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Generations of Service: The Bekaert Family’s Legacy of Military Dedication

The Bekaert family’s long-standing commitment to serving their country spans nearly ten decades, crossing multiple branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and four generations of dedication, honor, and leadership.

The family’s tradition began with Yules Bekaert, who joined the U.S. Army in 1918. Private Yules Bekaert served with the 91st Division, Company A 348th Machine Gun Battalion during World War I. He was honorably discharged in 1919.

Albert Bekaert: The Foundation of Service



Albert Bekaert enlisted in the U.S. Army in May 1956. Bekaert joined the U.S. Army because work was difficult to find at that time and many employers wanted men who had fulfilled their obligations to Uncle Sam. Albert felt the call to serve his country as had his older brother, Raymond Bekaert, who served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War from June 1953 until being honorably discharged in April 1955.

After completing basic training at Fort Ord, California, Albert was assigned to the 10th Infantry Division in Schweinfurt, Germany, where he served for 18 months. They drilled 7 days a week - even on Thanksgiving and Christmas day.

In February 1958, Bekaert was selected as a Drill Sergeant for basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, serving with the 2nd Infantry Division. He was honorably discharged in 1959 as a Staff Sergeant (SSG). He then served three years in a reserve status. Many returning veterans attended the Vets’ Ag course in Canby. This course taught all aspects of farming from crops to livestock to record-keeping and journals which became a life-long practice for Bekaert.



A Legacy of Service
The Bekaert Family
Page 1-3

Fairchild Farmgirl
Fall Traditions
Page 4

Building a House
With his own two hands
Page 6-8



Not content to hang up his uniform, Albert rejoined military service in the 1970's, this time with the Minnesota National Guard's 175th Field Artillery in Madison, MN. Over a total of 21 years, he rose through the ranks and retired as Chief of Battery with the rank of Sergeant First Class (SFC).

Michael Bekaert: A Distinguished Career of Leadership



Following in his father's footsteps, Michael Bekaert enlisted in the U.S. Army in October 1979 and joined the Minnesota National Guard's 175th Field Artillery. After completing basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, he transitioned from an administrative role to a Fire Direction Chief (1980-1988).

Michael's career took him through several leadership positions, including service with the South Dakota National Guard, 1742nd Transportation Company (TC), 740th (TC), 727 Palletized Load System (TC) and multiple activations during major conflicts. He was activated during the Gulf War (1990-1991) and again for Operation Iraqi Freedom (2002-2004).

Promoted steadily through the ranks, he became Command Sergeant Major (CSM) of the 881st Battalion in Pierre, SD, before being appointed in 2006 as the 6th State Command Sergeant Major for South Dakota by Major General Michael Gorman. He later served as CSM for the Wounded Warrior Battalion (3rd ID) at Fort Stewart, GA, before retiring honorably on May 30, 2010, serving an impressive 31 years.



Mark and Brad Bekaert: Continued Commitment



Mark Bekaert enlisted in June 1983, serving with the 175th Field Artillery in Madison. After completing both basic and AIT at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, he served honorably until his discharge as a Specialist (E4) in 1989.

Brad Bekaert followed suit, enlisting in June 1985 and completing his training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He continued his service with the 175th Field Artillery, achieving the rank of Specialist before his honorable discharge in 1993.





Amber Bekaert Opitz: Service in the Skies

Representing the family's next generation, Amber Bekaert Opitz (daughter of Michael) joined the U.S. Air Force in November 2005, serving with the South Dakota Air National Guard in Sioux Falls, SD. She trained at Lackland Air Force Base (AFB), TX, and continued her education as a medic at Sheppard AFB, TX, and Travis AFB, CA.

Amber supported state operations during the 2011 Dakota Dunes flood and served with distinction until her honorable discharge in May 2015 as a Technical Sergeant (TSgt).

Allison Bekaert Hill: Continuing the Legacy

Allison Bekaert Hill (daughter of Michael) carried the family torch into the next decade, enlisting in the U.S. Air Force in March 2015. After completing basic training at Lackland AFB and technical training at Fort Lee, Virginia, she began her career in Services at Davis-Monthan AFB, Tucson, AZ. Her next duty station was Hurlbert Field Air Force Installation, Fort Walton Beach, FL.

Her deployments include Afghanistan (2017), Dubai (2020), and Greece (2024), showcasing her global service record. Currently stationed at Edwards AFB, California, Allison serves as a Technical Sergeant in Safety, continuing her family's proud tradition of dedication and excellence.



Nathaniel Bekaert: Fueling the Future



Nathaniel Bekaert (son of Mark) also carried the family torch into the next decade, enlisting in the South Dakota Army National Guard in March 2018. Following basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina he attended AIT at Fort Lee, Virginia as a 92F (Fueller). The 1742nd Transportation Company was the first Unit Nathaniel was attached to and is currently serving in the 147th Forward Support Company as a Sergeant. SGT Bekaert proudly mobilized and deployed to the border for the Southwest Border Patrol Mission in 2021.

A Legacy Etched in Service

From Yules Bekaert's service in World War I to Nathaniel Bekaert and Allison Bekaert Hill's service in 2025, the Bekaert family's story stands as a testament to patriotism, leadership, and the enduring spirit of the American military family.

Their collective service—across the U.S. Army, Minnesota National Guard, South Dakota National Guard and U.S. Air Force—reflects a shared commitment to duty and country that spans over 100 years.



Fairchild Farmgirl

Happy fall ya'll! I wanted to say that before the snow flies, which I guess could be next week...but we won't get into that.

I will say it is craft show season, and I'm on par! I've got something going on literally every weekend. Which if you do these as well, you know you could be at 4 shows a week if you had enough hands to help. With me working at school however, it gets a little tough to make products to sell. I've got the sales "kids" but I'm usually pretty wiped by the end of the day. The thought of making things until the wee hours isn't as enticing as it once was. Ah, I remember those days. I could churn out 300 bars of soap per day, make a bunch of needle felting kits, feed lambs, pick, clean and sort chicken eggs from 120 chickens. All the things. Now I'd just love to come home, make a simple dinner and watch Netflix. Wow...I'm feeling very lazy after that paragraph.

So lets talk November. First, Veterans Day. I have so much admiration for those who've served. I absolutely love the Vet's Day program at the local schools and honestly if you have the time, go. It's ceremonial, they usually have the highschool band play and a great speaker. It is in my top five of favorite happenings at school. I'm always so touched by it. So thank you Veterans, and people still serving. Freedom isn't free and it's because of our military that we have such a wonderful country to live in and feel safe living in.

And then there's Thanksgiving, or Turkey day as we like to call it around here. What's your meal? We're pretty standard here. Turkey, stuffing, brussel sprouts, mashed potatoes, and pie. Oh and this wouldn't be the Fairchild household if we didn't have corn as well. Is there any yams with marshmallow on top? No. That's disgusting. Is there any cranberry jello or cranberry slices from a can? Again, no. Yikes, that's not happening. I do like and appreciate a good cranberry lemon cookie or a cranberry orange muffin on occasion. I also like a plain sweet potato with pepper, salt and butter.

Do you all have any traditions that you do for Thanksgiving? We usually eat the day of at Ron's dad's place. Then the next day we have a celebration at our house with our kids. That's a lot of fun. We've started to talk about what we are thankful for, which there's so much! Also, after dinner we all get a piece of paper and make our Christmas lists and tape them to the pantry cupboard for everyone to see. That's my favorite part. I love to see my kids' planning. We really encourage not spending much at all. If I had my way my kids would make things for each other and us. Last year Grace made a few quilts, but I'd love some potholders, and a winter table runner. I'm hoping that we can make some of our gifts too for our kids. Anyway, enjoy this month. Hug a service person and love on your family as they gather around the table.

Until next time,
Fairchild Farmgirl

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A Look Back

125 years ago, November 1900

Thanksgiving Ball to be held at the I.O.O.F. on November 29th.

The baby of R.A. Kerr fell onto the heating stove Monday, burning itself quite badly. The little one is getting along nicely at the last report.

F.H. Greene has his new store about ready for occupancy. He expects to move in the first of next week.

New steam fixtures installed all through the old building (Court House)at the Blind School.

100 years ago, November 1925

R. Abrahansom injures hand in shredder.

Subscription for Gary Interstate \$2 a year

High school orchestra will have a concert November 20th.

Father and son banquet was held November 19th.

Deaths: George Dixon

Robert Abrahansom

75 years ago, November 1950

Fires at Johnny Hauger's, Harold Brevik's and Elmer Musch's

Reihes sell rest home to Schutjers.

Theodore Thomas gets foot caught in baler.

Births: boy to Mr. & Mrs. Roy Gilbertson; girl to Mr. & Mrs. Rudy Meyer

Marriage: Aylyce Peden and George Oviatt

Deaths: Mrs. Rose Kunow - George Walter- Nellie Winrow- Ed Simonton

Auction: Herman Wiederich

50 years ago, November 1975

Annual Legion Poultry Party November 10

School bond election November 18

Barb's Beauty Shop opening November 24

Deaths: Erna Sander and Clifford Gaard

Auction: Alvin Sorte

25 years ago, November 2000

≡No Interstate Published

What Is A Veteran

A "Veteran" - whether active or reserve - is someone who at one point in his life wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America" for an amount of "up to and including his life". That is honor. And there are way too many people in this country today who no longer understand that fact.

-Author Unknown-



Veterans Day 2025

November 11th, 2025, Armistice Day now called Veterans Day. The commemoration remains the same as it has since 1920 – paying tribute to all those who have served in the U.S. military. Veterans Day programs in the local area include the Deuel School Veterans Program at 10 AM on Tuesday, November 11th at Deuel School in Clear Lake. The Veterans Day program in Canby, MN will start at 10 AM at the Canby High School. The VFW Patriot's Pen Essay and the Voice of Democracy Essay winners will present their essays during the program.

Please plan to attend one of these progams and pay tribute to all veterans who have served in the U.S. military.

Definition of a homesteader –

- Someone who lives frugally or self-sufficiently especially by growing and preserving food.
- Someone who acquires, settles on, occupies land under a Homestead Law.



The homestead of Jon and Kathryn Groenhoff, southeast of Gary, exemplifies the lifestyle of a homesteader. Jon had previously owned a home in Gary to which he had added sweat equity by remodeling the home (including an addition) and building a large garage in the backyard. During this time Jon and Katie had married and started a family. After eleven years of living in town, the couple decided they wanted to raise their family on a farm in the country. Both of them had grown up on farms and felt this was the best place to raise children and that was definitely the experience they wanted for their family. Katie admits to being envious of the town kids in her younger years, kids who had fewer responsibilities and more freedom to do whatever. Looking back on it now, she's incredibly grateful she wasn't a town kid.

So in 2019 they started talking about buying land. They approached Jon's aunt and were able to purchase 40 acres of family land from her -bare land - not a building on the property. Jon began to build the homestead. He started with a needed shed – don't all farmers need a shed ? – and it will never be big enough. Then he began to build the house. The cement work was hired out as was the plumbing, but Jon built the rest of the house by himself. He built the entire structure himself including the electrical (which passed inspection) and they finished it together, moving in on the July 4th weekend in 2021! The house was built while Jon continued to work 40-60 hours a week at his day job as a millwright/pipefitter/welder in Marshall, MN.





Where did these skills come from to be able to build a house? A lot of these abilities come from growing up on a farm. Jon was raised to learn by doing. Many of his skills were obtained by watching his father and uncles, as well as his older brothers. He picked up carpentry, welding and repair skills and electrical knowledge. Basically, if something wasn't working or had broken, they figured out how to make work again rather than call someone out to do the repair for them.

Farm kids learn how to be responsible by taking care of animals and this develops into a strong work ethic that stays with them for life. "Learn by doing" - they learn to problem solve and figure out the solution. Equipment and building repairs become normal tasks. Learning to weld and repair, to operate large and small machines, and so much more is just a part of growing up on a farm. "Farm smarts" is a real thing.

Jon and Katie were both raised in large farm families. Jon is one of 11 children and Katie, one of 10. They grew up learning life skills without even realizing it. They learned self-sufficiency by doing what they could and learning what they needed to know. Katie grew up watching her mother and grandmother preserve food, bake in the kitchen, raise full gardens, etc. Theirs was an ingredient household which meant if you wanted something to eat, you'd have to make it from scratch. No quick "pop it in the microwave" meals. They spent summers raising and butchering chickens for the family's meat supply. She recalls one time there was a cow hanging in the garage to butcher and a kitchen shrouded in plastic as her mother prepared and packaged the meat for the freezer.



The Groenhoffs invested in a sawmill when they were preparing to build their home. As the cost of lumber had skyrocketed during the pandemic, cutting their own lumber was a way to save on the costs of building. This was just one example of how they choose

to live frugally. They make many choices as a way to avoid debt. Owing banks or using credit cards are things they are not interested in, and they encourage others to live within their means as well. There's nothing worse than having to work your whole life just to give all your money to others.

Like Dave Ramsey says: "live and give like no one else" by balancing spending, saving and giving.

Their home is heated with wood in the winter and cooled with a window AC unit in the summer and they are very comfortable. They are especially spoiled in the winter months as the temperature hovers between 75-80 degrees. Wood heat is the warmest heat! They have considered solar energy, but the smaller home is efficient and doesn't use much electricity. They do not support wind farms so that is something they would not consider.



Both of them grew up in households that did a lot of food preservation - canning, freezing, and dehydrating. This is more of Katie's domain, and she continues to try new recipes and to learn new methods. It can be fun! They have discussed digging a root cellar and hoped to have one dug before winter but, again, life had other plans. Maybe next year it will happen. In the meantime, there is a spacious pantry and a porch that stays quite cool so onions and potatoes store well there.

The garden provides tomatoes, beets, carrots, corn, onions, green beans and potatoes. They also grow zucchini, squash, pumpkins, cabbage and watermelon. Livestock raised includes chickens, cows, sheep and goats for meat and a milking goat for fresh milk. Raw cow milk is also sourced from a nearby farm.

One common homesteading skill not yet developed by Katie is sewing as both of their mothers sew and any needed patching and repairs gets passed to them. Maybe in the future Katie will try that but right now her life is busy with four children, ages from one year old to fourteen years old. The Groenhoffs chose to home-school their children, which they are very blessed to be able to do. Being at home gives Katie the opportunity to watch her family learn and grow and develop before her own eyes.

They are also working on building a farm store on their acreage. It's called Crossroads Farmshop, and they will offer homegrown, handcrafted and homemade products such as fresh produce, herbal wellness products (salves, balms, tea blends), household products, baked goods, eggs, milk (when available) and so much more. Katie creates non-toxic alternatives to commercial products using natural ingredients. They're planning on an official opening in the spring or summer of 2026 but may be offering baked goods or homemade gift items around the holidays. Follow their progress on social media accounts (Facebook, TikTok and Instagram a @CrossroadsFarmshop or at <https://crossroads-farmstead.square.site>).

Jon continues to come home from his job and work on the homestead in the evenings. He may be constructing outbuildings or working in the field or cutting wood. Or maybe splitting firewood, tending livestock, or welding for his JDL Welding business. Looking to the future, Katie sees the time the buildings will all be completed and they can rest and enjoy their accomplishments but then it will also be time for repairs and upgrades. Thankfully, Jon is a man who enjoys staying busy!

October Event Photos



Area families enjoying a Spooktacular Halloween thanks to the efforts of the Gary Legion Auxiliary and Gary Community Club.



Lyle Gene Gorder

Lyle Gene Gorder, age 95, of Canby, Minnesota passed away peacefully on Saturday, October 25, 2025, surrounded by his loving family at the Sanford Canby Medical Center. Funeral service was 11:00 am on Wednesday, October 29, 2025, at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Canby, MN with burial in St. Stephen's Cemetery, Canby. Visitation was on Tuesday, October 28th with a Prayer service at the Houseman Funeral Home, Birk Chapel in Canby, MN.

Lyle Gene Gorder was born on September 24, 1930 to Morris John Gorder and Bertha Caroline (Ufkin) Gorder in Canby, Minnesota. Lyle started life as a town boy and moved to the farm when he was eight.

He spent the rest of the years on the family farm with his sisters Loraine and Joanie. He attended school in Canby and graduated in 1948. Before he settled into farming, he spent four years serving his country in the United States Air Force. Those years shaped him; they taught him discipline, pride, and the value of service, qualities that stayed with him all his life. When his service ended, he returned home to Canby and began farming. Shortly after, Lyle met Joey and found his partner for life. They were married on September 22, 1956 at St John's Lutheran Church in Omro Township. Many busy years followed as they raised four children while establishing their farming business. He also fed cattle, which led to many cattle sales that he enjoyed with friends. In his children, he planted a work ethic that will last for generations, lessons learned in early mornings, shared chores, and the pride of harvest.

Beyond his own fields, he served the community. He was active in Our Saviour's Lutheran Church and served in various positions. He also served on the Canby Hospital Board, Production Credit Association Board, Canby Elevator Board, and Midwest Cattleman's Board. He enjoyed the lasting friendships made serving on these boards.

At the heart of his life was his family. Lyle was a devoted husband to Joey, a true partner in every sense of the word. It was a love built on faith, laughter, and mutual respect, a love that grounded their family and gave it strength. He was a proud father and grandfather, teaching by example the values of faith, integrity and hard work.

Some of the families' most special memories were made at Lake Cochrane. He loved the time spent there, weekends filled with family, friends and fun. He loved fishing and the grandkids loved fishing with him. When they would catch a fish, they would often ask, "Grandpa, is this a keeper?" There was a peacefulness at the lake that came from the waves, the sun, the wind, and being surrounded by family and friends.

After retirement, Lyle and Joey spent many wonderful winters in Arizona with dear friends, golfing, playing cards, swimming and exploring the area. Those times were filled with laughter and new memories that they cherished deeply.

He loved the simple joys of life, particularly a good day's work, a meal with family and friends, and rides to check the crops.

He is preceded in death by his parents, sister Loraine Reynolds, brothers-in-law Bud Reynolds and Ron Goetsch, his father and mother-in-law, Otto and Emma Wiegers, sisters-in-law Florence Werner and Muriel Wiegers, brother-in-law Leon Werner.

Lyle is survived by his wife Joan, children: Jon (Carol) Gorder, Mary (Earl) Thrasher, Mark (Nancy) Gorder, and Tom (Amy) Gorder; grandchildren: Elizabeth (Tony) Reiss, Dot and Josephine; Cassie (Wyatt) Branham, Mesa and Hazer; Tony (Elizabeth) Gorder, and Florence; Katie (Jay) Lohmann, and Aker; Zach (Moriah) Gorder, Braxton and Beckham; Taylor (Cole) Brusven, Rory and Jace; Bryce Gorder and fiancé Kendra Eichten; Mya (Josh) Steffen; sister Joan Goetsch and his nieces and nephews.

His family takes comfort in knowing that the fields he tended may now rest, but the seeds he planted in his family, his faith, and his community will continue to grow for generations.

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