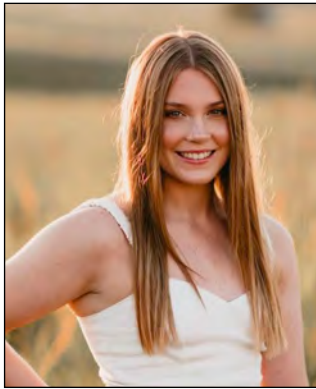
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The last of the VanHemerts

Brandon Valley family graduates last of 7 in their brood

Jill Meier, Brandon Valley Journal editor

For 20 years straight, a Brandon mom and dad have cheered on their children from the sidelines – all eight of them. That long stretch of “bleacher time” comes to a close this year as the youngest VanHemert – Aaron – graduates.

“I think I’m ready for this to be over,” says Linda VanHemert, the family matriarch. “I think the time that it will really hit me is the last season event that we go to,” which will be the State Track & Field Meet that Aaron will compete in as a BV Lynx.

Married 38 years last week, seven of Lyle and Linda’s children are BV graduates, beginning in 2008 with Luke. Ashley, the oldest, is a Sioux Falls Christian grad.

Raising a large family was always the plan for the VanHemerts. There’s a 20-year spread between Ashley, now 38, and Aaron, who is 18.

Despite raising kids over two decades, Linda says she’s cherished every moment along the way, even those sometimes dreaded back-to-school shopping sprees.

“I miss the days when they were younger, because when we would go in stores, they would kind of go in tallest to shortest,



Submitted photo

Lyle and Linda VanHemert will watch with pride as their seventh – and final child, Aaron – graduates from Brandon Valley High School this Sunday. The family is comprised of, from left, row one: Caleb, Aaron, Lyle, Linda, Alex DeVries and Isaiah; row two: Micah, Kylie (soon to be daughter-in-law) Jenna (daughter-in-law), Terril, Ashley, Luke, Jesse and Carissa DeVries.

like little ducklings,” she tells. “I would get a lot of compliments on how well they behaved. The older ones would always take care of the younger ones. I miss that part. Everyone always says, ‘Wasn’t it hectic?’ and it was, but it was so worth it.”

With a handful of track and field meets to go, you can bet the VanHemerts will be in the stands until the very last race.

“With Aaron, it’s so fun seeing him excel,” Linda says of the 2023 BVHS

senior who holds the No. 3 spot in the 300 hurdles and seventh – possibly up a notch or two – in the 110 hurdles. “We still have ESD and state to go yet, and he might go to college and run.”

Linda, a former track and field athlete herself, may have been the inspiration behind her children’s involvement in the sport.

“All of the kids participated in sports, some more than others,” she tells.

The family’s preferred sports are soccer, cross country and track and field. All of the kids played soccer.

“And a lot of them hurdled, like Aaron,” Linda notes. “The older ones ran cross country, so I would be there with babies in the stroller going from side to side.”

“I thought I was the one with the stroller and you were just running side to side,” Lyle chimes in.

After Ashley graduated from Sioux Falls Christian,

the VanHemerts enrolled the rest of their kids at BV, and say they haven’t regretted the decision.

“When we moved to town, if they ever did go to a public school, we wanted them to go to a smaller district,” Linda said.

Their eldest, Ashley, resides in Bozeman, Mont. She was involved in an unfortunate gun attack in 2018 impairing her ability to work fulltime. She works a few hours a day in a middle school lunchroom.

Luke lives in Omaha, where he works from home for Mutual of Omaha.

Terrill, who married two years ago, lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, with his wife, Jenna. He works in computer support and Jenna is a physical therapist.

Carissa and her husband, Alex, call Watertown ‘home.’ They are parents to Isaiah, 2, and are expecting a second child at the end of this month. A stay-at-home mom – like her own mother – Carissa works part-time from home.

Caleb also resides in Bozeman, where he is self-employed buying and selling vehicles.

Micah and his fiancée, Kylie, will say their “I do’s” on June 9. He graduated from the University of

Sioux Falls and works for Eide Bailly. Kylie is a neonatal nurse at Avera.

After studying for two years at Mount Marty University, Jesse left school – by God’s calling – and started his own landscaping business.

“He said that God said he would support him in business, and so far, he’s done really, really well with the landscaping business. He’s keeping busier than he knows what to do with,” Lyle said.

And finally, Aaron, the last of the VanHemert clan, has yet to decide which path he’ll pursue.

“He’s still filling out his FAFSA forms,” Lyle says.

Lyle says there is one thing that he will not miss.

“Those emails from a teacher that said, ‘They missed an assignment.’”

When the VanHemert’s growing family is all together, Lyle describes it as “controlled chaos.”

“The boys, of course, always have to wrestle to see who’s the strongest,” adds Linda. “It’s funny, Aaron started out the smallest and now he’s the tallest, so roles change along the way. It’s fun getting everybody together, and now we have a grandson, so once he’s old enough we’ll go to his activities. It’s just going to keep going.”



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USD Community College



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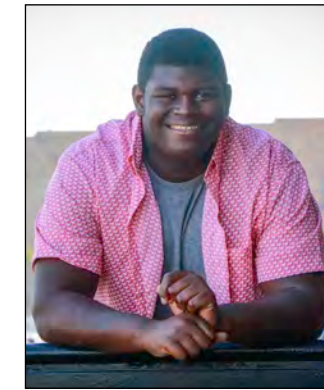
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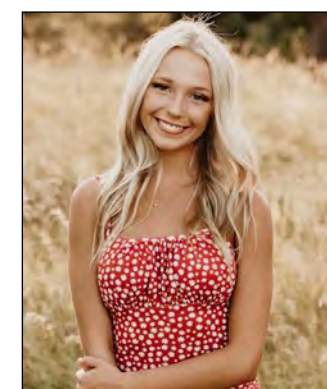
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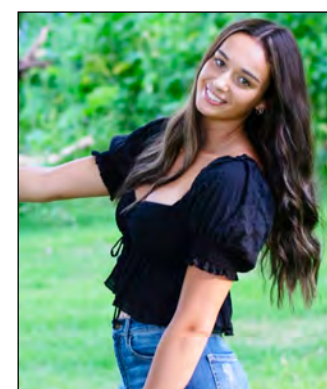
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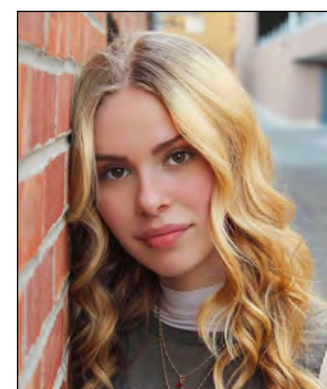
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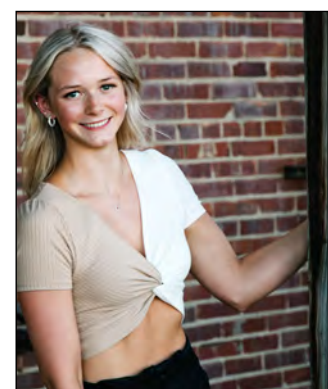
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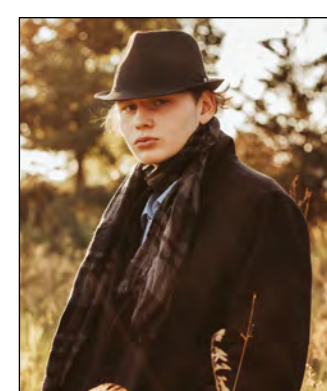
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Delaney Kiesow



Abok Kiir
Undecided



Jordan Kimball



Ashlee Kirbach



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South Dakota State Univ.
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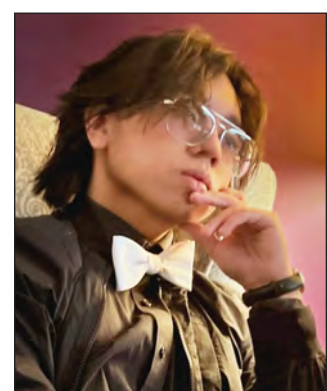
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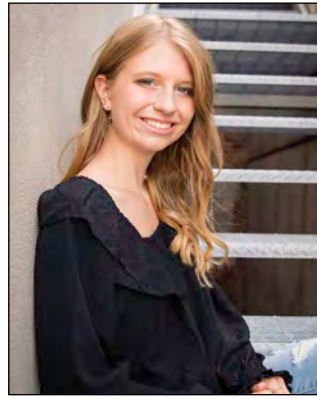
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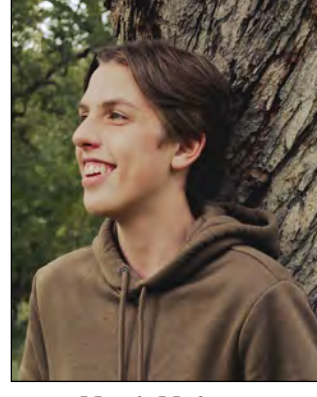
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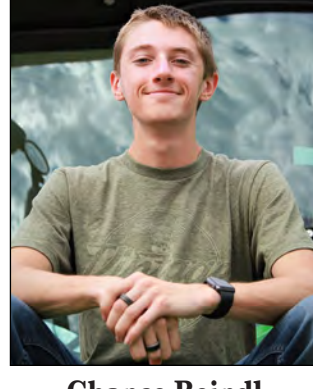
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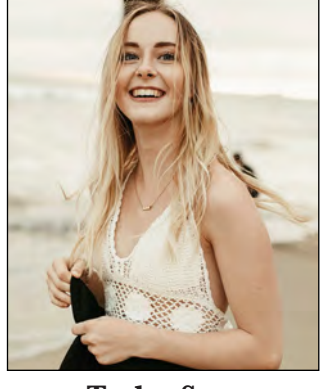
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Donovan Rice
Work

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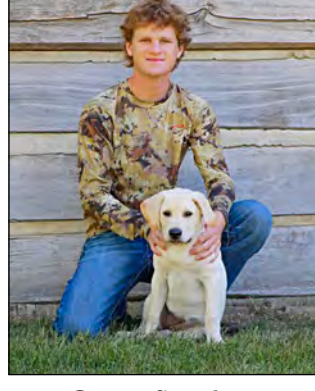
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Southeast Technical College



Samuel Sejnoha
Southeast Technical College
Highest Honor Graduate



Ashirvad Sharma



Lily Simonson
South Dakota State Univ.
Business & Marketing



Claire Siverhus



James Skyberg



Lucas Slack
Minnesota State
University-Moorhead



Bradley Slater



Brody Smith
Southeast Technical College
HVAC & Plumbing



Champ Stevens
University of South Dskota



Natalie Stewart
Iowa State University
Veterinarian or Vet Tech



Alizae Stinehart
Southeast Technical College



Kyle Stotts
Southeast Technical College
Diesel Technology



Samirah Stratman



Tayton Stroh
Dakota State University
Exercise Science



Bailee Struckman
South Dakota State Univ.
Elementary Education



Payton Swain
Undecided



Kelsi Sylliaasen
Minnesota State
University-Mankato
Nursing
High Honor Graduate



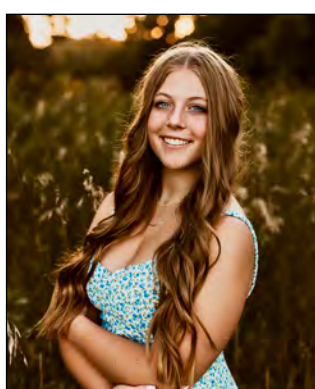
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South Dakota State Univ.
Engineering
High Honor Graduate



Aftyn Terveer
North Dakota State Univ.
Nursing



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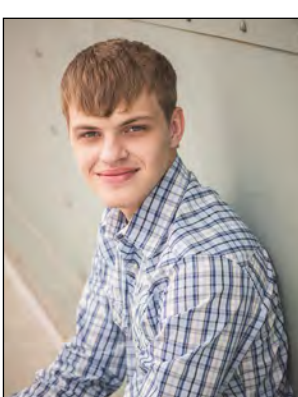
Cole Walton



Spencer Warkenthien
Mitchell Technical Institute



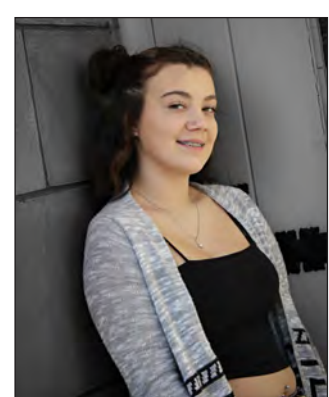
Joshua Warne
Work



Matthew Warne
Work



Katherine Watkins
Iowa State University
Genetic Engineering



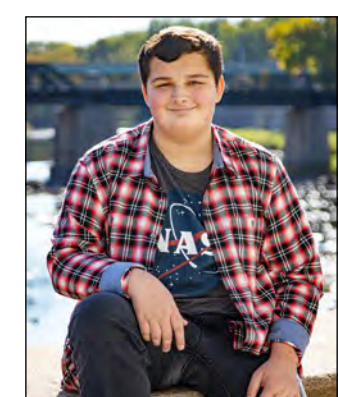
Kailey Weig



Morgan Westendorf
Southeast Technical College



Brandon Wheeler
South Dakota State University
Honor Graduate



Dylan Wickersham
Undecided



Josey Wickersham
South Dakota School of
Mines & Technology
Biomedical Engineering
Highest Honor Graduate



Lacy Wickstrom
Black Hills State University
Psychology



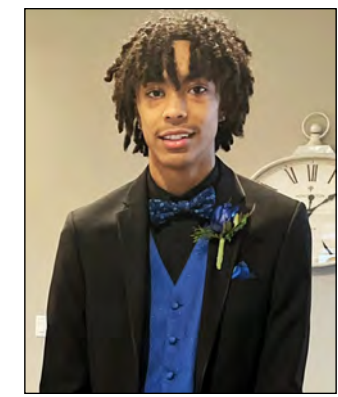
Raegan Wiese
South Dakota State Univ.
Forensic Psychology



Christopher Wilkinson
South Dakota State Univ.
Engineering
Highest Honor Graduate



Nash Williams
South Dakota State Univ.
Civil Engineering



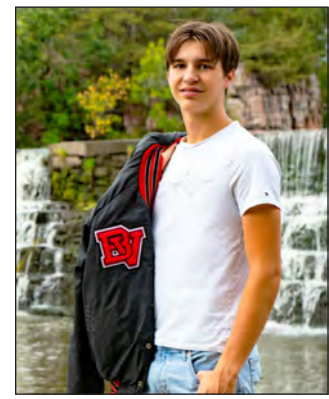
Charles Williams III



Nathaniel Wilts
Northern State University
Medical field



Gage Winter
Undecided



Hemi Woertink
South Dakota State Univ.
Software Developmen



Kennedy Woessner
University of South Dakota
Environmental Engineering
Highest Honor Graduate



Kaiden Woitte



Emily Wright
South Dakota State Univ.
Secondary Education
Highest Honor Graduate

HEAVY LIFTERS cont. from page 4B

other people. Then I kind of figured it out that it's not like that," says the eight-time record holder. His resume of records include the South Dakota state record in squats in two weight classes, 300 and 308-plus, deadlift in two weight classes, most pounds lifted overall in two weight classes, and especially notable, the all-time state record since the 1990s in both squat and deadlift.

All this success for a guy who was trying to avoid competing.

"I wish I had started earlier. I feel like I kind of cheated myself out of more greatness. I just kind of did it. That's my thing. I try to go everywhere with a chip on my shoulder – like you're really good until you prove it otherwise. I feel like I said what I was going to do and then I just did it. That's the biggest thing and that's my goal in life is just to define what my goals are and then achieve them and then move onto the next one," he said.

Bobzien said that's the kind of student-athlete that Johnson has grown to be.

"He tried 600 pounds on the squat last year (at state) and didn't get the lights that he needed as far as passing the lift. This year, he came in with a goal – 'I'm getting over 600 pounds' – and he achieved that goal. He fought through some injuries from football and from hockey, and that's the other

thing that a lot of people don't know about Isaac is he has a full schedule of hockey that he deals with along with powerlifting. He's a busy guy and just very goal-oriented and very focused on what he does," the coach said.

Johnson's goal-focused concept helped him to elevate the weights he was lifting. As a sophomore, he squatted 495 pounds and benched 225.

"I want to say I failed a 500-pound (dead) lift. That was actually in the newspaper and my mom has that cut out on the fridge," he shares.

Johnson's record-setting performances at state this year came on a day when he wasn't 100 percent healthy.

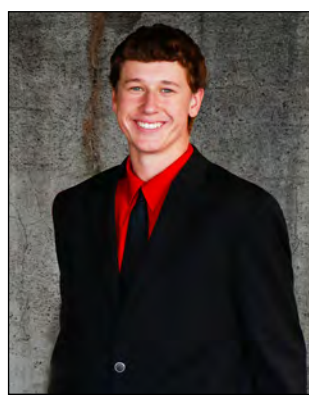
"I was pretty sore and my hands were still ripped open from deadlifting the previous week," he said. "I wasn't really totally sure I could get that 605-pound squat up, but I did and it was just stellar. It was kind of a surreal experience, an out of body experience."

Johnson realized early on in training that he has the ability to succeed in the world of powerlifting.

"I kind of had inclinations because I was definitely surpassing my peers in the way that I worked out," he said. "Getting up at 5:30 in the morning, you're not always 100 percent there mentally, but you have to just do it. I just try to put my best foot forward every time – not just in powerlifting – but in everything I do."



Tyrese Zacher
North Dakota State University
Nutrition Science



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