

# BRainerd DISPATCH

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## SOLVING A MYSTERY

Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Sharon Richards (left) and her son Stevie Johnson talk about their relative Ernest Cleaveland Thursday, April 29, at Richards' home outside Ironton. A dog tag belonging to Cleaveland, a World War II veteran from Brainerd who died in 1994, recently washed up on a beach in Northern Ireland.

Dog tag from World War II veteran found in N. Ireland returned to Brainerd family

By Theresa Bourke  
Staff Writer

It's been nearly three decades since Ernest Cleaveland died and more than 75 years since he was discharged from the U.S. Army after World War II.

That's why the recent discovery of his military dog tag was so surprising. But even more remarkable was where the token was found — near the coast of Northern Ireland, hundreds of miles away from the beaches of Normandy where Cleaveland served.

Eighteen-year-old Jack Murray was out walking his dog on Kilkeel Beach one day in the small Northern Irish town where he used to live when he spotted something unusual. "Whenever I first found it, it was completely rusted. You couldn't make out any names or anything, so I took it home," he said during a Facebook video interview.

Murray cleaned up the object and realized it was an old battered military dog tag with the name Ernest Cleaveland and an address in Brainerd, Minnesota.

"I tried to do my own research, but to get a service record, if you're not a U.S. citizen, it's quite difficult," he said.

Realizing it could take months to get Cleaveland's service records, Murray turned to

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**VIDEO**

For video, see [brainerddispatch.com](http://brainerddispatch.com)



**FIRST**  
AMENDMENT WEEK

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**Editors note:** This column is part of a seven-day Forum Communications series on the First Amendment. If you have a question or comment, please email [freepress@forumcomm.com](mailto:freepress@forumcomm.com).

Kathy didn't give her last name and we don't know where she's from. Her note, however, resonates.

"As a kid, I thought whatever was written in the press had to be the truth, in black and white," she wrote to Forum Communications Co., which operates news-papers, television and radio stations and specialty websites



**KORRIE WENZEL**  
Forum Communications

in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. "Today, there is more opinion presented as truth, making it harder to disseminate the truth. This has led to more separation between people."

Kathy wrote that after our company called out to readers,

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## Cooking up quality culinary concoctions in the kitchen

Pillager ProStart program prepares students for restaurant industry jobs

By Theresa Bourke  
Staff Writer

PILLAGER — The aroma of melting cheese filled the ProStart classroom at Pillager High School Tuesday, April 27, as students clad in white chef's jackets were hard at work making homemade mac and cheese.

Jenny Wise moved from station to station, explaining recipes to her students and checking cheese sauces as they bubbled.

About 45 minutes later, four pans of piping hot, gooey mac and cheese lined the counter, as students taste-tested their work and voted on their favorites.



Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Pillager High School students Karly Clyne, Kailyn Kimball and Tehanna Johnson cook up mac and cheese Tuesday, April 27, during their ProStart culinary class, taught by Jenny Wise. The students have all new equipment this year, thanks to Pillager's 2019 bonding referendum.

Wise teaches students of all culinary abilities in her class, which stems from the national ProStart program aiming to teach students both cooking techniques

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## CLC green bandanas raise mental health awareness

Project aims to support students in need

By Frank Lee  
Staff Writer

College can be a trying time for students. But for those uncertain who to turn to for help dealing with a mental illness, it can be downright tragic.

At Central Lakes College, students and staff are trying to fix that.

The Green Bandana Project at Central Lakes College is a mental health awareness and suicide prevention campaign that uses backpacks and lime-green bandanas in an effort to change lives.

"We have a videogra-

phy program and so this fall students created the video for it," said Suzie Karsnia, the counselor for the Central Lakes College campuses in Brainerd and Staples.

Karsnia hopes to get more students involved in the marketing and awareness of the project next year when more will have received the COVID-19 vaccine and return for in-person classes.

"It really is supposed to be or should be student-run. But because of COVID, we didn't have students on campus," Karsnia said of

the project.

The Green Bandana Project was founded at the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus in 2016. The idea was inspired by "Dan's Bandana Project" at UW-River Falls, which asked students to pledge to support others' mental health.

"We actually got the bandanas last year — and then COVID hit — and so we didn't get it up and running last year," Karsnia said. "The whole idea around it is to be able to tie the bandana around a backpack, and it shows sol-



Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Former Central Lakes College student Noah Karsnia displays the green bandanas, intended to be placed on backpacks, CLC counselor Suzie Karsnia will be rolling out in the fall for all students. The bandanas will indicate the wearers are safe individuals to approach with mental health-related issues.

idarity and support for one another, reducing the stigma." Students ages 15 to 24

are in the highest risk group for a majority of mental illnesses, but

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## DOG TAG

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— yes, this was real. “It was kind of a shock, really,” said Richards, who was close to her Uncle Ernie — her mother’s brother — as he had no kids of his own.

“He was single for quite a few years of his life,” she said. “... He lived at home with my grandma, and I lived there for a while with my grandma and my uncle. And then later on he met a nice woman and they married, and he had a home in Brainerd there. And towards the end of his life, my aunt and I went over there and kind of helped him out with his cleaning and stuff like that at his house.”

After weeks of waiting, the dog tag finally arrived in the mail Monday, April 26, from Northern Ireland, where Murray is just excited he was able to get it to its rightful owner, a process that went much smoother than he anticipated.

“I was utterly gobsmacked by Brainerd,” he said. “Just two days to find all this. People found gravestones of him, people found newspaper clippings of obituaries.”

The close-knit lakes area community came together in a big way to solve the puzzle.

“There were so many people bringing back, like, ‘Here’s his cousin who now lives in Minnesota, and here’s their address.’ ‘Hey, I went to this house because it’s listed on the dog tag, and I asked the residents if they know anything about it,’” Murray said. “... Within three days, I knew everything there was to know about this family. I literally did nothing; I took a

post and put it up on Facebook.”

Now, thanks to that Facebook sleuthing, Richards has her uncle’s dog tag to go along with the prestigious Purple Heart he earned after being wounded in Normandy July 26, 1944.

“He was hit with shrapnel, and that took a lot of his back out,” Richards said, holding up the official notice that came with his Purple Heart.

Cleaveland didn’t talk much about his time in the military until the very end of his life, so Richards doesn’t know a lot except that he saw some horrific things.

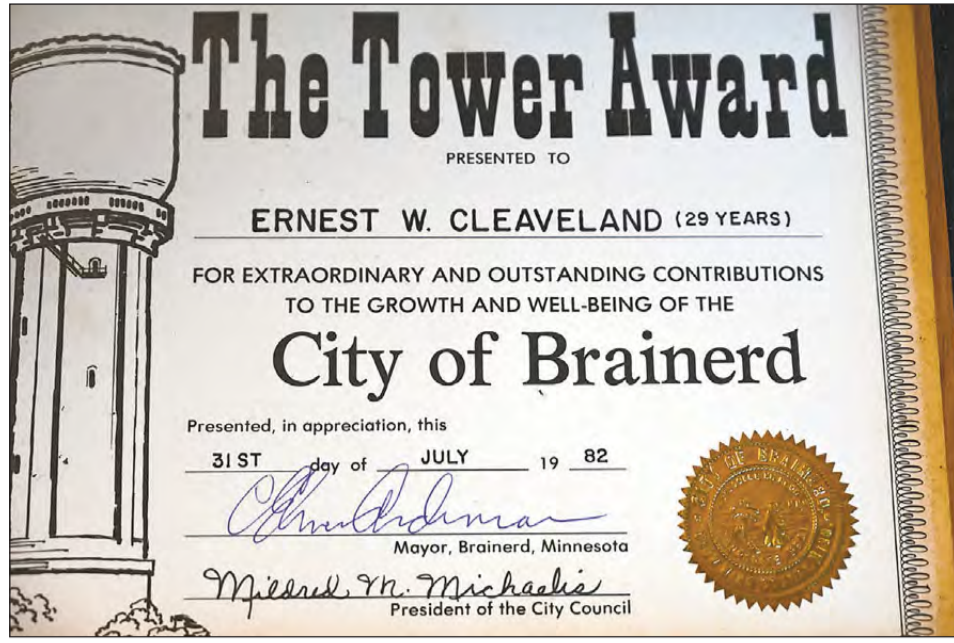
He was discharged in December 1945 after serving for about two and a half years. His specialty occupation was a cargo checker, according to his discharge papers.

Cleaveland died May 13, 1994, in Brainerd, where he was born and raised and later lived with his wife Edna while working at Brainerd Public Utilities for 29 years.

But how his dog tag ended up in Northern Ireland is still a mystery.

Murray said there’s an old World War II airfield not far from Kilkeel that could have a connection. Or perhaps Cleaveland could have spent time in Northern Ireland before shipping out to France, Richards suggested.

Another likely possibility, according to Crow Wing County Veterans Services Officer Erik Flowers, is that Cleaveland could have gone up north to recuperate after his injury. Though Flowers couldn’t find anything about Northern Ireland in Cleaveland’s military



Submitted photos

Ernest Cleaveland earned a Tower Award from the city of Brainerd in 1982 after 29 years as an employee at Brainerd Public Utilities.

records, there could be any number of possibilities as to why he may have spent time there.

“Maybe there was a station there where he was working, doing the cargo checking or something like that in the beginning or maybe towards the end,” Flowers said. “And if he was hurt enough, again, he might have been taken off the frontline and then that’s where he ended up serving the rest of his time doing what he could there.”

Regardless of how the dog tag ended up on Kilkeel Beach in view of a high school student walking his dog, Richards is happy to have another keepsake from her Uncle Ernie’s life. It will now rest among Cleaveland’s other awards, including the more localized Tower Award he received from the city of Brainerd in 1982 in recognition of his time spent at BPU.

Cleaveland also earned the European-



A Brainerd Dispatch newspaper clipping from 1982 shows City Council President Mildred Michaelis presenting Ernest Cleaveland with a Tower Award from the city for his 29 years of service to Brainerd Public Utilities.

African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, awarded to those who served in the European theatre of World War II, which was the main area of combat, and was recognized by the city of Antwerp in Belgium for his service to the city. A framed certificate from the city thanks Cleaveland for “his work in the Port of Antwerp during one hundred seventy five days of

continuous enemy air and V.-weapon attacks between October 7, 1944 and March 30, 1945.”

The battered old dog tag fits in perfectly with Richards’ collection.

“It’s nice,” she said, “but he’s been gone for 20-some years now. I wish he would have been able to see it.”

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## PILLAGER

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Photos by Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Pillager High School students Tehanna Johnson, Kailyn Kimball, and Karly Clyne prepare mac and cheese Tuesday, April 27, during their ProStart culinary class.

munity.”

The Minnesota ProStart chapter works closely with Hospitality Minnesota to help students get even more of a feel for the hospitality industry.

The two teamed up in mid-April, along with Grand View Lodge, Eco-lab and Sysco Minnesota, to host the 2021 state ProStart competition, with teams of student chefs from eight schools around the state.

The Pillager team of Julia Thomas, Allison Bellows, Chloe Pearson and Islay Peterson took second place, an improvement from the school’s fourth-place finish last year.

The competition was a little different than normal this year, thanks of course to COVID-19, but a condensed version still took place at Grand View Lodge in Nisswa.

Pillager students finished behind Sauk Rapids-Rice but managed to take home the Creative Secret Ingredients Award for their recipes.

“It was so different, but our team did amazing. We had amazing communication, and we all bonded so well,” Thomas said in an email. “... I am so incredibly proud of this year’s Pillager Prostart team.”

Those who have watched the Food Network show “Chopped” might be imagining a similar setup, with a basket full of mystery ingredients and a clock ticking down. According to Wise, that isn’t far off. The students learned of their mystery ingredients an hour before the competition, giving them time to make their plan. This year they had to cook a meal with a teres major cut of beef, jalapeño peppers and rutabaga. They also had a whole pantry full of other ingredients at their disposal.

“To prep for this ahead of time, our practices consisted of us giving them a few mystery ingredients,” Wise said, noting her students practiced with all sorts of different meats until about three weeks before the competition when they found out they’d be using beef.

They already had a concept in mind and practiced it with various ingredients before the competition. But one ingredient they had not used was a rutabaga.

Luckily, though, students got 10 minutes to talk with their teacher and their mentor chef to make a plan. What they came up with was Sicil-



Olivia Peterson and Mya Ronnebaum and chow down on the mac and cheese they made during their ProStart culinary class Tuesday, April 27, at Pillager High School.

ian sauce with deep-fried meatball over a vegetable caponata, along with homemade ricotta and homemade gnocchi. The caponata included jalapeños and rutabaga, while the meatballs had jalapeños as well.

“This was really a good team. They were very dedicated, they worked really hard,” Kavanaugh said. “... I always call my teams my young chefs, and that’s what they are. They really worked hard at the cooking side of things. There’s more to the competition than just cooking, from sanitation to organization to teamwork, and they really did that very well, too.”

Wise said the girls earned high praises from the judges in every category and fewer things pointed out that they needed to work on than last year.

“Being a part of the ProStart team has opened my eyes to the culinary and hospitality world and I have completely fallen in love with it!” Pearson

said in an email after the competition. “The excitement of being a part of this team with our amazing Chef Tom Kavanaugh and Ms. Wise is never ending. I have had such a great opportunity to be a part of the Pillager ProStart team two years in a row and I wouldn’t take it back for the world.”

With this type of enthusiasm for the program, Kavanaugh said it’s clear ProStart is the future of the hospitality and culinary industry.

“Culinary schools can become very expensive, and no matter what, even if kids come out of culinary programs, they’re still starting at somewhat of an entry level position in kitchens,” he said. “And what ProStart did from the high school level was to develop some of these students and their cooking skills to a point that they were somewhat ready to step into the professional kitchen environments that they wanted to, and then to be able to build on what they had learned at the ProStart level.”

ProStart has now become a feeder program for the culinary arts program at Central Lakes College in Staples, creating a less expensive option for future chefs. High school students can earn ServSafe certification through the National Food Safety Training Institute while participating in ProStart, giving them college credits at CLC and the ability to earn higher wages in restaurant jobs.

But even if students don’t necessarily pursue jobs in the restaurant industry, Wise said ProStart offers a unique outlet for those who may struggle academically in other subjects. “And when they come in here, they shine,” she said. “.. It could be shining in the kitchen, it could be shining in the dishwasher area. It doesn’t matter. Wherever it is, they do their best, and it’s pretty cool to see.”

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