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4-year-old reunites with mother A4

Your **playbook for Super Bowl snacks** E1



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13 kids. 2 bedrooms. 300 quarts of applesauce. Lots of love.



Photos by Elizabeth Nida Obert / enida@postbulletin.com

Sean Hansen, center, readies to blow out his candles as the Hansen family recently gathered to celebrate their birthdays, which they do quarterly.

Raising a baker's dozen

BY ELIZABETH NIDA OBERT
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A popular '70s TV program declared eight was enough. For Sarah and Jason Hansen, of Racine, 13 seems to be the lucky number. That's a lot of biological children, by today's standards, and it doesn't go without notice.

"We're the large family freak show," jokes Jason. The self-described "Hansen Clan" sometimes travels together in a 15-passenger van referred to as "the bus" and draws attention wherever they go.

"We're always on display, so we're used to it." Might a reality show be in the future?

"Never. I get enough of it going places. I don't need it filmed in my home," he says emphatically.

"I was never going to get married and have children," says

Sarah, noting she and Jason have heard all the jokes and been asked a lot of awkward questions through the years.

"We don't necessarily like kids. I like my kids! But I'm not so interested in kids, in general."

Something clearly changed after the pair met on an unusual blind date.



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"The truth is, I would be so much less than I am now if it were not for my family," says Sarah Hansen, left, who hugs her daughter, Joanna. "I'm not hindered by them. I am better because of their presence."

See **HANSEN CLAN**, page A3

INSIDE: Day in the family of 15 is like structured chaos. **B4-B5**

'They will not dwell in sorrow and pain'

Former cop sentenced to 25 years for murder

BY KAY FATE
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Judge Pamela King choked back tears Friday morning as she addressed Steven Mark Zelich, 55, who'd just confessed to killing a Farmington mother of seven.

"Mr. Zelich, a human life is not something to be played with," King told the former police officer. "Laura Simonson was loved and valued by those who called her mom, sister, daughter and friend."

The 25-year prison term King handed down for Simonson's death "is never going to be enough to bring her back; it's never going to replace her, but you're going to remain in prison long enough that no other woman will be harmed at your hands," she said.

Zelich's sentence will run consecutively to the 35-year term he received in March in a Wisconsin courtroom for the 2012 murder of an Oregon woman.

He was returned to a Wisconsin prison immediately after Friday's sentencing in Olmsted County District Court. When he completes his time there — he'll be 88 years old, if he lives — Zelich will begin his prison term in Minnesota.

He pleaded guilty to second-degree intentional, unpremeditated murder, answering questions from public defender Lisa Swenson about the events Nov. 2-3, 2013, the weekend Zelich killed Simonson in a Rochester hotel room.



Zelich



Simonson

See **SIMONSON**, page A2

Pounding heart brought Everest climber to senses

Survivor of deadly expedition shares story at Mayo

BY HEATHER J. CARLSON
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Lou Kasischke knows what it feels like to die slowly.

It happened to him May 10, 1996, as he stared at Mount Everest's summit. There he stood in minus-30-degree weather as the wind howled around him. His fingers had turned white and stiff from frostbite. He was thirsty, but the water in his water bottles was frozen. He struggled to breathe.

"Think of the feeling of running as fast as you can and breathing through a small straw while your brain and body functions are shutting down," Kasischke said.

On Friday, Kasischke shared with



Submitted

Lou Kasischke survived a blizzard that raged May 10-11, 1996, on Mount Everest. Eight people died in what was at the time the worst climbing disaster to occur on Mount Everest.

Mayo Clinic staff how he survived the worst mountaineering disaster in Mount Everest history. On that day in 1996, eight of his fellow

climbers died on the mountain. Kasischke recently wrote a book about his experience called "After The Wind." He also served as a con-

sultant for the 2015 film "Everest," which tells the story of the ill-fated expedition. He spoke as part of the Hickman Lectureship sponsored by the Mayo Clinic Division of Preventive Medicine, Occupational and Aerospace Medicine.

Often when people think about mountain climbing, they focus too much of their thought on the physical challenge. Certainly, that is part of it. But Kasischke said the biggest test ends up being decision making.

The group of mountaineers had a solid plan for the climb. After six weeks of climbing, they were prepared for the 59-hour slog to the mountain's summit. They had a set timetable of where they needed to be in order to stay safe and when they needed to turn back. But when things went haywire and the climbers got bunched up on a critical part of the ridge, the time had come to turn around. Yet, the climbers standing at 29,000 feet were resistant to do it with the summit they had strived to reach so tantalizingly close.

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- Marie "Toots" Berg, Wabasha
- Duane John Helland, Stewartville
- Sister Paula Leopold, Rochester
- Naomi Moon, Rochester
- Jacqueline Payne, Dodge Center
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RCTC puts forward legislative requests

BY TAYLOR NACHTIGAL
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Rochester Community and Technical College students, educators and administrators made their pitch to area legislators Friday for funding for campus construction projects and an increase in funding.

With a workforce shortage, the college's leadership made the case that the region relies on RCTC to train students that will work in Southeast Minnesota, pointing to partnerships with regional employers, such as Mayo Clinic.

"RCTC recognizes that homegrown talent is the key to our region's prosperity, but we can't grow it alone," said RCTC President Mary Davenport to a room full of legislators.

RCTC argued the workforce shortage is particularly challenging for Southeast Minnesota, more so than for other areas of the state.

Davenport asked that they peg funding to inflation for the next two years and fund the replacement of Minnesota State's "critical technology infrastructure," which would mean upgrading its records system and IT system to be more secure, according to RCTC's director of communications, Nate Stoltman.

And, of course, that "lingering bonding bill," Davenport said, reminding legislators of the Memorial Hall and Plaza Hall projects the college has been pushing for. The projects rank seventh on the Minnesota State system's priority list.

The project initially was included in the Legislature's bonding bill last year but didn't make the final cut. In early January, Gov. Mark Dayton announced the RCTC project was included in



Louis Garcia

RCTC Interim President Dr. Mary Davenport, Chad Israelson and Sen. Mike Goggin (R-Red Wing) introduce themselves at the RCTC 2017 Legislative Breakfast.

his construction proposal, though he recommended \$14.5 million.

RCTC's ask includes \$2.5 million for asset preservation and \$21.7 million for Memorial Hall and Plaza Hall demolition, design and renovation.

The college's final request: help create incentives for students who want to transfer to the system's four-year universities to get a bachelor's degree.

MINNESOTA STATE BUDGET WOES

In November, Chancellor Steven Rosenstone asked the state for continued help with the system's budget deficit. Increasing costs, lower enrollment and less money from the state put Minnesota State and its colleges and universities in an "urgent" financial bind, he said.

A plan to address that funding gap was put forward last year, and it included driving enrollment, cutting

costs and calling on the state to allocate more money to the system.

Enrollment this fall was projected to be about 20,000 fewer students than when systemwide enrollment peaked in 2011 at 157,900 students.

They say that needs to be increased to the national average of state investment in higher ed — that would mean about an additional \$184 million for Minnesota State.

Last week, Gov. Mark Dayton announced his recommendation for \$150 million in new funding for the Minnesota State system over the biennium.

A FOCUS ON THE WORKFORCE

Guy Finne, a Mayo Clinic human resources manager, said the region really needs to focus on ramping up its "skilled and capable workforce."

"The time's right for this conversation because it's obvious that it needs to be

done," he said. "We need to make sure higher ed grows so that we can attract more talent."

Last year, nearly 300 hires came from RCTC and nearly 200 came from Winona State University, Finne said.

"There's no doubt about it, year in and year out our regional schools provide Mayo Clinic with a ton of quality candidates."

Finne said area educators offer those already employed in the region a chance to advance their careers with additional training.

"We rely on having those options out there, a variety of options," Finne said.

He also said he thinks higher education brings together people from difference backgrounds — often a challenge in today's divisive society.

He said these are opportunities for people to develop "mutual respect," a skill highly valued by employers.

"If there's a difference in our values, our beliefs, how we look and what we like to do and how we like to spend our time, but we can learn to appreciate our differences."

"This really is about the American Dream," said Rep. Tina Liebling, DFL-Rochester. "This is where the ladder is for so many people. If you work hard, no matter where you start, there's a path for you."

She said that's why she is voicing support for addressing workforce shortages.

Rep. Duane Quam, R-Byron, said he recognizes the increasing burden on students. He believes we need to provide "options and opportunities" such as the option for students to attend two-year institutions because when it comes to education, "it's not one size fits all."

Hansen Clan

From page A1

"When he first met me, I had a big, cheap Dolly Parton wig and a big brown caterpillar unibrow," Sarah says with a laugh. They married in 1994.

Eight boys and five girls later, the Hansen's live an unconventionally conventional life.

'WHEN YOU GRADUATE FROM HERE, IT'S THE REAL DEAL'

Sarah, who was raised in Racine and holds a bachelor's degree in nursing from Winona State University, is a full-time mom. She home-schools her children, who range in age from 6 to 22.

"It's not as complicated as it could be," she says of those aghast at the very thought of the task, which goes year-round and includes standardized testing.

Her brood populates their sprawling, antique kitchen table, textbooks scattered and open, heads down. Sean, 18, who sometimes takes a break when "Mom needs me for a job," says it's not uncommon to focus on his school work from 7:30 a.m. to 4 or 5 p.m. It's also not uncommon for the older children to assist the younger ones with their homework.

"When you graduate from here, it's the real deal," Sarah says.

To say Sarah runs a tight ship — with a notable amount of patience and self-control — is an understatement.

"Where are you stationed today?" she asks one. "Stay on target," she encourages another; her voice even as her eyes scan the busy room in their well-lived, functional, modest, rural home.

General announcements are made at the first meal — which usually consists of toast from the multiple loaves of bread Sarah bakes weekly — but not until she has rustled them from the bunk beds in their two bedrooms; five girls in one, seven boys in the other (Eli, 20, lives in Stewartville).

"If you're up past 9:30 p.m., you have to put yourself to bed and can't complain about being up too late," Sarah says of those yawning around her.

TEAMWORK IS THE OPERATIVE WORD

The older kids juggle jobs. And all the kids tackle chores, which include feeding the animals and washing the dishes. Then there is the laundry. And the not-so-small matter of washing and sorting two to four loads daily.

"Just fold it. We'll figure out whose it is later," says one sibling to another as the clothes fly through a network of hands.

When you are a family of 15, "teamwork" is the operative word. And it comes up repeatedly in the Hansen household.

"Generally, we function as a team and a unified group. We can't pull it off without each other. It's basically just being civil to each other and helping each other out," Sarah says.

As the Hansen children became old enough to help each other with daily tasks, such as putting on mittens and buckling seat belts, their parents put them on rotating assignments with their younger siblings.

And when it comes to discipline?

"We're all on the same team, so there should be some way to resolve things. It's in my best interest that you work on my team. I am going to win. I run this place. When we as a family work together, we are going to win," she says.

"If people are really pushing my buttons, I get my refrigerator cleaned for free," she adds with a smile.

"She doesn't get so much mad as frustrated," says Joanna, 15, of her mom's generally even temperament.

"We can be irritating. We're always around each other, so we've got to work it out," says Sarah, who practices martial arts weekly in Spring Valley with seven of her children.

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Weekend Focus



Photos by Elizabeth Nida Obert / enida@postbulletin.com

The Hansen kids, including Jethro, left, and Rebecca, right, tackle chores, which includes the not-so-small matter of washing two to four loads of laundry daily. "Just fold it. We'll figure out whose it is later," said one sibling to another as the clothes flew through a network of hands.

'We're the large family freak show'

Day in the family of 15 is like structured chaos



Emma Hansen opens a Christmas gift from her grandmother as her family looked on. The celebration included several rounds of Christmas carols and was held at their grandma's home just down the street. Laughter and playfulness are abundant among the Hansen family.



"This is always a big day," says Sarah Hansen, left, who helped carry a deer carcass from the outdoors into the kitchen and onto the countertop as her children eagerly gathered around to watch and assist with the cutting, washing and trimming. "We talk about the process," said Sarah. "We talk about what the cuts are." Sarah said she can get about 40 quarts of spaghetti sauce from one carcass. Also pictured, from left, are Jonah, Jethro, Rebecca, Silas and Emma.



Siblings Jacob and Emma Hansen hunt deer last November. The family of 15 is dependent on the meat, learned about the anatomy and skilled at cleaning.

Weekend Focus

Life is rewarding but exhausting, with a lot of big days

BY ELIZABETH NIDA OBERT
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RACINE — Sarah and Jason Hansen have 13 children and one 30-year-old TV that seldom gets watched.

“We are incredibly busy,” Sarah says. “It’s a nuthouse. It’s just crazy. We’re always moving.”

“It’s almost like structured chaos,” says family friend and neighbor, Ross Cooper, who grew up in Racine with Sarah.

“The kids are all very well-behaved and respectful,” he says. “At the same time, I’ve been to their house and there’s 13 different people doing their own thing. And Sarah’s on top of it.”

Cooper adds that he is “amazed” by the intelligence of the Hansen kids and their ability to carry on adult conversations.

“I’ve known other home-schooled kids where the world escapes them. With them, that’s not the case. They may not be on the Internet hours a day, but they know what’s going on in the world. There’s not one bad kid.”

The family dynamic has changed through the years.

“When they were all little, it was a lot of work. Exhausting. This is tiring, too, but it’s different. I have different balls I’m juggling,” Sarah says. “Once they’re in charge of their bodily functions — feeding selves, dressing selves, cleaning selves — the whole game changes.”

The work doesn’t necessarily stop when Sarah goes to bed.

“Sometimes that’s my only downtime to think of someone’s problem with algebra. Or what I need to do with that last bit of venison.”

‘WE EAT A LOT OF FOOD’

Sarah generally hunts at dawn and dusk during the deer hunting season, sometimes with her older children. The family is dependent on the meat, learned about anatomy and skilled at preparing meals.

“This is always a big day,” says Sarah, who helps carry a carcass from the outdoors into the kitchen and onto the countertop as her children eagerly gather around to watch and assist with the cutting, washing and trimming. “We talk about the process,” Sarah says. “We talk about what the cuts are.”

“We eat a lot of food here,” she says, noting that she can get about 40 quarts of spaghetti sauce from one carcass. “We like to do it because it’s cheaper and a great learning experience. And I know how it lived and died.”

The family is also resourceful when it comes to the several bushels of apples that populate their garage following the fall harvest. Teamwork ensues as they all cut, boil and puree about 300 quarts of apple sauce, enough to feed them through July. Stella, 10, says she doesn’t mind the work “until you’ve cut 70 apples and your arms start hurting.”

Emma, 16, says one advantage of being part of such a big family is that it’s “a lot easier to dodge chores.”

Other advantages?

“If I ever want to go someplace with a friend, I always take these hooligans,” says Lydia, 19, who is an aspiring journalist and writes her own weekly column, “Too Hick to be Square,” for a local newspaper. The topic is her family, of course.

Lydia says the hardest part of having so many siblings is “handling it all the time. They’re always there, and they’re always loud. It’s great having this many siblings around, but sometimes they also get on my nerves. They know my buttons.”

“And hanging on to your food is always a bit tricky,” Emma says.

GAMING GRANDMA

Aspects of their lives, however, are Norman Rockwellian. At Christmas, for example, the non-denominational Christian family gathers just down the lane at grandma Linda Grabau’s home to sing



The self-described “Hansen Clan” is resourceful when it comes to the several bushels of apples that populate their garage following the fall harvest. Teamwork ensued as they all cut, boiled and pureed about 300 quarts of applesauce, enough to feed them through July. Pictured, from left, are Stella; Joanna; Jethro; Levi; Silas and Emma.

“I’ve known other home-schooled kids where the world escapes them. With them, that’s not the case. They may not be on the **Internet** hours a day, but they know what’s going on in the world. There’s not one bad kid.”

NEIGHBOR ROSS COOPER

Christmas carols; they sound like a choir. Each grandchild then takes a turn opening their one gift from her, which is usually a European board game.

“I am the gaming grandma,” she says, explaining that all the grandkids take group shifts throughout the week to play with her. “Who’s ever really going to know me? My grandbabies. We play games. I get to sit across the table from the children and learn about them.”

She also believes games are important because her grandkids “learn how to lose gracefully.”

“If I’m playing with them, I’m playing to beat them. They know I’m playing as hard as I can.”

Linda also hosts sewing once a month at her home — Sarah says all her children are required to sew on their own martial arts patches — and appreciates the conversation and generational mix. And while each child is

required to learn piano with their mother; Linda offers advanced lessons to those interested in continuing.

Birthdays are celebrated quarterly and include gifts, singing and cake. Sarah is busy swapping and lighting candles as the family starts in with yet another round of “Happy Birthday.” On the days of their actual birthday the children request their dinner of choice, which their mother usually prepares.

And though they don’t use the word, sacrifices are clearly made when you have 13 children.

Vacations are taken at state parks, for example.

And “date night” doesn’t necessarily sound romantic so much as functional.

“We go to Fleet Farm without the kids. Or the grocery store,” says Jason. Or perhaps discuss family logistics over a dinner out.

‘JUST TOO WEIRD’

Sarah says that she has actually lost friends because their lifestyle is “too far out there” and “just too weird.”

Grateful for the friends who have remained throughout the journey, Sarah says, “The truth is, I would be so much less than I am now if it were not for my family. I’m not hindered by them. I am better because of their presence. Each of us is better.”

And to skeptics who question whether she is spreading herself too thin, Sarah says, “I don’t send them to school for eight hours and I don’t work eight to 10 hours so I’m always here. I taught everyone to read, one on one. They have all of my time.”

And someday when the nest is empty?

“It will just be different,” says Sarah. “We’re expecting that they will strike off.”

And likely bless them with a grandbaby or two.



Jason Hansen assists his son, Levi Hansen, with his algebra homework. Jason works at IBM weekdays but is otherwise hands-on with reading, teaching and projects.



Siblings Joanna and Silas Hansen complete their morning chores, which included tending to the chickens on their property.



Rebecca Hansen admires the moon — and noted that “it looks weird” — between her early morning chores of feeding the outdoor cats and dogs at her home in Racine.



“I am the gaming grandma,” says Linda Grabau, of Racine, second from left, who frequently plays European board games with her grandchildren, including, from left, Joanna Hansen; Sean Hansen and Emma Hansen. “Who’s ever really going to know me? My grandbabies. I get to sit across the table from the children and learn about them.”