



STAFF PHOTO BY HOWARD LESTRUD

Brenda Salinas hugs a friend while son Efen looks on at a special gathering on Sunday at Central Park in Blooming Prairie. Efen was a classmate of Emerson Harberts who was killed in a car crash last Friday near Claremont.

CRASH REACTION

BP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Blooming Prairie Schools Superintendent Barry Olson said the tragic crash is “tremendously hurtful.”

The following statement was sent to Blooming Prairie students and their families: “Counselors will be available throughout the district on Monday and future days as needed.” Further info can be found on this Caring Bridge site: <https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/rachelandjaxonharberts>

Staff must listen and talk to students about what happened, says Superintendent Olson. “We must be there for our kids,” he added.

“We still have 800 kids to take care of and want all to know that we will have counselors available and administrators will be walking around our buildings to check on staff and students,” Olson said.

CRASH: girl killed FROM A1

Patrol is reconstructing the crash and will be doing a full investigation, which could take several months to complete.

While it’s unknown what led up to the crash last week, state court records indicate Kruckeberg has an extensive driving record. During the past eight years since he obtained a driver’s license, Kruckeberg has been issued nine speeding citations, four seat belt violations, four driving after suspension violations and one use of wireless communications device violation, state records show. Of the speeding violations, three of them were for traveling at least 14 mph over the speed limit, including one for going 79 in a 55 mph zone in 2011, according to the state.

Assisting the State Patrol at the scene were Dodge County Sheriff’s Office, Dodge Center Fire, Dodge Center Ambulance, Gold Cross Ambulance and the medical helicopters.

Sheriff Scott Rose said the crash scene was especially difficult for some of his deputies who have worked other fatalities along Highway 14 in the past, including the death of Scott Hodgman in 2014 just miles down the road.

A teacher biography page on the BP Schools website quotes Rachel Harberts as saying, “I have a love for teaching and learning with all my students.”

Harberts grew up in Lanesboro. She attended Rochester Community and Technical College for two years earning an associate degree in nursing.

Her career path changed, and she headed back to school at Winona State University where she earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education.

She and her husband Brandon were married in 1999. Her biography on the school’s website says they “had a Mickey Mouse wedding because I love Mickey Mouse.”

achieved through pledges. Anyone wishing to contribute can do so at www.gofundme.com/rachel-and-jaxon-harberts.

The family has also set up a caringbridge site to keep people updated on Jaxon and Rachel’s conditions. The site can be accessed at caring-bridge.org.

On Sunday, the family posted that Rachel had a “low key day.” After having an MRI, they found she had broken ligaments in her neck and a broken nose and a disc that is putting pressure on her spine. They have chosen not to do surgery at this time.

Meanwhile, Jaxon has “a great day,” according to a caringbridge post. He has a torn ligament on his C-spine but at this time they don’t think they will do surgery. They were able to “wake him up” a little on Sunday, and he was moving all around and at one point in the night he opened one eye.

“They are both strong fighters,” family posted. “Thanks everyone for the thoughts and prayers. I know everyone needs the support.”

TREACHEROUS ROADWAY

Since the mid-1980s, more than 145 people have been killed on Highway 14, which winds through 265 miles of farmland from Winona to the South Dakota border. State records show about 75 percent of the deaths between 2000 and 2005 occurred on the two-lane stretches.

Two sections remain two-lane: Dodge Center to Owatonna—the stretch of last week’s fatality—and New Ulm to North Mankato. For years, people have referred to the highway as a “death trap.”

There are no turn lanes or passing lanes at the intersection where last week’s fatal crash took place.

Just this past May, state lawmakers finally approved funding to widen the Dodge Center to Owatonna stretch. However, bids won’t be let out until next March with construction possibly beginning later in 2019. So the roadway won’t be completed for at least another year and a half.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILY

A GoFundMe campaign has been established to help the Harberts family with funeral and medical expenses. As of early Monday, \$25,401 of the \$50,000 goal had been



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

A Blooming Prairie third grader was killed instantly in a two-vehicle crash along U.S. Highway 14, which has become known as the Highway of Horrors, at County Road 3 on the east end of Claremont Friday morning. Markings in the roadway show where the vehicle containing the child was stopped attempting to make a left hand turn when it was rear-ended by another vehicle. The State Patrol continues to investigate the crash.

REACTION: support FROM A1

nell of the BP Baptist Church, the Rev. Lindsay Brennan of Red Oak Grove Lutheran Church and the Rev. Michael Walerius of First Lutheran Church of Blooming Prairie were all summoned to the elementary school on Friday.

The Rev. Heidi Heimgartner was asked by school administration to go to St. Mary’s Hospital. She spent the day there with family.

Counselors from school were also asked to provide counseling at the high school and elementary school.

“This is a time of healing and sharing.”

Father Thomas Niehaus
St. Columbanus Church

The idea to bring third grader classmates together with their parents and grandparents was conceived by parents Stephanie Miller, Kristin Romeo, Jaclyn Schlichter and Becky Miner. The get-together was open to all.

“This gathering provides a safe place for kids and their parents whatever their feelings,” said Schlichter.

“It’s OK to shed tears,” Miller said. She also emphasized that now Monday won’t be the first time students see one another since the crash. “This is what Blooming Prairie is,” she said.

“This gathering gives people strength and gives people time to connect,” commented Pastor Lindsay.

“People want to touch and feel and help and heal the third graders and their families,” said Heimgartner.

Standing by a swing set carrying her three children, mother Brenda Salinas said her three children were affected by this tragic crash.

Her youngest son, Efen Hernandez, 8, was a classmate of Emerson. “This is devastating and hard for kids to understand,” Salinas said, tears flowing from her eyes. “It’s heart breaking and hard to put into words,” she said.

“It feels like I lost a daughter; it’s very personal,” Salinas said.

Harberts was going to be her daughter Gloria’s volleyball coach. Emerson was also to be in that team. Salinas’ son Vincent played football with Jaxon.

Blossoms Forever Awards honor BP grads

Jay Iverson chosen for Distinguished Service

By HOWARD LESTRUD
STAFF WRITER

Each year, the Blossoms Forever group, an offshoot of the Blooming Prairie Education Foundation, honors people in three different categories.

It has been learned that Jay Iverson, a 1989 graduate of Blooming Prairie High School, has been selected to receive the Distinctive Service Award.

Iverson will be honored, along with three others, on Saturday, Sept. 29 at a Blooming Prairie Education Foundation Alumni Awards Banquet. The banquet will be held at the Blooming Prairie Servicemen’s Club. Social is at 5 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m. and program at 7 p.m.

Candidates for the Distinctive Service Award must have graduated from Blooming Prairie High School at least 10 years prior to the current date.

This person has become known for making a positive contribution to the benefit of mankind and has achieved success in one or more of the following areas: a profession, business, the arts, humanitarian efforts or community service.

The other three recipients are: Robert Nahlovsky, Honored Teacher; Dennis Kruckeberg, Athletics Hall of Fame and Peggy Tashima, Honored Staff Member.

Iverson is saluted, according to his nominator, for his strong desire to help people in need. Wanting to always help people, Iverson has done so in his role as a firefighter and as an EMS (Emergency Medical Services) volunteer for



IVERSON

the Blooming Prairie Ambulance Service. He is also certified as a fire and EMS instructor.

Iverson has been an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) for 22 years and he has been a firefighter for 21 years.

As an EMT, Iverson has served many roles in this function, including president. He is also a CPR instructor and has trained many of the Blooming Prairie businesses, schools and individuals in the community.

“It’s a great honor to be recognized by my home town,” remarked Iverson.

Knowing his sincere dedication to his service as an EMT and as a firefighter, his wife Carol nominated him for this award and also for the American Hero Award. He received the latter award for Southern Minnesota in 2016.

Carol said she has been told many times by people who say they are glad Jay was on a particular emergency call.

“He even has people contact him with emergency questions,” Carol related. “People feel comfortable around him and trust him,” she continued.

“I had one person tell me that when she heard his voice at a scene, she was instantly comforted,” Carol says. “This is what Jay is about,” she said.

Jay has been a Blooming Prairie firefighter since 1997 and has been a rescue captain for many of those years. He also helps research and meet vendors during the process of purchasing trucks or fire equipment.

He was a day-time firefighter and First Responder in Hayward from 2006-14.

Jay recently completed fire instructor/EMS instructor training through the Riverland Community College. He now is able to teach the

Awards night set for Sept. 29

By HOWARD LESTRUD
STAFF WRITER

Two Blooming Prairie Blossoms graduates and two staff members will be recognized on Saturday, Sept. 29 at a Blooming Prairie Education Foundation Alumni Awards Banquet. This will be the 11th annual banquet.

It’s a special night for Blooming Prairie High School alumni on Saturday, Sept. 29 when the Blossoms Forever Group of the BP Education Foundation gives out special recognition awards.

Special awards to honor alumni and staff were created by Blossoms Forever group in 2008.

The Blossoms Forever night is planned for the BP Servicemen’s Club with social hour at 5 p.m., the meal at 6 p.m. and a program follows at 7 p.m.

Doug Myers, a Blooming Prairie High School alumnus, will be the master of ceremonies for the evening.

Awards will be presented in three different categories:

- Distinctive Service -- Jay Iverson, Class of 1989
- Athletics Hall of Fame -- Dennis Kruckeberg, Class of 1965
- Honored Teacher, Bob Nahlovsky; Honored Staff Member, Peggy Tashima

Special criteria are cited for each category.

Julie Noble, president of the BP Education Foundation, says nominations are encouraged the year around. “We are always looking for nominations,” she says.

Tickets for the Blossoms Forever recognition night are available at the New York Life office or by contacting Julie Noble, BP Education Foundation president, at 507-456-2410 or at jnoble2410@gmail.com

Kruckeberg to enter BP Athletics Hall of Fame

By HOWARD LESTRUD
STAFF WRITER

Dennis Kruckeberg, Blooming Prairie High School Class of 1965, will enter the Blooming Prairie Athletics Hall of Fame on Saturday, Sept. 29 at a Blooming Prairie Education Foundation Alumni Awards Banquet.

Athletics and sports in general have long appealed to Kruckeberg as a participant and as a fan.

Kruckeberg excelled in high school sports, football, basketball and track.

That wide smile comes across his face when it is mentioned that he scored over 1000 points in his basketball career and that’s before the three-point shot came into play.

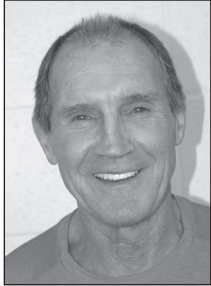
Kruckeberg is often seen wearing his green sport coat. How many does he actually own? He’s not telling.

Kruckeberg is one of five boys born to Kenneth and Edith Kruckeberg. In order, it’s Doug, Bruce, Dennis, Butch (Kenneth Jr.) and Todd.

All were athletes. Of course, Dennis thinks he was the best of the crop. Jokingly, no not really jokingly.

Kruckeberg is most proud of being the Valedictorian of his class of 87 students in 1965.

He was captain of the football squad his senior year. He played both ways in football, as a receiver and as a defensive back. “I did a pretty good job at those positions and I remember catching a touchdown pass from David Ressler in a big game against Hayfield.”



KRUCKEBERG

He also captained the basketball team in 1964-65. During that year, he garnered honors on WCCO’s Cage Team of the Week. A newspaper article said “the classic guard (Kruckeberg)” was one of the reasons Coach Jim Poole’s Blossoms led the Gopher Conference.

It took 35 years for records to be checked and verified that Kruckeberg scored over 1,000 points. He actually logged 1,012 points. It is likely he scored more than that because he actually saw some varsity playing time as a sophomore.

Kruckeberg’s high-point game came against Freeborn when he scored 36 points. He averaged 23-plus points per game as a guard.

He was all-conference in football and basketball both his junior and senior years.

Kruckeberg excelled in track, too, setting school records in the 120-yard high hurdles and in the 220-yard low hurdles.

Following high school graduation, Kruckeberg was offered scholarships at the University of South Dakota for football and basketball.

He declined the scholarships, attended Austin Junior College for one year and then finished college at Mankato State College. He became an English and psychology teacher, teaching in Slayton, Minn., for five years. He coached boys tennis while at Slayton.

Kruckeberg married Pam Christianson while in college. The couple had two children, Grant and Chadwick. Grant resides in the Twin Cities and Chad in Belize. Kruckeberg has one grandchild, Abigail, 12.

Kruckeberg’s working career then sent him to California, Chicago, the Grand Cayman Islands and back to Minnesota. He started an electric lighting business, which he ran for 16 years.

Family then called with Dennis’ father having health issues. Dennis