

Gathering to celebrate the life of “one of the good ones”

Officers, family, friends, and community gather to honor MPD Officer Riley Kurtz

TINA L. SCOTT
EDITOR

When Officer Riley Kurtz died from medical complications associated with pulmonary blastomycosis on Jan. 3, 2022, at the age of 24, his family, fellow officers at the Merrill Police Department and Kronenwetter Police Department, friends, and the community were in shock. In the words of Officer Joshua McCaskill to those gathered in attendance outside the funeral home that evening, after a multi-jurisdictional procession had escorted Officer Kurtz’s body from Aspirus Wausau to Merrill, “He was one of the good ones. You all know what I mean.”

The Merrill Police Department Officers began watch over Riley when he was brought back to Merrill and continued until Thursday, Jan. 5, “when we knew cremation rites would be accorded the following week,” Merrill Police Chief Corey Bennett said. “At that point it became too much to ask our people to staff the continuous watch until the following Tuesday (Jan. 11) when he was transported to Wausau. For a number of reasons,

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Tim and Danielle Kurtz, the parents of Officer Riley Kurtz, after accepting the flag from Merrill Police Chief Corey Bennett. **Tina L. Scott photo.**

Fire at Blue Haven Stables property destroys single rental unit

TINA L. SCOTT
EDITOR

On Thursday, Jan. 13, 2022, at around 9:20 p.m., Lincoln County Dispatch received a report of a fire at N437 Blue Haven Lane in the Town of Scott, on the Blue Haven Stables property. The farm there consists of a barn/stables, a number of outbuildings, and a tack shop, along with six rental units, and an apartment where owners, Wayne and Sharon Jahnke, reside, set on about 60 acres on the south side of the road plus another 50-60 acres on the north side of the road.

The Merrill Fire Department (MFD) responded. “Upon arrival, crews had fire coming out of windows on one of the outbuildings which was an apartment,” a press release from MFD Chief Josh Klug said. This particular building was central to many of the other

buildings, so ensuring the fire didn’t spread, in addition to putting it out, was critical.

There are two apartments in the building that caught fire, an upper unit and a lower unit. The MFD reports the fire was confined to the one structure, and a family member confirmed the fire was contained to the lower unit. “The downstairs is totally burnt out. It’s awful,” Sharon Jahnke said. And, significant smoke damage to the upper unit displaced all the building’s occupants.

“I’m just glad Chris got out. He just barely got out,” Sharon said. Chris Jahnke, Sharon and Wayne’s son, was occupying the unit where the fire started. Sharon, Wayne, and Chris had all come home early from playing cards, around 8:30 p.m. “If we had come home any later than that ...” Sharon feared the outcome could have

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The interior of the lower apartment in one of the rental units at the Blue Haven Stables property is completely destroyed in a Jan. 13, 2022, fire. **Submitted photo.**

2022 Snowmobile Torch Ride brings Badger State Winter Games torch through Merrill

TINA L. SCOTT
EDITOR

The Annual Badger State Winter Games (BSWG) kicked off their 33rd year with the 2022 Snowmobile Torch Ride that started on Thursday, Jan. 13, at the Trailmates Snowmobile Club in Wausau. The Torch Ride passed through Merrill and made a stop at about 10:00 a.m. that day at DuWayne Kreager Insurance Center, one of the sponsors of the Ride. Continuing on, it made stops at checkpoints in Tomahawk,

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The Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce came out to greet the Badger State Games Torch Tour on its stop at DuWayne Kreager Insurance in Merrill on Jan. 13, 2022. **Photo courtesy of Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce.**

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