

Wilfred

Continued from page one

Wayne Sanderson said he nominated his dad for the quilt after learning that his uncle had been a recent recipient.

"Dad's brother showed me an article in the Tyler paper, where this individual awarded (Lester) a quilt," Wayne said. "Lester said, 'You know, your dad actually served in a combat area.' We thought if anybody deserves a quilt, he does. So, I contacted these gals and that's all it took."

The 66-year-old eldest son of Wilfred and the late Norma Sanderson understands the dedication, sacrifice and effort involved with serving in the military, having spent 24 years of his own life in the Army.

"This was kind of big deal," Wayne Sanderson said. "I just figured my dad deserved that."

The Sanderson family moved to the Balaton area in 1965. All five sons graduated from Balaton High School.

"I lived on the east side of the county road, the Balaton district," Wilfred said. "If I'd have been on the other side of the country road, I'd have

been in the Tyler District. So, my five boys graduated from Balaton."

Wayne Sanderson graduated in 1972, followed by Craig (1974), Calvin (1975), Michael (1977) and Jerry (1983).

"I stay pretty active," Wayne said. "Since I've been retired, I keep awfully busy. I do a lot of volunteering for disabled veterans in Hutchinson. We pick up clothing and donate that. Then I drive veterans to medical appointments. I stay busy doing that."

Longevity seems to run in the family for the Sanderson men.

"In Dad's family, there were three boys and four girls," Wayne Sanderson said. "All the girls have passed away — they were much younger when they passed away — and all the boys are still up and running. Dad is doing pretty well. But you should see his brother (Lester) at 98. You can sit down and have a conversation. And his third brother (Victor) is in Flaudreau, South Dakota. He was a farmer all his life and retired a number of years ago. He's in

his 80s and doing well."

Quilts of Valor started in 2003, after founder Catherine Roberts, whose son, Nat, was deployed in Iraq, had a dream one night. The message of that dream was that quilts wrapped around hurting soldiers and veterans created a sense of healing and hope for them.

The first recipient was a young soldier from Minnesota who had lost his leg in Iraq. The quilt was awarded in November 2003 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the Washington, D.C. area. The movement then spread across the nation and beyond.

Pieces for Heroes — one of nine Quilts of Valor groups in Minnesota and the only one in southwest Minnesota — is starting its third year.

"Nancy McClain is our group coordinator," Peterson said. "She lives in Wood Lake, and she's the one that got all of us into this. Several of us gals are from Russell, but we are actually out of the Marshall area."

Jones said she believes the local group started with seven members but has since grown.



Joy Jones (at left) and Carol Peterson hold up a quilt made by local Quilts of Valor volunteers and given recently to 95-year-old Wilfred Sanderson at Lakeview Senior Housing in Balaton. Photo by Jenny Kirk

"I think there are 16 or 17 members now," Jones said. "Some don't come all the time, but that's just how it goes. You can come and be there for however long you want. We meet the second and fourth Mondays of the month (at the Adult Community Center in Marshall)."

Wilfred Sanderson asked how long it took to make a quilt like his. Peterson said it typically takes more than 40 hours.

"It takes from 40 to 50 hours from start to finish," she said. "And it's about \$250 to complete it, depending on size. I'm a beginner, but we have some very, very talented members."

Lakeview resident Maxine Wilmes said she did a lot of embroidering squares for quilts but that she has never been able to put it together to make it look nice. Peterson noted that the choice of fabric oftentimes is the key.

Gravley

Continued from page one

3-year-old Simon), my dad (Aaron) and I then, so I was the only girl. It was like that for quite a while."

The Gravley family lived in Balaton up till about four years ago, when they moved to Cottonwood.

"My older brother helped me out a lot," Shelby said. "Obviously, I had the family around us — my dad especially. He is supportive, especially in our sports. My little brother, Simon, actually plays basketball, too."

Balaton resident Lora Johnson fondly remembers Shelby and her siblings.

"I've kept track of them," 97-year-old Johnson said. "I felt so sorry for the kids because the same thing happened to me. My mother died when I was 6 years old. I had sympathy for them because I know how hard it was for them."

Johnson continued to be a proud supporter of Gravley, even after she moved away.

"My granddaughter Shelby (Buntjer) is the school counselor, so I always keep track of what's going on in Cottonwood," Johnson said. "I went to so many of (my great-granddaughters') games that it seemed like our school. Shelby really blossomed this year. I'm really happy she is doing so well."

Prior to Lakeview, Gravley attended Tracy Area Public Schools. She also took piano lessons from Johnson's other granddaughter, Shannon (Wee) Benson. Before Balaton closed its school, Gravley attended preschool and kindergarten there.

"I feel like the whole town of Balaton is my family," Gravley said. "Sometimes I like to drive by to see our old house because everything happened there. Before we moved, I knew the whole town. When somebody passes away in a small town, everyone knows about it."

Gravley's love of basketball was sparked while playing the sport in Balaton as a third grader. Coach Sara Larson

said she worked Shelby harder than most young Warrior players.

"I spent extra time with her in the fitness center and gym, teaching her some skills and how to find her emotional drive," Larson said. "I know I made her cry a few times and got under her skin, but she knows I love her and only wanted to better her. I knew her mother and I would always remind Shelby of her mother's drive and passion. I told her it was in her, too."

Larson recalls teaching different skills to the youngster.

"I made her learn to dribble and learn to move around a garbage can," Larson said. "I have watched her improve greatly over the past few years. Shelby has stayed in contact with me over the years, letting me know her basketball schedule and inviting me to games."

Larson said she is thankful that her former player has continued to play basketball.

"She has turned into a great player, and more than that, she is a wonderful person," Larson said. "Her compassion for others and her humble attitude makes her someone anyone would want on their team. I will always be a fan of hers and I know she will do great things in life on and off the court."

In late December, Larson accompanied Wendy Lustfield, who provided daycare for Gravley for many years, at a game against Adrian.

"I scored the most points I've ever scored (29) at that game," Gravley said. "It felt good. I just love basketball so much."

Gravley gained even more of a support system about a handful of years ago when her dad remarried.

"My dad met Emily and now I have a stepfamily," she said. "It's nice to have another woman in the house. Along with my two brothers, I have three stepbrothers."

The typical Brady Bunch household settled into a regular routine for some time — until the family made the



Above: No. 81 Shelby Gravley is pictured with other Balaton Warrior youth basketball players in 2015. Photo courtesy of Sara Larson

At Right: Shelby Gravley, a Lakeview basketball player and former Balaton resident, poses recently with two of her biggest fans — Sara Larson (left) and Wendy Lustfield. Submitted photo

decision to move to Cottonwood. At first, the thought of changing schools as a junior high student caused Gravley a lot of anxiety. Fortunately, she found that the community welcomed her and her family with open arms.

"There was a lot of emotions in switching schools," Gravley said. "But if I'm being honest, I wouldn't go back because this place is my home."

Mike Imes, head coach for the Lakers, said Gravley fits right in with the very talented junior class.

"Shelby makes seven juniors on the team and they all play," Imes said. "They're all good."

Looking back, Coach Imes said Gravley has grown immensely as a player. He said Gravley didn't play a lot last season and lacked some confidence on the court but that it was like a switch got flipped at the end of the school year.

"She said, 'I want to play' and put in the time," Imes



said. "She went to camp and had individual training outside what we were doing with her. She wants to get better and is extremely coachable. I think she's improved more than any kid I've ever coached."

Imes said that Gravley has good stamina, can get up and down the court well and understands the game, adding that she's also fun to be around and is very caring.

"I think she has aspirations to play college basketball," he said. "With what she had to go through as a young child, it hasn't hindered her at all. She's been a really great addition to that class. The kids love her."

The Laker basketball team recently rallied together for lone senior Savannah Rausch, who was diagnosed with cancer on Christmas Eve.

"In November, she thought it was a cold," Gravley said. "Then her eye started drooping, so they thought it was pink eye. One day we had a game in Canby, and she told us her arm hurt. Then she fell on it. A teammate's dad (Curt Louwagie) who is an eye doctor knew something was up. Savannah then went in for more exams."

Rausch was diagnosed with Horner's Syndrome. More tests then revealed a mass running down her esophagus and to her left lung.

"I stayed after the night it happened," Gravley said. "It kind of freaked me out. She came out and said it was probably nerve damage. She started crying and I started crying because we're a family, you know?"

Imes said if he ever gets cancer, he hopes he is able to handle it like Rausch. He said she's done three rounds of chemo and the tumor has shrunk like it's supposed to.

"I hope I can be as strong as her," he said. "You never once hear her complain. She's been a real inspiration."

Imes said area teams and communities have also stepped up to support Rausch and the Laker team. While some of the emphasis could have been a negative distraction for the team's progress, as there were a lot of tears shed before announcing the starting lineup, Imes said the kids handled it in a "phenomenal" way.

"This has probably been the most challenging year but the most rewarding year," he said. "At 19-7, we've had a great year, but how they rallied around Savannah and how Savannah has handled this is even more amazing. Every year, we talk about that tomorrow isn't a given. I've given that speech, but to be honest, you never think it's going to be one of your kids."

"They start out with a focal point and go from there," Peterson said. "Lauren and Joy are really good, but I am still learning. You show up and sometimes you cut, sometimes you sew and sometimes you put labels on — there's always something for everybody to do."

In the three years Pieces for Heroes has been in operation, more than 90 quilts have been given to deserving men and women in the area.

"Nancy (McClain) told me that we've presented 93 quilts so far in the three years that we've been getting together," Peterson said.

The group is pleased with the effort so far.

"For a group that small, that's really good," Jones said.

Several people, including 91-year-old Wilmes, congratulated Sanderson after he received his quilt.

"You had a nice day today," Wilmes said to Wilfred. "Enjoy the quilt."

Sanderson replied: "I will. Every day."

Life has been known to throw curveballs, but some people just get stronger.

"I believe adversity makes me stronger," Gravley said. "It gets me to think that you never know what's going to happen the next day, so you should make the best of it. In basketball especially, you should work your hardest in that game."

Gravley tries hard to do her part in every game, adding that she and her teammates push each other to be their best.

"I feel like I'm playing a lot more physical this year," she said. "It does help because when I'm getting more physical to get open and making more baskets, I get doubled teamed. Then our other players get open."

Gravley said she has a lot of confidence in her teammates, which includes fellow juniors Kaitlynn Bot, Kiana Imes, Savannah Louwagie, Aubrey Kaczmarek, Payton Timm and Jaci Hubbard.

"I like the togetherness of basketball," Gravley said. "When you do something right, I'm getting cheered on by my teammates. And when they do something good, I cheer them on. I push them to be their very best."

Gravley is also a good student — she's a member of the National Honor Society — and has wisdom beyond her years.

"Whenever I hear people complaining about their parents, I try to say, 'Let's not hate on our parents because some of us don't have them,'" she said. "People just don't know when one day, your life can change."

And even though she might have a heavy heart at times, Gravley has the whole world in front of her to conquer if she chooses. While she doesn't have her mom's physical presence with her, Gravley does have her mom's height, heart and spirit.

"I get my height from my mom," Gravley said. "She was 5-11 and she played basketball, too. I just don't want to forget her. Spencer was old enough to remember her, and he will tell me stories about her, so that helps."

In the future, Gravley may need to have other reminders, but for now, basketball continues to be a tie that binds together all the things that truly matter.

"A lot of times, I think about her before I go into the game," Gravley said. "I know my mom would be proud of me, with where I am today."

Note: Lakeview is now 20-7 overall after defeating Lac qui Parle Valley 62-47 on Monday evening. The Lakers advance to the Section 3A North championship against the Minnetonka Vikings (28-1 overall).



The Lakeview Laker basketball team show their support and strength for one of their own — senior Savannah Rausch (center front) — who was recently diagnosed with cancer. Teammate Shelby Gravley (at far right) faces adversity of her own as she's dealt with the death of her mom since the age of 4. The two young women are inspiring others with their resilience and "together, you can accomplish anything" attitude.

Photo courtesy of Karen Berg