

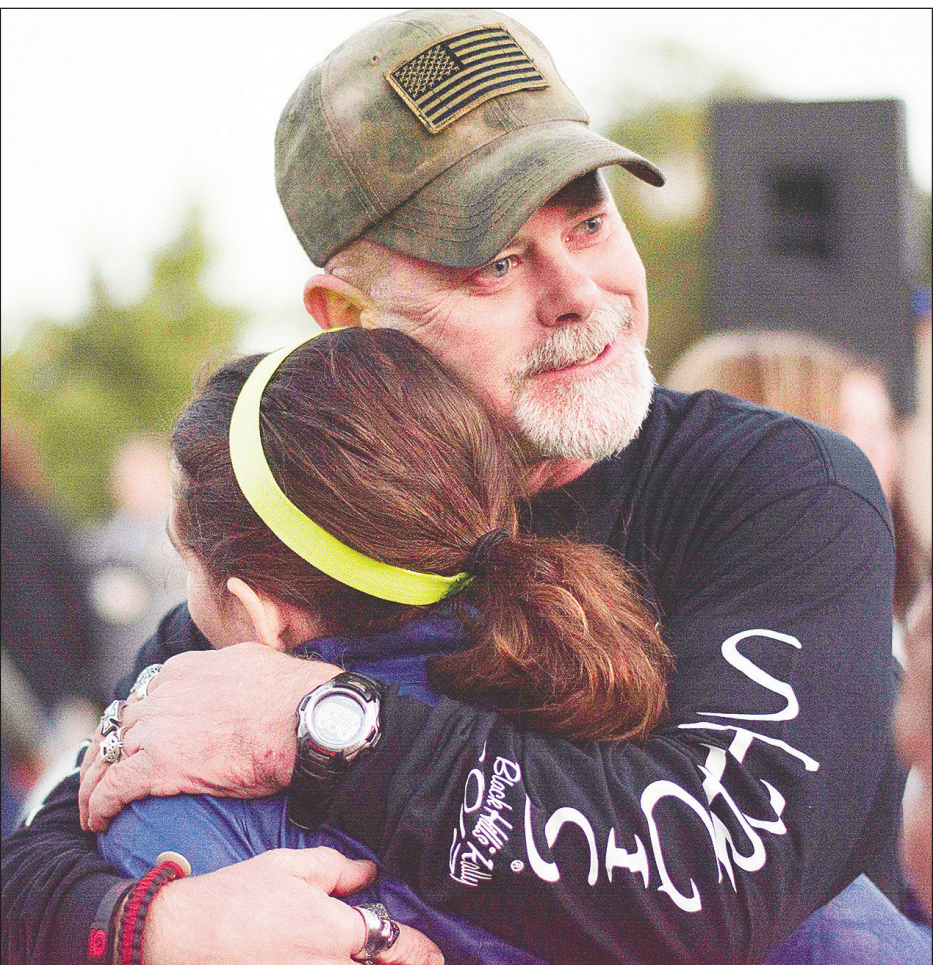


INSIDE
GRAY
LADIES IN
ALEXANDRIA

LIFE, A8

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EERIE ECHOES

Similarities in stories of two missing girls

By Celeste Edenloff
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The news of Jayme Closs being found alive hit Sarah Block pretty hard, and was eerily all too familiar.

The Alexandria woman is the mother of Jasmine Block, who after 29 days, escaped from the three men who kidnapped her and held her hostage in a vacant house in rural Grant County, about 20 miles from Alexandria.

That all happened less than a year and a half ago.

The story of these two young girls, who were both abducted, held captive and who both bravely escaped their captors, brought tears

— lots of tears — to Sarah Block. “When I heard about Jayme’s return, it reminded me so much of Jasmine,” Block said. “It brought back all my memories. I’d cry and then I’d cry again. It reminded me of the whole overwhelming experience.”

Closs is the 13-year-old who was abducted after her parents were brutally murdered in their home in Barron, Wis. She was missing for more than 80 days when she escaped and was found last Thursday, Jan. 10.

“She escaped and then ran up to someone and asked for help. Jasmine did that, too,” Block said. “The guy who kidnapped Jayme kept her hidden when people

would come over. That is what happened to Jasmine, too. Jasmine was locked in a closet. And I just found out that Jayme’s favorite color is blue. That is Jasmine’s favorite color.”

Block said even though there were so many similarities to the teenage girls’ stories, there is one big difference: Closs doesn’t have her parents to come home to.

“Jayme lost her parents. She watched her parents get murdered,” Block said.

That sadness is what Alexandria Police Chief Rick Wyffels has been thinking about since he heard the news of Closs being found alive.

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Above, left: Jayme Closs is pictured with her aunt Jennifer Smith (left) after being rescued from Gordon, Wis. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Smith

Above, right: Brian Burke, a good friend of Sarah Block’s, gave Jasmine Block a hug at a community celebration in September 2017 that was held in Jasmine’s honor. She escaped from three men after being held captive for 29 days. Echo Press file photo

Fish house vandalism prompts reward

Two dozen break-ins so far reported in Douglas County

By Ross Evavold
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Already this winter there have been two dozen reported cases of break-ins to fish houses in Douglas County. One of those was Carol VanderWeyst’s fish house on Blackwell Lake, which she said vandals hit on Christmas Day.

That prompted her into action. She wants “people to

start looking and watching” in the hope that someone sees something that will lead to an arrest in the theft and vandalism at ice fishing houses on lakes in the region.

“Somebody knows something. Somebody has seen something,” VanderWeyst said. She’s so convinced that someone has seen or will see something, that this past

week VanderWeyst has set up a reward fund called Hook A Crook.

The fund has been started through Bremer Bank, she said, and donations can be made to Hook A Crook reward fund at any Bremer Bank branch.

Fish houses not safe

Thefts and vandalism at ice fishing houses is a problem

not only in Douglas County but across the region, said VanderWeyst, who lives in Cyrus. She is concentrating her efforts on lakes in west-central Minnesota, including Pope and Otter Tail counties.

In late December, the Echo Press reported a rash of break-ins on three Douglas County

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Gas prices under \$2: How low will it go?

Steph Jacobson of Elbow Lake fills up with gas at Holiday on 3rd Avenue in Alexandria on Monday. For the first time in several years, gas prices have dropped below \$2 per gallon in the area.

Lowell Anderson
Echo Press



Traut pleads not guilty to manslaughter

By Al Edenloff
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Troy Traut of Alexandria, one of two suspects charged with manslaughter in the death of Steven “Beaver” Hlinsky, has pleaded not guilty.

Traut, 33, who appeared in Douglas County District Court on Jan. 10, also pleaded not guilty to two fifth-degree misdemeanor assault charges.

Hlinsky, 46, a longtime Forada firefighter, died on May 13, 2018. Authorities believe his death was the result of injuries he suffered after being assaulted in the early morning hours of May 5 outside a bar in Forada.

Judge Timothy Churchwell scheduled a settlement conference for Traut for Thursday, March 7, at 10 a.m.

The other suspect, Jacob Larson, 33, of Kensington, faces the same charges as Traut. He has not yet entered a plea, according to court documents, and a settlement conference is scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 31, at 9 a.m.

Recently, a change of venue was denied for both suspects, meaning their court cases will take place in Douglas County.



Traut

BRANDON-EVANSVILLE SCHOOLS

District to start day care program

By Celeste Edenloff
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Parents in the Brandon-Evansville School District may soon have a new option for before- and after-school child care. The B-E School Board approved the adoption of a day care program on both ends of the school day at its Monday night meeting.

Surveys were sent to parents of students in grades K-6, asking if they would be interested in a day care program. Of the 59 responses, 38 said yes while 21 said no, Superintendent Don Peschel told the board.

With the responses, as many as 50 students could be participating in the after-school program, he said, and roughly 20 in the before-school program.

Now that the program is approved, Peschel said the school district will go back to those who stated yes and provide them with more details, such as pricing and a registration date. He said the district will work with the 38 parents who responded first, but that the program will be open to everyone.

“I think it’s going to go and we’ll have kids,” said Peschel, who noted that he started a similar program in a district he worked in previously and it has been running for a couple



Peschel

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