



Watkins Play – Page 3

EDEN VALLEY WATKINS
VOICE
 YOUR VOICE BE HEARD



Submitted Photo

The EV-W National Honor Society members – including (front) William Ballard, Lee Dziengel, and Mitchell Lipinski; (middle) Olivia Kramer, Cambel Hesse, Marissa Laudenschmidt, and Zoey Schmidt; and (back) Hope Molitor, Mya Andersen, Brinn Kuechle, and Ellaree Anderson – conducted their “Christmas for Kids” shopping on Tuesday, Dec. 10, buying gifts for 81 kids.

CHRISTMAS FOR KIDS

National Honor Society provides gifts for 41 families

With generous donations, NHS students bought gifts for 81 kids

By Ava VanderBeek

As Christmas approaches, the Eden Valley-Watkins National Honor Society has been busy preparing for the upcoming holiday season.

For 22 years, EV-W’s NHS advisor Renae Ward has continued the program called Christmas for Kids.

“Christmas for Kids is about love, kindness, and wishing people peace and ease of worry. The holidays can be so stressful for families that are already having trouble,” explained Ward.

“Parents want to give their kids everything, I mean everybody does, but some aren’t able to do that because of hardships that at some point everyone will face,” Ward continued.

With the method that Christmas for Kids uses, each of the presents that the NHS members thoughtfully picks out will go to a selected member of the EV-W community. “It is similar to organizations like Toys for Tots, which are fabulous, but you never know where that toy is going and who it’s reaching,” said Ward.

“So, it is a really wonderful way to give back to families that might be facing hard times in our own community,” explained Ward.

Ward has continued Christmas for Kids year after year because she believes that every parent deserves to see the Christmas magic in their child’s eyes on Christmas morning, no matter the circumstances. “It looks like it is about money and presents, but really it’s about love, care, kindness, and the support that we can give to those families who are struggling to make it work,” Ward noted.

Although Christmas for Kids has proven to be very

XMAS FOR KIDS – Page 2

NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH DAY

CentraCare – Paynesville recognized for excellence

Hospital earns 2024 Performance Leadership Award

As part of National Rural Health Day, CentraCare – Paynesville announced – on Thursday, Nov. 21 – it has earned a 2024 Performance Leadership Award for excellence in patient perspective.

Compiled by the Chartis Center for Rural Health, the Performance Leadership Awards recognizes the highest performance (i.e., 75th percentile or above) among rural hospitals in quality, outcomes, and/or patient perspective.

“We are incredibly proud to be recognized for excellence in patient perspective,” said Craig Henneman, president of CentraCare – Paynesville. “This award is a testament to our dedication, compassion, and teamwork for our entire staff. Each member of our team plays a critical role in ensuring that our patients feel heard, respected, and cared for. This recognition is a testament to the exceptional work our staff does day in and day out, and it inspires us to continue striving for excellence in

every aspect of patient care.” For CentraCare – Paynesville, this award recognizes the tireless efforts of health care professionals who prioritize patient-centered care. “This is truly a team achievement,” Henneman added. “We’ve all worked hard to create a supportive environment where patients feel safe and valued, and this award validates the commitment and heart that each member of our team brings to their work every day. We believe that fostering a strong relationship with our patients and their families is essential to providing the highest level of care.”

Several key initiatives that reflect the hospital’s commitment to continually improving the patient experience and quality of care contributed to CentraCare – Paynesville’s earning this award:

Enhanced Patient Communication – Clear and compassionate communication is central to patient care at CentraCare – Paynesville. The team prioritizes open, transparent discussions with patients and their families, ensuring that they are well-informed about their care

CENTRACARE – Page 5



Photo by Julie Haag Bulau

Siblings Jena Albright Kaufman (left) and Aaron Albright (right) purchased the Valley Liquor Warehouse along Highway 55 in Eden Valley in June 2024 from their parents (Barry and Julann Albright) and their parents’ partners (Ross Amundson and Michele Johnson-Amundson and Randy and Michelle Hanson).

VALLEY LIQUOR WAREHOUSE

Siblings purchase liquor store from group

Aaron Albright and Jena Albright Kaufman became business partners

By Julie Haag Bulau

Growing up, siblings Aaron Albright and Jena Albright Kaufman didn’t envision they’d one day be business partners. However, that happened when they teamed up to purchase Valley Liquor Warehouse in June 2024.

The two are second-generation owners, purchasing the business on Highway 55 from their parents Barry and Julann Albright, along with their parents’ partners: Ross Amundson and Michele Johnson-Amundson and Randy and Michelle Hanson.

“We took possession (on) June 28,” Aaron said. “We both thought about buying it separately, but then Jena came up with the idea of buying it together.”

The pair took over June 28, 2024, and on July 7, 2024, Jena gave birth to Whitney, the first baby for her and her husband John. Three days later, she was at the liquor store learning the ropes from her mom.

“Yeah, I had a lot going on, but the timing was absolutely perfect,” Jena said. “Mom was here to snuggle the baby and train me in.”

Jena has since returned to her full-time job as a paralegal at the St. Cloud office of Moss and Barnett. She works a couple shifts a month at the liquor store and handles the bookkeeping duties. Aaron, who works with his dad in farming and in the tree removal busi-

ness, handles the building repairs, which also includes the medical clinic and a small storage area, helps with stocking, and fills in work shifts when needed.

Their mom Julann has continued to manage the business – ordering and inventory.

The store also employs three additional workers.

“Both Mom and Dad have been a big help,” Jena said. “Randy and Ross have also been great if we have questions. They are smart business people to have as backup.”

It’s been a learning experience for the siblings. Both Aaron and Jena agree that the store’s hot seller is Fireball. The popular whiskey comes in a variety of sizes, and customers can even buy Fireball bottles in a package shaped like Christmas trees for the holidays. When it comes to beer,

Busch Light remains the local favorite.

“When I first saw the roll-your-own tobacco products, I thought, ‘Why do we have these?’ But then I worked a shift and saw how many were sold,” Jena said. They are also learning more about the popular THC and CBD cannabis drinks and gummies, which became legal for recreational use in Minnesota in 2023.

“Otherwise we haven’t made a lot of changes,” Aaron said. “We moved some stuff around and cleaned some stuff out. We also added pull tabs.”

Both Aaron and Jena agree the partnership is working out well. “We’re different people and good at different things,” Aaron said of his sister.

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