

**FOLLOWING HER INTERESTS TO A BOOK**

First-time Hutchinson author discusses her path to writing / B1



written by Bre Brooks  
illustrated by Barret Lee

**PREPARING FOR BACK TO SCHOOL**

Special section offers news from Hutchinson educators / C1

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2022



Chad Greenway stands with the Thode family — Sara, Jones, Hawkins and Matt — after presenting them with a \$10,000 check that will help fund the Zella Thode Scholarship. The presentation was made at the conclusion of the Chad Greenway Day to REACH football camp Friday afternoon at Hutchinson High School.

STAFF PHOTO BY BRENT SCHACHERER

**Let's light the night purple!**

The annual Relay for Life of McLeod County is fueling the fight against cancer

BY KAY JOHNSON  
johnson@hutchinsonleader.com

Cancer. It's a word none of us want to hear. It touches almost everyone and it's the second leading cause of death in the United States.

This Friday join the fight against cancer by attending the Relay for Life of McLeod County. This year's theme is Light the Night Purple.

Erika Smith of Hutchinson is the event lead. She has been involved for seven years. This is her first time as chair. Joining her on the committee are the following: Mackenzie Boeckers, Jennifer Burley, Deidra Beilke, Kim Karels, Kelly Mickolich, Ashley Telecky and Sadie Jenkins.

"I originally got involved with a couple of friends who needed help volunteering," Smith said. "Then they asked me to join the Event Leadership Team. Then cancer started affecting me personally — my mom, my dad, my father-in-law, my mother-in-law."

The annual event is community driven and volunteer based. Last year, the local relay hours were shortened from an all-night vigil to 4 p.m.-midnight. This year's event will follow the new schedule but will remain at its longtime location at Masonic/West River Park along the Crow River in Hutchinson.



Erika Smith



Casey O'Brien

**The importance of family**

**Day to REACH campers learn family extends beyond blood relatives**

BY BRENT SCHACHERER  
schacherer@hutchinsonleader.com

Zella Thode loved going to Target. She loved roaming the aisles of the big box store, but more than that, she loved engaging with other customers in the store.

"We would go to Target all the time, and people that didn't even know her would just kind of stop and say, 'Hi,' because she was smiling at them or waving at them," Matt Thode, Zella's father, recalled. "She was amazing. I mean, she had one of those voices, and one of

those smiles, that anybody that saw her, even if you didn't know her, she would just brighten your day with her smile."

Memories of that bright personality are still strong, nearly a year after Zella's death, at 8 years old, from a heart defect Sept. 16, 2021.

Her spirit continues to live on in the form of a scholarship fund that received a significant boost from an extended family that gathered Friday afternoon in Whalen Gymnasium at Hutchinson High School at the conclusion of the 15th annual Chad Greenway Day to REACH football camp.

Camp organizer Chad Harlander and former Minnesota Vikings linebacker Greenway presented Zella's parents, Matt and Sara Thode, with a \$10,000 check for the Zella Thode Scholarship fund as the approximately 300 campers cheered.

The donation was one of two made during Friday's camp wrap-up ceremony. The other

donation, of \$5,000, went to Colby Smith, 39, a Hutchinson football alumnus who was paralyzed in an automobile accident at 17 years old, to assist him in the purchase of a new wheelchair.

Both donations, Harlander told campers assembled in the bleachers, are reminders of what it means to be "family" — with FAMILY being the theme of this year's camp.

"This is what it's all about. This camp is all about family," Greenway said.

Family goes far beyond the traditional definition of blood relatives, to a community and friends who support each other, Harlander said.

"Lead with your heart," Harlander said in a message prior to the camp. "This family is soft spoken, have never asked for anything during the many years of appointments, surgeries."

Family to A2 >

**Yes, they're open**

**Long-awaited, much-anticipated opening arrives for RiverHouse Kitchen + Drinks**

BY BRENT SCHACHERER  
schacherer@hutchinsonleader.com

If there's one thing Eric Labraaten wants people to know about Hutchinson's newest restaurant, RiverHouse Kitchen + Drinks, it's this: It's open. Now.

"I mean, the biggest thing is, we've been asked — I've been asked — probably 5,000 times, when we're going to open," Labraaten said with a wide smile. "So I would like ... to put it in big, bold letters. We are open. We can finally say that."

RiverHouse opened Monday, after a four-day "soft opening" in which invite-only customers provided the owners, along with kitchen, bar and wait staff an opportunity to fine-tune their approaches for the official opening day, paying crowd.

It's been a long-time coming, Labraaten acknowledged, but the calendar for opening changed due to extensive renovation of the building on Main Street, which housed the former Hutch Café.

"We went into it (thinking) we wanted maybe a small restaurant down here and turned it into a complete, complete remodel of the building," Labraaten said. "We ran into a lot of hiccups with a 100-something-year-old building, so one thing led to another and we just ended up having to do more and more, which is fine. Now we've got a beautiful building and we're ready to roll."

Labraaten and Ray Zeuli are longtime friends, and when the Hutch Café went up for sale last year, the pair saw an opportunity to combine their diverse experience and talents.

"I'm a business owner ... Ray has been managing restaurants for about 25 to 30 years," Labraaten said. "It's a good combination, a good team, of him having the restaurant experience and me the starting business experience."

Labraaten owns other local businesses, including ACC Midwest Transportation and Auto Xpress, but he says he was interested



STAFF PHOTO BY BRENT SCHACHERER

Partners Eric Labraaten and Ray Zeuli say they're excited to finally be able to tell the public that RiverHouse Kitchen + Drinks is ready to serve them.

in the Hutch Café for a long time, because of its location in the heart of downtown and his friendship with the sisters — Angie Jergens, Maureen, Ziemer and Teresa Plombon — who owned the business.

When they decided to sell, Labraaten and Zeuli were ready, and the sale was completed in June last year. The Hutch Café closed, and the new owners set to work transforming the building to create their own restaurant — though as

Riverhouse to A4 >

**Primary Election is Aug. 9**

BY JEREMY JONES  
jones@hutchinsonleader.com

Minnesota's Primary Election Day is Tuesday, Aug. 9. Do you know where to vote?

Hutchinson recently established its 2022 polling locations, some of which have changed from years past. The new locations dictate:

■ Hutchinson Precinct 1, which covers the portion of the city east of State Highway 15, will vote at Ridgewater college, 2 Century Ave. S.W.

■ Precinct 2, which covers everywhere north of the Crow River and west of State Highway 15, but also some portions of the city west of downtown and south of the Crow River, votes at Days Inn, 1000 State Highway 7 W.

■ Precinct 3, which covers southwest Hutchinson, west of State Highway 15 and south of the Crow River, save for a portion of the city near downtown, votes at the Recreation Center, 900 Harrington St. S.W.

See the map published with this story for more details.

A complete list of local voting locations was provided by McLeod County. The remaining locations are:

■ Brownton — Brownton Community Center, 310 Second St. N., Brownton

■ Glencoe — Glencoe City Center, 1107 11th St. E., Suite 112, Glencoe

■ Lester Prairie — Lester Prairie City Hall, 37 Juniper St., Lester Prairie

■ Silver Lake — Silver Lake Auditorium, 320 Main St. W., Silver Lake

■ Stewart — Stewart Community Center, 551 Prior St., Stewart

■ Winsted — Winsted City Hall, 201 First St. N., Winsted

■ Acoma Township — Acoma Town Hall, 23486 230th St., Hutchinson

Election to A4 >



We break news at hutchinsonleader.com, facebook.com/hutchleader and twitter.com/hutchleader.



Honored for General Excellence by the National Newspaper Association in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2018

**TO REACH US**

PHONE: 320-753-3635 FAX: 320-753-3636  
DELIVERY AND SUBSCRIPTIONS: 320-753-3657

MediaNews Group



7 92511 00050 0