



# THE PRESS

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March 27, 2019

**Pelican school 'Mathematic Masters' return from state competition**

Vikings among top ten in Class A schools  
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PELICAN RAPIDS, MINNESOTA

Year 123, No. 13

Otter Tail County

Single Copy \$1.25

## There was no loss of words--to describe Faith

Pelican mourns, and celebrates, the life of red-headed teen angel who was an inspiration for all

By Louis Hoglund



One word to describe Faith? Not possible. But more than 1,000 family members, friends, neighbors and classmates picked one word, at the urging of Rev. Phil Tobin, as he preached to mourners at the funeral of Faith Westby. On this day, March 23, 2019, the high school gymnasium was transformed into a "holy sanctuary to celebrate the life of Faith."

One word? Not possible. But dozens of words, strung together, begin to illustrate the impact this red-haired "angel on earth" had during her 16 years on the planet.

Amazing • Pure • Angelic • Strong • Special • Magnetic • Charismatic • Teacher • Minister • Perseverance • Authentic • Inspirational • Incredible • Admirable • Compelling • Uncanny • Courageous • Brave • Precious • Persistence • Crusader • Unforgettable ...

"Smooth" was a word Principal Brian Korf deployed. Also "charm." Faith used "her charm to--possibly--distract staff to get around doing her school work," chuckled Korf. "She was smooth."

"Athlete" is also applied to Faith. As a Special Olympian, she bowled, she tossed softball, and she ran. She trotted the 50 yard, and the 100 yard dash—but she never set any records. At one Special Olympics meet, Faith charged out of the starting blocks but was quickly distracted by her

fans, recalled Korf. She veered off course, running to all of her friends and family and classmates to show her appreciation as they cheered her onward. Statistically, it is unimportant. But she probably finished last place--distracted by all the folks she loved, out in the grandstand.

Faith's qualities were far too numerous to inventory, but her cousin Andrea Kaufman Westby identified one of her finest traits: "Never hurt people's feelings."

"Addictive" applies to Faith, as Kaufman added, "because you can't get enough of her."

Words that she taught her Class of 2021 mates, said Kaufman, included kindness, patience, un-arrogance. "Did you know that you had a teacher with you all of this time?" asked Kaufman, directing the question to her classmates. "Remember what she has taught you in the

The "Leaders" gym at Pelican Rapids High School was nearly packed for the March 23 funeral for Faith Westby. With a bleacher capacity of 1,600, and floor chairs totalling about 400, it is reasonable to estimate there were 1,500 in attendance. They bid farewell to a 16-year-old who inspired thousands through her health and medical challenges.

way she lived her life." Her aunt, Angie Westby, marveled at how Faith "lit up every room she was in." Despite the challenges, pain and struggles—which spanned her entire life; in, out, in, out, released and then back to the hospital—Faith lived her life fully, authentically.

"We all benefitted from her teachings...She made us feel like the best versions of ourselves," said Angie. "Lives were changed because of Faith...and we're all better because of it."

Born with Kabuki syndrome, Faith's medical challenges—including a liver transplant—were too numerous to list. There aren't enough words.

It was the third time, in recent history, that school facilities hosted funerals that were too large for local churches. One was the funeral for Middle East war fatality and Pelican high school graduate Staff Sgt. Josh Hanson, in 2006. The second was the funeral for Jessica Weishair, the Pelican Rapids student who was killed in a buss accident during the school's high school band trip in 2008.

Mentally, Faith functioned at barely a grade school level. But as an educator, she held a Doctorate degree—earned by her example to others.

"She loved blindly...She taught me more about life over the past 16 years than any class ever could," said Haley, of her "incredible little sister." Faith Eileen Westby. The initials of her name spell another word: Few. Uncle Pat Westby checked the dictionary, and "few" is described as small, handful, exclusive, limited number.

LIFE OF FAITH WESTBY CELEBRATED AT FUNERAL  
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**A better world with Faith...One hug, one smile at a time...**  
See column page 4

## Muslim in Minnesota...

Speakers, diversity dinner March 31 feature authorities in Islamic multi-cultural relations

By Joan Ellison  
Special Correspondent

In today's world, people of all faiths sense the need to come together, learn more about each other, and share our commonalities while building understanding across our differences.

The Pelican Rapids Multicultural Committee has invited speakers from the Islamic Resources Group to join the local Muslim religious leader,

Imam Shaakir, to talk about their religion, Islam, and being Muslim in Minnesota.

They will speak on Sunday, March 31 at 3:30 p.m. at the Pelican Rapids Public Library.

The Islamic Resources Group is a non-profit organization founded in 2001 and based in Saint Anthony, Minnesota.

Its mission is to build bridges of understanding between Muslim Ameri-

cans and the broader community through education. John Emery and Mohamed Ali are both volunteer speakers for the organization.

John spent nine years in the US army as a translator for the Arabic language.

**Army veteran Emery had extensive duty in Middle East**  
His service took him across the  
MUSLIM IN MINNESOTA  
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Student creations fill Pelican Public Library

Above, sailboat scene created by Ella Backstrom, grade 9.

See "Booster Page" feature this week, on page 2, supported by area advertisers.

## UP FOR AN EMMY

Pelican media students earn award nominations for news broadcasts

By Louis Hoglund

Pelican Rapids mass communications class students may be "walking the red carpet" at a student television arts award ceremony.

Local students are in line for an "Emmy" award.

Actually, it is the high school version of the "Emmys," but definitely noteworthy for a smaller, outstate Minnesota school--competing against much larger city and suburb schools in the upper mid-west.

Pelican received two "Crystal Pillar" nominations from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences: Upper Midwest Chapter.

The nominations were for one of the "Viking News" broadcasts that was submitted to the judges; and



Students involved in the Pelican Rapids High School mass communications class:

Front Row: Katlyn Haugrud, Spencer Okke, and Crystal Diaz.

Second Row: Tucker Maus, Mackenzie Thornton, Melissa Salazar,

Back Row: Zane Brosowski, Kirby Nelson, and Colm Fitzsimmons.  
English teacher Kathryn Anderson teaches the mass communications students.



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- Faith Westby, 16, Pelican Rapids

**Retired tennis pro who played against the best in the world guest speaker for Pelican Christian athletes event April 6**

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# Camp provides fun, personal growth--for Pelican students High school applicants sought by local Rotary Club

Pelican Rapids students are invited to apply for an opportunity to enjoy a week of fun--while developing leadership skills.

The Pelican Rapids Area Rotary Club is sponsoring Pelican Rapids High School students Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA).

Rotary International's RYLA Camp strives to help high school seniors identify, understand, and develop their personal leadership qualities.

The camp is free, through scholarships provided by the Pelican Rotary Club. All students have leadership potential--even though they may not have recognized it yet, noted Rotary members at the recent Pelican meeting. So all students are encouraged to consider an application.

Dozens of Pelican students have participated in the camp over the years. The 2019 camp is July 14-20, in Crookston, Minnesota.

Camp facilitators and staff work closely with each student to help them build on their strengths. While no camp experience is identical, the focus of camp remains consistent:

- Help campers understand the fundamentals and challenges of being a leader
- Introduce and refine leadership skills (e.g. communication and problem solving)
- Encourage campers to take active and positive roles in their communities
- District 5580 is committed to sponsoring Camp RYLA as one of its

outstanding youth projects. Camp is held in July of each year beginning Sunday and running through Saturday.

Students can contact the Pelican high school counselor for information. Application forms are also available on line, at district 5580ryla.org.

Local Rotary contacts include:  
Rudy Martinez  
rmartinez@pelicanrapids.k12.mn.us

Andrew Sorum  
andrew.Sorum@mn-bank.com

At RYLA camp, young men and women spend a week in a challenging program of discussions, inspirational addresses, leadership training and social activities designed to enhance

personal development, leadership skills and good citizenship.

Campers will also have the opportunity to participate in a character building program which focuses on leadership, effective communication, trust and cooperation. Utilizing adventure, personal commitments and shared insights, you will gain an increased sense of confidence in yourselves and in your team.

Attendance at RYLA is by scholarship only. All winners are selected and funded by their local Rotary Clubs.

Considered one of the outstanding youth programs in Rotary, our comprehensive, volunteer staff makes RYLA a highlight of each participant's educational experience.

## What is RYLA camp?

Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) is a leadership program coordinated by Rotary Clubs around the globe. Each year, thousands of young people participate in this program. Young people ages 13-30 are sponsored by Rotary Clubs to attend the event run by the club's district committee.



Rev. Phillip Tobin leads pallbearers at the conclusion of the Faith Westby funeral March 23 at the Pelican Rapids High School gym. Pallbearers were Larry Backstrom, Casey Bruggeman, J.R. Mauch, Allen Westby, Bob Westby, Chris Westby, Mike Westby and Pat Westby.

Musicians for the funeral program included Laura Hagen, Sean Fitzsimmons, Amanda Backstrom, Lee Brenna and Tom Ladwig.



## Photos, display items celebrated Faith Westby's life, impact

Photo and memorabilia displays were in the hallway, as the community celebrated the life of Faith Westby. The 16-year-old, who died after a lifelong struggle with a range of medical conditions, touched so many lives, the funeral was held at new Pelican Rapids High School Leaders gym on March 23.



PHOTOS BY LOUIS HOGLUND

## Describing Faith

### FUNERAL HELD AT GYM

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"It fits Faith to a tee," said Pat. "She was one of the few. Angels on earth are here, but they are very few. They are small in number...Faith did exactly what angels do. She saw the world through a positive lens."

Angels bring people together, said Pat Westby. "Look around you today," he said, scanning across the hundreds of faces. The numbers reflect "the enormity of Faith's ministry."

Pat Westby's vision, proceeding toward the pearly gates beyond? God is there, smiling and waving, saying "come on in." But a little, red-haired angel pushes the Lord out of the way, and delivers an invitation to join her--with a wave, and her favorite gesture: Thumbs up.

Allen Westby, one of Faith's several "favorite uncles," made a special effort to acknowledge what the community has done for Faith. And, that community extends beyond Pelican Rapids--to other states, and as far as Bosnia, where Faith's story has circulated.

"She ministered to us, right up to her last breath," said Allen Westby.

"Faith is forever...Faith directs our lives as we move forward with our faith journey--just as our precious Faith did," concluded Allen.

"Faith lost her earthly battle...the red-headed warrior's mission is done. The calling from her Creator is fulfilled...Well done, my good and faithful servant," said Rev. Phillip Tobin, Central Lutheran Church, who delivered the sermon.

Faith, who ministered by the minute her entire life, nurtured a "following" that numbers in the thousands--and will continue into eternity, as her example is shared by family and friends, and across generations.

"Faith's 'congregation' is a lot bigger than mine," said Pastor Tobin, with a smile, as he looked around the gymnasium bleachers and chairs. "Her name, and her ministry is known all over the world..."

Faith's "crusade" has taught us how to pray; to laugh at life's threats; and the power of a God who lives, laughs and hurts with us, said Tobin. She also taught important lessons for a "narcissistic world," he said.

Everything is possible with Faith. Even death, stated uncle Allen Westby.

And in death, Faith continued to serve as a teacher; a minister; a great counselor.

She taught us to expand our vocabulary.

Because there is no single word to describe Faith...or love.

Not possible.

Faith's smile was "as wide and bright as the morning sun this morning," said Rev. Phillip Tobin. Faith Westby's funeral, appropriately, was March 23--the most beautiful spring day thus far in 2019, after a long, hard and harsh winter.



Balloons, including these with Faith Westby's photo, were among the items decorating the funeral at the Pelican Rapids High School gym.



Rev. Phil Tobin and Allen Westby were clergy for the Faith Westby funeral March 23.



The Class of 2021, pictured here in their Faith Forever t-shirts, were the honorary pallbearers for Faith Westby.

## Westby family benefit April 27 at Hillbillies, Erhard

A benefit for the Faith Westby family will be hosted April 27, from noon to 6 p.m. in Erhard. A silent auction and raffle prizes will be included in the event, hosted by Hillbillies, with all proceeds going to the Westby family. Donations to the benefit can also be submitted at Bell Bank in Pelican Rapids, which has a special account established for the benefit.

