

## Outdoor Fest replaces traditional banquet for Viking Sportsmen

Entertainment-filled event set for July 31 at Alexandria Shooting Park

By Eric Morken  
Alexandria Echo Press

The Viking Sportsmen are hosting a new event in Alexandria on July 31 that will offer a day of outdoor events for adults while raising money for local projects that the outdoor organization helps fund and put together around the Douglas County area.

Instead of its traditional banquet that has been going on for more than 30 years, the Viking Sportsmen are offering a variety of ticket packages for people to attend their first-ever Outdoor Fest the last Saturday in July at the Alexandria Shooting Park. It's an entertainment-filled day for people in the outdoors, and the idea stemmed from the Viking Sportsmen having to cancel their annual banquet due to the pandemic in 2020.

Questions lingered into the 2021 banquet season that usually comes in the spring for outdoor organizations. Would the Viking Sportsmen be able to hold an indoor banquet with the pandemic lingering on? If so, at what capacity?

"At one point during conversations I believe we would've been limited to less than 100 people, and in a typical year the banquet turns out around 300," Viking Sportsmen president Chris Kleine said.

"It started as just an idea as some of us were standing around after one of our board meetings. It definitely wasn't broken, but it was time to look at something else after 35 years of banquets. We are taking a leap of faith and committed to thinking outside

### Outdoor Fest information

Ticket packages, along with a full schedule and additional information on the first-ever Outdoor Fest hosted by the Viking Sportsmen can be found at [www.vikingsportsmen.org](http://www.vikingsportsmen.org). Contact Chris Kleine at (320) 491-4135 or Tim Olson at (320) 766-2650 with questions.

the box and putting together an event that can draw 3-4 times or more than our traditional crowd, which equates to additional dollars and that much more of an impact in our local communities."

The cost for ticket packages ranges from \$20 for a single entry ticket to a \$1,000 platinum package (valued at \$1,500) for a group of 10. There are multiple options between those prices for those coming as an individual or as a group.

Money raised from this event will go toward projects such as the annual Youth Outdoor Activity Day (set for Aug. 29 this year), wildlife food plots (over 100 acres planted in 2020), walleye, brown and rainbow trout stocking programs and financial support for the District 206 archery, trap shooting and fishing teams, along with the local Let's Go Fishing chapter that helps get seniors outdoors through fishing and sight-seeing trips on area lakes.

Outdoor Fest will offer a full day of activities. It starts at 10 a.m. when gates open. A trap shooting tournament starts at 11 a.m. There will be food vendors, a cash bar (Depot Express and Carlos Creek Winery), 3D archery, and raffles with 30-plus guns and other prices.

The afternoon includes a bean bag

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Eric Morken / Echo Press

Alexandria tennis head coach Dave Ronning talks things over with Alexandria's Brianna Holm during a quadrangular on Aug. 25, 2017. Ronning has served as both the girls and boys tennis coach for the Cardinals for nearly two decades, but he has resigned from the girls' job for this coming fall and is still thinking about whether or not to coach the boys program again in the spring.

## Commitment to teaching tennis takes a break

Ronning steps down from girls' coaching job

By Jared Rubado

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Dave Ronning has worked to take steps forward with the Alexandria tennis programs in his 20 years of coaching. But now, he's taking a step back.

Ronning is retiring from the Alexandria girls tennis head coaching position this coming fall and is waiting to make a final decision on his status with the boys team that plays in the spring season. What started as a way to connect with his children through the sport has turned into a love lost for the structure of high school tennis in some ways.

"I've always said the thing that will get me out of coaching is other coaches, and there have been some very unethical coaches out there that are getting to me," Ronning said. "I have a very hard time dealing with those people anymore. Then there's the way tournaments are run. Even our section tournament doesn't go by the ethical means and the discipline and sportsmanship that comes with it. That's getting lost,

and it's driving me nuts."

In a traditional tennis match, each team has its four best singles competitors and its three best doubles teams. When schools compete, kids traditionally play against the athlete ranked equally across from them. The first team to win four of the seven matches wins the competition.

Where Ronning feels it's started to change is that some schools are no longer putting their athletes in traditional spots in the order. While it's not an illegal strategy to have a better player compete in a lower-level match in an attempt to get a sure team point, it's seen as unethical by some.

"It would really get to him," longtime assistant coach John Schmidt said. "I know other coaches feel the same way. But he can sleep comfortably knowing that his teams never did any of that."

"When I complain about it, I come off as the bad guy," Ronning said. "I don't want to see that change in the game continue. Let's get back to ethics, respect,

sportsmanship and discipline. It's just taken a bad turn because of some of the coaches out there. I think it's the right time for me to get out of there and let someone new take over."

One candidate for the coaching vacancy has worked with Ronning over the last couple of years, including the 2019 trip to state for the boys team.

"There's only one candidate I would pick, and that's Nick Jansen," Ronning said. "He's phenomenal, and he's one of a kind. I would hate to see a school system lose someone like that, so I hope and pray he gets it."

### Where it all started

Tennis has been in Ronning's blood from a young age. Growing up in a competitive household with 12 siblings, the love for the game started early on — especially when that meant he could compete against his brothers.

"I was probably eight years old

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## Area youth wrestlers get training from some of college's best

Penn State's Kerkvliet, Starocci highlight counselors at Cardinals' camp

By Eric Morken  
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Wrestlers from Alexandria and the surrounding communities had quite an opportunity recently when a star-studded lineup of counselors helped lead a camp from June 28-30 at the NorthStar Christian Academy in Alexandria.

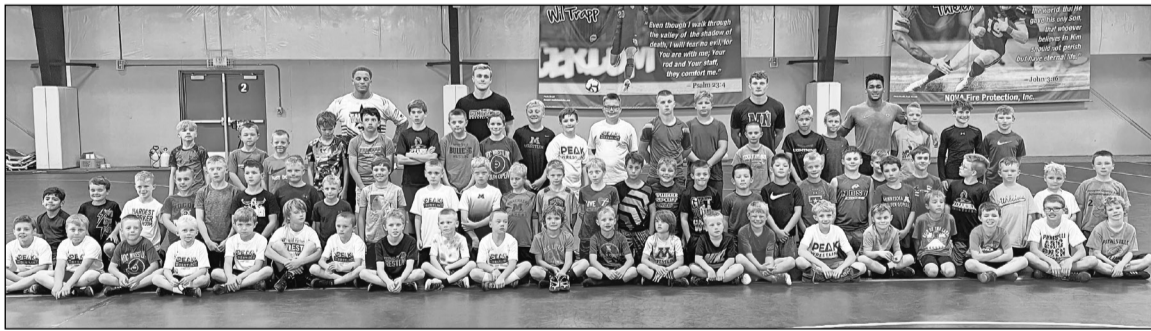
A total of 142 area wrestlers in 1st through 12th-grade attended the camp where Penn State University standouts Greg Kerkvliet and Carter Starocci headlined a group of talented athletes on hand to help teach skills and some life lessons to area athletes.

Redshirt freshman Grant Parrish from St. Cloud State University's 2021 Division II National Championship team, and Minnewaska's Tyson Meyer, a three-time Minnesota State High School League state champion, also helped coach at the camp. St. Cloud State is a perennial power at that Division II level, having won three straight national titles.

"I contacted Steve Costanzo, the head coach at St. Cloud State, asking if he had any wrestlers willing to come up

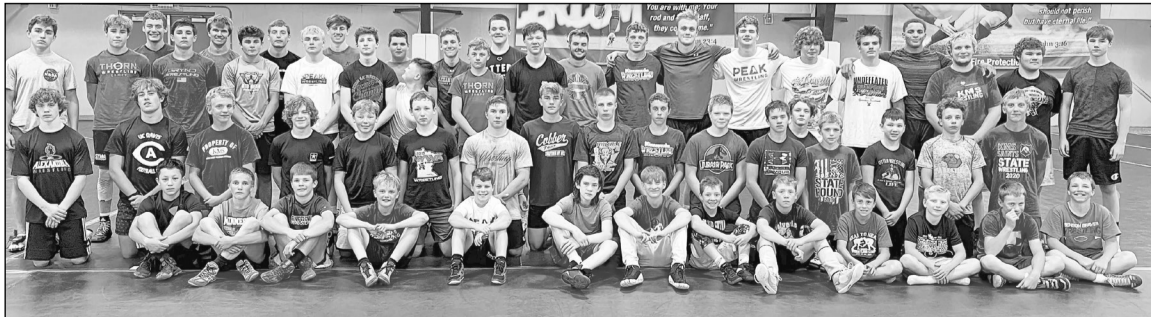
to Alexandria to run our freestyle club this spring," Alexandria Cardinals varsity wrestling coach Aldon Struchen said of how they were able to attract this list of counselors to Alexandria's camp. "We got Grant Parrish and (redshirt freshman) Colby Njos for that. Grant happens to be cousins with Greg Kerkvliet. Greg asked Grant if he knew anyone looking for clinicians for wrestling camps so he could come back home for a week or so. Timing was just impeccable. (Alexandria's) Jake Bryce did most of the organizing, advertising, and communicating for this event which produced a ton of kids for the event."

Kerkvliet, a redshirt freshman wrestling at heavyweight this past winter season for Penn State, is a Minnesota native from Inver Grove Heights. He was a four-time MSHSL state champion for Simley High School and a USA Junior National Champion. This past March, he received All-American honors as one of the top heavyweights in the country after finishing seventh at 285 pounds during the



Contributed photos

Young wrestlers from around the Douglas County area pose for a big group photo at the Alexandria wrestling camp that ran at the NorthStar Christian Academy in Alexandria from June 28-30. Counselors who worked with kids at the camp included Penn State University All-Americans Carter Starocci and Greg Kerkvliet, along with Grant Parrish from the 2021 St. Cloud State University Division II national championship team, and Minnewaska wrestler Tyson Meyer, a three-time Minnesota State High School League state champion.



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NCAA finals. Starocci, a redshirt freshman from Erie, Pa., won the 174-pound National Championship this past season with a 3-1 sudden victory against red-

shirt senior Michael Kemerer of Iowa.

Penn State under head coach Cael Sanderson is a perennial power in Division I college wrestling. The Nittany Lions

have won eight of the program's nine national titles since the 2011 season under Sanderson's guidance. That

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