

Students of Character

Celebrating quiet leaders in our region

April 17, 2024 | 5 p.m.



How to watch on April 17:

- Go to facebook.com/sourcewellgov
- Click on the post that says:
“2024 Students of Character Celebration”
- Enjoy!

Celebrating quiet leadership

Welcome to the 33rd annual celebration

The Students of Character Celebration recognizes high school juniors and seniors in our region for their quiet leadership, perseverance, and dedication to their community, school, and fellow students. Honorees are selected by their school staff with the criteria that they are unsung heroes of their districts. The event celebrates the difference these students make and lets them know we appreciate and believe in them.

Wednesday, April 17, 2024 | 5 p.m.

Agenda:

Hosts of ceremony: Travis Bautz and Chelsea Ornelas,
Sourcewell Marketing staff

- Call to order by Board of Director Chairman Greg Zylka
- Student photos in lobby
- Representative Assembly meeting
- Welcome by Chad Coauette
- Keynote presenter: Tara Soesbe
- Presentation of awards and scholarships
- Closing



Wyatt Anderson

AITKIN HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Meredith Sander

Wyatt is an all-around good student and is well respected by his peers and teachers. While he is typically more reserved, Wyatt knows just when to add a humorous remark to lighten the mood in the classroom. After graduation he plans to further his education and has an interest in structural design.

Riley Belmore

AITKIN HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Meredith Sander

Riley has overcome mental health challenges that affected both her academics and her personal life. Through the support of family, friends, and teachers, she has not only persevered but now strives to help others. Riley even earned a Most Improved Student trophy. She plans to attend North Dakota State University and major in theater and minor in psychology.



Hannah Banister

BERTHA-HEWITT HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Traci Wutzke

Hannah has an exceptional work ethic. She puts her best effort into studying, working her part-time job, and volunteering at her church. She also treats people with kindness and respect and is highly regarded as a friend to everyone. Hannah is a wonderful role model for younger students and her peers.

Nathan Stange

BERTHA-HEWITT HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Nancy VanDenheuvel

Nathan is a naturally quiet person who has worked hard to be heard. He uses his voice to advocate for his brother, who has special needs, both in and out of school. Nathan treats everyone with respect, and he goes out of his way to help teachers and classmates. He plans to pursue further education after graduation.



Norah Boyd

BRAINERD HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Twila Ehrich-Belton

Norah is no stranger to hard work. After a challenging pregnancy at the end of her junior year, she has learned to balance parenting with school. Norah now supports other students who are parents-to-be by sharing her journey and connecting them to available resources. Norah would like to attend Central Lakes College and explore a career in counseling.

**Will receive a \$750 scholarship from Central Lakes College.*

Students of Character



Jacob Terhaar

BRAINERD HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Katie Gobler Anderson

Jacob has overcome more obstacles than most students. Many of those challenges prevented his most basic needs from being met. Though life has been difficult, Jacob never gives up or expects others to treat him differently. He is friendly, kind, and helps others in need. Jacob would like to attend college and become a pharmacist.

Bryce Rickbeil

BROWERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Charles Stier

Bryce is a leader in academics and athletics. Going beyond traditional classroom learning, Bryce has been active with the district's Knowledge Bowl team since seventh grade, and he has consistently contributed to its success. He is the only senior on the golf team, and his leadership is respected and appreciated. He is a great role model for fellow students.



Steven Rowe

BROWERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Rollie Lais

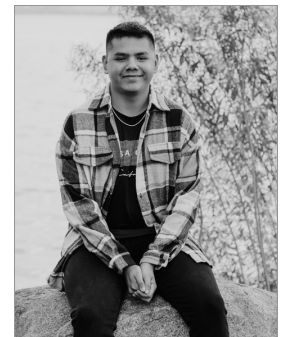
Steven is a positive and hardworking contributor to his school community. During the summer, he worked with the school custodial staff to clean the school building and tend to the school grounds. Steven is responsible and respectful, and he sets a great example for his peers.



Sean Gotchie

CASS LAKE-BENA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Alisha Hillukka

During middle school, Sean struggled with attendance issues and substance use. After an invitation to live with his sister in Bemidji, he committed to turning his life around. Sean now goes to school every day and works hard to be one of the top students in his class. He plans to attend the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.



Ellianna Johnson

CASS LAKE-BENA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Alisha Hillukka

Elli switched schools eight times before joining Cass Lake-Bena High School. Despite having to make new friends, learn new systems, and start over, she maintained a positive attitude. Elli enhances the school climate by going out of her way to make everyone feel like they belong. She encourages her peers to reach for the stars and is a positive influence.





Aidan Bendson

CROSBY-IRONTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Mike Gindorff

Aidan suffered devastating physical injuries during his athletic career, but that hasn't stopped him from being an important part of his team. Aidan has continued to attend practices and is a respected assistant coach and mentor to his teammates. He plans to study neurobiology and pursue a career in the medical field.

Cora Roach

CROSBY-IRONTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Emma Otterstad

When Cora was in fourth grade, her father was diagnosed with osteosarcoma. Adjusting to this devastating diagnosis was difficult, but Cora remained focused on her studies. As a senior, she has maintained a 4.0 GPA while taking all college-level courses and training to become a dietary aide. She plans to attend Central Lakes College to become a dental assistant.

**Will receive a \$750 scholarship from Central Lakes College.*



Monet Darsow

FRESHWATER EDUCATION DISTRICT — Nominated by: Staples Area Learning Center staff

Learning isn't always easy for Monet, but she doesn't let that stop her from succeeding. When she faces obstacles, she tackles them head on. She always puts forth her best efforts and eagerly participates. Monet also has an eye for art and finds beauty in every aspect of life, including those around her. She is considering a career in cosmetology.

Aribella Kinnunen

FRESHWATER EDUCATION DISTRICT — Nominated by: Menahga Area Learning Center staff

Aribella didn't have an easy path to a high school diploma. Though faced with adversity, she remained determined to complete her education and go to college. Aribella always delivers high-quality work, stays on top of her responsibilities, and treats others with kindness and compassion. She plans to pursue a radiology degree at Minnesota State.

**Will receive a \$500 scholarship from M State.*



Patience Posch

LITTLE FALLS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Shae Edgerton

With an ever-present smile and boundless optimism, Patience strives to radiate positivity and be a pillar of support for everyone. Through life experiences and volunteerism, she has cultivated resilience and leadership. Outside of school, Patience contributes to her church youth program and volunteers on mission trips. She plans to pursue early childhood education at North Central University.

Students of Character



Maya St. George

LITTLE FALLS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Megan Siemieniak

Maya has faced her share of formidable obstacles. Through strength and perseverance, she has overcome adversity and is now a true leader in her school community. Maya was voted captain of the dive team and is the percussion section leader in Concert Band and Wind Symphony. She shows compassion and empathy for those around and is an inspiration to all.

Caitlyn Ahrendt

LONG PRAIRIE-GREY EAGLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: David Blanchard

Caitlyn endured personal, family, and environmental struggles throughout her life. Living with her grandfather, she has also had to adjust to generational differences. Though it hasn't been easy, Caitlyn has overcome these obstacles while maintaining a positive, caring attitude. She plans to further her education and become an EMT.



Madison Koltes

LONG PRAIRIE-GREY EAGLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Michelle Halonen

Navigating life as part of a blended family can pose unique challenges, but Maddie doesn't let anything hold her back. She makes every day brighter with positivity and an ever-present smile, and she always offers kindness and encouragement at just the right time. Maddie plans to pursue a nursing degree at University of Minnesota - Twin Cities.

Henry Hultberg

MENAHGA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Michelle Rinke Koch

While having autism comes with challenges, Henry takes them in stride. He successfully juggles academics, activities, responsibilities, and practices with a positive attitude. His dedication and hard work are evident through his involvement in National Honor Society service projects. Henry "The Hammer" also participates in Special Olympics, and he plans to attend college to study communications and graphic design.



Joie Koll

MENAHGA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Hope McAdow and Shawn Andress

Joie has suffered several concussions, leading to memory loss and hard decisions to give up activities she loves. Despite those challenges, Joie is a leader in her school. She shows empathy without being demeaning and helps students who are marginalized or ignored discover their strengths and passions. Joie is interested in pursuing a career in occupational therapy or special education.



Trey Flowers

NORTHLAND COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Scott Peterson

Trey has experienced many difficulties, including the loss of his brother. Despite challenges, he strives to be a positive influence for others. He encourages his peers to be kind by reminding them to be empathetic to difficulties others may be experiencing. Trey plans to earn a degree in business or graphic design.

Maverick McMonigal

PEQUOT LAKES HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Joanna O'Neil

Maverick is the epitome of hard work. After losing his sister to suicide when he was very young, he has taken huge steps toward improving his own mental health and has made drastic improvements academically. No matter what kind of day he is experiencing, Maverick keeps moving forward with dedication to honor his sister.



Felix Williams

PEQUOT LAKES HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Sarah Johnson

Felix is a genuine person who has faced adversity. Born in Haiti, where he grew up speaking Creole, Felix had to learn another language and acclimate to a new culture when he was adopted. Though he has experienced occasional setbacks, he has persevered by learning to reframe his mindset. His positive outlook is present in every interaction with other students.

Tyler Foss

PIERZ-HEALY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Scott Herold

Tyler demonstrates perseverance in every sense of the word. Despite significant personal hardship, Tyler is a resilient student with a positive attitude no matter the circumstances. He stays actively involved in school as an athlete and a musician, and he is always encouraging and helpful to his classmates. Tyler's good nature is an inspiration to all.



Matthew Powell

PIERZ-HEALY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jill Hoheisel

Matthew's strong work ethic has helped him overcome many challenges. He can have difficulty advocating for himself, but he is committed to personal growth and stepping outside his comfort zone. His recent student custodial position with the school demonstrates Matthew's sense of responsibility and pride in his work.



Students of Character



Olivia Abear

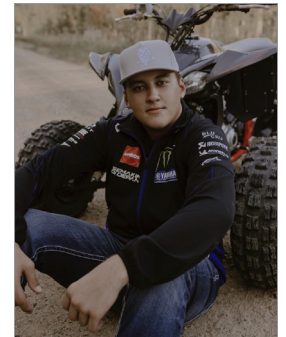
PILLAGER HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Militza Rivera

Olivia has a positive outlook that is evident to everyone around her. She is always willing to help her fellow classmates and share her passion for learning with others. Despite chronic medical issues that have affected her grades and motivation, she keeps pushing through and maintains positivity in everything she does.

Cole Carlson

PILLAGER HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jamie Prax

Cole missed most of his junior year while in treatment for a rare type of cancer. Returning to a thankful school community this year, he dove right back in as a leader in academics and as manager and statistician of the boys' basketball team. Everywhere he goes, Cole brings a positivity and joy that brighten everyone's day.



Katelyn Denton

PINE RIVER-BACKUS HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Janice Oakley

Katelyn's passion for music is clear: She shines in musicals and choir, leads as an officer on the Choir Board, and advocates for other students who struggle with music content. Katelyn has overcome changing schools and personal challenges to pursue her goal of music education, and she inspires others to chase their passions.

Alyssa Wheeler

PINE RIVER-BACKUS HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Teresa Hamp

Alyssa is a driven and dedicated student, class officer, and advocate. She is always the first to arrive before a choir concert, assist younger students, and lead class discussions. After recently losing her older brother to suicide, she has continued to show her inner strength by becoming a passionate advocate of suicide prevention.

**Will receive a \$750 scholarship from Central Lakes College.*



Brooklyn Meek

ROYALTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Monica Flakus

Brooklyn is a nurturing person who readily helps, supports, and welcomes others. She has persevered through bullying, panic attacks, and learning difficulties by finding methods that fit her needs and putting in extra effort to meet her goals. Brooklyn plans to attend college in an EMT program and eventually become a paramedic.



Brandon Trisko

ROYALTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Monica Flakus

Brandon came to Royalton at the start of his high school career and initially struggled with feeling like an outsider. His natural kindness and positive attitude helped him quickly develop lasting friendships and become a part of the school community. Brandon takes life changes in stride, seeing them as opportunities to prepare for college and beyond.

Emma Malone

SEBEKA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Dave Kerkvliet

Emma is highly involved in the school community as a dedicated band member, student, peer tutor, and friend. Her drive to succeed is clear and has helped her achieve academic goals and take on challenging positions in drumline. Emma's ability to connect with a wide range of personalities helps her contribute to a positive, safe, and collaborative school environment.

**Will receive a \$500 scholarship from M State.*



Eugene Reger

SEBEKA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jacob Haag

Eugene has persisted through academic challenges to become an adaptable, focused advocate for himself and others. By learning strategies to keep himself organized and efficient, Eugene has improved his classroom performance and discovered a new passion for education as a peer tutor for elementary students. His persistence and perseverance set a great example for younger students.

Madalynn Beto

STAPLES-MOTLEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Debbie Ferdon

Maddy's confidence has helped her rise above difficult experiences, from academic challenges to peer bullying. She is committed to helping other students feel valued and cared for, and she has a knack for viewing the world from different perspectives. Maddy is driven to do her best and move forward from tough situations in a positive way.



Richard Page

STAPLES-MOTLEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Debbie Ferdon

Richard has moved in and out of several schools and finds his way each time. Richard is known as a hard worker and a kind classmate, making every school a more positive place and helping others feel important. He plans to attend Central Lakes College and ultimately pursue a career in human resources or social work.

**Will receive a \$750 scholarship from Central Lakes College.*

Students of Character



Lexi Hanson

SWANVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Liza Hasse

Lexi has diligently maintained her academic performance, even through a difficult cancer diagnosis and surgery. Her positive demeanor, eagerness to work with others, and gracious approach to life have a clear impact on her school and community. Lexi's infectious, positive personality makes her a joy to be around and a great example of a student of character.

Colton Villnow

SWANVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Joel Rieffer

Colton has worked through physical issues that have kept him from participating in school sports and have made it difficult to function the way he would like during class. Colton doesn't let this stop him, though. He is very polite, has a solid work ethic, and is always ready to help others or take on a new challenge.



Noah Boeckermann

UPSALA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Nick Klug

Noah suffered a significant shoulder injury in his junior year, which left him unable to play basketball. However, he didn't let that adversity define him and pushed through vigorous rehab. Noah's perseverance and positive attitude make him a positive role model for both his peers and younger students. Noah plans to pursue a degree in elementary education.

Brooke Opatz

UPSALA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Nick Klug

Brooke is a hardworking student who has made the most of her limited free time. She expertly juggles studying and work, all while bringing a positive attitude and respect to interactions with her classmates. She is also always willing to lend a helping hand. Brooke plans to continue helping others by becoming a social worker.



Calvin Brooks

VERNDALE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Katie Bolland

Calvin has shown tremendous personal growth. He has learned to face challenges head on and has a great attitude even when facing setbacks. Calvin always leads with kindness and is eager to lend a hand to anyone in need. One of his classmates even shared that the best part of their day is seeing Calvin.



Mazie Hopp

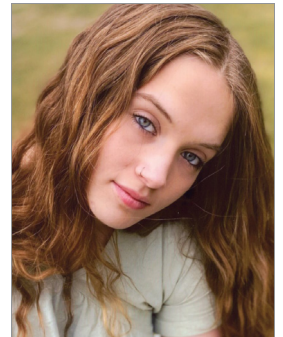
VERNDALE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Katie Bolland

Mazie has made it her life's mission to be kind and make others feel accepted. Even when faced with difficult conversations, she remains adaptable and doesn't take comments or actions personally. Mazie's unwavering positivity, willingness to help others, and kindness are truly commendable. After graduation she plans to continue helping others through mission work before pursuing a degree.

Kieza Chandler

WADENA-DEER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Toni Kraska

Kieza is a highly responsible and positive individual. She spends a lot of time helping to support her family and serves as a fantastic role model for her four younger siblings. Kieza is always willing to help others and has a positive attitude that can't be missed. She has been a ray of sunshine for the WDC school community.



KatieRae Fiemeyer

WADENA-DEER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Laura Kiser

Despite losing her sister to leukemia at a young age and struggling through ongoing family medical challenges, KatieRae retains a positive attitude and is highly involved in her school. She is part of the National Honor Society and Business Professionals of America, as well as captain of the tennis team. KatieRae represents the very best of her community.

Abagayle Audette

WALKER-HACKENSACK-AKELEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Thomas McIver

Life and school have not been easy for Abagayle, who lost her mother during middle school, then moved cross country to a new school. However, Abagayle persevered to find her own path. She demonstrates kindness and a strong sense of fairness daily. She has been an integral part of her school community through participation in speech, theater, and yearbook.



Rowyn Bach

WALKER-HACKENSACK-AKELEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Thomas McIver

Rowyn is a gracious and selfless person. He has encountered many personal challenges over the years but does his best to lead by example and do the right thing. Rowyn is an active participant in community service projects, and he is dedicated to ensuring others' needs are met. He plans to become an electrician serving the Walker area.



Thank you

Sourcewell partners with local businesses, organizations, and individuals to hold this annual celebration. Thank you for your donation of prizes and scholarship money.*

Platinum



Gold

Allegra Brainerd
Chad & Dawn Coauette
CTC
Hinkle Realty
Jeremy & Joni Schwartz
Madden's Resort
Marcus & Erica Miller
Mid Minnesota Federal Credit Union
Nor-Son Construction
Sourcewell Staff
Sourcewell Marketing &
Public Relations Team
Sourcewell Board Members,
Past & Present
Steph & Paul Drange
Subway-Staples
Susan & Craig Nanik

Silver

Ann & Robb Reid
Adam Sisneros
First International Bank & Trust
Heidi Murray
Long Prairie Chamber of Commerce
Noonan Sports Specialists
Pemberton Law Firm
Tower Pizza
Wadena State Bank

Bronze

Campfire Bay Resort
Contegrity Group, Inc.
Kate & Ryan Thorson
Lane & Donna Waldahl
Mason Brothers
Melanie O'Leary
Michael Epsky
Mike Domin
One Trick Pony
Pivotal Consulting
Staples Lions Club
Tom & Jenny Hoppe

About Sourcewell

Sourcewell is the regional service cooperative for Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties. As a service cooperative, we're a self-sustaining government organization charged by Minnesota state statute to partner with education, government, and nonprofits to boost student and community success. Locally, we deliver training and contracted services. Statewide, we manage a self-funded group health insurance option for public agencies. Throughout the United States and parts of Canada, we offer a cooperative purchasing program and technology solutions for schools. Sourcewell staff aim to be force multipliers, empowering public employees as they fulfill their public service mission.

*Up to date at press deadline. Watch the live celebration on April 17, 2024, for final list.

888-894-1930 | mn.sourcewell.org

