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On the cover: Montague football salutes veterans and heroes.  
Photo/Amanda VanSickle

**SUBWAY**

# Montague salutes heroes in pregame ceremony prior to gridiron matchup against Oakridge



by Scott VanSickle | LocalSportsJournal.com



Making sure veterans get the support and recognition they deserve has been a personal mission for Jacquie Wood, starting during her career as a teacher at Montague Area Public Schools.

Wood put on a veteran's concert throughout her 33-year tenure and they weren't just elementary school kids singing or playing patriotic songs. Wood went all in on the production and brought in different speakers throughout the years, including a general in her final veteran's concert, to give her students a chance to learn from people with real-world experience. It also gave the students a chance to appreciate and learn about the sacrifices that they make.

But the idea for the "Wildcat Salute" came when Wood was awarded Teacher of the Year for the state of Michigan in a ceremony in January, 2023. One of the other teachers being honored did the

same ceremony at their school, and Wood knew she wanted to do it at Montague. After retiring that summer, Wood had the time to get the ceremony off the ground and running. But she had plenty of help along the way, starting with Superintendent Jeff Johnson and Athletic Director Jay Mulder lending their support, as well as help from Gloria Hess from the VFW Post 3256 in Montague in



**"Tim Lipan, he does the Sailor Salute at Mona Shores, he gave me everything. He gave me their script, their timing. That was so helpful in getting this started."**

**- Jacquie Wood**

making sure the show followed proper military decorum.

"I always wanted to do it and I'm grateful our school let us do it," Wood said of the ceremony that began in 2023 and saw this year's version take place in front of a packed house before Montague's 14-7 nail-biting win over Oakridge on Sept. 6.

"I missed that connection with the vets (from the concerts), but I don't want it to be just military. If you ever need an ambulance, a police officer, a firefighter, you realize they are so underappreciated. My two sons are policemen, and some of the things (police) see, I don't want to know about. Or the things firefighters go through, or what police or first responders see. They deserve our acknowledgement."

The "Wildcat Salute" also has a connection to the "Sailor Salute" done by Mona Shores. In fact, Wood said that the director of the Shores program gave her the blueprint and made it possible to turn the

idea into reality as quickly as she did. "Tim Lipan, he does the Sailor Salute at Mona Shores, he gave me everything. He gave me their script, their timing. That was so helpful in getting this started," said Wood.

The event was set up with three goals in mind: honoring those who serve or have served in the military, and police,



fire departments and first responders that serve the Montague community; to educate the community about the needs and issues that exist in those fields and remind the fans about the freedoms they provide; and to connect all the branches of service with the community.

The event began two hours before kickoff and gave the Montague community, as well as Oakridge fans in attendance, the opportunity to view the interactive displays from the different branches of the military, the Montague and state police departments, White Lake VFW Post 3256, the Civil Air Patrol Youth Cadet Program, and Lighthouse for Suicide Veterans. The Michigan State Police had a helicopter from its aviation unit parked in left-center field of the Wildcats' baseball diamond, and a Coast Guard boat, local fire trucks, police vehicles and an ambulance lined the traffic circle in front of the stadium entrance.

The on-field ceremonies began at 6 p.m. and started in style with the Patriotic Motorcycle Parade. Riders from Rolling Thunder Inc. and the American Legion

did a lap around the track to help bring full accountability for all POW/MIA from all wars.

Earl Langler, Jerry Brandenburg, George Mead, Ricky Hall and Wayne Schneider all were honored in the Quilt of Valor ceremony, which saw these five veterans receive quilts made from the Shining Stars Quilting Bee of Muskegon. These Lifetime Awards were also made possible by the Quilts of Valor Foundation.

The Wildcats' football program then honored Ken Dahl and Wayne Schneider as "Home Town Heroes." Dahl, who was unable to attend the ceremony, was known through his time at Tri-County Feeds, his family-run business, and his service to the community and the Montague School Board. Schneider served in the Navy in the Pacific in the mid-50s, returned to Montague and served his alma mater by doing maintenance work and repairing sports equipment. Schneider received a medal from Montague captain Ryver Jarka, was named an honorary co-captain and was at midfield for the pre-game coin toss. Dahl

will be receiving his medal in the near future.

The White Lake VFW Color Guard presented the nation's colors in the fourth ceremony of the night, with a POW/MIA table prepared in honor of the men and women that never made it home while fighting for their country. All the pieces on the table had a special significance and the ceremony ended with a moment of silence. Following the pause, 1st Sergeant Andrew Schwallier of the 126 Army Band played Taps in honor of the fallen soldiers whose remains have returned home and those who have served and passed on.

And the final ceremony saw nearly 60 community members line the track on the home sideline for a grand salute. Active and retired military, law enforcement, fire fighters, first responders, members from the Michigan National Guard post in Montague stood side by side as every player from Montague and Oakridge gave each of the local heroes a handshake and a thank you. The heroes got a lengthy applause and a standing ovation from each contingent of fans, setting the stage





for the nail-biter of a game played by the two teams.

“Seeing the players go through the line, saying thank you to the heroes, I shed a tear,” Wood said. “This was a real-life educational opportunity (for the players) to realize that the heroes, they drop everything for them and others when they’re needed.”

The lone downside of the night was the flyover from the Hooligan Flight Team was canceled due to rain at the Muskegon County Airport, and they couldn’t parachute the game ball into the stadium. But Wood doesn’t plan on stopping work on the Wildcat Salute anytime soon. She has some ideas in the very early stages to expand the salute to the city of Montague to raise money and streamline the process. But first and foremost, Wood’s top priority will be making sure the people that protect our communities and nation are recognized for their sacrifices.



# Mona Shores Sailor Salute 2024!



Mona Shores completed its 8th Annual Sailor Salute on September 20 in Norton Shores. Thousands of fans came out in full support of our local military and veterans who have served and continue to protect the freedoms we all enjoy. Photos/ Eric Sturr

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Photo/Leo Valdez



# Mr. Norse, Jr.

## Coach Cody Liverance's love for North Muskegon shows both in the classroom and on the court

by Ron Rop | LocalSportsJournal.com



Cody Liverance could easily be labeled Mr. North Muskegon, Jr.

Of course, there have been so many great athletes, teachers, coaches, administrators and others who have spent their entire life rooting for the blue and gold of the Norsemen. Guys like Dave Cooke, Jeff Cooke, Bobby Walters, Stan Guy, Frank Moran and Dale Swanson.

But, at the age of 31, Liverance has pretty much been a "lifer" when it comes to North Muskegon who has decades to go to match the accomplishments and the longevity of the aforementioned legends of North Muskegon.

While Liverance was born in Marquette, he ended up in North Muskegon before he even started school. He grew up on Fleming Street right in the heart of North Muskegon. Across Fleming is the tennis courts. Two houses down and on the other side of Moulton

Avenue is the North Muskegon gymnasium. He's lived at a handful of locations over the years, but if you measured the distance, it would barely cover a mile. That's how grounded Liverance is in the North Muskegon community.

"I don't have a wife or kids, but I firmly believe this is one of the best places around to raise a family," said Liverance. "When your kids can ride their bikes and go do things around town, as a parent, you don't really have to worry about them. It's just a great place to live and it was



Chase Yeager reacts to Liverance's advice during the 2023-24 campaign. Photo/Joe Washington

a great place for me to grow up."

So great that those childhood friends from back in the day remain on the top of his friend's list to this day, 13 years after they graduated from high school and went their separate ways.

He remains in close contact with his school buddies like Graham Preston, Zac McCamant, John Hardy, Marshall Scheldt, Stefan Miller and Peter Host. Preston was his doubles partner on the NM tennis team that advanced to the state finals before finishing runner-up. And, it was Miller (No. 1 singles player) who convinced Liverance to pick up a tennis racket when the team needed a couple more bodies to fill the roster.

Liverance's high school sports experience was highlighted by playing in the tennis state finals along with Preston, his No. 2 doubles partner.

"It took me until the start of my junior year to give tennis a shot," said Liverance, who now coaches both the boys and girls tennis teams at North Muskegon. "It turned out that I happened to be decent at it. It's funny because baseball is the one I loved and that was the one my dad (Shawn) told me right away that I would love baseball and I would play baseball. I did, but then tennis became the sport I was best at even though I put in the least amount of time and effort into it. But when you're growing up, you're doing everything, you pick up football and go to the field. When Michigan State plays at noon and the

game is done, let's go play a pickup game."

There was plenty of pickup basketball on the court at a friend's house and wiffle ball in the backyard.

"We grew up doing all of those things," said Liverance, who graduated from North Muskegon in 2011. "I think that helped a lot of us, going through school, turn into pretty decent, well-rounded athletes. I might not be the most athletically fit person, I never was, and I'm not right now, but that helped me have good hands and decent athletic abilities."

After high school, Liverance wanted so badly to attend Central Michigan University following his days at NM and that's exactly what he did. He loved the smaller campus, the "scene" at the university and the academics seemed to be the right fit. Some visits to friends at Michigan State University prompted Liverance to make a change.

"I made me realize this is where I wanted to be," said Liverance, who returned home to Muskegon Community College before moving to MSU. "I grew up a Spartan fan and I had family located around the Lansing area. I always thought it was going to be too big for me, but once I got a taste of Central, I realized I could go bigger at Michigan State."

He finished off his degree at MSU and did a year of student teaching through their program and did his Master's work there.

His first taste of teaching was as a long-term substitute at Orchard View Middle School. While there, he was hired to coach tennis and freshman basketball.

"I really did love it over there," Liverance said. "The people were great over there and I really enjoyed the kids and the atmosphere and the way that things were going, there wasn't a job for me at the end of the year. But, luckily, a

job came open here at North Muskegon."

Liverance is in his eighth year of teaching at North Muskegon. He taught middle school and high school social studies, physical education and economics during the day. He's also been spotted in the football press box and down on the field. Doing such things as making sure the microphone for the singer of the national anthem has fresh batteries or keeping an eye on the student section during game action. And just this year, he's been helping out Jeff Cooke as an assistant athletic director at the middle and high schools.

There is a chance that at some point in the future, Liverance may end up stepping into the AD role, but that bridge will be crossed when the time comes. It may force Liverance into stepping away from what he loves and that is coaching tennis and basketball.

That move would seem to fit Liverance, who was voted to have the most school spirit when he was in high school. And, as an AD, going to all the game is part of the job.

"I was going to soccer and I was going to the tennis matches," Liverance said.

"I supported everything and that is where I realized I had this background in sports. I wanted to do that as my career, but I also realized I love it here. How could I be involved in sports and still stay in Muskegon. The stars kind of aligned and if you're a teacher or a coach you can do that or if you're an athletic director, you can go that route."

For the time being, Liverance is grooming his boys' tennis team for another successful season. And that's by playing top competition.



Photo/Leo Valdez

“You’re not going to get better if you don’t play good teams and see what good teams look like,” he said. “This is nothing against anyone in our area, but we are not blessed with just a bunch of teams that are world beaters. It’s hard to find a team that is deep 1-12 and we’re doing to have our days when the competition is not super strong, but you also have to play the good schools as well. Kids need to see what the good players look like, what their work ethic looks like, what their attitudes look like if they want to get to that level.”

And while the team has taken some lumps at times during the season, there is a method to the madness of scheduling top competition.

“We’ll get our chances to get our wins, but also chances to see the good teams and take some losses to get better,” Liverance said. “If we get to our level of being of a caliber that can go to the state finals and compete with those schools, that’s what it’s about.”

Much of Liverance’s success as a tennis coach has been with the girls’ team, which has made it the state finals as a team six of seven seasons. The best finish at state was third with a definite highlight being the state title won by Marilyn Gaston and Greta Goszkowicz at No. 4 doubles.



**Liverance talks with former girls player Francine Vinson during the 2023 spring season. Photo/Joe Washington**

The boys have not yet made it to the state finals as a team. Luke Hall won the No. 1 singles regional title a year ago and made it to the state finals as an individual and reached the quarterfinal round.

“As much as I’ve had success with the girls team, the boys team means just a little bit more because it’s the team I played for,” said Liverance, whose high school team finished fifth at the state finals. “I’ve seen that success and I know how impactful it was for me and how great it was to experience that with still my best friends to this day at the age of 31.”

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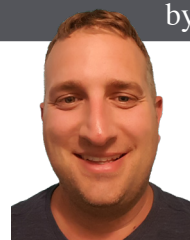


Addy Smith

Valerie Beek



by Nate Thompson | LocalSportsJournal.com



GRAND HAVEN – Grand Haven’s cross country program may not utilize it as an official motto, but the way the Bucs have been consistently successful over the past decade, they could easily adopt the slogan, “Tradition Never Graduates.” Since former longtime coach Greg Russick led the Bucs’ girls team to back-to-back runner-up finishes at the Division 1 state finals at Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn in 2007 and 2008 and a state championship in 2010, the program hasn’t slipped much, if at all, under Coach Scott Przystas, who took over for Russick in 2012.

During the last three seasons, Przystas has guided the Bucs to be a force to be reckoned with at MIS, finishing 12th overall in the team standings in 2021, 10th overall in 2022, and seventh a year ago. The same holds true for the Bucs’ boys program under longtime coach John Tarr, who has led them to a third-place state-finals finish a year ago, 11th in 2022 and seventh in 2021. Current Bucs’ runners say Przystas does a tremendous job at balancing everyday life values and goals to those accomplished on the trails and track. In other words, he expects greatness from his runners, but he’s not the type of coach whose face turns bright red from screaming at his

student-athletes. “He’s kind of quiet,” admitted senior Addy Smith, who just missed all-state honors at the state finals last season by finishing 31st overall. The cutoff was top 30 for the recognition. “He’s really good to work with because he pushes us pretty hard. But he’s not the screaming type. He gives us ideas or guidelines on how to improve and wants us to see our own potential.” “In races, he’ll motivate us by saying stuff like, ‘Don’t set the bar too low.’ And he’ll tell me, ‘Go out there and race anyone. You can compete against anyone.’ “He says that a lot to me.” Smith is a unique story in that she didn’t run competitively throughout middle school, as she attended Grand

Haven Christian. “I started running my freshman year,” she said. “I came out for cross country just to meet new people.” From the start, she recognized the tight-knit chemistry within the program, where the upperclassmen would take young runners like herself under their belt and instill a confidence in them to strive for greatness. “There’s definitely a legacy or a reputation that we try to live up to, because there’s been so many past teams and runners that have done so well,” Smith said. “The culture is such a good culture because everyone pushes each other to be their best.” Although they are in the same class, Smith believed it was somewhat

“unfathomable” that she would one day be in the same category as teammate Valerie Beek. Beek first excelled in track in middle distances such as the 800-meter in middle school and as an underclassmen, but she’s definitely been no slouch in cross country as well. In fact, she’ll be going for a rare fourth all-state finish this season, as she previously finished 16th in the field as a freshman, 23rd as a sophomore, and her best finish of her career as a junior, where she placed 14th with a time of 18 minutes, 23.7 seconds. She was also the top overall finisher at the regional meet last fall. “It’s not like we’re trying to beat one another every practice, but we do push each other,” Smith said. “It’s

good. I’d say we have both evolved as runners since we were freshmen.” Beek said she really began to excel in cross when she learned how to push through the middle of a 5K, stay on pace with the leaders and then flourish with her outstanding closing kick. That’s the same formula she used at MIS last season, she said. “The first half of the race, everyone was cruising, but I just tried to relax and stay in position to catch some girls,” she said. “Once we entered the track at the end, that’s when I started catching people because a lot of girls were slowing down. I was able to use my closing kick to my advantage.” Beek said she’s extremely excited about the Bucs’ potential for her senior season, considering they returned five runners who placed at the state finals last season. Aside from her and Smith, the group includes Cianah Budrik-Ramos, Abi Albright and Gracey Barry. “I believe we have the potential to finish Top 5,” she said. “It may not look like it right now on paper with some of our early meets we’ve had, but we’re a team known for progress as the season goes on. I believe our true colors will show. “Coach (Przystas) trains us so we peak with our best times at the end of the season,” she added.

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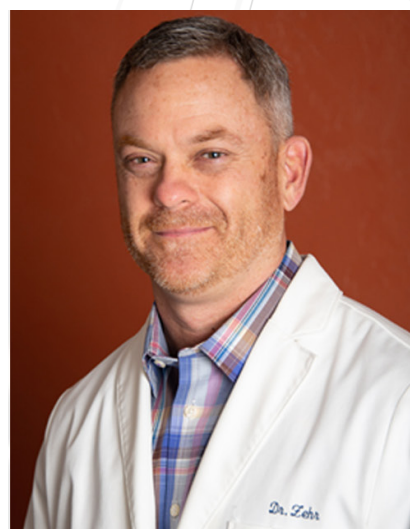
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Photo/Sondra Workman



# Muskegon Lumberjacks head into 2024-25 season with solid nucleus, plenty of optimism

by Dave Hart | LocalSportsJournal.com



It is hard to believe, but the Muskegon Lumberjacks are about to enter their 15th season as a member of the United States Hockey League.

The Jacks are coming off a pretty successful season, which ended in a disappointing three-game sweep in the Eastern Conference Finals against the Dubuque Fighting Saints. Muskegon finished the regular season last year in second place in the Eastern Conference with a 38-22-2 record.

After a first-round bye, the Lumberjacks played a tight five-game second round series against the Green Bay Gamblers and advanced to the conference finals. The Fighting Saints were just too much for Muskegon as they never allowed the Lumberjacks to even take a lead in a contest.

The Lumberjacks will start this season with nine straight road games, which included the two games at a neutral site in the USHL Fall Classic, due to the renovating of Trinity Health Arena. Muskegon will play its first home game on Friday Oct. 25 against the Chicago Steel.

“We are grateful for the renovations and we have to be a little bit patient in waiting to play in front of our home crowd,” said Muskegon Lumberjacks coach Parker

Burgess. “We always have a stretch of road games through any given season, and I think having one early can be positive towards having the team bond early in this long season.”

The offensive production was a huge part of the Lumberjacks success last season as they totaled 254 goals, which was good for the third best in the USHL.

The Lumberjacks are going to need to find some firepower offensively as they lost their top seven goal scorers from last season as Matvei Gridin, Sacha Boisvert, Joe Connor, Justin Solovey, Cody Croal, Ethan Whitcomb, and Ty Hendricks have all moved on.

“This year we are going to have a collection of players take care of the scoring and not just a couple of guys carrying the load,” Burgess said. “We also have defensemen that can help and we are confident in the group of guys we have on the roster.”

David Klee, who had 15 goals and 25 assists for 40 points last season, returns to the team and may be a candidate to carry some of the offensive load. Another forward returning to Muskegon is Jack Galanek. He had 11 goals and 11 assists last year in 57 games played for the Jacks. Other notable returning forwards Teddy Spitznagel, Jake Merens, Cooper Pierson, and Vaclav Nestrasil.

The Lumberjacks have a couple of new faces that the

Muskegon fans will learn to get to know and love this season. Matthew Van Blaricom is one of the newcomers who is expected to make an impact this season. Van Blaricom spent the last two seasons with the Humboldt Broncos of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League where he scored 40 goals and picked up 53 assists for 93 points in 80 games.

He has already made an impact in the first two Muskegon games with two goals and an assist.

“He has some experience at the junior level,” Burgess said. “Van Blaricom is a competitive player who likes to hit and provide energy.”

Another new player to watch is forward Tynan Lawrence, who has a goal and an assist in the first two Lumberjacks games this season.

“Lawrence has good vision, and he has already been making major impacts early on,” Burgess said.

The Lumberjacks will have five defensemen who have played at least a game for Muskegon last season. Xavier Veilleux returns to Muskegon after playing 62 games for the Lumberjacks last season, recording three goals and 29 assists for 32 points. Veilleux had his name called last June in the NHL Entry Draft as he was taken in the sixth round (179th overall) by the New York Islanders.

Another NHL draft pick returning to Muskegon is defenseman Bauer Berry, who was a seventh-round pick by the defending Western Conference champion Edmonton Oilers. Berry recorded a goal and 13 assists for 14 points in 59 games for the Jacks last season. Cameron Aucoin, Jake Toll, and Danny Klaers also return to the Lumberjacks.

Aucoin played in 47 games last year for Muskegon,

recording a goal and eight assists for nine points, while Toll played in 22 games and recorded seven assists. Klaers just played in 11 games and recorded a single point on an assist last year.

The Lumberjacks biggest strength this season may be their goaltending. Shikhabudin Gadzhiev, a fan favorite, will return to the Lumberjacks after playing in 30 games for Muskegon last season. Gadzhiev posted an 18-10 record with 3.18 goals against average and one shutout earned. He was one of seven goaltenders used last season as it was a revolving door at that position for the Lumberjacks.

“It is huge to be stabilized early on at goaltending,” Burgess said. “Shik (Gadzhiev) was great for us last season and he is looking to take another step forward in his development.”

The Lumberjacks will also have Stephen Peck returning to Muskegon between the pipes. Peck played in only one game for the Lumberjacks and earned a win allowing three goals on 27 shots faced.

The Lumberjack organization believes they have a skilled group of players who can compete for a spot in the Clark Cup playoffs. Last season’s team set the standards of playing year in and year out for a Clark Cup championship.

Muskegon will have a young roster and the team will need to learn consistency to reach the levels of success the organization is hoping to achieve.

“We want to keep getting better everyday and that starts at practice,” Burgess said. “We are going to take it a day at a time but overall, we want to be in the mix for a Clark Cup Championship when it is said and done.”



## For the Mahans, being a Muskegon Lumberjack billet family is an annual event



by Jason Goorman | LocalSportsJournal.com

There is no place like home.

Dorothy from Wizard of Oz said that on the silver screen decades ago and it still rings true today.

But what if you're a hockey player for the Muskegon Lumberjacks and your home is thousands of miles away? Well, in that case, you inherit a billet family.

A billet family is a sports term that originated to describe families who provide housing and support to student-athletes who are playing for a team that is far away from home.

With 28 players on the Lumberjacks' active roster who are literally from around the world, each one needs a place to live while competing on the ice for Muskegon. One can't expect a Lumberjacks defenseman like Olle Karlsson, who is from Nacka, Sweden, to kiss his mother on the cheek goodbye and fly across the ocean to the rink each day.

These prospective Division 1 college athletes and future NHL prospects need a place to call their home away from home and they need adults in their lives to give them the

consistency a proper home base brings.

Muskegon natives Joe and Cindy Mahan have opened up their homes to dozens of Lumberjacks over these many seasons. Homes is plural because the happily married duo has been billeting for so long, they have even moved into a new home.

During the Mahan's 15 seasons, which is how long the USHL franchise has been in Muskegon, they have opened their doors to dozens of Lumberjacks hockey players.

They have had seasons where they hosted up to four Lumberjacks players.

"I was a Muskegon Heights cop and there was a Heights fireman who took pictures for the (Muskego) Fury and he was telling me about the switch over from pro to juniors and he was talking about billeting and they were looking for billet families," said Joe. "So, 'I said let me talk to Cindy' and I went home that evening and we talked about it."

"We originally just wanted to be a backup and I was working one day and Cindy called me and said that she got a phone call from a Carter Foguth and she said he's going to be living with us this season. He lived with us for three seasons."

One thing is for sure, whether it is one player or four,

these top-tiered athletes can put down the food.

Joe and Cindy know good cooking, but they leave the dishes up to the boys. They also take the boys out to eat



Carter Foguth became part of the Mahan family during his three seasons in Muskegon. Photo/LocalSportsJournal.com

once a week. Parents need breaks from kitchen duty once in a while too.

"I'll fix dinner, you guys clean up afterward, you guys do the dishes, put stuff away, you do that and then once a week we go out for dinner," said Joe. "I don't have to cook, you don't have to do dishes."

The players of the USHL are not like average kids of today's world and the Mahans know it.

"They all really want to go pro," said Cindy. "It's hard to be realistic, but it's like go for it, you're here, you've got the opportunity, go for it, do whatever you need to do, but know that you're also working for a scholarship."

Some kids keep to themselves and others open up. One thing that Joe and Cindy make sure of is that each player understands how much they care about them on and off the ice and they also keep them honest by emphasizing how important it is to respect rules and boundaries.

"For the most part, I tell them they are going to have fun here whether they want to or not," said Joe. "If something goes wrong here, it's your fault. If Cindy tells me the garbage didn't get taken out, it's because they didn't want to take it out. We want this to be a place for them to relax, have fun, but there is responsibility to clean, and they do a good job."

"They are good about wanting to be part of the family. They are treated like part of the family," said Joe. "If I

have to go some place, you're coming with. If we have a family function, they go with us."

The love the Mahans have for the players they host, who they clearly consider their own kids, has grown into life-long friendships. During their interview with Local Sports Journal, Joe had to answer a phone call from one of their "kids." While we can't drop names out of respect for privacy, the last name of the caller was a recognizable NHL last name. The call was to give Joe an update about a new stage in life.

"This one kid was from Sweden and he got home sick. I offered to take him to IKEA so he felt like he was more at home," joked Joe, who clearly knows how to get his kids to know they are going to be ok.

Probably the best compliment the Mahans could have ever gotten was from one of the boys who said when he was with them, he felt like he was at home.

That deep connection the Mahans are able to make as billet parents comes from a broad understanding of who people are. Their former professions definitely helped set them up as successful and caring Billets. Joe is a retired Muskegon Heights policeman and Cindy retired from Community Mental Health. Their past work lives have led them to understand different personalities and it helps them connect at genuine levels with their kids.

While every kid comes from diverse backgrounds, they each have an intense desire to win. Some have a harder time with losing more than winning.

"They can have a hard time when they lose if it puts an end to the season, but the day-to-day stuff, especially goalies, they have to have short memories," said Cindy. "Some hate to lose more than they like to win, but they all see it as a reason to work harder. They take the blame, goalies take it that way."

The USHL season can be long, similar to winters in Michigan. Add in a deep run into the Clark Cup Playoffs and it makes it even longer. How long the season goes doesn't matter to the Mahans. What matters is these extremely special student/athletes get to experience something as close to home as possible. This is important to the Mahans because players go through ups and downs, including when their season is cut short.

"When you look at how long they're here, they're with us more than their actual parents," said Joe. "One dad called me aside, he said, 'I want to thank you, my son, I sent him here 3 years ago and he came home different.' Granted we don't have that impact on everybody, he spent more time sleeping in our house than his own for 3 years."

No matter what the case is, if the Lumberjacks win a Clark Cup, or if a player is traded, the Mahans will be celebrating their kids' success on and off the ice for as long as they can live to tell the story.



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