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Parnell is 'mane' man for C-I boys hockey

by John Wagner

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The first thing you notice about Cambridge-Isanti boys hockey player Easton Parnell is his hair.

"I guess it's a mop," Parnell said. "I have thick hair and really curly hair, and that's not a good mix. I've never had tame hair."

When his helmet is off, the senior's tresses are impossible to ignore. It's a wild, tangled afro that's equal parts tumbleweed and Brillo pad. In the hockey world, it's known as "flow" or "lettuce" – and let's just say that Parnell's dome is a garden flowing with lettuce.

"That's one luscious mane," said his coach, Jarad Ziebarth, with a laugh. "It's like a lion's mane."

Before this season began, Parnell's locks garnered some notori-



This photo of Easton Parnell, taken before the season began, caused a reaction around the state as high school hockey fans admired the senior's hair.

Photo courtesy John Olson

ety as social media celebrated his flow. But hockey fans around the state should know there is more to the Bluejacket forward than his hair, as he ranks among the leading scorers for a team off to a 4-1 start.

"Every time he hits the ice, I have no doubt he's going to give us 100 percent," Ziebarth said of Parnell. "His work ethic is incredible. His acceleration and speed on the ice are also impressive. His ability to make something happen on the ice is important to us."

"And he's been a captain for our program since he was a sophomore. He's a leader who's happy to grab his lunch pail and go to work."

Parnell, who has played hockey since he was 3 years old, earned minutes on the Cambridge-Isanti

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Celebrating 30th anniversary

Tyler Nelson talks about the successes of the family-owned company T & T Waterproofing & Drain Tile in Isanti.

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Air Force junior officer trainees

Two North Branch Area High School students become honorees.

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COVID-19 TRACKER



As of Feb. 2
Isanti County, confirmed: 2,918; deaths: 44.
Chisago County, confirmed: 4,689; deaths: 39.

North Branch moves forward with apartment development

Mayor Swenson calls the project a 'game-changer' for the city

by Rachel Kytonen

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Plans to construct a new apartment development in North Branch, which includes 144 market-rate apartments, is moving forward.

During the North Branch City Council meeting Jan. 26, the council approved a comprehensive plan amendment, rezone, preliminary and final plat and a conditional use permit for the proposed Falcon Apartments development. The council also approved a resolution vacating drainage and utility easements relating to Falcon Apartments as well as a resolution approving the development and subdivision agreement between the city and Falcon Apartments.

City Administrator Renae Fry

explained Kuepers Inc. has submitted plans for a comprehensive plan amendment, rezone, preliminary and final plat, and conditional use permit for four lots. Each lot will have a 36-unit apartment development with amenities including a pool, pool house, dog park, playground and a large treed promenade named Falcon Apartments.

"This is something really different that I think is going to be a big game-changer for our community," Mayor Jim Swenson said. "The building looks really beautiful, and I want to comment also on, Council Member (Patrick) Meacham, that they're not asking for anything, for this community, from any help for it, and that I'm very, very appreciative of you for taking faith in this community that we will be able to support you on this project. So I'm

very, very tickled to be in favor of this."

The property is generally located north of Ecumen, west of the North Branch Outlet Mall, east of Falcon Avenue and south of Fairview/M Health Clinic.

Council Member Kathy Blomquist noted the apartment development will have a large number of two-bedroom apartments, and she is pleased the development will be geared toward families.

Fry explained the Falcon Apartments of North Branch LLLP, the developer, is proposing a comprehensive plan amendment from LU B, business, to LU 3, high-density residential; a rezoning request from B3, regional business, to R3, high-density residential; a preliminary plat creating four lots; and a conditional use permit to allow for apartment

structures with 17 or more units and plumbing fixtures in an accessory building (the accessory building being the pool house).

City staff listed benefits of Falcon Apartments as follows:

- Per the Chisago County housing study prepared by Maxfield and the city's comprehensive plan approved by the council in 2018, a need for a variety of housing is in demand in the city and region. The planned development on the plat identifies the anticipated construction of 144 market-rate apartments, a need that has been identified in the Maxfield and other studies.

- The landscape plan includes a good mix of trees. Should another tree disease occur, the variety should protect against

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APG
EAST CENTRAL MINNESOTA



PARNELL

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varsity’s top line as a freshman, and by his sophomore year he was a team captain. But that was a mixed blessing, because the Bluejackets at that time were extremely young – and took a beating from older, more experienced opponents. “We took our lumps from just about everyone,” Parnell admitted. “It’s tough, but we knew that, if we stuck it out, we would have a strong team this year. We knew that there would be a light at the end of the tunnel.

“We knew, when we were growing up, that we had solid teams. But when we got to the varsity as sophomores and didn’t have a ton of upperclassmen to help you, it was tough. We have paid [the price] for this season.”

Ziebarth said Parnell and the nine other seniors on the varsity roster deserve praise for their perseverance during those lean years.

“Credit to these guys, because they have been faced with a lot of obstacles,” Ziebarth said. “Easton and the other seniors on this team deserve all the credit for keeping the program afloat. Their dedication and sacrifice means they deserve the rewards they are getting this season.”

Parnell said he takes his responsibilities as a team captain seriously.

“I just try to keep everyone focused – keep their eyes on the prize,” he said. “You have to keep a level head. I know that everything I do, the underclassmen are watching, so I try to lead with my actions as much as with words.”

With the uncertainty of high school



Easton Parnell prepares to take a face off in Cambridge-Isanti’s contest against St. Francis played at Central Green on Thursday, Jan. 28.

sports looming last fall, Parnell skated with the Rum River Mallards, the U.S. Premier Hockey League team based in Isanti, and tallied six goals and an assist in 18 games.

“I skated with them in the summer, and at that time we kept hearing that our season would be pushed back,” Parnell said. “So I figured it would be in my best interest to play a few games with them to get ready for the high school season.”

When the Minnesota State High School League announced the hockey season would start in mid-January, Parnell and his Cambridge-Isanti teammates were ready. Parnell scored two goals and added three assists as the Bluejackets rebounded from a season-opening 2-1 loss to Becker/Big Lake by whipping their next four opponents by a combined margin of 18-9.

What Parnell was not prepared for was the reaction to his hair.

“I definitely didn’t expect it,” Parnell



Parnell has scored a pair of goals and led the Bluejackets to a 4-1 start to the season. He began this year taking regular shifts with the Rum River Mallards of the USPHL and scored six goals in 18 games.

Photos by John Wagner

said of the attention. “I was getting random texts from people I don’t even talk to, and that was kind of funny. My twin sister, Ashton, and my older sister Riley give me a lot of grief, but I think they’re a little jealous.”

Parnell said he has a specific care regimen for his flowing locks.

“Contrary to popular belief, I don’t brush my hair out because it’s so hard to get the knots out – and it gets knotted really easily,” he said. “I use shampoo and a lot of conditioner. And if there’s a special occasion, I’ll brush it out to get it a little more ‘poofy.’ If there’s something going on, I might gel it, but usually I let it sit. But that takes 10 minutes of hard brushing.”

With a wink, Parnell gives the credit for his hair to his parents, Clint and Shontel. But he was serious when he thanked his parents for their support of his hockey career.

“Hockey is not a cheap sport, and it’s not easy to do because you trek all over the place going to practice and games,” Easton Parnell said. “So I thank them for everything they’ve done for me, and I thank all of the coaches I’ve had along the way.”

That thanks includes his current coach at Cambridge-Isanti, Ziebarth, who said the notoriety Parnell has received for his hair is a sign of the changing times.

“Growing up, my teammates and I cut our hair short,” Ziebarth said. “But you have to change with the times or you won’t make it in coaching. You can drive yourself bonkers worrying about stuff like hair.

“Minnesota hockey hair has become a phenomenon. It’s almost like a badge of honor to have hair flowing out of the earholes and the back of the helmet. For me, if it’s not disrespectful to the game of hockey, why not?”

Bluejackets win twice

The Cambridge-Isanti boys hockey team knocked off St. Francis 3-1 in a contest played on the outdoor rink at Central Green on Thursday, Jan. 28, then blitzed Mora/Milaca 7-2 two days later.

The Bluejackets scored a goal in each period against St. Francis, as Jacob Ziebarth found the back of the net in the first, Parnell scored just 33 seconds into the second, and Luke Pierson added an insurance goal in the third. Bobby Hendricks stopped all but one of the 28 shots he faced to claim the victory.

C-I scored three goals in each of the first two periods to cruise to the win at Mora/Milaca. Jacob Ziebarth had a hat trick and added two assists to lead the offense, while Hendricks finished with 13 saves in net.

APARTMENT

Continued from front

site-clearing tree loss. Trees are also being planted throughout the development and along streets. A total of 177 additional trees are proposed to be planted along with 99 bushes around each building. They are also saving trees along 383rd Street.

- The trail along Falcon Avenue will improve pedestrian and bike traffic safety in the area as required in city code.

- The sidewalk system throughout the development will link north, south, east and west for very well planned pedestrian movements throughout the development.

- The sidewalk along 383rd will also provide good east-west pedestrian movement required by city code.

- Upon final platting, the development will include construction of the new 385th Street and the improvements will be offered to the city in accordance with the development agreement. The new road of 385th Street will allow the

newly platted lots to have road and utility access.

- All platted lots within the development will have pedestrian access to Falcon Avenue for non-vehicular traffic movement.

- The developer will pay all park dedication fees as well as construct trails as shown on plans.

- More properties will be constructed on municipal utilities.

- City comprehensive plan modification to a designation of LUR-3 the residential area anticipated density of more than 6 units per acre, the development proposes a density of 16.71 units per acre.

- The rezone modification will allow for apartment use.

- The proposed conditional use permit will allow for buildings with more than 16 residential units.

High-speed internet project update

Fry mentioned footings are being poured for the three new towers that are being constructed to support the city’s network, as part of a project to bring

high-speed internet throughout the entire city. She said the project is on track for substantial completion by the end of February.

Fry said Genesis Wireless will be offering three different internet packages for residents, noting the packages do not include equipment lease fees. The lowest level package will be \$45 per month; the mid-level package will be \$65 per month; and the highest package will be \$95 per month.

“The new equipment that we are using that is going on these three towers, 125 feet into the air, the entire plan is set around saturation,” Fry said. “So everyone within the city, if they want to switch from their current provider, they certainly may do so, but in terms of getting families hooked up, we have asked that our partner in this, Genesis Wireless, give priority to those families that currently don’t have high-speed internet and knowing that eventually everybody that wants coverage and wants service will get hooked up.”

Fry noted Genesis Wireless will not be taking subscriptions until the network

is up and running, but residents can be put on waiting list by emailing info@igenesis.us and letting them know they are a North Branch resident and wish to be contacted when they can start taking subscribers.

“The reason we are putting up three towers at different locations around town is to be able to maximize the reach out to all of them and it may reach out into the townships and further out,” Swenson said. “We don’t know how far out that’s going to go out at this time.”

In other action the council:

- Appointed North Branch resident Peter Schaps to the vacant position on the Parks, Trails and Open Spaces Commission due to the resignation of Amanda Darwin, who was elected to the council in November.

“I’ve had the opportunity to work with Peter in the past and I think he would be an asset to replacing former Commissioner (Amanda) Darwin,” new Council Member Darwin,” Council Member Kelly Neider said.