

Students becoming Soldiers

Cambridge-Isanti hosts first military signing.

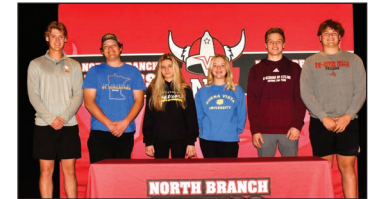
page 6



Making a commitment

Six North Branch athletes will play sports in college.

page 7



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Dreams coming true for North Branch leukemia patient



Grace Grams gave a big smile and thumbs-up for her first photo in front of her new playhouse called "Grace's Cottage." She was surprised with a brand-new playhouse on Saturday, May 14, in their backyard of their North Branch home. Magic the Unicorn joined her for the photo.

Photo by Nikki Hallman

by **Nikki Hallman**

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After two long years of chemotherapy, Grace Grams is cancer free. And now her wishes are coming true.

All Grace wished for was a playhouse of her own. She wanted a space to play dress up and host tea parties for her grandparents.

That does not seem to be too much to ask for, especially for a 4-year-old who has spent the majority of her life battling leukemia.

The family kept their faith, wearing bracelets that say "God's got Grace", never losing hope.

Little did Grace know that dream would come true in her backyard on Saturday, May 14.

A rough start to life

At the age of 1, Grace was diagnosed with B-Cell Acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

In 2019, the not-so-spunky toddler was brought to urgent care by her parents, Reggie and Christina Grams of North Branch, after they noticed she hadn't been acting herself and seemed lethargic for several days.

"Before she was diagnosed, I think Halloween was like a month before, I just remember walking along the street, we were dressed up in a costume and she was just pale that night," Grace's grandfather Jeff Grams said.

After performing some tests, her doctors misdiagnosed her with transient ethroblastopenia of childhood, a condition meaning her body didn't respond well to a virus, causing her bone marrow to slow its production of blood cells. After monitoring her blood counts for a couple weeks, she showed little improvement. They performed a few more tests and found that she had leukemia.

Grace then began chemotherapy treatment at Children's Minnesota Hospital in Minneapolis. Although Grace lost her hair, she managed to keep great spirits and her family did as well.

"It's tough going through 2 1/2 years of chemo," Reggie said. "It's kind of a blur in a lot of ways, but we have faith in God and trust that he knows what's going on. We have my parents, and my wife's parents. I don't know how we would have gone through it without them."

See **DREAMS** on page 17

Index

Your Voice.....	4-5
Good News.....	6
Sports.....	7-10
Focus on Faith/Senior.....	11
Obituaries.....	12
Business.....	13
Government.....	14
Education.....	20
Classifieds.....	22-29
Public Notices.....	30-34
Business Connection.....	36

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DREAMS

Continued from front

Living a normal life

While working with a team at Children’s Hospital, Reggie mentioned how they pushed the family to make sure she could still live like any other child despite all the obstacles she faced.

“They kept encouraging us, ‘Make sure Grace gets a wish.’ They referred us to Wishes and More,” Reggie said.

So that’s exactly what the family set out to do. The Grams met with a few people from Wishes and More, where Grace was asked what her wish would be.

“When we interviewed her, this was her wish, and of course, yes, we all kind of jumped at the opportunity to grant this for her and make it as special as possible, and of course we do this for all of our kids,” said Laura Daily, program manager of Wishes and More.

Grace’s wish was for a custom designed playhouse perfectly decorated for a princess.

“She’s always playing family, having tea parties, being a princess, dressing up. And it would be something that — you know she’s 4 now — she’d be able to use for the next 10 years probably,” Reggie said.

In partnership with NARI Cares and J Korsbon Designs, Wishes and More provided a wish for a prefabricated playhouse, which was customized with Grace’s color palette and whimsical accessories.

On Saturday, May 14, the design team began building Grace’s dream playhouse while she and her mom were away overnight, making sure it would be the perfect surprise.

“This one, I don’t know why it hit a chord with me, probably because I like everything to do with houses and little houses, and she wanted a little house of her own, and that just sings to my soul,” said Sarah Ivers, president of NARI Cares. “So I just personally wanted to be involved in this project and just wanted to make it really special for her.”

Making the wish come true

The team finished just in time for her arrival. And not only did they provide a personal playhouse, a special visitor also joined the surprise: Magic the Unicorn.

“Blown away for sure, and this will be



The Gram family got together to feed Magic the Unicorn as she got to hang out inside Grace’s new playhouse. Photos by Nikki Hallman



Grace experiences her first steps taken into her new playhouse.



Grace noticed her new playhouse just moments after stepping into the backyard.



The design team makes the final touches just minutes before Grace’s arrival.

something she will never forget,” Reggie said.

This all came just in time for Grace’s fifth birthday, coming up May 31.

Grace spent more of her life under treatment than she did as a healthy child. On Feb. 28, Grace completed treatment and is cancer free.

“This is a ‘you’re done with treatment and almost 5’ kind of a celebration,” Daily said.

The tight-knit family celebrated the completion of Grace’s treatment by hav-

ing her grandparents over for a party. Grace wanted chicken Alfredo, sparkling juice, an M&M Blizzard, popcorn — and to watch “Beauty and the Beast.”

“Not only is she going to be fully restored, which we truly believe she is, the other piece of that is that she’s now going to be a testimony to share that story with others and be an encouragement,” Jeff said.

Grace is on her way to a bright future. She has already begun preschool, which she started at the end of her treatment.

With such support from her family, she is already soaring. Her 6-year-old brother Evan has been especially helpful.

“He’s really helped with the physical therapy portion of the journey,” Reggie said.

Grace will now have regular checkups to make sure she stays cancer free.

“She’s a gorgeous little sweetheart,” Jeff said. “Just going through that and knowing she’s full health and running around with everybody else, just smart as a whip.”



A family photo is taken in front of the new playhouse. Pictured front bottom left: Evan Grams; top, left to right; Reggie Grams, Christina Grams and Grace Grams in mom’s arms, and Magic the Unicorn.



Sarah Ivers puts the last of the decorations together inside Grace’s playhouse before she arrives home to the surprise.