

## Business

An Eden Prairie grad is the founder of Indura Athletic, a startup offering women's athletic activewear.

Page 12



## On a mission

After finishing third last season, the Hopkins girls basketball team is on a mission for 2021-22.

Page 28

Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021



The holiday llamas were a popular attraction at the Northern Express event in Excelsior Dec. 3.

(SUN PHOTO BY NATALIE CIERZAN)

## The Northern Express comes to Excelsior

The event features a variety of Christmas-themed experiences

By NATALIE CIERZAN  
natalie.cierzan@apgecm.com

The Northern Express, an immersive Christmas-themed experience, kicked off in Excelsior Dec. 3 within the Tanadoona camp grounds.

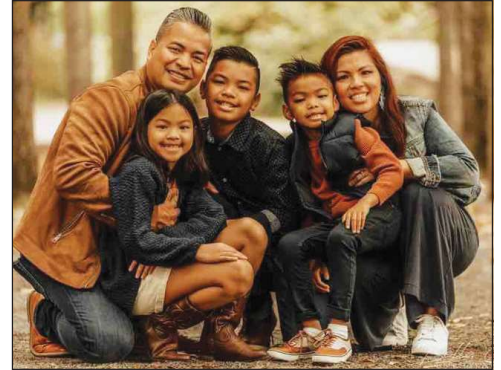
The event features a Christmas village with a variety of events for all ages, including a European-style market with merchandise. Visitors can visit with Santa Claus, play some games, say hello to characters from the North Pole, spend time with some holiday llamas, and peek inside different interactive displays from the Claus house.

"It's hard to give people the breadth of the experience until they're actually here, but we've built out roughly five acres using

the buildings on Tanadoona's property," said Wynnee Reece, the creative director for the event.

In collaboration with the small-business community, she said they brought in food vendors and food trucks. After 5 p.m. the Northern Express becomes more adult-oriented with DJs on Fridays and Saturdays, as well as trivia, bingo, karaoke or caroling each night.

See **Express**, Page 6



(PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEBBIE YEE)

Rhoenan and his family.

## Excelsior student battles brain cancer

First-grader Rhoenan Tep was diagnosed last August

By NATALIE CIERZAN  
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Early last August, it would have been hard to notice anything was different about first-grader Rhoenan Tep, a student at Excelsior Elementary.

During a family get-together, he was swimming and diving into pools, enjoying the weekend and behaving like a normal, energetic 6-year-old. It wasn't until



A cake for Rhoenan's first radiation treatment.

See **Cancer**, Page 8

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Volume 51, No. 51

### Index

Opinion-Pages 4-5  
Calendar-Page 7  
Public Safety-Pages 10, 17  
Education-Page 15  
Classifieds-Pages 19-25  
Sports-Pages 28-31

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**PUBLIC NOTICES:** See page 27

# Cancer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

that Monday that he started to show symptoms that something was wrong.

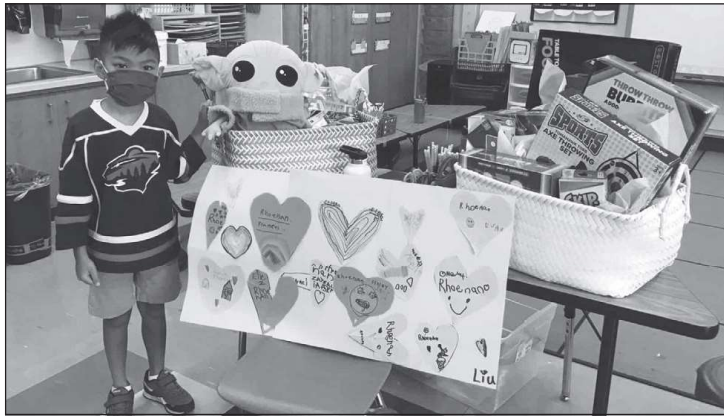
“From the weekend and then into the week day, it was like 360. It was just a dramatic change,” said Debbie Yee, Rhoenan’s mother.

They called his pediatric nurse, who after hearing the symptoms, said she was concerned and recommended a trip to the emergency room.

After a CT scan that revealed a shadow in his brain area, an overnight stay in the pediatric intensive care unit at Children’s Hospital in St. Paul, and a biopsy, Rhoenan was diagnosed with diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma, an aggressive form of childhood brain cancer, on Aug. 17.

“Our world just changed overnight,” Yee said.

**Showing symptoms**  
Approximately 150-300 children are diagnosed with DIPG in the U.S. each year, according to DIPG.org. When a child has this type of cancer, tumors form in an area of the brain stem called the pons, an important part of the body controlling motor skills, breath-



Gift baskets Rhoenan received from his classmates.

(PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEBBIE YEE)

ing, sleeping and other key bodily functions.

As the week started, Rhoenan’s parents noticed his energy level was lower than usual. He was off-balance, slurring his words and his eyes looked sleepy. “With his age, it’s really hard to know the symptoms in the beginning because they’re still in (those) child developmental stages,” Yee said.

**Treatment options**  
Because of the location of Rhoenan’s tumor, it cannot be surgically removed and there is no known cure for DIPG. Instead, his par-

ents learned about other treatment options, such as radiation, and began investigating the possibility of participating in some clinical trials.

“We know what’s best for him at that moment was to have him receive radiation treatment because we didn’t want to wait too long,” Yee said. “With the tumor growing so aggressively, to give him a normalcy as quick as possible would be to receive radiation treatment.”

He started six weeks of radiation treatment, Monday thru Friday, for 31 days of sessions. Because Rho-

enan could lie still during the sessions, he didn’t need to be sedated. The sessions only lasted 10-15 minutes, she said. The patient could listen to their favorite music during their sessions, and Rhoenan chose “The Greatest Showman” soundtrack every time.

“The reason we listen to that is because we, as a family, watch that and we sing and we dance and we play,” said Lin Tep, Rhoenan’s father.

When treatment began they were told that there wouldn’t be any symptoms at the start, yet Rhoenan

was nauseous immediately and had difficulty swallowing.

“It was hard to watch, and then seeing him not be able to hold any food down and he was fatigued, complaining about having headaches,” Yee said. “But it had to hurt very bad for him to say he was having double headaches.”

Rhoenan was prescribed Tylenol, but required a stronger medication to help curb the symptoms. As he approached his second and third weeks of treatment, he began to feel better. Some of his original symptoms of DIPG began to fade as well, Yee said.

“He was entirely independent prior to when this happened and then all of a sudden, again like I said, overnight everything changed and he is so reliant and dependent on us now that I’m sure it’s hard for him,” she said.

Because his symptoms were better, Rhoenan was able to go back to school at Excelsior Elementary. With help from Principal Stacy DeCorsey, the school nurse, Rhoenan’s homeroom teacher and Yee able to be in-class with Rhoenan alongside a paraprofessional, he started going for half

days.

“That entire school, that whole staff. Amazing. It makes my 30-minute one-way (drive) worth it,” Tep said, adding the family lives in Burnsville.

Rhoenan loves school and it was definitely something he needed and helped give him some normalcy, Yee said. But due to the COVID-19 cases surge at Excelsior Elementary, he had to be pulled out of school. They hope he can go back after the holidays, she said.

## Post radiation

His radiation treatment ended on Oct. 12, a feat the family celebrated with a cake. While an MRI two weeks after his treatment ended revealed the tumor was reacting to the radiation, his parents noticed some of the symptoms were returning only a few days after his last treatment.

“It was just hard because we felt like there was just improvements being made,” Yee said.

They then looked into options to help treat his returning symptoms, which were steroids or a medication called Avastin, a man-

See **Cancer**, Page 9

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# Cancer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

made antibody used to treat various types of cancer.

They chose Avastin and had a port surgically placed in Rhoenan's chest to receive the treatment once every two weeks. His parents were initially hesitant about the port, but she said it made the infusion very easy.

"We don't know for how long. It could be a temporary thing or it's supposed to give him quality of life by improving his symptoms, so it could be long," Yee said.

During this time, they were also considering targeted treatments with oral medication, a more personalized option than enrolling him in a clinical trial.

Rhoenan's oncologist prescribed four different medications, but only two were approved by insurance after several weeks of waiting. While he may not take all four drugs, his doctor wanted to ensure they had options when insurance approval can take a long time.

"Any time we start something with him, there's always the unknown. Are we nervous? Absolutely," Yee said.

## Support from the community

To help pay for the costs of treatments and bring awareness to DIPG, a GoFundMe was made for Rhoenan at [tinyurl.com/2r27vafv](http://tinyurl.com/2r27vafv). So far, a total of 270 donations have raised \$29,859.

"The bills are starting to come through now. It's helped," Yee said, who hasn't been able to work as assistant store manager at Banana Republic for many months. Tep, a supervisor for Entegris in Bloomington, has been the only one able to work.

For Tep, the support the family has received is beyond words. They said they hope they can also bring awareness to DIPG through Rhoenan, especially because of how rare it is.

He said when he called the doctor to get a COVID-19 test and explained his reason for getting the test, the doctor didn't know what DIPG was. Through awareness, they said they hope one day a cure will be found.

"Yeah, you see all these statistics and studies but, you know what, we're hopeful. Miracles are out there and (Rhoenan's) been so resilient and he's so strong," Yee said.

## Obituaries

### Pamela "Pam" J. Feldt

Pamela "Pam" J. Feldt, 67, of St. Louis Park, MN, passed away peacefully on November 26, 2021 after a battle with several illnesses at HealthPartners Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park.



She was born in Redwood Falls, MN on May 4, 1954, the daughter of Robert J. and Phyllis A. Feldt. Pam was raised in Redwood Falls and graduated from Redwood Falls High School in 1972. She attended the University of Minnesota - Morris where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theater Arts.

Pam moved to the Twin Cities area to pursue a career in Human Resources, specializing in employee benefits, and also invested in career advancement coursework at Metropolitan State University. She was employed for many years at Valspar Paint Corporation and Jostens International. Outside of work, Pam was an avid gardener and enjoyed the company of her cat, Kirby who was named after MN Twin Kirby Puckett. She was a lifelong MN Vikings fan, purple was her favorite color. She also enjoyed making crafts, reading -especially Stephen King novels - cooking, and listening to Neil Diamond. Pam was a member of Colonial Church in Edina, MN.

Pam is survived by brothers, Michael and Robert, and sisters, Alison and Jennifer, and several nephews and nieces.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

Any monetary donation is requested to be made in Pam's name to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

A celebration of Pam's life will be held at a later date.

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