

Citizens Bank Minnesota *Duane Laffrenzen, Vice President, Retires after 27 Years of Service*

BY MISSY VISSER
CITIZENS BANK

After over 27 years of dedicated service, Duane Laffrenzen, Vice President, Citizens Bank Minnesota, La Salle Branch, will retire on Thursday, August 20, 2026.

Duane joined Citizens in August 1999 as Vice President located in the La Salle Branch. He grew up in the Worthington area on a small dairy farm. His parents never owned any farmland, and his experience of not having a home base shaped his passion for his career to help farmers have a secure financial future. Laffrenzen graduated from Worthington Community College in May 1978 and earned a Bachelor of Agricultural Business Administration from the University of Minnesota in June 1980. Laffrenzen worked for 19 years in various positions and locations in the Farm Credit System prior to joining Citizens. Laffrenzen is a graduate of the Graduate School of Banking at the University of Colorado, Boulder graduating in July 2002 with outstanding Scholastic Achievement. In January 2024, Laffrenzen was the Service to Agriculture recipient by the New Ulm Farm City Hub Club.

Outside of Citizens, Laffrenzen has been an active leader and volunteer in the New Ulm community, serving with organizations including the New Ulm Farm City Hub Club, New Ulm Rotary Club, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Narren of New Ulm, State Street Theater Board of Directors, Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts. He also previously served on the Minnesota Bankers Association Agriculture Committee and volunteered with Best Prep's Classroom Program.



Submitted photo
Duane Laffrenzen

Open Houses will be held in honor of the occasion at two locations:

- Tuesday, August 18 from 2-4 p.m. at Citizens Bank Minnesota, La Salle Branch, 102 South Broadway, La Salle
- Wednesday, August 19, from 6:30-8 p.m. at the New Ulm Country Club

All friends, clients and well-wishers are welcome. The bank extends its sincere gratitude to Duane for his dedicated service throughout the years. Duane, and his wife Toni, plan to continue to reside in New Ulm after retirement, where they enjoy spending time with family and friends. In retirement, he looks forward to pursuing his passions for hunting, fishing, woodworking, custom picture framing, and relaxing at their lake place in the Brainerd Lakes area.

MHS Students Experience History Firsthand During Washington, D.C. Educational Tour

BY JULIE LEHMAN
MHS INSTRUCTOR AND PARENT

History came to life for some Madelia High School students during an unforgettable four-day educational trip to the nation's capital, where iconic landmarks, memorials, museums, and historic sites provided lessons far beyond the classroom. Throughout the journey, students immersed themselves in American history while building new friendships and creating memories that will last a lifetime.

The group was housed on the beautiful University of Maryland campus, where evenings provided opportunities to connect with fellow student travelers from Dawson-Boyd and Sleepy Eye St. Mary's. The experience offered not only historical learning but also the chance to meet new people from neighboring Minnesota schools.

Day One: Exploring America's Story
The adventure began with visits to two of the Smithsonian Institution's most renowned museums – the National Museum of Natural History and the National Museum of American History. Students explored exhibits showcasing everything from prehistoric fossils and priceless gems, like the Hope Diamond for example, to artifacts that tell the story of America's growth and innovation.

Later in the day, the group visited several of Washington's most recognizable landmarks, including the towering Washington Monument and the inspiring World War II Memorial, where students reflected on the sacrifices made by the Greatest Generation. The day concluded



Fifty-five students and chaperones from Madelia, Dawson-Boyd and Sleepy Eye St. Mary's on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building. This group traveled from Minnesota to Washington D.C., and back, as one large group. Students enjoyed making new friends from the different schools, while learning about our nation's history.



Photos courtesy of Julie Lehman
Students at Mount Vernon.



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Students at National Marine Corps Memorial.

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Robotics Kits Donated to MHS via MSU

BY MICHELLE VAN HEE
VAN HEE MEDIA EDITOR

On Tuesday, August 4, in Madelia High School's Ag room, there was a presentation discussing a community partnership between MHS and Minnesota State University, Mankato's RESEPI to bring high-quality, affordable STEM education to Madelia.

RESEPI stands for – Rural Experiential STEM Education Partnership Initiative – and it is a STEM program that helps educators and students learn to code, build robots, install code, and operate them. These are all vital skills for today's world that our students need to learn, understand and be able to work with. And, it might not be easy for rural schools and rural students to get access to this equipment and the education to know how to work with it.

Travis Thul, Minnesota State Mankato's Vice President for Student Success and Engagement, explained that through the donation of free classroom experiential robotics kits, Madelia High School will be able to build STEM skills such as programming, computer aided-design, and manufacturing. "The goal is to ensure that every student in the State of Minnesota, especially rural students, have access to high-quality STEM education. As I'm sure everybody in this room can appreciate, especially when you get into our rural communities, access to high-quality robotics education, programming, mechanical design, all of the technology literacy that's quintessential for working in manufacturing

or agriculture - it is expensive, it's hard to develop, and it's something our rural students don't always have access to," Thul said.

In addition, students need to learn soft skills necessary across industries, including critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving. Active partners in this effort include Taylor Corporation, and Jason Greenfield Corporate Vice President of Properties and Engineering, attended the presentation and is the school's liaison. South Central Service

SEE ROBOTICS, PAGE 4



You can buy a copy of these photos

(Above) Travis Thul explains the donation. (Below Left) The robotics kits that MSU donated to MHS. (Below Right) Lisa Sackreiter shows what she created with the kit at the educator training.

VAN HEE MEDIA PHOTOS

Madelia High School Class of '61

Another year has gone by and the Madelia High School Class of 1961 just keeps on Showing Up. This was a big year for them as they celebrated 65 Years since graduation. They enjoyed gathering for the Madelia Park Days Parade July 10 along Main Street. The location gives them a close feeling of where the old Madelia High School used to be! Many from out of town stay at the Best Western hotel in New Ulm and gather there evenings after Madelia's daytime activities. On July 11, 2026, they visited the sites and memorials around Madelia, including Watonwan Historical Society. They were especially impressed with the Military Display and the WWII Era Jeep. Many thanks to the Kelsey family for sharing the items belonging to Milton Kelsey. He was a Class of 1961 classmate and the student council president. Kelsey lost his life flying a helicopter mission in Viet-Nam. Thanks to classmates Ellen (Smith) King and Pam (Gudahl) Fadness for providing their majorette items and other items on display as well. The classmates enjoyed a splendid dinner at La Plaza Fiesta and are grateful to Krystal and her staff who provide a wonderful dining experience for them each year. Lynne at Sweet! Indeed Bakery made up a beautiful cake for them to enjoy at Jim and Jan Jose's Madelia Ford Garage. Sunday, July 12, the Class of 61 classmates and spouses gathered for breakfast at the Madelia Fireman's Relief Association Pancake Breakfast at the Community Building. They are already looking forward to celebrating the 66th Madelia Class Reunion in 2027!



The Picture of Class of 61 at La Plaza Fiesta includes, front row L-R, Ardis (Ellingsberg) Davis, Ellen (Smith) King, Audi (Thurston) Arndt, Judy (Schroeder) Michniewicz, Karen (Mickelson) Mosel, Darlene (Beierle) Patterson and Emily (Gustafson) Johnston. Back Row L-R: Jim Jose, Jan (Cunningham) McCabe, Al Arndt, Vern Rasmussen and Charles Hakes. Also pictured is the beautiful cake the class enjoyed.



Photos courtesy of Al Arndt
The Class of 61 at Madelia Parade includes, first row L-R, Audi (Thurston) Arndt, Mike King-husband of Ellen (Smith) King, Vern Rasmussen, Judy (Schroeder) Michniewicz and Marlin Knaak. Second row L-R: Al Arndt, Ellen (Smith) King, Karen (Mickelson) Mosel, Darlene (Beierle) Patterson. Bill Johnston-Husband of Emily (Gustafson) Johnston, Emily (Gustafson) Johnston and Ken Peterson.

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Madelia Times-Messenger
PO Box 254
Madelia, Minnesota 56062

156th Year
Number 13
© 2026 Madelia Times-Messenger

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