

# SPOTLIGHT

## East High School graduate Katie Kortuem Olson unites love of gymnastics with love of teaching

By Shelly Miller

Madison Lake native and graduate of East High School, Katie Kortuem Olson, grew up loving gymnastics. She evolved into an elite, competitive gymnast attaining many titles and is now sharing her love of the sport with youth around her hometown.



Katie Kortuem Olson

In high school, Olson lettered four years in a row in gymnastics, placed second at State two years in a row and won the state championship on bars as a ninth grader. She was also a Hall of Fame gymnast and National Honor Society member.

After high school, Olson attended Gustavus Adolphus College and earned a degree in elementary education. While there, she represented the gymnastics team and was a seven-time All-American gymnast and National Collegiate Gymnastics Association Gymnast. Upon graduation, Olson attended St. Mary's College to obtain her master's degree in education.

Olson combined her love of gymnastics with her love of teaching and is now co-owner of K&G Gymnastics in Mankato. In 2011, Olson joined Gabe Essay, a former elite gymnast for West High School, and launched the new gym. Today, the gym houses nearly 900 gymnasts and 55 coaches each session. Its 32,000-square-foot facility is the largest in southern Minnesota.

Olson's objective is not only to provide a fun, exciting and safe place for area youth to stay fit but to teach life lessons through gymnastics. "It's not about turning out Olympic gymnasts, but teaching life skills like perseverance, hard work ethic, teamwork and comradery as well as physical wellbeing," says Olson. "Success comes from learning these skills."

## Tenth grader Grace Morgan has great ideas

By Shelly Miller



Grace Morgan

When East High School tenth grader Grace Morgan sees an opportunity, she takes it. She, her peers and teachers consider this her life motto and words she lives by every day.

East High School Counselor Andy Vander Linden agrees. "As a rising student, Grace impresses with her academic dominance and forward-thinking," Vander Linden says. "She is a passionate person driven by her interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). I am excited to see what she brings to our world."

Morgan's passion for STEM courses comes from her desire to create ideas and help solve problems. In her engineering design course, she is able to dig deeper in the engineering design process and apply math, science and engineering to hands-on projects. "One of my ideas was inspired by seeing my cousin with attention deficit disorder struggle to concentrate without fidgeting," Morgan says. "I am working to develop a pen that is quiet, yet a person can fidget and help them pay attention at school or any task-at-hand."

## Michael Sipe: Impossible to define in a single word

By Michelle Laven

Pay attention to the text of one of his assignments, and it's easy to understand why students find Michael Sipe, a U.S. History and Psychology teacher at Mankato Area Public Schools (MAPS) West High School so special. Says Sipe, "I ask my students to make a personal observation on each person in class, and I have two stipulations: stay in alphabetical order so I can compile them afterwards, and use more than one word. Because no one can be defined in a single word."



Ben Stevens reviews his chapter vocabulary with his psychology teacher, Michael Sipe.

In addition to his daily presence at West, Sipe invests time teaching Social Studies at MAPS Central High School during the summer. "The district does a good job of trying to offer different environments for students who need a more personal structure," says Sipe. "I want to be someone who can walk with them and give them credit for what they know."

When tables are turned, and students are asked to describe their teacher they describe him as a teacher who talks with them, not at them. West Principal, Sherri Blasing says. "They will tell you they learned authentic life lessons in his classroom, along with history and psychology."

## Brady helps students take first steps into school

By Michelle Laven

"When students come to me they are so excited for school, I know I want to be a part of that excitement and keep it going when they move on," says Abby Brady, Kindergarten Teacher at Mankato Area Public Schools Washington Elementary.

Brady works closely with Washington's three other kindergarten teachers to meet student academic needs while generating enthusiasm for learning. Every month they have a themed kindergarten celebration where they invite families into the classroom for two hours. Each teacher has an activity which kids and parents rotate through. "It's one important way we try to connect adults with their kids' academic development," Brady says.

Principal Shane Baier feels Brady's success stems from the way she comes to school believing she will make a difference in the lives of her students. "If you spend five minutes in her classroom, you realize how special she is to her students," says Baier. "She represents everything students, families, and schools want to see in a kindergarten teacher."

For more information contact staff at Washington Elementary School at 507-345-3059.



Washington Elementary Kindergarten teacher, Abby Brady, listens and guides students as they read aloud during small group time.

## Monroe Elementary School third grader Chloe Geer does the right thing

By Shelly Miller

Third grade student Chloe Geer stands out as a leader amongst her peers at Monroe Elementary School.

Monroe Elementary School Principal Steve Johanson says Geer is a student who stands out. Angie Eccles, Geer's third grade teacher at Monroe Elementary School concurs. "Chloe is an outstanding student," says Eccles. "She works hard, cares for others and does what is right."

Geer believes she sets an example by doing the right thing. "I really like to help people," says Geer. "Either on the playground or in the classroom I just do it because I know that's what I would want someone to do for me and it's the right thing." And, Geer says in the classroom she listens and works hard to do her best which she hopes rubs off on others.

Geer enjoys math because it is a good challenge. She particularly has fun computing problems on the calculator that make words when turned upside down. When she comes up with a good one, she is happy to share it.



Chloe Geer