

2025 Patrick Denne Memorial Scholarship WINNERS

Patrick Denne, a beloved figure in North Dakota's rural water community, dedicated 20 years to serving as a Circuit Rider for the North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association (NDRWSA). His travels amounted to about 750,000 miles visiting every corner of the state. His passion and commitment to rural water made a significant impact on countless communities across North Dakota.

Denne's dedicated service was evident in his willingness to provide assistance anywhere or any time. This often took him away from home on weekends and for many days at a time, if necessary; but it also allowed him to witness the incredible growth of rural water systems as few others in North Dakota did. Patrick Denne passed away peacefully at his home in West Fargo surrounded by family on April 4, 2004, following a short, but courageous, battle with cancer. He was 53 years old. NDRWSA honors his memory through the Patrick Denne Memorial Scholarship. In 2012, the scholarship was established. Since that time, more than \$100,000 has been awarded to deserving applicants.

This scholarship is open to children or grandchildren of current employees or elected officials of a city or rural water system. To be eligible, the water system must be a current member of the North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association. The rural water affiliation for each recipient is listed below.

Additionally, the scholarship is available to students enrolled in Bismarck State College's Water and Wastewater Technology program who have successfully completed at least two courses with a GPA of 2.5 or higher and are carrying a minimum of 12 credit hours. Finally, apprentices currently enrolled in the NDRWSA Apprenticeship Program are also eligible to apply. In 2025, the committee selected 12 recipients to receive the Patrick Denne Memorial Scholarship. This year's recipients of the Patrick Denne Memorial Scholarships are included in this article. Please visit our website at www.ndrw.org/denne_memorial_scholarship to read their essays.

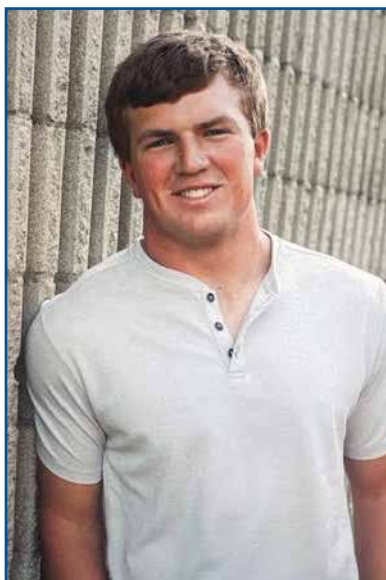
Sparkle Sawyer

is with Southwest Water Authority. Her long-term goal is to advance within the water industry and learn about the water treatment process. She is currently enrolled in the NDRWSA Apprenticeship Program, which is a two-year program that requires 4,000 hours of hands-on training and 288 hours of classroom training. She is logging her work hours through a mentor assigned by Southwest Water Authority as well as taking classes as assigned by NDRWSA Apprenticeship program. The program is under the umbrella of the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) and is registered by the Department of Labor.



Hank Bodine

of Velva is studying construction management at Western Carolina University. He plans to return to North Dakota after graduation to pursue a career in the field. During high school, Hank was highly involved in a variety of activities, including football, baseball, basketball, wrestling, golf, and track, as well as FFA and FBLA. His connection to rural water is his mother, Kerry Wyche, who is the deputy auditor for the city of Velva.



Talli Eaton

, from Reeder, is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Studies at the University of North Dakota (UND). She plans to continue her education at UND's School of Law to obtain her Juris Doctorate and become a criminal defense attorney. During high school Talli was involved in a wide range of extracurriculars, including volleyball, track and field and FBLA, as well as serving as a basketball statistician. She was also a member of FFA, NHS, Pep Club, Science Olympiad, and participated in volunteer groups. Her relation to the water industry is Jonathon Eaton, Adams County director of Southwest Water Authority.



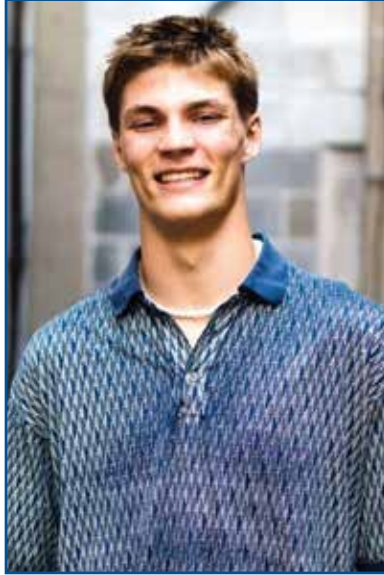
Ethan Gast

of Carrington is pursuing a degree in computer science at the University of Jamestown (UJ). He hopes to find a career where he can promote the benefits technology provides. In high school, he participated in UJ esports and volunteered in the community. Ethan's tie to rural water is his mother, Jennifer Gast, city auditor for the city of Carrington.



Kaullen Hegney

of Mandan is pursuing a degree in environmental science at Concordia College in Moorhead. An avid outdoorsman, Kaullen plans to become a game warden after completing college. During his time at Mandan High School, he was an accomplished wrestler, placing third at this year's state tournament. Kaullen's rural water tie is Jennifer Johns, auditor for the city of Velva.



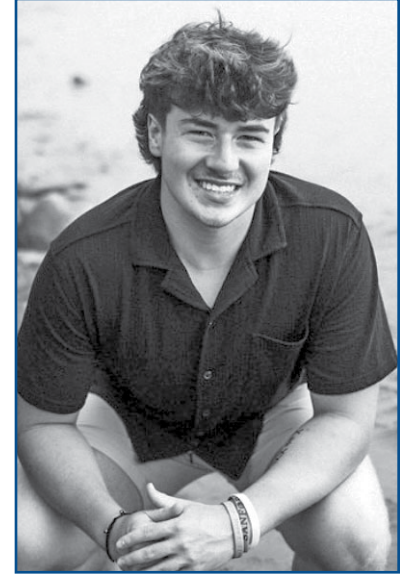
Connor Klein

of Rugby is studying biomedical engineering at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. After completing undergrad studies, he plans to go into medical device design. He wants to make affordable medical devices for communities unable to access healthcare. In high school, he participated in basketball, cross country, and track and field. He was also a member of the band and the National Honor Society and was active in volunteer work. His connection to rural water is Dale Klein with North Prairie Rural Water.



Joseph

McCormick of Lincoln is pursuing a degree in physical education at North Dakota State University. He hopes to build a successful career where he can make a real impact on his community and in the classroom. In high school, he played multiple sports and was also a mentor in the peer-to-peer program. He also spent many hours volunteering. His affiliation to rural water is James Farrell, water distribution operator for Southwest Water Authority.



Brady Reilly

of Hoople is majoring in business at the University of North Dakota. He plans to pursue a career in finance and find a job in North Dakota. He was involved in football, basketball, track and field, trap shooting, golf, and multiple extracurriculars: one act play, band choir, and Riverwatch. He was also in the National Honor Society, refereed and coached youth sports, and did volunteer work. His rural water connection is his father, Brian Reilly, manager of Walsh Rural Water District.



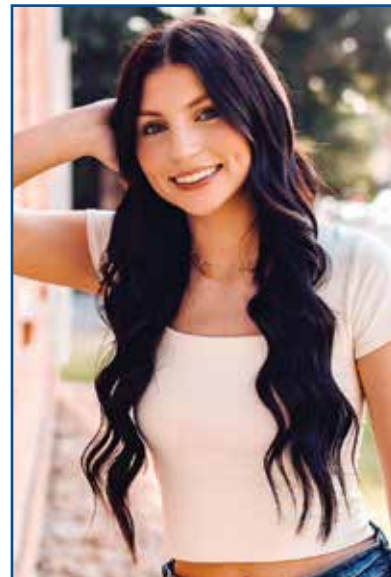
Carter Sonnenberg, a native of Frazee, Minnesota, is studying natural resources at Itasca Community College. After earning his associate degree, he plans to complete a four-year degree. He hopes to then join the Department of Natural Resources and start his own forestry and land management business. He was heavily involved in high school activities, playing football, basketball and baseball, and competing in track and field. He also dedicated time to both FFA and band. His connection to rural water is his grandfather, Patrick Denne.



Gracelyn Soper of Argusville is pursuing a degree in nursing at the University of North Dakota. Her goal is to obtain her Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist degree. In addition to her involvement in school and studio dance, she was a member of the National Honor Society and participated in youth philanthropy. She also dedicated time to coaching cheer and dance. Her tie to rural water is Sally Herda with Greater Ramsey Water District.



Mckenzie Suko from Alexander is pursuing a career as a skilled ultrasound technician at Bismarck State College. Her goal is to assist in medical diagnoses by providing imaging for patients. During high school, she was an active student, participating in volleyball, basketball, and track and serving as both class president and a member of the student council. Tyler Fixen, foreman for the city of Williston, is Mckenzie's stepfather and her connection to rural water.



Paityn Ziegelmann of Grafton is working toward a degree in nursing at the University of North Dakota. After receiving her bachelor's degree, she plans to continue her education to become a nurse anesthetist. During high school, Paityn was a well-rounded student-athlete, serving as captain of the basketball team and participating in volleyball, track and field and softball. She was also actively involved in student council, the National Honor Society, and the North Valley Technical Honors Society, along with various other clubs and volunteer activities. Her connection to rural water is Nick Ziegelmann with the city of Grafton.

