

Students of Character

Celebrating quiet leaders in our region

April 23, 2025 | 5 p.m.



How to watch on April 23:

- Go to facebook.com/sourcewellgov
- Click on the post that says:
“2025 Students of Character Celebration”
- Enjoy!

Celebrating quiet leadership

Welcome to the 34th 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 23, 2025 | 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: Joe Beckman
- Presentation of awards and scholarships
- Closing



Levi Berg

AITKIN HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Meredith Sander

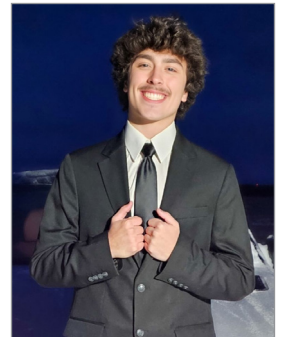
Levi has thrived in his later years at AHS after struggling with depression and anxiety and working to maintain his education and connection to others. His kindness, energy, and dedication to helping others is infectious, whether in class or in his role as the AHS choir president. Levi plans to attend Concordia College in Moorhead to study history education.

Jeremia Cortez

AITKIN HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Meredith Sander

Jeremia is an intelligent and caring person who has grown tremendously throughout school. He has chosen to become a more active student and a natural leader, and his calming demeanor and valuable contributions enhance the class experience for all of students. Jeremia plans to attend Minnesota State Wadena to pursue a career as an electrician.

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



Hailey Rudolph

BRAINERD LINCOLN EDUCATION CENTER — Nominated by: Amy Jordan

Hailey has overcome many hurdles since starting the ATLAS program three years ago. She has shown incredible dedication, kindness, and attention to detail in all she does, and she is always willing to advocate for her peers and for herself. She seeks challenging experiences and finds the skills necessary to reach her goals. Hailey plans to continue her education at Central Lakes College after the ATLAS program.

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

Bella Volkl

BRAINERD HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Allison Bullard

Bella displays remarkable maturity and dedication, balancing leadership roles in her school and maintaining high academic performance. She is a resilient and compassionate advocate for others and herself and is an inspiration to students and educators alike. Bella plans to attend Central Lakes College to pursue a career in nursing.

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



Emma Voss

BRAINERD AREA LEARNING CENTER — Nominated by: Jessica Haapajoki

Emma is a dependable and resourceful person who always looks for a way to move forward. She faced significant loss in her childhood, including the loss of her father, but she always pushes to find value and meaningful conversations in everything she does. Emma models respect and maturity to other students, setting boundaries when needed. Emma plans to attend Central Lakes College for social work.

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

Students of Character



Bridget Wells

BRAINERD HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Allison Bullard

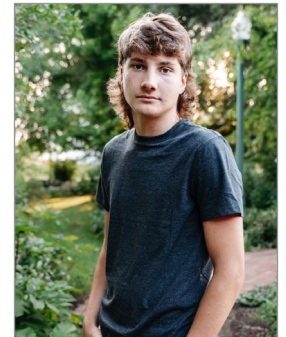
Bridget has navigated multiple life transitions outside of her control with maturity and optimism. She is a dedicated and engaging leader who fosters collaboration through her authentic care for others. Her deep care for the school and community is clear in all she does, especially her thoughtful writing and charismatic presentations. She plans to attend the University of St. Thomas for English and Catholic studies.

Dylan Recknor

BROWERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Patrick Sutlief

Dylan is a very positive person who creates a comfortable, welcoming space for learning at Browerville. He always exceeds expectations and is quick to step forward for any task needed.

He has worked diligently to manage his asthma to participate in the activities he loves and is a model for younger students to look up to. Dylan plans to enter the workforce or a trade/technical school.



Kailee Sandbakken

BROWERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Wayne Petermeier

Kailee is one of those students who can be counted on to get anything done. She is a person of incredible strength who overcame anxiety to participate in cheerleading and gymnastics, and she has served most of her high school years on the student council as a constant helper and accomplished leader. Kailee plans to attend Minnesota State University Mankato.

Eliana Bowley

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

Eli is kind to everyone she interacts with and a big supporter of younger students. Her dedication helped her weather a long and difficult period of illness last year, where she still received excellent grades even when the effort seemed nearly impossible. Eli plans to attend Oklahoma State University for a degree in Nursing.



Judson Goss

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

Judson thoughtfully contributes to every classroom or environment he is in. He engages in meaningful conversations with others and shows genuine concern for how they feel. His vulnerability and willingness to participate, even when others are hesitant, have helped many students. Judson plans to attend Bemidji State University to study computer science.



Taylor Smith

CROSBY-IRONTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Megan Syrstad

Taylor is a responsible, kind, mature student who has worked hard to get where she is. Taylor is quick to get involved and help make positive changes, showing selflessness and resilience through many challenges. Taylor is a positive role model and an active mentor for many younger students. She plans to attend Ridgewater College to study education.

Taytum Tisdell

CROSBY-IRONTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Chelsea Lipski

Taytum has not let academic difficulties stop her from challenging herself. Instead of shying away from tough situations, she has faced them head-on by enrolling in college-level courses. She is the definition of a quiet leader, working behind the scenes to help make Crosby-Ironton High School a positive and inclusive place to learn. After high school, Taytum plans to attend college to pursue a career as a veterinary technician.



Luis Lopez Arevalo Jr.

FRESHWATER EDUCATION DISTRICT — Nominated by: Heidi Heino

Luis is an excellent listener and a diligent student who encourages others to persevere through challenges. He has overcome academic and anxiety challenges through his hard work and maturity. As a result, Luis has built success and confidence and has grown much more comfortable with school and life. Luis plans to enter the workforce after graduation.

Ruby Sherman

FRESHWATER EDUCATION DISTRICT — Nominated by: Heidi Heino

Ruby is a kind and respectful person who has blossomed over time to become an excellent student who can collaborate with peers and staff alike. Her quality of work and willingness to help others are both excellent, and she contributed her skills as an artist in many places at school. Ruby graduated early last fall and plans to attend Alexandria Technical and Community College for graphic design.



Julia Erwin

LITTLE FALLS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Becky Abbott

Other students look up to Julia for her kind demeanor and positivity. She is always willing to help out and isn't afraid to speak up if she feels something is not right or out of place. She continually strives to do her best, working extremely hard to keep a regular routine even through struggles with mental health. Julia plans to attend NDSU for interior design.

Students of Character



Carie Gerwing

LITTLE FALLS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Abigail Schnobrich

Carie approaches challenges with a positive attitude and exceptional critical problem-solving skills. Despite having a lot on her plate, she shows unfailing empathy and constant respect for everyone around her and is never afraid of asking for help. She is a mature member of the school community and a role model for younger students. Carie plans to attend Central Lakes College for dental hygiene.

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

Aiken Lambrecht

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

Aiken's calm, kind, encouraging, and supportive personality makes the school a better place every day. He is always a friend to whoever needs him. Despite experiencing significant loss during both junior and senior years, Aiken has continued to offer a kind heart and warm smile to all. Aiken plans to attend community college and obtain his CDL after graduation.



Naomi Quijano Gonzalez

LONG PRAIRIE-GREY EAGLE SECONDARY SCHOOL — Nominated by: Angela Eldred

Naomi is a wonderful example of hard work and determination. Her kindness is contagious, as is her willingness to include others in everything she does. She is always striving to find positive interactions with others, setting high standards for herself as she works multiple jobs to save for the future. After graduation, Naomi plans to attend UND to study nursing science.

Isabelle Aho

MENAHGA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Brian Carlson

Isabelle is an important part of her school and community. She is a true teammate on the court and field, and a supportive and inclusive leader who organizes events for students, parents, and staff. She inspires others to get involved and make their school a better place. Isabelle plans to attend Southwest Minnesota State University to get a degree in education.



Sylvia Hill

MENAHGA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Randy Thompson

Sylvia hasn't had anything handed to her easily in school or life. However, she always finds a way to have a positive spirit and make the school day a better one through her presence. Behind the scenes, she has kept multiple projects together and running smoothly. Sylvia plans to make a difference in the healthcare field by going to nursing school.



Ashlyn Schwarz

NORTHLAND COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Scott Peterson

Ashlyn's hardworking personality and upbeat approach to life have served her well. As a student leader and willing helper, she always seeks to inspire students to give their best effort, and she lives up to that inspiration by diligently working past her own obstacles, even when it doesn't come easily. Ashlyn plans to attend Southwest Minnesota State University to study exercise science.

Zairion English

PEQUOT LAKES HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Kim Truchan

Zairion's character and determination to succeed are a model to his peers. Despite academic setbacks early in high school, Zairion has worked hard to excel, taking on extra assignments and doing independent experiments. He has become an extremely successful student, even setting the curve on his last college biology exam. Zairion plans to attend MSUM to study physics.



Camden Zinda

PEQUOT LAKES HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Angie Klein

Cam exemplifies the qualities of a leader through his quiet yet impactful efforts to include and uplift others who are left out. He has become a very positive influence in the arts community and has grown tremendously in his own self-esteem and maturity. Cam plans to attend Central Lakes College – Brainerd, then MSUM, for animation and graphic design.

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



Sophie Leidenfrost

PIERZ HEALY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Matt Poepping

Sophie is a leader in the classroom, on the court, and in the community. She is always willing to step in when students are struggling, and she displays selflessness and generosity at every chance. She always shows immense maturity, even in the recent loss of a close family member.

Sophie plans to attend school to become a school counselor.



Luke Thomsen

PIERZ HEALY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jill Hoheisel

Luke has consistently demonstrated resilience and determination in his education, despite facing significant challenges in his personal health and the loss of a family member at a young age. His empathy, patience, and ability to connect with others make him a role model throughout the school and community. Luke plans to attend Central Lakes College for robotic engineering.

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



Students of Character



Cooper Colgrove

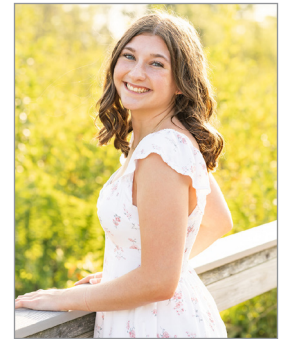
PILLAGER HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jamie Prax

Cooper is the kindest, most respectful, and most responsible student you will find. Even though he may lead from the back of the group, every student is inspired by his dedication and helping spirit. He has overcome many challenges, including the loss of his father at a young age, through his supportive and connecting nature. Cooper plans to pursue a degree in science after graduation.

Chelsea Williams

PILLAGER HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jamie Prax

Even through the challenging and chaotic times of high school, Chelsea has challenged herself to succeed in all areas of life while not seeking recognition. She always creates a welcoming and collaborative environment in every group she joins, and she offers her time as a TA as well. Chelsea plans to attend college for a degree in psychology, then grad school for neuropsychology.



Kelsey Bergem

PINE RIVER-BACKUS HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Abby Golish

Kelsey's determination to succeed despite health and personal challenges has displayed a tremendous amount of discipline and resilience. She brings a positive attitude to all she does and has forged strong relationships with her peers, making her an excellent role model for others. Kelsey plans to attend Concordia College in Moorhead to study nursing.

Paige Strong

PINE RIVER-BACKUS HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Abby Golish

Paige has faced significant challenges that have shaped her resilience and strength. She has shown determination to maintain her focus and persevere, even through the difficult decision to switch schools. Through these changes, she created a place for herself where she could thrive and be a great leader and role model. Paige plans to attend University of Minnesota – Duluth to study psychology.



Damien Bishop

ROYALTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Joel Swenson

Damien has a high degree of integrity: He will do the right thing, even when nobody is watching. Despite not actively promoting himself for leadership roles, he naturally earns them through his work ethic and positive attitude. He has been a constant supporter and role model for younger students and athletes. Damien plans to attend NDSU for industrial engineering and business administration.



Sascha Duevel

ROYALTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Joel Swenson

Sascha is a great student and quiet leader who sets an example by consistently doing the right thing, treating others with respect, and getting involved. She is always invested, positive, and kind to everyone she meets, and this creates a safe and positive environment within the school. Sascha plans to pursue a degree in biology after graduation.

Logan Dehmer

SEBEKA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Tom Smith

Although Logan is sometimes a quiet person, he is not afraid to use his voice to stand up for what is right. His focus and precision are incredible, both in his work as a welder and as a mentor for others who are learning to weld. His presence as manager played an important role on the football team as well. Logan plans to pursue an electrical apprenticeship after graduation.



KayeLeigh Warmbold

SEBEKA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Rachel Kern

KayeLeigh's sense of humor and personality bring joy to the people around her. Despite frequent and painful migraines, she has persevered with a positive attitude and stayed focused on her schoolwork and peer tutoring. She is efficient, helpful, and dependable, and a leader in boosting school spirit. After graduation, KayeLeigh plans to pursue a career in child care.

Josiah Critten

STAPLES-MOTLEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Val Turner

Josiah has grown into a leader at his school through his infectious energy and good attitude. He worked hard to become a better student by focusing on school and getting things done right. He is a good friend who helps out and gives back to the community wherever he can. Josiah plans to attend Central Lakes College in Brainerd.

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



Violet Dahlvang

STAPLES-MOTLEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Maggie Borg

Violet is an outgoing and responsible student who can tune into others and support them however they need. Despite disruptions for her family throughout her life, she has always cared for her siblings and worked to find inspiration and strength from the right places. After graduation, Violet plans to attend school for nursing to become an RN.

Students of Character



Ingrid Anahi Meza

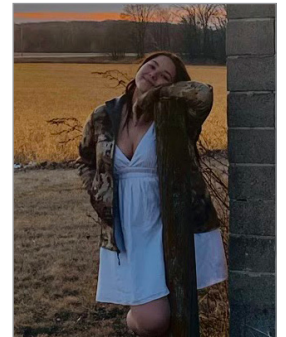
SWANVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Nicollet Gammon

Everyone knows and loves Ingrid: She will welcome, greet, and laugh with everyone she meets. She has faced many challenges and has learned to communicate her emotions and needs and find resilience throughout all obstacles she encounters. She is simply a one-of-a-kind student, athlete, friend, and mentor. Ingrid plans to attend SMSU for physical education.

LaKiesha Kuhl

SWANVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jolaineah Waltman

LaKiesha's compassion shines in all that she does. She supports others and offers guidance, and she is reliable and hard working in every challenge she encounters. Despite medical setbacks and pain, she has shown commitment by showing up and continuing to make exceptional contributions to all she does. LaKiesha plans on pursuing a career in nursing after graduation.



Paul Blonigen

UPSALA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Nick Klug

Paul is always there to lend a helping hand to anyone who needs it. He is an active student, treasurer for the Upsala FFA chapter, and volunteer in his community, all while helping his family run two dairy farms. He is an excellent role model for younger students and always makes sure things run smoothly. Paul plans to attend college after graduation.

Samantha Pilarski

UPSALA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Nick Klug

Samantha will help anyone in need no matter the situation. She is an advocate for others and herself, having lost her brother suddenly a year and a half ago. She always makes sure she has the tools needed to succeed, and she creates positive relationships with others to act as a mentor as well. Samantha plans to attend Winona State University to study social work.



Braden Shamp

VERNDAL HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Kody Van Den Eykel

Braden inspires those around him to strive for excellence, consistently leading by example. He is dedicated to success in every aspect of his life, tirelessly working to be the best version of himself and encouraging others to do the same. Braden's care and compassion for his younger siblings and cousins stands out as well. Braden plans to study law enforcement at Alexandria Technical College.



Haylee Tuinstra

VERNDALE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Tim Fiskum

Haylee's actions and attitude make her a true leader in her school and community. She has balanced numerous responsibilities and challenging college courses, all in the midst of the sudden loss of her mother. She consistently treats others with kindness and maturity, creating a comforting space of cooperation. Haylee plans to continue taking college courses after graduation.

Madison Goeden

WADENA-DEER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jil Fiemeyer

Madi's transformation into a hardworking, focused student is truly inspiring. She has faced numerous challenges and demonstrated remarkable dedication along the way. Despite moments of self-doubt, she has risen to meet her goals. Madi's positive attitude and excellent behavior impact students and staff each day. Madi plans to study cosmetology at M State after graduation.

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



Vanessa Haataja

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

Vanessa leads with integrity, respect, and kindness while still having high standards for everyone – including herself. She has had significant losses in her life yet continues to thrive, making others feel seen and helping to mentor younger students. Her character and dedication are second to none. Vanessa plans to attend UMN Crookston to study agricultural education.

Nevaeh Brinston

WALKER-HACKENSACK-AKELEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Sarah Johnson

Nevaeh is a kind and inclusive friend to all she meets. She has always prioritized school and self-improvement no matter the circumstances, and she strives to live up to the encouragement of her mother who died in 2022. Nevaeh is a gifted artist and an active participant in many programs to better her school and community. She plans to attend Bemidji State University in the fall.



Corbin Johnson

WALKER-HACKENSACK-AKELEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Brea Naeseth

Corbin tends to make every situation better. His persistence and kindness are clear every time he willingly lends a helping hand or a listening ear. His positivity is infectious wherever he goes, which is everywhere, since he is an eager volunteer throughout his school and community, always ready with a smile. After graduation, Corbin plans to attend the University of Minnesota Morris.

Thank you!

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

Platinum Level Donors



Gold Level Donors

Amanda Tegels
Ann & Robb Reid
Becky & Greg Grunig
Dawn & Chad Coquette
Ethan Shutt

Hinkle Realty Inc.
Joni & Jeremy Schwartz
Katie & Jose Alba
Mid Minnesota Federal Credit Union
Nor-Son Construction

Pemberton Law
Sourcewell Board Members,
Past & Present
Steph & Paul Drange
Subway - Staples

Silver Level Donors

Alison & Jacob Zetah
Bremer Bank
CTC
First International Bank & Trust
Hanneken Insurance Agency Inc.

Jenny & Jack Roberts
Jenny & Tom Hoppe
Lisa & Mike Worden
North 4th Laundromat & Car Wash
Sara & Mike Carlson

Staples Hardware
Tower Pizza
Walker Sands

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-funded 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. We also provide procurement support upon request to authorized military installations across the U.S. Sourcewell staff aim to be force multipliers, empowering public employees as they fulfill their public service mission.