

# LITCHFIELD Independent Review

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## AN ENCHANTED EVENING

LHS prom offers students a magical night / B1



## PLENTY TO SEE IN MAY

Opera House to host several upcoming shows / A2

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 2019



STAFF PHOTO BY BRENT SCHACHERER  
**Owen Boerema's 34-game hitting streak set a state record and has garnered statewide attention.**

## Homegrown success: Elite Insulation completes new facility

Litchfield native builds insulation business from ground up with hard work

BY MATTHEW KOTELNICKI  
for the Independent Review

For Brooks Holmgren of Elite Insulation, the opening of his company's new 15,000 square foot office, warehouse and production facility just south of Litchfield is the culmination of a monumental effort.

"It's been three years of my life," he said, sitting behind of the desk of his unfinished office.

Since he purchased the property in 2016, Holmgren spent nearly every moment of his free time working on the facility.

"If I'm not here, I'm out working on the job site," he said.

Anyone who knows Holmgren knows that his work ethic is unrivaled. They also know his business has been a long time in the making. Holmgren started Elite Insulation 16 years ago after the company, where he learned the insulation trade, went bankrupt.

Elite to A5 >

# Hitting, on the record

## Boerema claims state record with 34-game hitting streak

BY BRENT SCHACHERER  
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Owen Boerema had just completed an interview with a reporter from a Twin Cities television station when another reporter appeared to talk with him Monday afternoon at Optimist Park.

The Litchfield High School senior took the interruptions of baseball practice in stride, but he admitted that all the attention was making

him a little uncomfortable.

"Honestly, it's kind of embarrassing," Boerema said with a grin. "I mean, it's really cool that WCCO (was here). Hopefully it brings a little more attention to our team, because we're having a pretty good year. It is cool, I just don't love talking about myself."

And yet, when you do the things that Boerema has done on the baseball diamond this spring, you become a magnet for media attention.

Especially his most recent accomplishment. In his second at-bat against Kimball Friday, Boerema laced a single to center field that extended his hitting streak to 34 games, setting a new state high school record for hitting consistency.

The streak, which includes all 26 games of his junior season and the first eight games of

this season, eclipsed a record set in 1983 by Tim Gullickson of Deer River.

"If I stop and think about it, it is a lot," Boerema said. "But ... I don't know, it's tough to think about. I would rather just win the games and have success as a team than to be talked about individually."

This season, there's a lot to talk about in both areas.

The Dragons entered Tuesday afternoon's game against Glencoe-Silver Lake with a 7-1 record and in first place in the Wright County Conference West.

Meanwhile, Boerema, one of the team's captains, has posted some impressive offensive numbers. As if the 34-game hitting streak were

Boerema to A2 >

## Nifty, nifty, look who's 50

### Lake Ripley Elementary celebrates half-century of educating area students

BY CAM BONELLI  
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More than 30,000 kids have passed through the halls of Lake Ripley Elementary School since its opening Sept. 21, 1969.

This year, the school will celebrate its 50th anniversary, coinciding with the city of Litchfield's 150th anniversary. Former students, families, community members and all others are welcome to an ice cream social at the school from 5:30-7 p.m. Tuesday, May 7, to celebrate the structure's 50-year history. Stephanie Hansen, dean of students at Lake Ripley Elementary School, along with a committee of 20 teachers and staff, organized the event. The committee includes Lake Ripley Elementary staff and teachers Becky Sussner, Kris Haugo, Tammy Minton, Natalie Ahrens, Kay Sandin, Serafina Miessen, Lori Weseman, Tara Swenson, Monica Wedin, Audrey Webster, Angie Huhner, Carrie Johnson, Kathy Grabow, Rose Lendt, Michele Seiffert, Sharon Robertson, Hannah Hanson, Jean Fischer, Greyson Pingeree and Autumn Mickelson.

Hansen said the event will be an open

house format.

"There will be a book fair and a timeline with pictures of Lake Ripley throughout the ages," Hansen said. "All community members are invited. We will have tables outside, music, and people can tour the school."

It costed \$1.15 million to build Lake Ripley school in 1969. The building was originally a 26-classroom, open school model capable of housing 900 students. It was built on a 14-acre tract of land. Sharon Roberston, media center director who will retire this year after working at the school for 44 years, said a lot of changes have taken place.

"The biggest change is that the west end of the building is no longer an open concept," Robertson said. "The permanent walls around the media center haven't always been here. We had a space issue and those areas became classrooms. The school used to use accordion walls to separate classrooms. The separators became difficult to use."

The school has seen three principals since its inception: Jack Raulston, Sandy Nicholson and Gregg Zender. Zender has spent 26 years as principal of Lake Ripley Elementary, coming to Litchfield Public Schools from Baudette, Minnesota.

Zender said some of the biggest changes the school saw was the enactment of the Education for All Act of 1975, which included special education requirements.

"When this building opened up, there was



PHOTO COURTESY LHS SENIOR BROCC WESEMAN

**In September, Lake Ripley Elementary School turns 50 years old. Litchfield High School Senior took this photo with a drone of nearly 600 people lined up to form "50."**

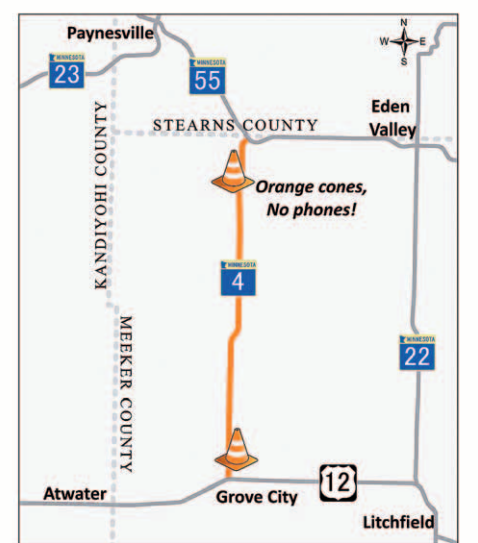
no special education," Zender said. "That was a huge change. Think of all the students in our special education programs now."

Another change over the years includes the amount of security enhancements made to buildings in recent years, Zender said.

"Just the amount of funds diverted toward safety now from other sources is a lot," he said. "After Sandy Hook, everything changed, and we started seeing security at the elementary level."

While Zender has seen a lot of changes, the future of Lake Ripley Elementary looks bright with the district's planned operating referendum and bond levy for the fall. He believes that technology will never take the place of

Ripley to A2 >



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
COURTESY IMAGE MNDOT

**Reconstruction of Highway 4 in Meeker County begins May 6.**

## Highway 4 project in Meeker County starts May 6

MnDOT will begin a pavement project on State Highway 4 in Meeker County starting May 6.

The project includes resurfacing 12 miles of Highway 4 from the east junction of U.S. Highway 12 to State Highway 55.

No detour is required for this project, however, flagging operations will be in place during construction. Motorists should plan for short delays.

Benefits of the project include a smoother road surface and extended pavement life. The project is estimated to cost \$1.5 million and to be complete by mid-June. Knife River is the contractor on the project.

For more information visit the project webpage at [dot.state.mn.us/d8/projects/hwy4/](http://dot.state.mn.us/d8/projects/hwy4/).

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