

# BENNINGTON (BUZZ)

## 100 Connections, One Vision: TeamMates Hits Milestone in Bennington

By Marisa Dawson

The TeamMates of Bennington mentoring program has reached a major milestone, achieving its goal of 100 active mentor-mentee matches. They reached this milestone with their 100th match, recently connecting Hayley and Maddie. Matched based on shared interests like reading, music, food and the outdoors, the pair are both described as outgoing,

energetic, curious and compassionate. They're already looking forward to spending time together doing crafts, activities and, of course, having fun.

For Program Coordinator Megan Detjens, the achievement represents far more than a number. "Reaching our goal of 100 Mentoring Matches is HUGE

for us," Detjens said. "We know that each match had dedicated time, energy and love to their mentoring relationship."

The milestone follows rebuilding after the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted matches. The program focused on visibility, outreach, and emphasizing that mentoring is for everyone. Community partnerships, mentor recruitment, and school staff referrals helped reach the goal set in a 2024 strategic plan. While celebrating, the program continues to prioritize retaining matches through middle and high

school and welcomes more mentors, especially during National Volunteer Month. Detjens invited those interested: "Meet us for coffee! We want to learn about YOU!"



Photo Courtesy of Bennington TeamMates

## Bennington Students Among First Responders Foundation Honorees

By Marisa Dawson

Two Bennington students are being recognized for their character, achievements and service to the community as part of a regional awards program honoring the children of first responders.

The First Responders Foundation recently announced its 2026 Awards of Excellence honorees, a group of 33 high school seniors from five counties across Nebraska and Iowa. Among those selected are Bennington students Dane Casey and Zoe Nelson.

demonstrate "outstanding character, balanced achievement, and commitment to their communities." The program honors graduating high school seniors who are the children of first responders, selected for academic performance, involvement in school activities, volunteerism, work ethic and overall contributions to their communities. Each spring, honorees are recognized at a formal reception and receive scholarship support. The 2026 honorees will be formally celebrated at an awards reception later this month.

According to the organization, the Awards of Excellence recognize students who

**Congratulations to the following students who have been selected for our 2026 Awards of Excellence:**

Eli Bartsch-Bang - Westside	Abby Lozzi - Plattsmouth
Chloe Cannon - Papillion LaVista	Kylie Mraz - Papillion LaVista
Dane Casey - Bennington	Zoe Nelson - Bennington
Addison Checksfield - Papillion LaVista South	Makenna Nielsen - Blair
Eden Connolly - Elkhorn North	Layne Parker - Bellevue East
Sofia Dill - Ashland Greenwood	Jacob Parker - Elkhorn South
Ava Eichhorn - Lewis Central	Joelle Peatrowsky - Guardian Angels Central Catholic
Jordan Farmer - Westview	Gage Patrick - Elkhorn
Evelyn Ferguson - Skutt Catholic	Jayden Prosski - Gretna
Delaney Focht - Duchesne Academy	Kaitlyn Robey - Millard North
Keary Friedrichsen - Elkhorn North	Connor Sams - Gretna East
Lexi Gangwish - Underwood	Lauren Schneider - Elkhorn South
Chastity Hahn - Blair	Marina Spizzirri - Skutt Catholic
Nolan Hammers - Gretna	Jason Sundeen - Millard West
Morgan Jones - Lewis Central	Sierra Thomas - Omaha North
Sean Larsen - Conestoga	Nate Trofholz - Elkhorn North
Toben Lasater - Missouri Valley	

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# Three Candidates, One District: LD18 Candidate Profiles and Upcoming Town Hall

Three candidates are competing for Nebraska Legislative District 18: Derek Schwartz, Jess Goldoni, and Taylor Royal (listed in alphabetical order). We sat down with each of them and they shared their background, top priorities, and vision for addressing property taxes, education, affordability, and the state budget. A public Meet & Greet event is scheduled for Saturday, April 25th at 3:00 PM at the Bennington Fire Station. This provides a chance to hear your questions answered.



**Derek Schwartz**

Derek Schwartz draws on experience as a business owner, trucking company operator, and police officer. A father of two young girls, he prioritizes reducing property taxes, strengthening public safety, and improving affordability for families. He supports growing the economy through agriculture, energy, and new jobs while cutting unnecessary spending, collaborating on school resource efficiency, and investing in trades to attract young families and increase housing supply.



**Jess Goldoni**

Jess Goldoni brings over 20 years in public relations, marketing, and business development, including founding Nebraska AI. A longtime District 18 resident and working families advocate, she focuses on balancing the state budget, eliminating waste, and creating stronger pathways from schools to trades and modern jobs. She supports targeted tax relief, smarter education funding with local control, and using innovation and economic development to boost affordability.



**Taylor Royal**

Taylor Royal is a CPA and CFA charterholder with extensive experience in finance and tax strategy. A Bennington resident of 18 years and father raising his family here, he emphasizes property tax relief, responsible budgeting, and economic growth. He supports valuation and mill rate caps, growing the commercial tax base, cutting wasteful spending through audits, flexible school funding, and reducing housing regulations to improve affordability for young families.

**Scan here for event info and to find out how to submit your questions!**

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# BENNINGTON ((BUZZ)) SPORTS

## Bennington Buffaloes Special Olympics Team Builds Confidence Through Sports

By Marisa Dawson, Courtesy Photos



When parents in the Bennington area grew tired of long drives across Omaha for their children to participate in Special Olympics activities, they decided to create something closer to home. The result is the Bennington Buffaloes, a thriving Special Olympics Nebraska team that now includes more than 50 athletes and unified partners.

Jennifer Hammer, who runs the team, recalled the grassroots

beginnings. The biggest goal is “the ability to be part of something so much bigger than themselves,” along with opportunities to meet new people, exercise, learn new skills, practice sportsmanship, build confidence and experience a deep sense of belonging. “This is their group!” she added.

The program fosters friendships, teamwork, and life skills, and organizes social

events beyond sports. Athletes compete in unified basketball, bowling, track and field, volleyball, soccer, softball, cornhole, flag football, and more. Recent successes include gold and silver medals in basketball regionals, with state competition upcoming. The team emphasizes support, respect, and pride in being Bennington Buffaloes, creating belonging, confidence, and joy for participants.

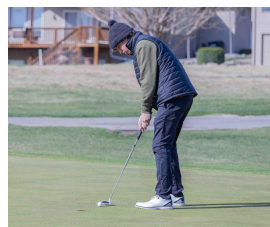
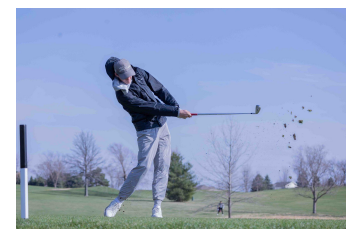


## Bennington Golf Finishes Runner-Up at Windy Gretna Invitational

By Marisa Dawson

Battling strong winds all day at Tiburon Golf Course, the Bennington boys golf team delivered a strong performance and earned runner-up honors at the Gretna Invitational last Tuesday for their first meet of the season. Bennington finished with a team score of 318, just six strokes behind champion Gretna East, which posted a 312. Sophomore Austin Jochum led the Badgers, shooting a 75 to medal and place third individually. His teammates followed closely behind: Reid

Thornburg – 80, Caleb Clark – 81, Kale Lamberty – 82, Brady Nichols – 83. Head Coach Craig Nichols was proud of how his team competed. “I liked how the team grinded through the field of players and wind,” Nichols said. “They kept battling and that’s all you can ask for.” The experienced group aims to compete strongly in conference and districts, with eyes on a top finish at Scottsbluff in the postseason, while continuing to work on short game, chipping, and putting.



Clockwise from top: Austin Jochum, Brady Nichols, Kale Lamberty, Reid Thornburg, Caleb Clark



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# Bennington Boys Soccer Claims Norfolk Invitational Title with Multiple Wins

By Marisa Dawson, Photos by Ken Dirksen

Bennington's boys soccer team continued its strong start to the season by winning the Norfolk Invitational tournament over the weekend, improving to 6-1 overall with two impressive victories against competitive Class A opponents.

In the opener against Norfolk, Bennington won 4-1 with two goals from Kade Olbrich and one each from Krish Muktan and Zander Hanish. They then faced South Sioux City in the championship, tying 3-3 before prevailing 3-2 in a

penalty shootout after a resilient comeback.

Head coach Nick Nyman praised the team's focus and mental toughness. "It's always great to see your team fight until the end and not fall apart under the pressure," he said. As state runners-up from the previous season, the Badgers aim to compete at the toughest stage in the Class B final, using tournaments like this to build confidence and teamwork as they head into the heart of the season.



# Bennington Badgers Girls Soccer Rolls to Four-Game Road Winning Streak

By Marisa Dawson

The Bennington Badgers girls soccer team is hitting its stride after several wins on the road. With four consecutive road wins, including an overtime victory at Elkhorn followed by shutouts against Lincoln Northwest and Standing Bear, the Badger girls have improved to 6-2 on the season. Along the way, they've shown resilience, depth, and a defensive identity that continues to anchor their success.

The stretch began March 30 with a hard-fought battle at Elkhorn that ended in a 0-0 draw before Bennington edged Elkhorn 7-6 in a penalty kick shootout. Converting for the

Badgers were Claire Miller, Autumn Christiansen, Lila Pick, Rihanna Rodriguez, Tora Aken, Makenna Ladenburger, and Aliya Molina.

On April 2, they defeated Lincoln Northwest 3-0 with goals from Tora Aken and two from Aliya Molina. They closed the trip with a 1-0 win over Standing Bear on a goal from Lila Pick. "Defense has been and will always be our strength," head coach Ed Anibal said. "We just have to find ways to finish." The team emphasizes working together with a deep bench of talented team players and plans to stay focused and play their game.

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- BHHS The Briley Team: Anthony Byers
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