

# HENDERSON INDEPENDENT

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## State track

Emily Sullivan is a three-time state champion, while Dylan Novak finished a respectable 9th and 11th in his events. P. 10

## New barber in town

Like the prodigal son, Taylor Peulen has returned to Henderson to take over as its new barber. P. 4



## Reinhardt finishes 5th at state

Senior golfer MaKenna Reinhardt finished her career in a two-way tie for 5th last Wednesday. P.11

# STATE CHAMPIONS!

## Giants softball makes history, wins LS-H's first team championship

By Rachel Miller  
Editor

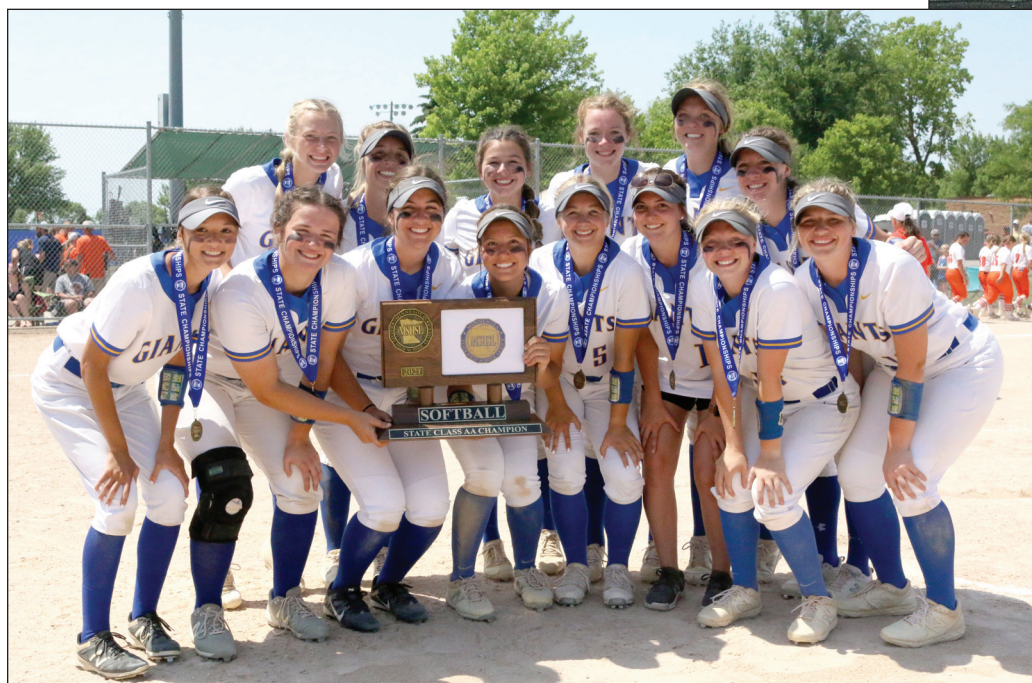
The 2021 Class AA State Softball Championship, held Wednesday, June 16 at Mankato's Caswell Park, ended in screaming and tears for the Le Sueur-Henderson Giants — screams of excitement and tears of overwhelming joy, that is.

The Giants were leading 7-3 as St. Charles stepped to the plate to start the seventh inning in the state championship game. Giants pitcher Chloe Brandt walked the first batter, followed by three

singles, resulting in a run and narrowing the lead to 7-4.

With bases loaded and no outs, the pressure was on. But the Giants have the rare ability to remain calm under pressure, and in rapid succession earned a strikeout, a pop out, and another strikeout to end the inning, and in doing so, earned not only the team's first state championship, but the Le Sueur-Henderson School District's first team championship.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP  
CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



## Treasures in Town turns 15

The Le Sueur downtown business celebrated its volunteers last week, as it hit its goal of donating \$200,000 to the local communities. P. 4

## Sauerkraut Days

The annual celebration is back this weekend, with all the fun and sauerkraut you can handle. P. 5

## New mayor in town

After Robyn Geldner withdrew her application for mayor, the Henderson City Council appointed Keith Swenson mayor. P. 12

## COVID-19 update

For the second week in a row, new cases were under 1,000. P. 12

PHOTOS BY RACHEL MILLER

Above: Halle Bemmels made a history-making catch last Wednesday that will no doubt be talked about for decades to come. The Giants were up 6-3 in the state championship game, and Saint Charles had the bases loaded with two outs when Mya Omdahl hit what would have been a grand slam to center field....were it not for senior outfielder Halle Bemmels' high-flying, game-saving catch at the fence line. Left: The 2021 State Champion Giants, beaming as they accept the state trophy. Top, left: Senior Olivia Fritz shares a celebratory hug with her fellow seniors, catcher Zoe Thomson (left) and Makenna Borchardt (right).







Senior Makenna Borchardt picked up an easy out at first base against Annandale in the semifinal game of the state tournament last Tuesday.



PHOTOS BY RACHEL MILLER

Starting pitcher Chloe Brandt racked up an impressive 45 strikeouts during the three games of the Class AA State Softball Tournament, including 13 strikeouts against St. Charles.

## Championship player stats

**Halle Bemmels:** 3 hits, 3 runs

**Rhyan Fritz:** 1 hit, 1 run, 2 RBIs

**Olivia Fritz:** 3 hits, 3 RBIs

**Morgan Gregersen:** 1 run

**Chloe Brandt:** 1 hit, 2 runs, 1 RBI, 13 strikeouts

### STATE CHAMPIONSHIP CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Hundreds of Giants fans who turned out to the game erupted in a cacophony of celebratory cheers, as the Giants rushed into a pileup on the field. Smiles and tears streaming down their faces, coaches and players hugged as they prepared to accept the state championship trophy.

“This is amazing. This team is so unforgettable, and this is the best way to end the season by far,” said Brandt.

About 30 miles away, in Henderson’s HomeTown Bank, a half-dozen staff and customers who had turned into the broadcast for the final inning, also let out loud screams of excitement.

Throughout the regular season, the Giants decimated the majority of their competition, usually winning by at least 10 runs. But reaching the state championship is no easy feat, and St. Charles was not going to be a walk in the park.

The Giants lost just one game all season — to Zumbrota-Mazeppa — and St. Charles beat Zumbrota-Mazeppa two out of three times in the section tournament to make it to state.

A state tournament is not won by any one individual, and this year’s team, which includes eight seniors, worked together in near-flawless form. Sophomore Rhyan Fritz made an unbelievable side-diving catch in the fourth inning. Sister Olivia Fritz batted in three of the team’s seven runs. Sophomore pitcher Brandt threw an impressive 13 strikeouts. And this year’s championship team has benefited from years of coaching by the dynamic husband and wife duo of Eric and Anne Lewis, who have taken five Giants teams to the state tournament since 2014.

But if there was a game ball, it would go to senior outfielder Halle Bemmels, who made a spectacular game-saving catch in the fifth inning.

The Giants were leading 6-1

at the top of the fifth, when St. Charles started to gain momentum. A batter singled, and Brandt hit the next batter. The Giants earned two outs, but another single and a double plated two runs with runners on second and third.

Now leading 6-3, Coach Eric Lewis ordered the next St. Charles batter to walk, loading the bases so the Giants could force an out at any base. It was a strategic call, but one that almost massively backfired.

St. Charles’ Mya Omdahl stepped to the plate, and three pitches later the ball was flying to deep, deep center field.

“It’s gone,” Coach Anne Lewis said. The grand slam would allow St. Charles to take the lead.

Then, in an almost Angels in the Outfield-inspired move, Bemmels was at the fence line, leaping, her glove arm fully extended, and a second later a flash of yellow was visible through the top of her glove.

It was a play that will no doubt be immortalized in Giants lore for decades to come, the story continuing to be told to generations of young Giants players, persisting

long after this generation of players has families of their own.

“I just kind of went for it, and it worked out, and it could not have happened at a better time,” Bemmels said.

After a year dealing with numerous challenges due to COVID-19, it was the perfect way to end the season.

“It is the fairy tale ending every kid dreams of,” Bemmels added.

Coach Eric Lewis was speechless as his team took turns getting pictures with the trophy.

He left his players with parting words they will likely never forget: “You all just made one of my dreams come true.”



Sara Milam fields a ball to teammate Rhyan Fritz in the championship game against Saint Charles.



The Giants pile on after winning the Class AA State Softball Championship.

### Le Sueur - Henderson Athlete of the Week

#### Halle Bemmels

HS-H senior Halle Bemmels came up with a huge game-saving, grand slam-denying catch at the fence line in the fifth inning of the Class AA State Softball Championship last Wednesday. The Giants went on to defeat Saint Charles 7-4.

Athlete of the Week Sponsored By:

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