



NISSWA CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Foster races home and gets big surprise

Returns from Mexico just in time to attend chamber spring dinner

By Nancy Vogt
Echo Journal

NISSWA — Admitting she likes adventure, Tina Foster made the long drive home to Nisswa from Mexico just in time to attend the Nisswa Chamber of Commerce annual spring dinner.

That was her goal — to attend the dinner with her family and friends to see her good friend honored as the Nisswa Citizen of the Year.

But that's not how it played

out. Instead, Foster's eyes got big and her mouth opened wide upon hearing this year's Citizen of the Year had just returned from Mexico.

"I'm overwhelmed and so grateful to be part of this little town. It's amazing to be part of this community. After you go away for a bit, then you really know," Foster said after the news that she was the Citizen of the Year began to sink in.

Foster was sure her good friend, Shawn Hansen, would receive the award, and those in the know went along with her thoughts. At the Thursday, May 19, dinner at Cragun's Legacy Courses, Chamber President Pam Dorion opened

the Citizen of the Year program by praising the winner for her leadership.

"This is their second year being nominated, and it is voted on by past citizens of the year and two (chamber) board members that combed through many, many nominations this year. There's always one that just rises to the top," Dorion said.

"The nomination letter said, 'If you are from Nisswa or you visit here frequently, you have met this person and also they would give you the shirt off their back if they knew that you needed it.' They have sat or currently sit on many boards," she said.

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Nancy Vogt / Echo Journal

Nisswa Citizen of the Year Tina Foster, center, is shown with her son-in-law and daughter, Mike and Chloe Newton, left; her daughter, Sophie Foster; and son, Christian Burnett, on Thursday, May 19, at Cragun's Legacy Courses, where the Nisswa Chamber dinner was held.

Mother speaks up on worst nightmare

Pine River mom hopes others can learn from her experience

By Travis Grimler
Echo Journal

PINE RIVER — A Pine River woman experienced every mother's worst nightmare, and now she wants to speak up to help others avoid her plight.

In recent months, Cass County wrapped up a year-long court case in which an adult pleaded guilty to sexual misconduct charges for acts committed with this woman's daughter, who was 15 when the incidents began.

The woman, who wishes to remain anonymous to protect her daughter's privacy, said after the court case concluded she didn't feel the need to name the defendant and have him further punished.

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Travis Grimler / Echo Journal

At the May 18 scholarship award ceremony at Pine River-Backus School, 26 students received \$1,000 each in memory of their classmate, Evan Lindquist, who died in 2010 at age 6.

IN MEMORY OF EVAN

Pine River boy's legacy provides \$26,000 in scholarships

By Travis Grimler
Echo Journal

Pine River

The memory of Evan Lindquist persists strongly in the Pine River-Backus community, where the Evan Lindquist Memorial Scholarship provided \$1,000 to 26 of his classmates going on to higher education.

Evan died in a tragic school bus accident in 2010, when he was 6 years old. That tragedy rocked the community, but it wasn't long before a teacher and friend of his parents decided to do good in his honor.

His mother, Melanie Lindquist, said it was Noell Johnson who came up with the idea for an annual 5K memorial run/walk in 2011. The event raised scholarship money for Evan's classmates, who will graduate from high school Friday, May 27.

"It feels like five minutes ago that

Noelle came to me with the idea of doing a 5K," Lindquist said. "I remember when it was first starting up thinking, 'Oh, my gosh, that's so far away.' I was never thinking that we were actually going to get here. I knew we would, but it just seemed really far. Now it's come and I'm still processing that it just happened. It went by super quick."

The goal was to raise funds for a scholarship to be awarded to Evan's classmates in 2022, when they graduated. The community wholeheartedly supported the event, which attracted an estimated 500 people its first year, and ran for seven years.

The funds raised over those years provided \$26,000 at this year's scholarship awards ceremony — of an estimated \$164,000 overall from 55 different scholarships —



Contributed

Evan Lindquist, left, and his best friend, Cody Deplazes, dressed as superheroes as young boys. Evan died at age 6 on March 22, 2010. A scholarship awarded in his name on May 18 will help Deplazes and their classmates achieve their life goals.

held May 18. After this year, the Evan Lindquist Memorial Scholarship will be awarded to two graduating seniors every year, for an amount of \$1,000 each for 10 years.

Several students from Evan's class were

visibly and audibly touched when Johnson spoke and presented the scholarships. All 26 students stood at the podium with a somber air when the scholarship was announced. Among them was Cody

Deplazes, Evan's best friend.

"My family and Evan's family were really close," Deplazes said. "There were a few families that all went to the same Lutheran church for a long time. We were really good friends growing up since we were 2 or 3 years old. We had the same day care and that kind of stuff."

Deplazes said even after Evan's death, his family proved supportive to him and their community.

"I think it's important for everyone to know how amazing Melanie Lindquist and Eric Lindquist are, because they helped organize the runs and whatnot, and they've been really supportive of me personally," Deplazes said.

Evan left a positive impression on all his classmates.

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PEQUOT LAKES

Seniors, graduates share thoughts on pandemic

By Megan Buffington
Echo Journal

PEQUOT LAKES — Current Pequot Lakes High School seniors and last year's graduates had mixed responses when asked about their senior experience during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eight students, four from the Class of 2021 and four from the Class of 2022, reflected on how living through a pandemic while in high school impacted their senior year.

When asked what the best social part of her senior year has been, senior Maya Orvis said,

"Normal high school stuff."

Other seniors shared a similar positivity and general excitement for the return to normalcy. Emma Johnson said all the teachers are trying to have a good first year post-pandemic.

"After missing out on it in the past years it

was fun to be involved," Julia Keiffer said. "I got to play pep band at homecoming, be a part of coronation and powderpuff and buff and dress up all week and everything felt normal. It was fun to spend time with my friends in a regular way."

However, Keiffer said

returning to "regular high school again" has been stressful too because it felt unfamiliar after over a year of online and hybrid classes. Other students are also struggling with the return to normal academics.

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WHAT YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

Here are highlights of what was published in the Echo Journal e-papers online in the past week. Each e-paper is seven to nine pages of bonus news from around the world, including national, state, business, entertainment and sports news.

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MOTHER

From Page A1

But she wanted to help others to see the warning signs she missed.

"(She had been working) just a few months," she said of her daughter. "She had to be 15 to start, and that was in February until June."

She thought her daughter's first job would be a safe place for her to learn to be an adult. Unknown to the mother, her daughter's supervisor took an interest in her.

"(He) was a family friend," she said. "He was 30 at the time and using that to prey on her and groom her. He was also in management, so he had more free time."

She didn't see the way the manager kept her daughter working close by him or how he allegedly doted on her with food and attention, but she did see her daughter's personality change.

"She started hating school," she said. "I know every parent says that, but it just got progressively worse."

Her daughter skipped school and lied about it. She was constantly lying, seemed more and more depressed and started experimenting with substances.

The woman wrote off many of her daughter's misbehaviors as teenage rebelliousness and a reaction to some big life changes.

Before all this, she said her daughter was a model student. "She was innocent," she said. "I was pretty wild at 15, but she wasn't like that. She had just gone through her dad dying after a year at home with cancer. Then it was she and I alone and then I was dating. Then those two started a friendship and she turned into this little girl that we just didn't know what was happening to her and she wouldn't say anything."

Her daughter didn't want to live in Pine River anymore and moved to live with another

family member. In the years that followed, her daughter continued to spiral into using more substances, depression and suicide attempts.

She was traumatized and the cause did not come to light, until five years afterward.

"I found out about it in 2020," the mother said. "She told the old dean of students over Facebook, then he called up the sheriff's department. She finally told me."

The revelation of the incident shed light on many of her daughter's behaviors. She suddenly started to feel guilty, seeing what she thinks may have been signs.

"She was mad because I would make her go to work," she said. "Because that's what we do. We work."

She wasn't the only parent to confuse a red flag for rebelliousness, according to information from Support within Reach, a nonprofit sexual violence resource center that provides resources to victims of sexual crimes.

"Oftentimes, especially with that age group, it's very tricky," said Evett Ellis, executive director of Support within Reach for Northwestern Minnesota.

"Teens are in a place of defining who they are as an individual," Ellis said. "They're going through changes. There are a lot of factors happening and high school can be extremely tricky to navigate."

The Pine River mother was further frustrated when she learned that her daughter's coworkers were somewhat aware of what was going on. Her daughter said some coworkers called her names for supposedly being promiscuous.

It got worse when police spoke to another manager.

"He said, 'We thought they were in a relationship,'" she said. "I'm like, 'She was 15 and he was a grown man.' What if one person would have said something, or if they would have stopped it?"

In Minnesota, the age of consent is 16. Even at 16, an adult engaging in a sexual relationship with someone four years or more their junior is illegal.

Even if the defendant was not facing accusations for using his position, substances and possible threats of violence, any sexual relationship between the two would have been considered illegal under Minnesota law.

Mandatory reporters

Ellis said there are many common themes in this incident. It is statistically more common for abusers to be familiar to their victims, and it isn't uncommon for someone to use a position of authority incorrectly.

Ellis said some positions in the law enforcement, medical, education and other fields are "mandatory reporters," which means they must report suspicions of sexual crimes or abuse to law enforcement.

Not all people are mandatory reporters, but Ellis compared it to ignoring other emergencies.

"It's like if you see an accident happen, you're still going to call to try to get somebody some resources and support or some help," Ellis said. "Maybe they don't need it, and they can confirm that with the appropriate person. But if we see it, and we're not saying anything, or we're not checking in on it, then we're doing ourselves a disservice. And we're allowing this to happen."

Failure to take action means the possible indiscretions might continue, or even worsen. If witnesses don't step up, then abusers might build a pattern of abuse.

"Some people don't have the best possible intentions, and oftentimes you get a lot of people who haven't been caught working in spaces where they're constantly victimizing different individuals," Ellis said.

While there may be no laws

or policies saying so, Ellis said everyone should act as a mandatory reporter, especially in the case of children.

"If that individual is underage, it is your moral responsibility, or should be your moral responsibility to, in a sense, try to care and ensure that no harm is going to come to that individual, and when it comes to boundaries, knowing what boundaries look like," Ellis said.

While this includes possibly reporting the witnessed incident to either a higher level supervisor or law enforcement, it could also mean stepping in and telling the suspicious individual to stop, and speaking to the possible victim, asking them if they are uncomfortable.

Sometimes this is enough to prevent someone from being victimized or at least put a stop to it. It's important for people to not automatically assume that both individuals are OK with what's going on.

"We should be working towards getting people more comfortable with speaking up," Ellis said. "I mean, if you see a kid getting kidnapped, what would you do? You know, if you see a fire, are you not going to call the fire department or are you going to pass by it?"

"We have to make it urgent to reach out," Ellis said. "Even if we don't feel equipped to handle that situation, we can pass that information over to the appropriate people that know what to do with this information."

Red flags

In the case of people being victimized, there can be red flags like those this mother identified, including grades slipping, school absences, excess favor from a specific individual, avoidance, depression and experimenting with substances, among others.

It's possible these might not be signs of abuse, but acting on those red flags is still important.

EVAN

From Page A1

"Evan and I were classmates," said Claire Dahl. "We were in the same preschool class together. I guess a core memory I have with him is that we got to walk together in kindergarten and be crown bearers together for homecoming."

Melanie Lindquist, a teacher at Pine River-Backus School, got to know Evan's classmates not only through his involvement in the school and the community's mourning, but through having many PR-B students go through her own class.

"I've gotten to know these kids," Lindquist said. "I knew them a little bit when they were in elementary, particularly the ones Evan was friends with.

In the beginning they were Evan's classmates and friends, but now that they came to high school they became individuals. They are amazing people now, each one of them. I know them now as young adults and I can't imagine a more awesome class to have been his classmates and to do this with."

"I'm grateful to have Madame as one of my teachers," Dahl said of Lindquist, a French teacher. "She genuinely cares about each one of us as students and people in our community."

Evan's memory will serve to support Deplazes, Dahl and their classmates now as they go forward to pursue their dreams.

"It's really a blessing," Deplazes said. "I wasn't around for the first couple memorial runs, but I think I made it to the third, fourth and fifth. To see that finally

playing out for me and my classmates is truly amazing. I wish there wasn't that scholarship and he was still here."

"It's very special," Dahl said. "I'm honored to represent him in college by having the scholarship as part of my tuition. It's not just the dollar amount that matters. I'm just grateful to be one of his classmates."

Deplazes will attend Hibbing Community College to learn to be an automotive technician. After two years learning his trade of choice he

plans to come back to Pine River and put his skills to work.

Dahl will attend the University of Jamestown in North Dakota, majoring in exercise science and minoring in character and leadership. She plans to be a physical therapist and will play basketball and perform in the concert band for the university.

There were many generous groups and individuals represented at this year's scholarship event, including the Brainerd Elks, area American Legions, local

Lions chapters, Crossing Arts Alliance, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and some businesses. Memorial scholarships made a big splash this year, amounting to \$30,400.

Memorial scholarships included:

► The Evan Linquist Memorial in the amount of \$1,000 each for 26 seniors.

► The Brenden Fenstermaker Scholarship for \$500 to Zach McAllister.

► The Heather & Kelly Sigler Memorial for \$1,000 to Dahl.

► The Sarah Tabaka Memorial of \$500 to Morgan Hirschert.

► The John Geary Memorial of \$300 each to Lauren Penkhus and Owen Carlson.

► The Sheila Joan Anderson Memorial of \$500 each to Brady Bristow and Caleb Ruhl.

► The Steven Amy Memorial of \$800 to Hirschert.

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