

Brookfield & Elm Grove

THIS MONTH

MAY 2021

Looking ahead with optimism

Brookfield officials say activity at new conference center is picking up

By Dave Fidlin
Special to The Freeman

BROOKFIELD — After several years of planning, lining up contractors and construction, plans were in motion to take the wraps off the Brookfield Conference Center last spring in anticipation for what was to have been a busy, event-filled year.

And then came the pandemic, and all of the upending ripple effects that followed.

But the venue, located immediately south of Brookfield Square at 325 S. Moorland Road, has been slowly, quietly operating since last July, and local officials are hopeful about what the future holds for the facility and the 44,000 square feet of space it has available.

"The conference center came in on time, under budget and exceeded expectations, and then we hit the pandemic," Brookfield Mayor Steve Ponto said. "It's not the start that we envisioned, and we hope that we bounce back fully in a relatively short period of time."

Since last summer's soft launch, a range of events have been held at the conference center, said Nancy Justman, president and CEO of Visit Brookfield, who has been overseeing the venue.

Examples of what already has taken place include such consumer shows as vendor markets and craft fairs, small-scale corporate events and a number of private events running the gamut from weddings to funerals to high school proms.

"It is being used what it was envisioned for, but on a smaller scale at this point, 100 percent due to COVID," Justman said.

While the novel coronavirus naturally was an unplanned occurrence leading into the conference center's unveiling, officials said its interior



Submitted photo

Activity at the Brookfield Conference Center is picking up. After a quiet soft opening with a range of events already held successfully, the center's calendar for the fall is filling with larger events being planned there.

layout inevitably has been an asset as quick-shifting pivots have occurred throughout the past year. "One of the key features we were looking at was flexibility," Justman said of the pre-pandemic planning of how the facility would be laid out. "How can we make the space most flexible, with the end user in mind?"

The 18,000-square-foot ballroom, for example, is akin to a blank canvas, Justman said, and gives clients the opportunity to use as they see fit. Also popular, she said, is the outdoor 9,000-square-foot garden area adjacent to the new Hilton Garden Inn.

"I think people have been eager to get out and do events again, as long as they can feel safe and comfortable," Justman said.

While the future for life in all its forms still remains somewhat murky in the road ahead, there are indications activity within the conference center could pick up steam late in the year.

One of the most notable, Justman said, is an inaugural November fundraising gala for the Stars and Stripes organization, which provides flights to veterans and a family member to memorial sites in Washington, D.C.

"Our fall is extremely busy right



Submitted photo

An outdoor garden area is proving popular for events held at the Brookfield Conference Center.

now," Justman said. "We have large events that are happening in September through the end of the year. At this point, they are all scheduled and proceeding as originally planned. We're very excited about what the fall has to offer."

As post-pandemic realities hopefully loom on the horizon, Ponto said he is optimistic the conference

center will fully realize its intended purpose.

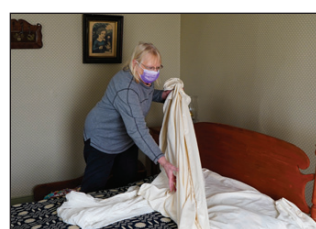
"I see this as a really good economic generator, not only for the portion of Brookfield that it's in, but for the whole area," Ponto said. "I think it also helps establish Brookfield as the premiere business community in Waukesha County."

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LOOKING BACK IN HISTORY



From the Freeman negatives at the Waukesha County Museum

Gordon Liebl, 18, of Brookfield aims for the target on the senior dunk tank as Dale Heiber, 17, looks to see if he'll be taking another turn in the drink during a Lancer-Spartan Carnival at Brookfield Central High School in this April 15, 1967, photo. The carnival featured dozens of booths judged for originality in the school gym and cafeteria, with a medal awarded to the booth raising the most money, as well as games, refreshments and a dance in the evening, all to raise funds for scholarships for needy students, according to assignment notes. The 1966 carnival was one of several sources that helped fund six \$500 scholarships that year.

Brookfield committee gives nod to larger treehouses

By Jake Ekdahl
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BROOKFIELD — An ordinance allowing for larger treehouses in the city won unanimous support from the Legislative & Licensing Committee on April 20 and will head to the full Common Council for consideration at their first meeting in May.

Currently, treehouses are allowed in Brookfield but only if under 30 square feet total. The proposed ordinance would treat treehouses more flexibly by considering them and roofed playhouses as residential accessory buildings.

Committee Chair Alderman Gary Mahkorn said he and Alderman Mark Nelson

are both members of the Plan Commission as well as the Legislative & Licensing Committee. "We've both kind of vetted this already," he said. "The idea (is) being a little more flexible for the people in this community to erect these things."

Alderman Mike Hallquist previously told The Freeman a resident reached out to him last summer inquiring about building a treehouse on their property as a birthday celebration for their child, and one of the limited activities available when much of the area was shut down due to COVID-19.

"I think 30 square feet is pretty limiting for homeowners," Hallquist said, adding the size must also accommodate for the tree itself. "To me, it's just another structure."

"Now it's no more than 100 square feet," Mahkorn said.

Hallquist said treehouses aren't particularly different from other accessory buildings like sheds or saunas.

"There is a section in our code regarding residential accessory buildings," he said. "It includes sheds, gazebos, cabanas, greenhouses, pavilions, and pergolas and saunas. It does not include playhouses or treehouses."

Mayor Steve Ponto previously told The Freeman he's interested in seeing what the committee moves forward and isn't aware of any issues when it comes to treehouses in Brookfield, but maintains the important consideration is children's safety.

Brookfield woman sues Elmbrook School District over mask policy

By Jake Ekdahl
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BROOKFIELD — A resident of the Elmbrook School District has filed a lawsuit against the district over its mask policy.

Heidi Anderson of Brookfield, who has taken the district to court before, claims the policy as it is now would prevent her from attending her daughter's in-person graduation — she objects to mask wearing on personal and religious grounds.

Attorney Brady Henderson, who represents Anderson, said the case is asking the court to decide whether Elmbrook's mask policy can actually be applied as it's currently worded.

"The problem is, after the last executive order from the governor (got) struck down, the language in Elmbrook's actual policy (is) no longer triggered," he said.

According to the court fil-

ing, that policy is filed under the student dress code, but is meant to apply to all individuals on district property, and becomes applied "in the event that a governmental agency declares a public health emergency due to a communicable disease."

Henderson cited the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling tossing out Gov. Tony Evers' public health emergency and mask mandate as well as Waukesha County's inability to enact such a mandate at the local level. "A county doesn't have the ability to declare a public health emergency," he said, adding a county can declare emergencies over things like riots or natural disasters, but not pandemics.

Henderson said although Anderson is the sole plaintiff currently, he's aware of others in the community who might consider joining in litigation. He said to some extent schools do have authority over masks the

same way they can deal with any health or safety issue, but the question is who policies can apply to and what lawful application actually looks like.

Anderson has gone to court against Elmbrook before, also represented by Henderson in that case. She sought the court's intervention against a "lifetime ban" of her on district property after she made comments at a School Board meeting. The court sided with Anderson and granted an injunction, lifting the ban.

Looking ahead, Henderson said the district can revise the policy on its own, in which case the court would simply decide whether the policy was viable for the sake of precedent, or the case can move towards a potential injunction. Elmbrook Superintendent Mark Hansen told The Freeman the district does not comment on ongoing litigation.

Ponto, Reilly call for more local control

Mayors criticize state government's hamstringing of municipalities

By Jake Ekdahl
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BROOKFIELD — Brookfield Mayor Steve Ponto and Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly are calling for more control at the municipal level regarding local decisions, rather than the current set of state-imposed restrictions that limit what local governments can actually do.

"As a conservative I favor local control and less centralized power," Ponto said. "This has been a positive I've taken for a long, long time. (And) I recognize that Brookfield is in a particularly fortunate position among Wisconsin municipalities. We have a very large tax base and we also have substantial investment in Brookfield, substantial economic growth.... Not all governments are that fortunate."

In particular, Ponto pointed out that in 2013 the state Legislature took away Milwaukee's locally imposed residency requirements for city employees, which mandated they live in the city they work for.

Ponto said the rule "had good middle-class jobs and they were a real stabilizing influence on the city... I thought that Milwaukee should be able to decide that issue — the city government — because they're the ones who really (are) held accountable for the failure or success of Milwaukee... It was really a helpful thing for the city of Milwaukee and I really felt that Milwaukee city officials should make that decision and not state legislatures all over the state, many of whom didn't have a vested interest in Milwaukee."

Sales taxes

A more recent issue of local versus state control is the potential for a referendum-based optional 0.5% sales tax increase, encouraged by Gov. Tony Evers. In order to enact such a tax, it would have to be approved by local voters. The state government currently restricts how much local governments can levy and in what ways.

Ponto said although he wouldn't be likely to push for such a tax in Brookfield, it's an option that could help some areas in Wisconsin — Reilly said the same. Ponto pointed out that due to state-imposed restrictions on how local governments can raise revenue, the existing streams of income are often burdened more heavily than they might otherwise be and a sales tax could actually ease the pressure currently placed on property taxpayers, as property taxes are a large share of local revenue.

"My opinion is, and I think it's pretty well documented, that the state has been taking away home powers of municipalities for at least 25 years," said Reilly. "If the state wants to impose this type of requirement for municipalities, why don't they do it for themselves as well?"

Ponto said when it comes to accountability, local governments are the most beholden to their voters and studies show they also receive the most confidence from voters, with state and federal government being less so, respectively. He pointed out local governments are also non-partisan, which can be beneficial.

Brookfield in particular is bipartisan by its very nature now, with two Democrats representing the area in the state Assembly and a Republican doing so in the state Senate. Ponto said he makes sure to work with all legislators on behalf of the city.

Cooperation across party lines has not been a common sight at the state level, however, Ponto said, noting the fact that even during a pandemic the "governor and the Legislature have agreed on virtually nothing," instead taking their fights to the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

"The courts, I think, have tried to give them the opportunity to come together and work on some things," Ponto said.

Both Ponto and Reilly said that although their cities have fared reasonably well, the situation is more dire for others.

"The longer it goes on, more and more communities are put in a vice of providing less services and not being able to grow because they're not considered the type of community people want to move into," Reilly said. "I do see it getting worse, not better, and that will make the entire state of Wisconsin worse off."

A 2019 study by the Wisconsin Policy Forum found "Wisconsin municipalities depend on the property tax more than their peers in any other Midwestern state and as a result also make the least use of all other taxes... Over the last generation, property taxes have grown as a share of city and village revenues as state aid to Wisconsin municipalities has lagged."



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Photos by Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

TOWN OF BROOKFIELD — Firefighters from the Town of Brookfield Fire Department, including Chief Andrew Smerz, Assistant Chief Tony D’Amico, Steve Ybarra, Phil Klass, Troy Schultz, Derek Hyde and Bryan Zydo, pose in front of their fire truck at the soon-to-be demolished La Quinta Inn next to the Corners of Brookfield on April 14. The department conducted exterior standpipe training at the hotel, which involves getting a fire hose through a second-story window. Other departments will use the building for training before it’s demolished to make room for a new development. Robert Gold, the CEO of The Corners, said he was glad to let the fire department use the building because it was a way for The Corners to give back to its community and because it provided the department with much-needed real-world training.



Firefighter Bryan Zydo participates in a training exercise at the La Quinta Inn near the Corners of Brookfield on April 14.



Firefighter Steve Ybarra empties a fire hose during an exterior standpipe training exercise at the La Quinta Inn near The Corners of Brookfield on April 14.

Report finds virtual instruction was common in December

More urban schools used virtual learning than rural

By Jake Ekdahl
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WAUKESHA — Almost all urban Wisconsin schools taught their students virtually in December compared with only a fraction of rural schools, according to a study released Monday.

The Wisconsin Policy Forum released findings based on a state survey of Wisconsin schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program. About four of every five public and private schools responded to the survey.

It found that 80% to 90% of urban schools had all or mostly virtual instruction in December depending on the grade. That compares with 40% to 50% of suburban schools and 14% to 18% of rural schools.

At the local level, Waukesha County’s public schools have had a mix of in-person, virtual and hybrid options available.

The School District of Waukesha opened for the year in a hybrid plan for secondary students, which saw in-person days increased and reduced as COVID-19 cases rose and fell, before switching to in-person five days per week in January, where it’s stayed.

“We know that the kids who have come back to us

face-to-face (are) starting to catch up and make good gains,” said Waukesha Schools Deputy Superintendent Joe Koch, adding that no learning format is ideal for all students, so having options is ideal.

Koch said student achievement data is showing progress from the beginning to the middle of the year, particularly in math — which doesn’t translate to virtual learning as naturally as other subjects might. When it comes to reading, performance was not as disrupted as anticipated; Koch pointed out parents can help read along with their children learning at home, and praised some of the district’s teachers for their creativity in guided readings.

At the Pewaukee School District, Superintendent Mike Cady said reading scores were higher than expected there, too. “Our data would show that our kids have done well throughout this,” he said. “We have not experienced substantial, notable losses of learning or regression... I think it’s not a simple ‘this works, that doesn’t’ scenario.”

Pewaukee Schools began the year in a hybrid format with both in-person and virtual days but switched elementary students to full in-person in January and sec-

ondary students in February.

It’s not yet possible to fully understand what the last year’s impact will be on students and schools.

“We really don’t know, long term, what the effects (will) have any differential effects,” said Wisconsin Policy Forum Researcher Ari Brown.

Regarding solutions and improvements, Brown pointed out there are federal funds coming that schools could use. “There are any number of directions they could take that in,” he said.

“It is important to note that schools are receiving a massive influx of federal relief funds in the coming months,” the Policy Forum notes. “Addressing the potential impacts of virtual schooling on students should be one important consideration for policymakers as they mull how to use these revenues effectively.”

Cady said Pewaukee Schools will be using those earmarked dollars to make improvements where needed.

“We have our existing structures (but) we’re going to be investing even more resources into academic intervention to take advantage of this opportunity of (these) one-time resources (to) attach any academic deficiency that we have — whether they’re more significant than previous years or not, it’s an opportunity to address them,” he said.

Area historical societies share plans for 2021

Most museums will be open with precautions

By Derek Johnson
Special to The Freeman

After being forced to either close completely or operate with capacity limits in 2020, most history museums across Waukesha County will be open fully with some limited exhibit closures this year.

The Elmbrook Historical Society and Stagecoach Inn in Brookfield, The Delafield History Center, the Oconomowoc Historical Museum and Old World Wisconsin will all be reopening this year with their usual programming, including self-guided tours and special events.

All the museums will have the now-standard set of COVID-19 safety precautions, including mask requirements where applicable and the museums will sanitize all common areas regularly. Most of the museums, including Old World Wisconsin, will also have some exhibits blocked off by plexiglass, but representatives from each museum said they are determined to keep visitors’ experiences as safe and enjoyable as possible.

“We’re trying not to lose the hands-on experience,” said Anna Altschwager, the assistant director of guest experience at Old World Wisconsin. “But unless we can clean it properly, we won’t let people into those spaces.”

Representatives from the assorted museums also said that their museums are determined to have their signature events this year, most of which were canceled in 2020 because of the pandemic. The Elmbrook Historical Society will be holding its annual Halloween festival on October 9, Old World Wisconsin will be holding a Family Fun Drive on May 29, and The



Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

Lynda Thayer uncovers a bed at the Dousman Stagecoach Inn, 1075 Pilgrim Parkway in Brookfield, while cleaning the museum on April 16.

At a glance

- Old World Wisconsin, W372-S9727 WI-67 in the Town of Eagle, will be open Thursdays through Sundays between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. starting on June 16.
- The Dousman Stagecoach Inn, 1075 Pilgrim Parkway in Brookfield, will be open every first and third Sunday of the month between 1 p.m. and

- 4 p.m. starting on June 6.
- The Oconomowoc Historical Museum, 103 W. Jefferson St. in Oconomowoc, will be open every Thursday and Sunday between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. starting on June 1.
- The Delafield History Center, 426 Wells Street in Delafield, is open year-round between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m. on Wednesdays and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Sundays.

Delafield Historical Society will have its Rhubarb Festival on June 5.

These events are only possible because of the contributions made by members of the assorted historical societies last year, however. Representatives from the museums said that, because they were either forced to close down or operate with limited capacity, it was difficult for the museums to make any money during the pandemic. However, because of donations from historical society members and their communities, all the museums are able to open more or less fully

this year

“Our membership has been very generous,” said Sandie Carter, the president of the Oconomowoc Historical Society.

The representatives said that they’re still looking forward to a busy season this year, both because they want to earn more money for long-term projects, but also because they can’t wait to offer their communities fun activities after a long year of being forced to stay inside.

“We’re hoping it’ll be a busy year,” said Lynda Thayer, the treasure of the Elmbrook Historical Society.

U.S. News: County high schools rank among Wisconsin’s best

WAUKESHA — According to the latest U.S. News & World Report, Waukesha County has some of the best high schools in Wisconsin.

Among the top 10 in the state: Eisenhower Middle/

High School ranked fifth, Kettle Moraine’s High School of Health Sciences ranked sixth, and Brookfield Central ranked seventh.

Among the top 50: Brookfield East (No. 11), Arrow-

head (No. 13), Hamilton (No. 16), Pewaukee (No. 18), Mukwonago (No. 23), Menomonee Falls (No. 24), New Berlin (No. 25), Waukesha West (No. 32), Muskego (No. 41), and Kettle Moraine (No. 44).

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PREP ATHLETICS

The long wait for spring athletes is over

Last event in spring was June 15, 2019

By Dave Radcliffe
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WAUKESHA — The wait is finally over. At least for some. With April 19 came the start of the spring sports season for those participating in boys golf, softball, outdoor track and field, and baseball. Girls soccer kick-started its season April 26, while boys tennis takes the court once again on May 3.

It's been a painstaking stretch of time in the interim for those who saw their chance to compete in high school athletics last spring taken away by the coronavirus pandemic. The last spring sporting event to take place came on June 15, 2019, the day both Muskego and Catholic Memorial claimed state championships in girls soccer in Division 1 and Division 3, respectively.

It was an unseasonably cold day at Uihlein Soccer Park in Milwaukee. Most days tend to be just that during spring in Wisconsin, but it's a trade-off anyone would have taken to get back the time they lost one year ago.

"Needless to say it was so disappointing that our 2020 season was canceled," Arrowhead softball coach Emily Martin said. "We had seven seniors last year that graduated and never had an opportunity to finish their career at Arrowhead. That leaves the 2020 season with a lot of 'what-ifs.'"

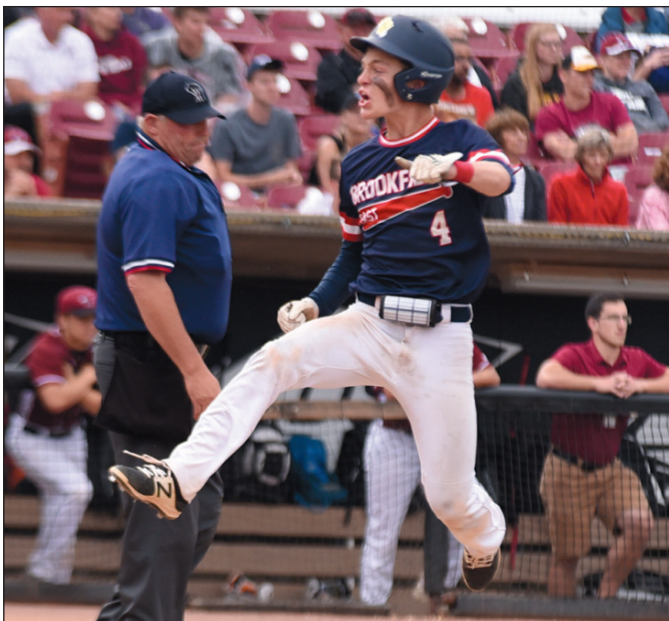
That wasn't the final blow spring athletics would be dealt. Normally at this juncture of the calendar, some sports would be about a month into their season. But everyone has had to remain flexible and expect the unexpected considering the uncertain times.

Last August, the WIAA gave schools an option. If they weren't comfortable moving forward with fall athletics, they would have the option to play in the spring, with seasons beginning in March and lasting into early May.

While there will still be some overlap, that meant spring sports would have to wait even longer to return to play.

The state series for each spring sport has also been pushed back as a result, with some yet to finalize dates and nearly all without a venue locked down.

■ Baseball: June 28-July 2



Dave Radcliffe/Freeman Staff

Brookfield East's Harrison Toone celebrates scoring the go-ahead run in the top of the eighth inning against Fond du Lac during a WIAA Division 1 state quarterfinal baseball game during the 2019 season at Neuroscience Group Field in Grand Chute. The 2019 season was the last time baseball was played during the spring season.

from Fox Cities Stadium in Grand Chute.

■ Boys golf: June 18-19, location TBD.

■ Girls soccer: time and location TBD.

■ Softball: June 28-30, location TBD.

■ Boys tennis: individual state June 17-19, location TBD; team state June 25-26, location TBD.

■ Track and field: time and location TBD.

Every school within Waukesha County participated in the traditional fall season — at least as traditional as it could possibly look — which means since the state boys basketball tournament series concluded on March 6, there has been a lull in the calendar from Mukwonago to Menomonee Falls, from Oconomowoc to New Berlin Eisenhower, and everywhere in between.

"It sure would be great to be in season and capitalizing on the good spring weather, but a delayed start is better than no start," Brookfield East baseball coach Ty Johnson said when southeastern Wisconsin was enjoying temperatures in the 70s in early April.

Johnson, who helped lead the Spartans to a state berth in 2019, the first year of no summer baseball in Wisconsin, lamented how much experience players have missed out on dating back to last March when everything came to a standstill.

"Interaction time with the players is the most valuable part of out-of-season events such as contact days, open gyms and weight training," Johnson said. "We now have two classes that have never experienced a baseball season because of the cancellation of the 2020 season. For most programs, the ninth and 10th

graders are your biggest classes. Out-of-season events allow us to connect with the players, and it is a bonus that the contact days provide us an opportunity to instruct the players."

Every spring sport was permitted 15 of those contact days, which have essentially helped players and coaches make up for lost time as they kill time before the season officially gets going.

While some athletes normally enjoy no more than a weekend off between winter and spring sports, now they've had upward of two months.

With facilities as advanced and pristine as they've ever been at the high school level, that has also paid dividends for coaches and athletes. In terms of when contact days can be utilized, however, it comes down to a number of factors.

"Coaches are making the best decisions for their programs on using contact days based on their circumstances," Johnson said. "Facilities, participation numbers, coach availability and COVID guidelines are all factors in that decision. For example, we use our contact days outside on the turf football field when available."

With all spring sports being held outdoors — indoor track was bypassed this year — athletes will enjoy competing without masks once again, as they were required in volleyball, basketball and wrestling. When wearing masks on the sidelines may become a thing of the past is yet to be seen and depends on various factors moving forward.

A small price to pay to have spring sports back once again.

PREP BOYS BASKETBALL

Central's Joplin commits to Marquette

Senior still wanted to play for Smart

By Dave Radcliffe
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BROOKFIELD — Even though it was a foregone conclusion for most, David Joplin still had a flair for the dramatic — just like he did throughout his historic basketball career at Brookfield Central.

The 6-foot-7 senior forward announced his decision to continue his athletic and academic career at Marquette University Wednesday morning in front of his family and several of his Central classmates, coaches and administration members, not to mention a few cameras.

Standing at the podium with his hoodie zipped all the way up, Joplin thanked everyone who helped him reach this point — jokingly pretending to announce his commitment without mentioning his parents — before unveiling a Marquette T-shirt.

"I was a little nervous but I told coach (Dan) Wandrey, good thing it's on my court," Joplin said. "This is where I feel at home."

Joplin originally committed to play for head coach Shaka Smart and the University of Texas in November of 2020. But on March 26, the Madison native left Austin for Milwaukee, and Joplin reopened his recruitment a week later as a result.

Now after going through the recruiting process all over again, the weight has finally been lifted off his shoulders.

"It feels great. I feel like I can breathe now," Joplin said. "My parents helped me with everything. Everyone around me made everything that much easier. The people in my life really helped me



Dave Radcliffe/Freeman Staff

Brookfield Central senior David Joplin unzips his jacket to reveal his commitment to play basketball at Marquette University.

get to where I am."

The leading scorer and rebounder in BC history also garnered interest from programs like Minnesota, Wake Forest, Virginia, Missouri, Vanderbilt, Georgia Tech, Georgia and Xavier since decommitting from Texas, but ultimately settled on making the short drive east on I-94 to play his college ball.

"I'm super excited," Joplin said. "I'm excited to get out there and stay at home."

The two-time WBCA all-state selection and reigning Greater Metro Conference Player of the Year finished his four-year varsity career with 1,929 points and 969 rebounds, also helping the Lancers win their first WIAA state championship in 2019. Joplin didn't receive a scholarship offer from Marquette's previous regime, but the Golden Eagles were nonetheless always on his radar, and the dominos began to fall when former MU coach Steve Wojciechowski was fired after seven seasons on March 19.

"I always liked Marquette," Joplin said. "I always went to

Marquette games. If I would stay at home, it's the one team I would play for, so I'm glad that it happened."

Of course, Smart's arrival played the biggest role in Joplin's decision. He led VCU to the Final Four in 2011 and capped his six-year stint at Texas by winning the Big 12 Conference Tournament this past season.

"It's Shaka. He's the man," Joplin said. "He's a real good dude. He makes you believe in yourself. You really want to battle with him. He gets me excited."

Smart has made in-state recruiting a priority, recently offering two of Joplin's former GMC counterparts — Menomonee Falls junior Seth Trimble and Wauwatosa East junior Leon Bond. Joplin, who will become the first Waukesha County boys basketball product in recent memory to play at Marquette, couldn't pass up the idea of staying home.

"Everything came full circle," Joplin said. "It's crazy — I was going to go far away and Shaka came to me. I'm like, cool, let's make it happen."



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