

# LOCALNEWS

## I Falls to NYC: Cheerleaders to perform in Thanksgiving Day parade

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

Maria Shermoen and Bailey Vollom can hardly wipe the smiles off their faces. The two Falls High School cheerleaders in November will join about 600 spirit leaders from across the country to perform in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.

"It hasn't even hit me yet that we're going," Shermoen said. "This is just awesome."

Last week the girls, along with 13 other Bronco cheerleaders, attended a National Cheerleaders Association camp at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth. As squad captains who will be seniors in high school, Shermoen and Vollom were eligible to participate in the parade after attending the camp.

Vollom said when the girls received a brochure of trips they were eligible for during camp, they instantly knew they wanted to participate in the parade.

"We opened it and (the

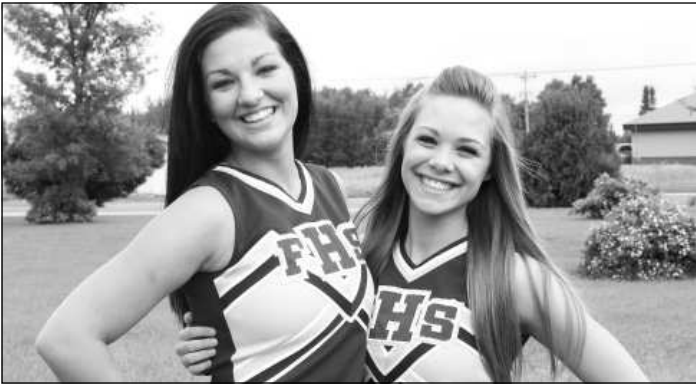
parade) was the first one we saw," she said. "We just looked at each other and knew we wanted to go there."

Spirit of America Productions organizes the event that attracts cheerleaders from around the United States. The week-long visit to New York City includes rehearsals for the Thanksgiving Day performance along with a Broadway show, a visit to the Statue of Liberty, dinner in Times Square and other well-known attractions in America's most popular city.

"I'm so excited and so grateful to be able to do this and to my parents who are allowing me to do this," Shermoen said.

Shermoen's parents will accompany the girls on the trip, which will allow them to explore the city further than what the program's itinerary allows.

"It is going to be so much fun," said Vollom, who noted that the visit to NYC will coincide with her 18th birthday. "I'm going to go shopping in Times Square for my



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

**Falls High School cheerleaders Maria Shermoen, left, and Bailey Vollom will perform in November in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.**

birthday. I can't wait."

Jessica Crosby, who coaches the FHS football cheerleadingsquad, of which both Shermoen and Vollom are members, said she is "incredibly proud" of the girls and excited for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"This is a huge opportunity for these girls," she said. "I am so excited for them."

Crosby noted FHS cheerleaders have participated in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in the past, "but it's been awhile," she said.

"Maria and Bailey will be in New York representing Bronco cheerleading and the rest of International Falls," she said. "I'm very proud of them."

With just under four months until Thanksgiving, the girls say they will be busy fundraising around the community to help cover expenses of trip.

"We will have donation cans around town and already have a few other ideas to help us raise money," Vollom said. "The rest of our

squad is excited for us and we're hoping they'll help out."

Crosby added that monetary donations can be made directly to the girls' trip by contacting her at 283-8311.

"Bailey and I are best friends, and being able to do it together is a time we'll never forget," Shermoen said.

### SUCCESS AT CAMP

While Shermoen and Vollom's trip has generated much excitement in the days following last week's visit to camp, Crosby notes the group made other accomplishments during the three-day event.

"The girls did awesome," Crosby said of the squad. "I couldn't be more proud of this group."

Cheerleaders from Minnesota and Wisconsin attended the camp at St. Scholastica and Crosby said the group of 15 cheerleaders received a plethora of awards.

"We didn't go to camp last year, so it was a first-time visit for a majority of the girls," she said. "I really saw

tremendous improvement in some of the newer girls."

Crosby said she and Shawna Bolstad, who coaches the hockey cheerleading squad, also participated in classes and achieved NCA coaching certifications.

On top of team awards, Crosby said there were seven cheerleaders – Shermoen, Vollom, Emma Johnson, Maddy Foss, Nikki Skifstrom, McKenna Rasmussen and Marisa Meyer – who were nominated for All American, a designation by NCA given to cheelearners who demonstrate quality in leadership, strength in stunting or jumps, and other areas of the sport.

And Crosby said other girls on the squad have qualified for other national events like the Macy's parade, but haven't made up their minds on attending.

"Younger kids in this community look up to these cheerleaders," Crosby said. "These girls are setting an example – whether they like it or not – to who those younger kids aspire to be."

## New homestead credit refund affects many homeowners in Minnesota

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

Minnesota homeowners feeling bogged down by their property tax payment will see some relief in 2014, thanks to a new homestead credit refund.

The new credit refund expands on the existing homeowner property tax refund, which is referred to as the circuit breaker. If property tax exceeds a certain threshold percentage of income, the homeowner is entitled to a refund that equals a percent-

age of the tax, up to a maximum amount. Much like a circuit breaker kicking in when overloaded, the property tax kicks in when the homeowner is overloaded by property taxes.

The biggest change to the circuit breaker comes in the form of lowering the income threshold for homeowners with household incomes between \$19,530 and \$105,500. The income threshold is the percentage of income a homeowner has to pay in property tax before they are eligible for a refund. Reducing this

income threshold means more homeowners who fall into the income range can qualify for a refund, and it will also increase the size of the refund for homeowners who have previously qualified for a refund.

This change is going to affect 300,000 homeowners in Minnesota, or 70 percent of filers, said Minnesota Rep. David Dill, DFL-Crane Lake. The average refund increase is a little more than \$200, he said.

There was a 12 year period, Dill said, when cities had

to rework the budgets and become more efficient, because there was no adjustment to taxes. However, when Minnesota Republicans eliminated the homestead credit, it became too much of a burden to taxpayers.

"When they threw away the refund legislation, it just added insult to injury," he said. "We brought it back to bring property tax back to where it's more affordable."

The new homestead credit refund legislation includes a \$120 million increase in homeowner refunds in prop-

erty taxes, compared to what they would have been paid under the previous program. This \$120 million represents a 35-percent expansion in funding, which is the largest single year increase in more than three decades.

The Minnesota Department of Revenue will also make an effort to reach homeowners who qualify for a refund of more than \$1,000 who have not filed for a refund before. The DOR will look at data from recent income tax returns and homestead credit refund

claims combined with current property tax information to determine potential refund candidates.

While the DOR will reach out to qualified homeowners, Dill stressed the importance of being proactive and taking steps to make sure they get the refund they deserve.

"They can go to the DOR website, fill out the forms, see if they qualify," he said. "Or they can go to their tax preparer, and make sure they're getting the full refund they're entitled to."

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