



Joe Brown / Tribune

This season, the Willmar football players have been honoring Jenna Reynolds with a sticker on their helmets. Jenna Reynolds, 13, died on July 18 after a battle with cancer.

PLAYING FOR JENNA

Willmar sophomore has thrived while grieving over his sister's death

By Joe Brown
jbrown@wctrib.com

Taggart Reynolds and his family live by the creed: "Live every day by the moment." They don't look ahead because there may not be a tomorrow. That's been the reality for the Reynolds family.

Taggart's mom, Brenda, has been battling various forms of cancer for 12 years. And this past July, his younger sister Jenna passed away after her own battle with cancer.

Still, Taggart is living in the moment. With a heavy heart, he has helped the Willmar football team reach its biggest moment: a showdown today with SMB (St. Paul Academy/Minnehaha Academy/Blake) in the Prep Bowl.

"Have the best day you can that day, then keep moving forward," Taggart said. "Keep walking, keep pushing, be strong."

'Make the best of it'

Battling cancer has been the norm for the Reynolds family. Brenda has Li-Fraumeni Syndrome, which makes her susceptible to develop certain kinds of cancer while being unable to suppress tumors. Today, she's battling lung cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy at home.

"Things are holding stable," Brenda said.

In February 2016, the family received stunning news: Jenna had a brain tumor. In March 2016, Jenna had the first of four surgeries to remove the tumor.

She underwent radiation, chemotherapy and participated in clinical trials to rid her body of cancer.

JENNA: Page A8

More Willmar Cardinal football coverage on B1.



Photo submitted by Brenda Reynolds

Unable to play basketball anymore due to a brain tumor, Jenna Reynolds, left, turned to art, making a poster for her brother Taggart and the Willmar wrestling team during the state wrestling tournament last season.

“
I use my sports to go get it all out. Get my anger out. Get my questioning out. Just let it out and play harder. That's what I use for my inspiration.
”

TAGGERT REYNOLDS

Murder suspect defers entering a plea

By Anne Polta
apolta@wctrib.com

WILLMAR – A suspect in the stabbing death last month of a 24-year-old Willmar man deferred entering a plea during a brief initial appearance Wednesday in Kandiyohi County District Court.

Caleb Aaron Blue, 35, faces a second-degree murder charge in connection with the death of David Medellin Jr. The



Blue

victim's body was found Oct. 31 in a muddy farm field east of Willmar.

Blue, also known as Caleb Aaron Jorgenson, will next appear in court Jan. 31 for an omnibus hearing.

During Wednesday's hearing,

Judge Dwayne Knutsen granted a motion by the state to request a DNA sample from the suspect.

DNA was collected when Blue was arrested but the Kandiyohi County Attorney's Office asked for an additional sample, saying it would aid in analyzing the evidence gathered by investigators at the scene and elsewhere, including vehicles allegedly involved in the crime.

Blue is being held in the Kandiyohi County Jail on \$2 million bail.

The motive for Medellin's murder remains unclear.

Blue and Medellin reportedly were seen on video in the Jackpot Junction casino near Morton in the early morning hours of Oct. 25.

According to the criminal complaint filed in the case, Blue allegedly drove

Medellin back to Willmar and made him get out of the vehicle on a gravel rural road. Blue allegedly stabbed Medellin, who then ran into the field.

A second suspect is charged as an accomplice. Lori Jean Harris Gafkjen, 51, of Brooten, allegedly picked up Blue after Medellin's death and drove him to Glenwood for medical treatment of a deep cut on his

hand. Gafkjen also was with Blue when both were arrested Nov. 5 outside a motel in Anoka County.

Gafkjen is a former correctional officer at the Kandiyohi County Jail but was no longer employed there in October. She and Blue allegedly met while she was working at the jail and he was an inmate.

She is charged with three felony counts of aiding an offender.

Young woman alleges harassment by Montevideo Police chief

Court has granted temporary restraining order

By Linda Vanderwerf
lvanderwerf@wctrib.com

MONTEVIDEO – An 18-year-old woman has been granted a harassment restraining order against Montevideo Police Chief Adam Christopher, alleging that he has sent her hundreds of texts, some of a sexual nature.

A hearing requested by Christopher is scheduled for 2 p.m. Nov. 28 in Chippewa County District Court in Montevideo. A harassment restraining order is a civil court action.

A temporary restraining order prohibits Christopher from having contact with the woman through phone calls, email or social networking. He is also barred from the woman's home or place of employment. The order will be in effect until November 2020 unless it is changed by the court after the Nov. 28 hearing.

In her petition for the restraining order, filed Nov. 15, the woman wrote that Christo-

pher was an acquaintance – the father of a taekwondo classmate and a Facebook friend. In 2017, when she was 17 years old, they began a casual texting and messaging, "and it was fine."

The woman alleges that things changed Nov. 7, when Christopher's texts and Facebook messages became sexual in nature and much more frequent. She said the texts numbered in the hundreds.

When the increase in texting started, "I usually conversed with him, because I didn't know how else to respond," the

woman wrote in the petition.

She alleged that Christopher called her "tempting" and said he wanted to kiss her "starting with my collarbone and move down."

Christopher would ask where she was and ask her to come find him. "When I refuse, he continues to ask and ask....," she wrote. While she's not aware of him stalking her in person, she wrote, he has said, "Next time I'm up there, I'll stalk you," referring to the city where she goes to college.

The woman wrote that she felt frightened and threatened by Christopher and feared retaliation from him for filing the petition. She also wrote that she feared the harassment would continue.

"I feel like he is using his power and his relationship with my family," she wrote. "He feels that gives him the right."

Attempts to contact Christopher and Montevideo City Administrator Steve Jones were unsuccessful Wednesday. Montevideo

City Council President Marvin Garbe said in a telephone interview that he was aware of the situation, but he referred questions about the city's reaction to it to Jones.

TUESDAY:
Men's Day -\$2 off Men's Haircuts & 20% off Men's Products

WEDNESDAY:
Kids' Day -\$2 off Kids' Haircuts

THURSDAY:
Ladies Day -15% off all Services or Products

Cut, Color and Style

for

\$80

Mention this ad offer. Expires 12/31/18

Dashing day to night

Participating salons only. Most salons independently owned and operated. ©2018 Fantastic Sams Franchise Corporation. FantasticSams.com



MASTER THE PARTY CIRCUIT WITH FRESH COLOR.

FANTASTIC SAM'S

CUT & COLOR

2211 1st St S, Willmar
320-231-2243

JENNA

From Page A1

But in January 2018, Jenna was again diagnosed with a brain tumor. In July, there was significant tumor growth that was too aggressive for chemo or surgery. Jenna was put in hospice care.

Taggart remembers the calamity around the house in those final days.

“There was a lot of nurses staying at our house. Both my aunts are nurses and RNs, so they stayed overnight for six, seven days until (Jenna) passed,” Taggart said. “We had family there every day. There was not a lot of privacy. We woke up every day and there’s people at our house, people coming to visit, people bringing food. Sometimes it was really overwhelming, especially when people started coming in and started talking to you.”

In a dour situation, Jenna didn’t want her family dwelling over her in those final days.

“She basically told us: ‘Why waste these last few days with her?’” Taggart said. “Have fun, make the best of it. She shouldn’t bring us down; she should be inspiring us.”

Jenna died on July 18, at 13 years old, leaving behind her parents, Troy and Brenda, her twin sister, Jorja, and her older brother.

“I think the family felt a sense of calm when she passed because she had been suffering a lot,” said Willmar head football coach Jon Konold. “They had that closure.”

Around the time of Jenna’s death, Willmar had its football camp, and Taggart had an



Photos by Joe Brown / Tribune

As a sophomore, Taggart Reynolds has made an impact as the center on the Willmar offensive line.

outlet for his sorrow.

Getting it out

Being around the guys helped ease Taggart’s pain. Along with his mom’s cancer battle, sports have proven to be Taggart’s catharsis in crisis.

“I use my sports to go get it all out,” said Taggart, who also wrestles and throws shot put and discus on the track team. “Get my anger out. Get my questioning out. Just let it out and play harder. That’s what I use for my inspiration. It’s going to be tough after the season ends. But as soon as wrestling starts, I’m better.”

Konold added, “He wants to be around the guys. He wants to make

sure he’s staying busy and I think that helps him.”

The center for the Cardinals’ offense, Taggart has shown poise uncommon for a sophomore.

“He’s got a lot of leadership qualities. He’s only a sophomore, but he’s the most vocal kid on the line,” Konold said. “He also plays a little nasty, and he’s brought that to the table. He and Andrew Reigstad have that nasty streak to them and the other guys have bought into that and developed into doing those things as well.”

Through Taggart and the team’s success, sports have also provided a getaway for the rest of the family.

“It gives us something



Willmar’s Taggart Reynolds, right, puts a block on a Becker defender during a regular-season game on Oct. 12 at Hodapp Field.

“Taggart’s a kid that has a good head on his shoulders. He also has a good support system and I can’t say that enough. Coaches, kids, teachers, they look out for him when we can’t. He’s really taken all this and turned it into a way to better himself.

BRENDA REYNOLDS

to look forward to every week,” Brenda said. “It’s pulled family and friends together. He’s got a good little cheering section with family. It brings us all together through this time and we keep revisiting each other and staying active, and it’s fun at the same time.”

Taggart’s family is fully invested. They’re talking to him after every game and pointing out every big block he makes while watching a replay of the contest.

After years of watching his mom battle cancer, Taggart knows the therapeutic benefits of his family’s cheers.

“(A) big thing about battling this with my mom is staying happy,” Taggart said. “When you’re happy, your body fights better. The way you fight when you’re not sad or down, you have a will. You keep pushing. And my mom’s fighting as hard as she can.”

A constant reminder

Taggart doesn’t need to look far to find motivation. On the back of every player’s helmet is a tribute, with a sticker with Jenna’s name between a pair of wings.

“We pray before every game. I play for her this season,” Taggart said, showing off the worn sticker on his No. 59 helmet. “I dedicated my season to her, to play harder and play my best for her.”

Brenda said one of the other sophomores on the team, Tyler Ludwig, came up with the sticker memorial.

“(Taggart) said, ‘I’m fine with it as long as it says Jenna or has to do with her and not me,’” Brenda said.

“The day we put them on, I got tears in my eyes,” Taggart said. “But now when I see them, I get happy. I use it as an inspiration and know she’s always with me

during the games and she’s watching over us, keeping us safe from injuries and pushing us through games.”

With Taggart pushing through personal pain, Willmar got back to state for the first time since 1988, which was the start of Brenda’s senior year at Willmar High School.

“Taggart’s a kid that has a good head on his shoulders,” Brenda said. “He also has a good support system and I can’t say that enough. Coaches, kids, teachers, they look out for him when we can’t. He’s really taken all this and turned it into a way to better himself.”

This afternoon the Cardinals will play in their first state final since 1973, hoping to win the Class AAAA championship for the school’s first football title.

“To be able to support these boys succeeding and putting their heart into this, it’s huge,” Brenda said. “Being able to follow them in a community that has poured their hearts out to support us, it’s been great. Seeing all the boys, especially Taggart, overcoming something like this, dedicating games to (Jenna), it’s just amazing.”

Through it all, Taggart has lived in the moment. Win or lose, Jenna’s inspiration has pushed Taggart to get better. Helping Willmar achieve a first for the school would be the ultimate tribute to his sister.

“I can’t put into words what I would feel,” he said. “It would just be so amazing to get it for her, my mom and the whole family. It would be an awesome feeling to play with the best team Willmar’s had, possibly ever.”

9TH ANNUAL

Red Carpet Event

JUSTIN WILLMAN

MAGICIAN COMEDIAN

AS SEEN ON
ellen
CONAN
COMEDY CENTRAL

NOW AIRING
ON NETFLIX

FRIDAY, DEC 28, 2018

6:00-8:00pm DINNER HORS D'OEUVRES

8:00pm JUSTIN PERFORMS

WILLMAR
CONFERENCE CENTER

PRESENTED BY WILLMAR LAKES AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND
THE WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

CONTACT THE CHAMBER TO RESERVE YOUR TABLES OR TICKETS!
320.235.0300 – CRANSOM@WILLMARAREACHAMBER.COM

COMMUNITY HEALTH CORNER

With Chief Pharmacist, Becky McCleery at Thrifty White Pharmacy,
2300 First Street South in Willmar.

MEDICARE
PART D OPEN
ENROLLMENT

It's time to review your
Medicare Part D plan options!

Plans may change every year,
so it's important to make sure your
current plan is still the best option
for you in 2019.

Thrifty White Pharmacy has a
plan comparison tool to assist you
in making the best decision when
choosing your Medicare Part D plan.

We have the tools to help you save
on your prescription drug costs.

Call or stop by your local
Thrifty White Pharmacy
anytime between now
and December 7th
for your free consultation.

FLU SHOTS AVAILABLE!

Walk-ins welcome, no appointment necessary!

2300 First Street S
Willmar, MN
320-235-1930

Store Hours: Monday - Friday: 9am - 7pm • Saturday: 9am - 4pm • Sunday: Closed

BUY ONLINE www.onlinedrugstore.com