

Community continues to remember fallen classmate

BY SHANNON GRANHOLM
LEAD EDITOR

This time of year is supposed to be a happy time for high school seniors and their families. Seniors walk across the stage at graduation to receive their diploma, attend the senior party and graduation parties, and enjoy one last summer before they head off to their next adventure.

An empty seat, a white rose and an unworn cap and gown signified that an important member of Centennial High School's class of 2021 was missing.

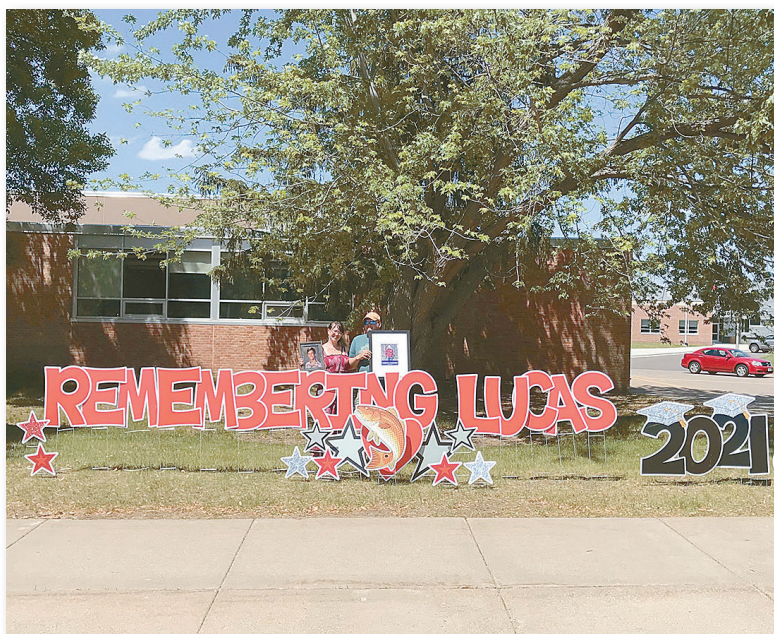
Back in December, senior Lucas Fiskewold took his own life, just five days before his 18th birthday. Fiskewold is the son of Chad Fiskewold and stepson of Cindy Fiskewold. Chad and Cindy, both Centennial grads, married in August 2019.

"These past couple of weeks have been really difficult ... Seeing all of our friends sharing their happy graduates, we have all of these grad parties we have to go to. It is great, I'm happy for everybody, but every time, it just points out what we are missing," Cindy explained.

Chad said he started to see "inklings" of depression when Lucas was 8 years old. His son went through a series of events that seemed to keep pushing him deeper into depression. At the age of 5, Lucas' father and mother (Charmilla Berg) divorced. As a fourth-grader, Lucas lost some classmates in a tragic accident. In November 2018, his mother passed away from cancer.

Over the years, Lucas tried counseling and some different medications to try to manage his depression, but late fall and early winter were always hard for him: his mother's October birthday was followed by the holidays.

"That time of year was always a struggle. Usually once Christmas was done, he would usually start to get better," Cindy explained. Cindy added that the pandemic was also hard on him because Lucas craved social interaction. "He was such a people person," she said. "He was a social butterfly, so he wasn't handling (distance learning) very well."



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Chad and Cindy Fiskewold continue to be amazed by the outpouring of support from the community after their son, Lucas Fiskewold, took his own life. A giant sign welcomed them at the senior all night party.

'A happy person'

Although he struggled with depression, Lucas had a lot of days when he was happy. In fact, that's how many people remember him.

"He was overall a happy person. He was very smiley, a people pleaser, and was always joking," Chad recalled. Cindy added, "His smile lit up the room. He was always entertaining people, making a sad person smile, making a bored person laugh. He just knew what people needed."

So, it may not be a surprise that Lucas was voted "best smile" in the 2020-21 yearbook.

Cindy recalled a story from Lucas' sophomore German class. One day, his classmates were being rude to the substitute teacher. "Lucas stood up and told them to knock it off, that the teacher deserved more respect and to be treated better. (He said) 'We are better than this.'" After class, Lucas collected money and bought the teacher flowers and chocolates.

Total shock

The week that Lucas took his own life, Cindy said he was acting a little bit more withdrawn than usual, but nothing out of the ordinary. She and her husband were in complete shock and disbelief when they got the phone call informing them that Lucas was gone.

"The next day, a lot of kids came to our house. They started showing up asking if Lucas was okay, because no one could get ahold of him. One by one, we had to explain," Cindy recalled.

For the past six months, the community has been nothing but supportive of the family, and for that, Cindy and Chad are forever grateful.

"They have been by our side through all of this. That part has been amazing. We have been really blessed in that way," Cindy said. Chad added, "That's what helps us get by."

Not only are Lucas' classmates and school staff keeping in touch with the family, but tributes keep pouring in for their son. Chad and Cindy were invited to attend graduation. There, they not only received an honorary diploma and white rose for Lucas, but also watched him "walk across the stage" with his best friend Kylie Wallen. As Wallen crossed the stage to pick up her diploma, she took off her cap to show the Fiskewolds. Her cap said simply, "For Lucas."

"Just seeing how much love there is for him, I wish so badly that he knew what an impact this would have on the world, because there are so many people who are really struggling with him not being there," Cindy said.

The Fiskewolds were also invited to the senior party,



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Kylie Wallen, a close friend of Lucas, shows off her cap, which says "For Lucas." Wallen continues to be a huge support for Lucas' family.

where they were greeted with a giant sign that read "Remembering Lucas." They were given a yearbook and framed photo filled with messages from Lucas' classmates, a gift certificate to a local restaurant and a memorial tree. Cindy's two daughters were given the prizes Lucas would have received at the drive-thru event.

Advice for parents, students

As cliché as it may sound, the Fiskewolds want everyone to know that you are never alone.

"If you are hurting or struggling, reach out to somebody. Someone always cares, even if you think they don't," Chad said.

Cindy added, "I want them to know that what they are feeling in that moment isn't going to last. I honestly think if Lucas would have pushed through those tough couple of days, he would be here still."

Cindy said it's important for parents to be there to simply listen, not to fix things. "Be open. Don't feel like you need to fix their situation or their emotions, but just be there to listen and provide understanding. That's what is so important when people are struggling, feeling like they are understood," Cindy explained. "Lucas knew he was loved. He knew everyone loved him, he just struggled to feel it sometimes."

A plaque that reads, "Those we love are never gone, they move within the wind's own song; unseen perhaps but always near, in our hearts near and dear" now sits next to the memorial tree the Fiskewolds planted in Lucas' honor.

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