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WHAT DID FOX9 SAY?: Traveling Twin Cities news feature highlights Isanti Redbirds. **PAGE 11**

A match made in heaven

Two area couples combine forces to build boutique hotel in downtown Cambridge

BY BILL STICKELS III
EDITOR@COUNTYSTAR.COM

After purchasing the historic, 103-year-old Leader store from his uncle in 2018, Grant Johnson had a vision of creating a higher-scale eating establishment joined with the traditional clothing store within its walls. Despite skepticism over whether Cambridge would support fancier dining — and a pandemic that greatly limited business for over a year — Johnson’s vision has not only come to fruition but thrived.

About that same time, Kate and Tony Becker had a vision to create a unique wedding and event venue that would combine modern, high-end amenities with natural surroundings. Despite public skepticism over light and noise pollution in the rural setting on the corner of Highway 95 and Palm Street west of Cambridge — and a pandemic that greatly limited business for over a year — their vision not only came

SEE HOTEL, PAGE 9



BILL STICKELS III | COUNTY STAR

Little Miss Muffet, sat on her tuffet ...

A large crowd of about 50 kids attended the Bruce the Bug Guy presentation, highlighting a variety of insects, at the Braham Event Center last Monday, June 20. While some were a little squeamish about handling the various “creepy crawlers” such as moths, millipedes, cockroaches, and this Rose hair tarantula, many were like these two girls and quite fascinated with the experience. The program, which was also held at the Isanti Community Center, was the kickoff event of East Central Regional Library’s Summertime Reading Program.



BILL STICKELS III | COUNTY STAR

This magic moment

Taylor Anderson, Kendyl Izzo, and Kylee Mix react to having a crown placed on their heads, signifying being named 2022 Cambridge Ambassadors during the Cambridge Ambassador Program on Friday, June 17, at the Cambridge-Isanti Performing Arts Center. See page 10 for more photos from the program.

Cambridge-Isanti teacher, coach killed in crash

BY HOPE MURRAY
NEWS@COUNTYSTAR.COM

The Cambridge-Isanti Bluejackets football team has a new hashtag — #playforhouts — created in honor of Brandon Houtsma, assistant coach and a sixth-grade math teacher at the middle school. Players and anyone who wishes are using the hashtag to pay respects to the teacher and coach, who was killed Friday night in Kanabec County in a pickup crash. He was 37.

According to the Kanabec County Sheriff’s Department, Houtsma was traveling north on Fish Lake Drive when his vehicle left the roadway and struck two separate

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