

29

Today's Local Stories

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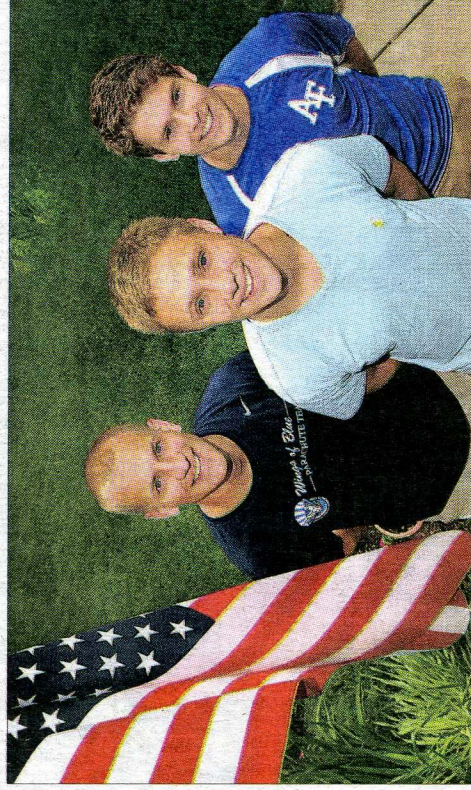
Index

Aces on Bridge.....	5C
At Home.....	1C
Business.....	4D
City/Region.....	1B
Classifieds.....	5C
Comics/crossword.....	4C
Community.....	4B
Horoscopes.....	8C
Obituaries.....	2B
Opinions.....	6A
Public notices.....	7C
Religion.....	4A
Sports.....	1D
Sudoku.....	8C
TV/Dear Abby.....	3C
Weather.....	4D

Soaring siblings

Three Chippewa Falls brothers are among the nation's youthful elite who have been accepted for officer training at the U.S. Air Force Academy

An appointment to the U.S. Air Force Academy is equivalent to a college scholarship valued at \$444,498, according to Carolyn Beryshek, the academy's admissions director.



By Christena T. O'Brien
Leader-Telegram staff

Seeing his older brothers, Ben and Jasper, attend the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., helped spur David Arneberg to aim high.

The 18-year-old, a 2014 Chippewa Falls High School graduate, is among the more than 1,200 cadets who will make up the class of 2018. (More than 9,000 applied, according to the academy's public affairs office.)

"I saw the great opportunities (the Air Force Academy) provided for my brothers,"

Three Arneberg brothers — Jasper, Ben and David, from left — gather outside their parents' home earlier this week. One by one, they've left their native Chippewa Falls to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado. Ben graduated in 2012; Jasper is part of the class of 2016, and David, the class of 2018. View more photos at LeaderTelegramPhotos.com.

Staff photo by Steve Kinderman

David said Monday — two days before leaving his parents, Tom and Beth, his younger brother, Simon, and the Chippewa Valley for six weeks of basic training. "I also like the mountains, the people (of Colorado) and the weather."

Having two or three siblings attend the academy is not uncommon, according to a public affairs spokesman, who

U.S. Air Force Academy: LeaderTelegram.com/links

Siblings/Fourth brother could be next

from Page 1A

recalled five siblings attending between 1995 and 2008.

Simon, the youngest of the five Arneberg children, could be the fourth brother to attend. But the 14-year-old, a Chi-Hi freshman this fall, has to finish high school first.

"There's definitely a little pressure," Simon said as his family members chuckled.

When classes begin in August, David plans to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering. Ben, a member of the Chi-Hi class of 2008, graduated from the academy in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in computer engineering. Jasper, a 2012 high school graduate, is working toward a degree in electrical engineering and is set to graduate in 2016.

"We couldn't be more proud," said Tom Arneberg, whose father, Ron Arneberg, served in the Air Force as a navigator on a B-52 long-range bomber. "It is an incredible opportunity for them."

Tom and Beth lived in Colorado from 1985 to 1988 and visited the academy once, Tom said. Until his sons were appointed to the institution, the couple didn't know anyone who had attended.

"My dad always said it would have been cool to go there, but there was no Air Force Academy then," said Tom, noting that his father, who normally is reserved, became emotional

when he attended a parade during the academy's Parents' Weekend.

Family ties

Their grandfather's military service "kind of got the Air Force on our radar," said Ben, who just finished his master's degree in computer science at Northeastern University in Boston, got married and moved to Virginia to complete his officer commitment to the Air Force. Academy graduates who enter pilot training have an active duty service commitment of 10 years after earning their wings; combat systems operators, combat rescue officers and special tactics officers have a six-year commitment after completing training; and all other graduates have a five-year commitment.

"I always liked the Air Force," said Ben, who toured the academy in eighth grade and began thinking about attending two years later.

"It was the branch of the service that provided me with the most opportunities to do what I wanted to do," he said.

Ben also was looking for a challenge and figured the academy, established on April 1, 1954, to educate and train the country's Air Force officers, would provide that.

His younger brothers were looking for a challenge as well.

"I saw all the opportunities Ben had there," said Jasper, explaining his interest in following his

older brother west. "Also, none of the dorms were locked, and that really impressed me."

Jasper, like Ben, is on the Wings of Blue parachute squad, which consists of a demonstration team that performs at football games and other ceremonies, and a competition team that flies formations at collegiate and national championships. When he graduates, he might continue on the path laid by Ben and attend graduate school or pursue pilot training.

Nomination process

The academy's admission process focuses on four key areas — academic, leadership, athletic and character. Applicants must be among the top high school achievers nationwide in these areas to be considered for acceptance.

Before a student can be considered for appointment, he or she must obtain a congressional nomination. Ben was nominated by then-U.S. Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis.; Jasper by U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy, R-Weston; and David by U.S. Rep. Ron Kind, D-La Crosse.

Securing a nomination doesn't guarantee an appointment, so Ben, Jasper and David all applied to other schools.

"But I really wanted to go to the Air Force," David said.

When Ben learned that Kohl had nominated him, he was ecstatic. When Jasper got a call from Duffy, he was caught off guard.

"Simon knocked on the bathroom door and told Jasper that Sean Duffy was on the phone," Tom, their father, recalled, chuckling. "Jasper thought it was a robocall, but it was really Sean Duffy."

David received his acceptance letter in January.

"David, you have earned a rare opportunity to participate in one of this country's finest officer training programs," wrote the academy's admissions director, Carolyn Benyshek. "Your previous accomplishments indicate you have the potential to meet the demands and challenges of the Academy and you should be extremely proud of your appointment as only the best of the best are so rewarded."

Heading off to boot camp, Ben and Jasper gave David some idea of what to expect, but "they haven't told me everything," he said as the older brothers chuckled.

"The first year you learn how to be a follower so you can eventually become a leader," Ben said.

Tom has no doubt David will succeed like his two oldest sons. All three are Eagle Scouts and were high school valedictorians and captains of sports teams.

"Yes, these guys are all driven individuals," Tom wrote in an email.

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