



Internationally recognized home on the market C1

Area teams punch tickets to state B1

LU 80708

HyVee SUPER COUPON

#HyChi

5.00
Hy-Chi Asian one entrée meal

Limit 2 per coupon. Limit 1 coupon per customer. Valid June 12-15, 2021 at Rochester Hy-Vee stores.

WEEKEND POSTBULLETIN

UNLOCK DIGITAL AT [POSTBULLETIN.COM/ACTIVATE](https://postbulletin.com/activate) | ROCHESTER, MINN. | **SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 2021** | FIVE SECTIONS | **\$3**

Rochester pools will reopen on Monday

Free admission, but registration required

BY RANDY PETERSEN
rpetersen@postbulletin.com

Rochester's two city pools are expected to reopen for public swims Monday, six days after activity was limited because of safety concerns.

"We look forward to welcoming the community back and ask that everyone help us by following the guidelines and rules," Rochester Park and Recreation Director Paul Widman said. "Safety is our top priority."

Open-swim slots at the pools at Soldiers Field and

Silver Lake parks were closed Wednesday, following a series of safety issues at the Soldiers Field pool, which opened Saturday.

"It's a whole array of things," said Autumn Kappes, CEO of Rochester Swim Club Orcas, which has managed the city pools in recent years. "I would say it's blatant disrespect of staff and patrons of the pool."

Unsafe activities reportedly included fights, pushing, children being left unattended, lack of attention to the lifeguards and general disregard for pool rules. Kappes said they involved patrons of all

age groups and demographics.

Park and Recreation staff, along with other city departments, have developed a plan to address the concerns that had arisen.

The plan includes using additional staff and volunteers to help monitor activities outside of the water.

Kappes said the Orcas had to double the number of lifeguards on duty at Soldiers Field as crowds grew to 550 Saturday and Sunday, drawn by free admission and warm weather.

See **POOLS**, Page A3



Ken Klotzbach / kklotzbach@postbulletin.com

A Rochester swim club conducts practice in the Soldier's Field pool Wednesday morning.

A gruesome discovery

In 1999, two decapitated bodies were found in ditch near city

BY MATTHEW STOLLE
mstolle@postbulletin.com

A road maintenance worker found the two trash bags in a ditch near Rochester. It was Nov. 26, 1999, the day after Thanksgiving.

They were double-bagged and heavy. Assuming the bags were filled with garbage or deer hides, the worker was arranging for a Bobcat loader to move them.

That's when a child's hand poked out.

The bags contained bodies. One was a woman in her mid-30s, and the other was a boy, believed to be about four years old. Both had been decapitated.

The case would baffle Olmsted County authorities for months. And even when law enforcement discovered the identities of the corpses and the suspected murderer, they kept the information under wraps in the hope of luring the killer back to the U.S. from his home country.

Even the little that local law enforcement thought they knew at the outset proved, in a couple instances, to be wrong.

It was assumed that the bodies were mother and son. Indeed, they were buried under markers that read "Mother at rest in 2000" and "Son at rest in 2000." It was also thought that they were African-American. Both suppositions turned out to be false.

Early on, leaders in the Black community interpreted the lack of developments and news about the case as a sign that the case wasn't being

See **VAULT**, Page A10



Photos by Ken Klotzbach / kklotzbach@postbulletin.com

Alexander Denning gestures to the Olmsted County Government Center - where he once was sentenced to prison - as his brother, Christopher Denning shoots a TikTok video

A reshaped life

'Alexander the Great' walks new path from prison

BY MATTHEW STOLLE
mstolle@postbulletin.com

Alexander Denning was outside the Olmsted County Government Center last week making a TikTok video he was certain would push him across the one million-followers threshold.

Known by his legion of fans as the self-styled Alexander the Great, Denning, 29, of St. Charles, was standing on the bridge spanning the Zumbro River with his wife, Abigail, and their 3-month-old son, William LeRoy. The scene was a measure as to how far

his life had come in the last decade.

In the bright morning sunlight, Denning pointed behind him to the jail in the county facility.

Ten years ago, the jail was home for Denning, who faced first- and second-degree attempted murder and first- and second-degree assault charges stemming from a stabbing incident.

Looking out the jail window about midnight, Denning would see his mom drive by and flash the car's high beams. It was her way of saying, "good night."

See **ALEXANDER**, Page A3



Alexander Denning works on a TikTok video earlier this month outside the Olmsted County Government Center.

For real-time news updates and in-depth coverage not found in print, go to postbulletin.com. The e-paper, available daily, lets you access digital stories in the same format as the paper. Find it by clicking the yellow e-paper button at the top right of the homepage.



Get help at postbulletin.news/epaperhelp

OBITUARIES

PAGES A6-A8

INDEX

Business **D1-D2**
Classifieds **B5-B7**
Comics **E1-E3**

Life **C1-C8**
Nation **A4**
Opinion **D3**

Puzzles **C3-C6**
Sports **B1-B4**
TV **E4-E6**

Weather **A11**

ROCHESTER, MINN.
VOL. 96, NO. 47, 38 PAGES

Talk to an editor 507-285-7700
Customer service 507-285-7676
Buy photos postbulletin.mycapture.com

© 2021 Rochester Post Bulletin
All rights reserved.

WEEKEND



6 521041 11983 8

2 arrested for alleged roles in Capitol riot

BY EMILY CUTTS
ecutts@postbulletin.com

AUSTIN — Two Minnesota men, including one from Austin, were arrested Friday morning for their alleged involvement in the riots at the U.S. Capitol on Jan 6.

Daniel Johnson, 29, of Austin, was taken into custody by FBI Minneapolis special

Updates

See www.postbulletin.com for updates on this story.

agents and the Austin Police Department on charges relating to criminal acts at the Capitol, the FBI Minneapolis tweeted.

Brian Mock, 42, of Minneapolis, also was

arrested for his alleged involvement in criminal acts at the Capitol.

Three other Minnesotans have been charged in connection to the Capitol demonstration that turned violent and deadly.

A Lindstrom, Minn., man was arrested in April. Jonah E. Westbury was charged with entering and remaining in a restricted building and grounds, disorderly

and disruptive conduct in a Capitol building and grounds, and parading, demonstrating or picketing in a Capitol building.

Rochester resident Victoria C. White also was arrested in April. She was charged with violent entry and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds, impeding or attempting to impede law enforcement officers, and

obstruction of justice/ Congress.

Jordan Kenneth Stotts, of Moorhead, Minn., appeared in U.S. District Court in Bemidji in March on charges of knowingly entering or remaining in any restricted building or grounds without lawful authority, as well as violent entry and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds.

More than 450 people

have been charged in connection with the Jan. 6 siege of the U.S. Capitol that left five people dead and more than 130 police officers injured after thousands of then-President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the building in a failed bid to stop Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's victory.

Man who threatened to harm himself is hospitalized

BY EMILY CUTTS
ecutts@postbulletin.com

A 59-year-old Byron man was hospitalized Thursday night after a mental health crisis led to a large, 2 1/2-hour law enforcement response, including the Olmsted County Sheriff's

Office's emergency response and crisis negotiation units.

One of the man's family members called emergency responders ABOUT 7:30 p.m. to their residence in the 8500 block of Town Hall Road Northwest after the man, who had reportedly been drinking, became upset and then fired a 9 mm handgun

five or six times into the woods behind the home, according to Olmsted County Sheriff's Capt. Scott Behrns.

The man reportedly threatened to harm himself, but did not threaten the home's other residents. When law enforcement arrived, they established a perimeter and found the man sitting on

a swing with the gun in his lap.

Deputies tried to engage him in conversation. At one point the man, who still had the gun with him, got up from the swing and got within 25 to 30 yards of law enforcement. A less than lethal round was fired, striking the man in the leg. It

reportedly had no effect and he went back to the swing.

The emergency response and crisis negotiation units were called to the scene. After talking with negotiators for about an hour, the man agreed to give himself up and was taken to Mayo Clinic Hospital for evaluation and treatment.

Pools

From page A1

She said the lifeguards typically handle all aspects of pool operations, from registering users in case a COVID-19 outbreak occurs to watching the water.

"Most of them are adults, and it's been overwhelming for all of them," she said of

the staff that was about to be spread over two pools with Wednesday's planned opening of the Silver Lake pool.

In addition to city staff, community organizations have offered to visit the pools and interact with participants in an effort to help control activity, and the Rochester Police Department's school resource officers visit the pools throughout the summer to interact

with the youth and families.

Kappes said one of the keys to pool safety will be making sure a parent or another adult is with children 12 and younger.

"The biggest thing to get across is that parents have to come with their kids," she said.

Ben Boldt, the city's recreation supervisor, said the added staff and community attention

became necessary after lifeguards became uncomfortable with what was happening at the pool leading up to Tuesday when some people were climbing the fence after being refused admission because capacity had been lowered.

"They were feeling anxious that something bad was going to happen in the pool. There's just that extra layer of danger — for lack of

a better word — with water," he said.

When the pools reopen, the maximum capacity will be set at 300 for each location.

Registration for both pools is required, with open-swim slots available in two time periods at each pool — noon to 3:45 p.m. and 4:15 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Soldiers Field, and noon to 2:15 p.m. and 2:45 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Silver lake. Registering

online in advance is recommended. Soldiers Field pool slots are available at www.signupgenius.com/go/20f054baaaa23a64-soldiers, and Silver Lake pool slots are at www.signupgenius.com/go/20f054baaaa23a64-silver.

Anyone who needs assistance with registering can call the Parks and Recreation department at 507-328-2525.

Alexander

From page A1

Denning was heading to prison. He had reached a plea deal for 98 months in prison for first-degree assault. The prosecutor and the family of the victim wanted him to spend time in prison. Denning's attorney, who had taken the case pro bono after seeing it in the news, prepared him for prison, giving him a one in 10 chance of avoiding it.

But remarkably, the judge showed leniency and gave him 20 months of supervised probation. His lawyer was so overcome with emotion that he cried.

Denning has always had a bit of a charmed life, but in this instance, his charm may have worked against him. Denning was caught in a robbery afterward and found to possess a gun. He was sent to prison.

PIVOT TO A NEW LIFE

In their own subsequent evaluations, authorities assessed Denning's odds of re-offending as highly likely. They thought he was largely un-reformable. In prison, Denning was caught with a nail file in his shirt pocket while passing through a metal detector. He was put in "the hole" — a form of solitary confinement — for two months.

Denning's actions and society's view of him appeared to have reached an intersection.

Surrounded by influences and surroundings that reinforced his worst instincts, Denning's life was less of a trajectory than a flat line. It appeared to have reached a dead end. So it is oddly ironic how Denning's pivot to a new life began. It started with a mob enforcer named Tony Vincent Caracciolo.

At the time, Caracciolo was serving two life sentences in a Minnesota prison for several mob-related arsons and two murders. Caracciolo worked as a janitor in the prison. Caracciolo was the first inmate Denning saw after getting out of the hole. Caracciolo took a liking to Denning. He saw his potential — in a good way, not a bad way.

"He would always say ... the charm, the looks, the



Ken Klotzbach / klotzbach@postbulletin.com

Alexander Denning takes his 3-month old son William from his wife Abigail Denning.

confidence, the energy. He often quoted a Jimmy Fallon TV show segment where Jimmy described it as being a 'likeable person' and how it can take you far in life," Denning recalled. "He always brought it up. He said that's why he felt compelled to be my mentor and help me be a better person."

It was Caracciolo who told Denning to enter a prison Christianity program. It led to Denning becoming a Christian. It was Caracciolo who told Denning to become a model, something Denning had never considered.

After six years of prison life, Denning walked out of the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Lino Lakes a free man.

And he became a model.

FROM PRISONER TO MODEL

Not that the doors just flew open. There were rejections from modeling agencies who were turned off by his many body-covering tattoos. But then he began to hit pay dirt. Modeling agencies saw what the mobster had seen: Looks, energy, personality, and a towering pompadour. He was eventually hitting the modeling runway in New York, California and Chicago, while going to school at Rochester Community and Technical College.

Denning wasn't getting rich from modeling or acting. He also worked as a waiter at the Hilton steakhouse in downtown Rochester, but it

was a far cry from prison life.

And when the pandemic hit and modeling gigs dried up, Denning began to pour his energy into TikTok and other social media platforms.

It was his third TikTok that blew up. Denning did a short video about how he would look out the window in jail, waiting for his mom to flash the high beams. The video got 5 million views on TikTok and 20 million on YouTube.

"I think modeling just propelled me. I don't think I'd be that interesting had I not gotten out of prison and been a model," Denning said. "It just blew up faster than I ever would imagine."

When a creator gets close to a million social media followers, it's not clear who is in charge. Making videos for TikTok and YouTube is a full-time job. Denning is part of TikTok's Creator Fund, allowing him to make money based on a combination of factors, including the number of views, the authenticity of those views, and the level of engagement on the content.

"I wake up and film videos all day, every day. I don't come off livestream," he said.

Denning agreed to color his distinctive pompadour a lavender after he reached 800,000 followers. If he reaches a million, he has pledged to dive into a pond and retrieve the weapon that

was used in the incident that sent him to prison.

A recent monthly check Denning received from TikTok was for \$1,200. But it's just one stream of revenue that Denning has created based off his videos and the marketing of his personality and life. He has his own clothing brand. He makes money off Instagram as well as when he's livestreaming.

"When you're living-streaming, people just send you money. It's odd. They just send you money," Denning said.

REMORSE AND RECOGNITION OF A CHANGED LIFE

It's his videos about prison life that fascinate his followers and get the most views. He gets asked about the stabbing incident. He gets asked whether he's ever tried to get a hold of his victim, who was then 25.

The incident happened in the early hours of June 18, 2011. It was sparked when someone in Denning's car — either Denning or the driver — yelled an obscenity at the victim as he was riding his bicycle on a country road.

The man got into a car and pursued Denning's vehicle. The driver of the car said that the victim came speeding up behind him and tried to run him off the road a few times before both cars stopped. The victim said he approached the passenger side of the car to ask what

the problem was. The driver said the victim charged at him and Denning.

In the altercation that followed, Denning stabbed the man in the stomach, forearm and back with a folding knife, then slashed the victim's tires.

Asked if he is remorseful about the incident, Denning said he feels bad about how the situation turned out.

"I feel remorseful for the situation and how it panned out," Denning said. "I wish we both would have had different choices and how we handled it."

Denning said that while in prison, he utilized what is called the Minnesota Apology Letter Bank. He wrote a letter to the victim, but it's unclear whether the victim ever received it.

Denning said the letter he wrote was similar to what he said to the victim in the courtroom when he was being sentenced.

"I broke down. I was crying. 'Listen, I'm terribly sorry,'" said Denning, who recalled how the victim in court said his son would ask him how he got his scars. "It's an unfortunate circumstance that happened to anybody. I reacted wrong. And I feel like he reacted wrong, and it created chaos."

"I don't want to ever put somebody in a bad mood, a bad idea of who I am. Everything I do, I try to let people know: I'm not here for anything bad. I'm not here to start crap. I want to be friends with everybody."

In the comment sections of his videos, critics sometimes ask Denning's followers why they are "praising this criminal," Denning said.

"I tried to comment back. Nobody's praising me for going to prison. They're praising the fact that I did not go back," Denning said.

But Denning also believes that if he hadn't gone through what he went through, he wouldn't be the person he is today.

"I don't think I'd be alive," Denning said. "I think my life was on a trajectory where I did whatever I wanted. I had no foundation in what I believed in, no morals. I would do anything and everything I wanted. Now, I still do that. But I have respect. And I have boundaries. And I do what's good."