

Best News Coverage Under Deadline Pressure/Category 1

Greenwood chief fired

Joseph Pete

Daily Journal (Franklin)

Greenwood Mayor Charles Henderson apologized Friday to the board that oversees police discipline for the behavior of the police chief and assistant police chief.

Police Chief Joe Pitcher and assistant chief David Mertz should not have made a deal to drop internal charges against an officer without a public hearing or disregarded subpoenas to appear at a disciplinary hearing earlier this week, Henderson said.

He said he was disappointed that they defied the Greenwood Police Merit Commission by skipping the hearing.

Both were issued legal orders to appear and testify at the merit commission hearing Wednesday regarding internal charges against officer Nick Dine.

Days before the hearing, Pitcher and Mertz withdrew the charges and said in a letter that the hearing should be canceled.

The meeting was conducted, and they did not attend.

“The people I put in place, which was the chief and assistant chief, were also subpoenaed, and they disrespected the merit commission by not going to that hearing,” Henderson said. “For that, I’m making a public apology to the Greenwood Police Merit Commission because they were not giving the due respect to people who I put in that position. That is their obligation and duty to do.”

On Friday, Henderson fired Pitcher, and Mertz resigned from his position as assistant police chief.

Henderson, police secretary Annalee Mason and Lt. Brian Blackwell also did not respond to subpoenas.

Blackwell called the attorney who issued his subpoena to tell him he was incapacitated and could not attend. Henderson said he was out of town and did not hear that he had been subpoenaed until after he got back.

Mason was told she had to attend after calling for clarification but still did not show up. Henderson said he thought the next police chief should decide what, if any, punishment she should face since she’s a department employee and not his appointment.

He did appoint Pitcher and Mertz. Henderson said he would not tolerate their failure to cooperate with the board that oversees all hirings, promotions and discipline in the police department.

Henderson also did not respond to a subpoena to testify at the hearing on eight internal charges filed against Dine. He apologized to merit board members for not being at the hearing and said he would have attended if he had been in town.

He said he would have answered any and all questions and will testify if subpoenaed again.

Henderson said he was out of town during the hearing and was not even aware of the subpoena until after he returned from a conference in Washington on Thursday night.

Henderson had left for the conference Saturday morning, and the subpoena was served about 9 a.m. Monday. He said his office staff had not called him to tell him about the legal order to testify at the hearing.

“They probably knew it here at the city building, but my staff knows that unless it’s something I can deal with or have to deal with, they don’t bother me with those things,” he said. “With the subpoena issue, they probably made a decision, and there’s nothing I can do about it anyway.”

Henderson said he would instruct his staff to immediately notify him about any subpoenas he is served in the future.

He said department heads have managed the city when he’s away, but he’s going to make sure that they notify him about any emergencies in the future. City employees will have to keep him better informed while he’s away in light of the police chief and assistant chief making a deal that he had told them not to make.

Henderson said he was opposed to any deal to drop internal charges against Dine because he thought the merit commission should handle the discipline in public.

“It left a cloud over the department that he was doing something in-house and the public’s not going to know what it is,” he said. “The merit commission is the only one to bring this thing out into the open.”

Henderson said he feared a plea bargain-like arrangement between the chief and Dine’s attorney would hurt public confidence in the police department. He said he worried it would raise questions about whether the officer was getting special treatment after getting into trouble.

“The public is skeptical of what’s happening anyway and what’s happened around in other departments,” he said. “This department is above that, and the merit commission needs to hear that and deal with that. No one then can say there’s a cover-up.”

Henderson said he agreed with the merit board’s decision to conduct its own hearing on the internal charges against Dine because the public would not feel that justice was served if the case were settled in private.

He said the board should make any decision about punishment in a public meeting.

He apologized to two board members after the meeting and told them he would give them the freedom to do their job handling the Dine case

without any interference from him.

He said he did not always agree with what the merit board did but thought the board should be able to do its job with the department's cooperation.

Merit board president Wendy Trietsch said she appreciated the apology. She said she regretted that the board's dispute with Pitcher over the Dine charges made it seem that the board and police department were at odds.

The department and board are supposed to work together, she said.

Best News Coverage With No Deadline Pressure/Category 2

Officers: Discipline selective

Joseph Pete Daily Journal (Franklin)

Five Greenwood police officers say that their bosses have disciplined them selectively, used schedule changes as a form of punishment and made degrading comments.

The officers hired an attorney to send a letter to the Greenwood Police Merit Commission, a civilian board that oversees the discipline, hiring and firing of police officers.

Sgt. Jeffrey McCorkle, Lt. Gary Duvall, officer Jason York, officer Randall Eck and Lt. Robert Dine, who also is a candidate for mayor, said in a letter that they have been singled out for discipline, that they have been deprived of their right to due process and that they have been the subject of demeaning remarks.

Attorney Michael Morken, who has served on the Indianapolis Police Merit Board for 20 years, wrote a letter asking the Greenwood police chief and deputy chief to follow department rules, to stop using schedule changes to discipline officers and to treat all officers fairly.

The letter also calls for a Greenwood Police Merit Commission investigation into disciplinary actions that have been taken.

The commission has opened an investigation into whether discipline in the department is fair and uniform. Merit commission member Paul Bird said the board is taking the letter seriously and wants to ensure that punishments are reasonable and that top supervisors are following department rules.

Greenwood Police Chief Joe Pitcher declined to comment, saying that he hadn't read the letter.

The letter says that officers have faced personal and financial hardships because of short-notice schedule changes, that explanations are not given for the changes and that Pitcher and deputy chief Mike Wright have made unprofessional remarks that included baseless accusations of steroid and alcohol abuse.

Pitcher and Wright broke department rules by making comments such as that an officer had not gone to a real college and by mocking an officer in the presence of others, according to the letter.

The merit board will investigate the grievances that the officers have but likely can do little about the schedule changes, since scheduling is an administrative decision, Bird said.

Greenwood Mayor Charles Henderson said he thought the letter represented the views of a minority of officers in the department.

"Any time, anywhere, you're going to have some people who are disgruntled," he said. "And it changes. The people who were happy last year might be disgruntled this year. Some people are always going to be disgruntled."

Three of the officers said they could not comment because of a rule imposed by the chief that bars officers from commenting to the media, but Pitcher did not return messages about whether he had such a rule. Dine and Duvall did not return multiple messages over the course of two weeks.

Wright said he thought the letter was political and related to the citywide election that will take place next year. Dine has announced that he will challenge Henderson for the Republican nomination for mayor. "I've never heard of police officers doing anything like this before," Wright said. "Frankly, I find it a little unbelievable."

Wright said he might have made at least one of the comments attributed to him in the letter, but he said he didn't think that schedule changes were used as discipline.

The letter says that:

- Pitcher and Wright have singled certain officers out for discipline that they don't deserve.
- The department regularly uses shift changes to discipline officers, causing them personal and financial hardship.
- Pitcher mocked an officer in the presence of others, questioning whether he had any intelligence and saying that he didn't attend a real college.
- The deputy chief accused an officer of using steroids, said the nosebleeds that officer was getting were a sign of alcoholism and said that

another officer was lazy.

‘Felt belittled’

Morken wrote that Pitcher violated department rules when he criticized Eck’s use of a Taser in front of another officer, a civilian employee and a merit board member.

Pitcher asked Eck if he had any intelligence and any college education, according to the letter.

When Eck said he had attended Vincennes University, Pitcher said that’s not a real college, according to the letter.

“Officer Eck felt belittled in the presence of these persons,” Morken wrote.

Pitcher broke department rules that ban officers censuring subordinates in the presence of others, from discourteous treatment to a fellow officer, from holding up a fellow officer to ridicule and from degrading a fellow officer, Morken wrote.

Wright also made comments that violated a department rule that bans discourteous treatment toward fellow officers, repeating falsehoods or rumors about fellow officers and ridiculing or otherwise disrespecting fellow officers, Morken wrote.

Wright told another supervisor that McCorkle was having nosebleeds because of steroid use and told another officer that bad alcoholics get nosebleeds while talking about McCorkle, according to the letter.

McCorkle had had a medical issue involving a burst blood vessel in his nostril, according to the letter. He has never used steroids and is not an alcoholic, according to the letter.

Wright said he never said McCorkle used steroids but believed he might have said that alcoholics get nosebleeds while talking to a supervisor about McCorkle.

When asked if he thought that was inappropriate, Wright said he had been concerned about recurring nosebleeds that forced McCorkle to go off duty to seek medical attention.

The letter said that Wright also broke a policy that prohibits demeaning comments by telling another officer that Duvall was “a lazy (expletive) and a “load,” police department slang for an officer who isn’t pulling his weight.

Wright said he did not recall whether he ever made that comment.

Rules requiring officers to treat fellow officers with respect apply to the entire department, including the chief and deputy chief, Morken wrote.

Up to the mayor

Pitcher and Wright have to follow department rules but aren’t disciplined by the merit board, which punishes other officers for breaking department rules, Bird said.

Under city rules, only the mayor can discipline the chief, and the commission traditionally has left discipline of the deputy chief up to the mayor since he makes that appointment, Bird said. City rules state that only the mayor can discipline the chief or associate chief but make no mention of the deputy chief, who is a merit officer.

Henderson said the commission or officers would have to give him more information about what was said before he would decide whether to investigate if Pitcher or Wright should be punished.

He said he doubted he would do anything about the frequent schedule changes that officers complained about since he believes that scheduling is an administrative issue.

Morken wrote that Pitcher and his staff have been using shift changes as a way to discipline employees without ensuring that they get due process. One officer has been forced to adjust schedules six times in the past three years.

Officers cannot protest the fairness of schedule changes to the merit commission the way they can with suspensions or written reprimands, since changing an officer’s hours is not an official form of discipline, Morken wrote.

Schedule changes have been regular over the past few years because the department has had several officers on disability and has had trouble making sure enough are working at any given time, Wright said.

Officers typically get reassigned to different shifts based on their productivity, or the number of tickets they write or arrests they make, he said. The department reviews tickets, warnings and arrests regularly to make sure that the officers are out doing something while on duty and uses that data to set schedules.

Wright said he did not use shift changes to discipline officers but also said that conduct was a factor when deciding who would work day, evening or night shifts.

Officers don’t get any accommodations for working at particular times unless they’re enrolled in college, Wright said.

Trustees pile up poor relief cash
Dave Kurtz & Matt Getts
The News-Sun (Kendallville)

Craig Bassett knows the township trustee system in Indiana needs changes.

Bassett, the trustee for Union Township in Auburn, is among a dozen area trustees who have built up huge surpluses in their accounts for assistance, commonly known as poor relief.

Over decades of spending conservatively, dating back long before Bassett took office in the last decade, Union Township has built up \$133,315 in its assistance account. Bassett gave out \$7,582 in assistance last year despite near record unemployment.

Across the four counties of northeast Indiana, 51 townships are holding \$1.56 million surplus in their poor relief accounts, nearly three times the \$553,124 they gave to recipients in 2010.

Much of the surplus has concentrated in the bank accounts of a few townships. Bassett's is one of 12 townships holding enough in reserve to give assistance for 10 years or longer – at present rates – without collecting another dime in taxes.

Bassett said the township finance system encourages trustees to collect as much in tax revenue as possible, even though they don't expect to spend it.

"If we do not take our maximum tax levy, and we reduce that tax levy, we are told we cannot get it back," Bassett said. "In a perfect world, allow me to not take any taxes for a period, so that I may spend down my excess."

In a partial answer to Bassett's dilemma, a new state law will allow trustees to cut their tax income for one year without losing income permanently.

Bassett said he thinks one year's worth of assistance is enough to hold in reserve. He now has enough for 17 years.

Barbara Donley, trustee for Perry Township in Ligonier, finds herself in a similar predicament. At the end of 2010, Perry Township was sitting on a balance of \$156,021 in poor relief funds. Last year, Donley handed out \$9,738 in assistance.

Donley said she told the state Department of Local Government Finance she wanted to reduce her assistance budget.

"I have asked," Donley said. "They tell us not to do that. They tell us not to lower our budget."

While some trustees have more assistance cash than they can spend, former Keyser Township Trustee Sue Blotkamp said she had problems getting enough poor relief money for her township in Garrett.

For her first two years in office, "I kept saying, 'Why am I not getting any poor relief money?'" Blotkamp said.

Each year, Blotkamp submitted a budget proposal that included a line item request for poor relief. In the first two years, the Department of Local Government Finance returned a budget with no money for assistance.

In her final two years, Blotkamp did receive poor relief funding. In 2010, the township was allowed to collect \$3,744. Drawing on reserves, Blotkamp spent \$10,778. The year ended with Keyser Township carrying a \$2,907 balance. Frustrated, Blotkamp did not run for re-election in 2010.

Mary Jane Michalak, spokeswoman for the Department of Local Government Finance, said the agency does not tell trustees how to spend their money, but serves more as an advisor on state laws.

"We kind of function as a bank," Michalak said. "The bank will tell you if the money is there, not if you should buy a car or groceries" with it.

"Poor assistance is something that is hard to budget for. You do not know who is going to walk in with a need and how much it is going to cost to help," Bassett said.

In Union Township, Bassett provides emergency cash for basic needs such as housing, food and medical care. As the most immediate source of help for many people, he tries to handle all requests within 72 hours.

"We're able to help people quickly, but we also have the pulse of the community," Bassett said about the wisdom of using trustees for public assistance.

Most trustees try to limit assistance to once a year for any individual, Bassett said. He often pays partial rent or utilities and helps people work out a financial plan. He directs people toward help offered by other agencies such as food pantries and Community Action of Northeast Indiana.

"We want people to help themselves, too. ... We are not longterm assistance," Bassett said. "But we don't turn anyone away."

Bassett said he tries to follow the advice of Auburn attorney John Martin Smith, who told him when he was first elected: "Always be compassionate to people needing assistance and be conservative with the taxpayers' money."

Despite Bassett's prescription, only 15 of the 51 townships in northeast Indiana are holding fewer than two years worth of poor assistance in reserve. Bassett said he believes that needs to change.

"If we can get our tax levy to be suspended or lowered for a period of time with the ability to reinstate it, then we can spend it down and get it to a livable level," he said.

The state is starting to make modest cuts to the amount Bassett can collect in taxes for assistance. Union Township collected about \$12,000 in most years until 2006, but the amount has declined gradually to \$8,914 last year.

“One thing that needs to be said is: Township trustees are not bad people,” Bassett said.

“We’re playing by the rules, but we’re getting a black eye playing by the rules,” he added.

“It’s a good job, it’s fun and it’s fulfilling,” Bassett said about serving as a trustee. “We do take pride in it. But there’s definitely room for reform – and I’d like to be part of it.

Best General Commentary/Category 4

Seeing a ghost in downtown

Michael Wanbaugh The Goshen News

One of the great things about having grown up in Goshen is that many of the memories I cherish are from simpler times.

At least for me they were simpler.

We had recessions back then like we do now. But to a 10-year-old boy with a gap-toothed smile and pack of friends pedaling BMX bikes down Goshen’s back alleys, the big problems in the world seemed as distant as the moon.

The world was flat to us back then. The far-reaching edges seemed to be called College Avenue or Bashor Road. A trip to the Concord Mall felt like an expedition as my friends and I would explore such distant civilizations as Super- Sounds and Pitstop U.S.A.

But with the exception of AC/DC cassettes and Bermuda shorts, most everything else we needed was within a short bike ride – Shanklin pool, a friend’s house, The Chief.

Having been away for nearly two decades before returning to Goshen a couple years ago to work at *The Goshen News*, nearly any venture outside the office pokes another memory loose.

Early last week I was walking from my office to the Goshen Chamber of Commerce building just a couple blocks south along Main Street. It remains a pleasant walk, even in the depths of winter.

As I was about to stroll under the iconic bulb-lined marquee of the old Goshen Theater, I noticed it once again had movie listings attached to it.

“Ghostbusters?” Really?

I kept walking but could feel nostalgia creeping up on my heels. On my return walk, I glanced up again, just to confirm what I read moments earlier.

Yep, “Ghostbusters,” starring Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, would be playing on Jan. 21 as part of an ’80s movie night. Also playing was “The Goonies” and “Back to the Future.”

I smiled. “Ghostbusters,” now a classic comedy about paranormal New York City, was released in the summer of 1984, the summer I turned 13. I remember seeing the previews on television (we had a total of about 12 channels back then, which I was responsible for changing on our TV when the adults didn’t feel like moving from the couch) and wanting to see it as badly as anything.

NEARLY EACH Saturday I would ride my Schwinn Phantom downtown and pass under that theater marquee on my way to the Olympia or some other place. Each time that summer I would glance up hoping to see “Ghostbusters” in big block letters.

I never would.

As the weeks dragged on I remember reading “Footloose,” on the marquee, “Romancing the Stone,” Muppets Take Manhattan,” and even “The Natural.” I eventually made the trip to either Dunlap or perhaps South Bend (truly deep space at the time) to see “Ghostbusters.” I loved it. It was classic junior high humor at its finest.

Finally, on a warm, Indian summer-like Saturday in late October, 1984, I was riding my bike downtown and the theater marquee caught my eye, just as it did last week.

“GHOSTBUSTERS,” it read, followed by a 7 and a 9:15 and a PG. On Saturday there was also a matinee at 2:30. I made sure I was there. Over the next two weekends (even four months after its original release “Ghostbusters” was held over for a second weekend), I would see “Ghostbusters” three or four more times at the Goshen Theater.

I still remember quotes from movie:

“Where do these stairs go?” “They go up.”

“That’s a big Twinkie.”

And a line that has gotten funnier over the years, “Everybody has three mortgages these days.”

Even though the movies were essentially second-run and the popcorn seemed stale, for a kid growing up here in the mid-1980s, the Goshen Theater was a great place to be. It wasn’t about the movies as much as it was the scene. Why else would I remember that I saw “Cannonball Run.” I remember because of where I saw it.

And the Goshen Theater had charm ... and a balcony. How many mega-plex theaters can boast that these days? Just how many first kisses were stolen up there? I know of at least one.

A few months after “Ghostbusters” finally came to Goshen, I met my friends Ian and Kris at the Theater for a midnight showing of “The Rocky Horror Picture Show.” I had to really talk my mom into letting me go. “Rocky Horror” was ... well ... we’ll just say an interactive film. Seeing it was one the best times I’ve ever had at a movie. It really does feel cool to throw toast at the screen. I haven’t done it since.

THE GOSHEN THEATER closed a year or two later. I felt like we had lost something special and that nobody else really seemed to notice. Over the next couple years the popular hangout spots for teens became Eddie’s Club Soda (sad) and Burger King for some bizarre reason (sadder still).

Seeing that marquee last week was like seeing a smiling ghost. I immediately felt younger as I was kicked back to a time in which I remember Goshen best. And for a second, I was standing in front of the coolest place in town once again. Michael Wanbaugh is managing editor of The Goshen New.

Best Editorial Writer/Category 5

Voter ID requirement is reasonable

Bob Bridge
Times-Mail (Bedford)

Since the first of the year, lawmakers in Alabama, Kansas, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee and Wisconsin have passed legislation to require voters to present photo identification prior to casting ballots.

Similar bills in New Hampshire and North Carolina await gubernatorial approval. In fact, more than 30 states are considering new voter ID statutes this year.

This trend troubles David Axelrod, a prominent playmaker in President Obama’s re-election campaign. He described the new legislation as a “calculated strategy” by Republicans to suppress voter turnout.

“I find it ironic at a time when all over the world people are struggling, marching, even dying, for the right to vote and cast meaningful votes that anybody in this country would be working to limit the franchise,” Axelrod told USA Today.

Indiana was among the first states to pass a voter ID law. The intention was not to suppress voter turnout but to ensure the integrity of the process.

At a time when so many citizens have become disenfranchised and disillusioned with government, steps to protect the validity of the ballot box make sense.

It is hardly unreasonable to require citizens of a democracy to present IDs when voting.

Citizens are afforded ample time to acquire basic identification.

Opponents of the legislation predict turnout will suffer, especially among students, minorities and the poor, who tend to side with Democrats.

But a show of ID already is required to drive, obtain a passport, cash a check, or purchase tobacco or alcohol.

The Bureau of Motor Vehicles offers photo ID to any citizen who cannot afford one. And, a citizen arriving at the polls without ID can vote via a provisional ballot and take up to 10 days to present proof of identity.

The ID laws inspire confidence in the system, and it is imperative citizens believe their votes count. Without credibility in the process, elections are rendered meaningless.

Best Business/Economic News Coverage/Category 6

Flinn project steps ahead

Maribeth Vaughn
Chronicle-Tribune (Marion)

Incentives for a new senior facility in central Marion moved one step further Tuesday, after the public questioned the stability of the new project and why tax dollars are on the table if it fails.

The Marion City Council unanimously approved a second reading of incentives for Mainstreet, a company that plans to build a new senior care facility at the former Emily Flinn nursing home site on 14th Street. A final reading will likely be held at the next council meeting.

The public hearing yielded several questions about how stable Mainstreet is, what the new facility would do to existing nursing homes, and what the entire project means for taxpayers.

“We as taxpayers could be on the hook for the out-standing debt,” said resident Fred Troxell.

Troxell said he opposed the city using manpower and equipment to help the company demolish the Flinn building. He also doesn’t think the community needs another nursing home, as existing ones are below capacity.

“It’s not fair to help somebody start a new business when it’s hurting part of them that are already here,” he said.

Citizen Steve Henderson asked why the city is becoming a lending institution, why it’s acting as a contractor in demolishing properties, and how much political pressure there is to approve the project.

Marion Director of Development Darren Reese said the city helped in the demolition as part of the incentive package, and the city works with anybody who wants to bring in new jobs and growth to the community.

He said with the economy and banking industry, the city needs to help companies in bonding.

“We’ll use every tool we’ve got available to us to support a project,” Reese said.

Mainstreet, owned by Zeke Turner, son of Rep. P. Eric Turner, R-Cicero, hopes to build a \$13 million facility. The Taxable Increment Financing (TIF) district incentives would help pay for improvements to center city, including new street lights, a turnabout and a senior park near the facility.

The proposed 100-bed facility would be state-of-the-art, company officials say, as it would provide private rooms, shopping and restaurants. The city is offering to assist in bonding the project. If it fails, County Option Income Tax dollars would pay back the bonds from Regions Bank.

But that’s not likely to happen, attorney Bruce Donaldson indicated Tuesday night. Donaldson outlined several “levels of protection” to where if the project fails, funds from other entities would pay off the debt before COIT coffers are reached.

He said those include the TIF dollars, operator Covenant Care and its parent company, Mainstreet and its parent groups, and annual fees that the company would pay the city for the project.

“It’s extraordinarily unlikely there will ever be a call on this COIT,” Donaldson said.

Still, members of the public questioned it. Greg Kitts, a CPA who has also worked in the banking industry, said the company can’t get a loan otherwise, and the project is risky.

“They’re here because no bank would approve the loan,” he said. “They’re here because no third party would pick up the bonds.”

Neighbors, however, supported the project. The Rev. Clarence Hand of Faith Apostolic Church, 902 W. 16th St., said he’s glad to see new apartments go up in the neighborhood, and he hopes to see more improvements continue.

“To see Emily Flinn torn down and hauled off is a great thing,” he said.

Neighbor Joan Bowman said she doesn’t understand why when new projects come to central Marion, there seems to be opposition. She said the Flinn building has been an eyesore, and she appreciates the city stepping in.

“You wouldn’t want nothing like this in your neighborhood,” Bowman said. “I don’t know what the problem is with center city that we can’t get the things we want and need.”

How the new building would impact current facilities was also questioned. Gary Ott, owner of two nursing homes in Marion, said a nursing facility in the city will not survive if another one opens up. Councilman Steve Wright questioned him, to where Ott said his facilities would probably have to offer more private rooms to compete and prices could also go down.

Wright said he wondered if Marion was “behind the times” on nursing homes, and said seniors leaving the city to go to more upscale nursing homes could stay.

“We talk about the brain drain; I think we’ve got a health care drain in Marion,” Wright said.

Mayor Wayne Seybold said because the proposed facility would have a \$4 million annual payroll, that multiplies sevenfold, so the economic impact is strong for the community. Both he and Reese said they strive to keep politics away from decisions, and they want to assist any company that wants to locate in the city.

“I’ve heard several times if this project had different names on it, we’d all be rejoicing over it,” Reese said.

Best Short Feature Story/Category 8

Unique bond: ‘Yellow Man’ starts kids’ day with smile

Ryan Trares Daily Journal (Franklin)

As soon as they spot the yellow sweatshirt in the distance, the students on Bus No. 89 start waving frantically.

“There’s the Yellow Man,” they yell as they look out the windows and try to catch his daily hat tip.

The man is Center Grove area resident Vaughn Moore, out taking his daily walk. Wearing a yellow sweatshirt and bright, orange hat, he looks up at the bus, smiles and waves.

Casually, he tips his hat to the children.

From a simple friendly gesture, Moore and the students on Bus No. 89 have forged a bond this school year. The children look forward to passing the 76-year-old Moore every day before school starts, peering out the windows in the hope of spotting him.

When they stopped one day in early December and gave him a Christmas card, he was overwhelmed.

“I was glad I opened it after they had gone, because I didn’t want them seeing a grown man cry,” Moore said.

From his house on Travis Road, Moore regularly walks between four and eight miles each day.

He started five or six years ago simply as a way to get exercise. After having surgery this year to have two stents implanted in his heart, his cardiologist insisted he keep it up.

So every day in the summer, and when weather permits in the winter, Moore is out on the White River Township roads.

As a friendly gesture, he started waving to people.

“A lot of these people don’t know my name, and I don’t know theirs, but I see them about every day,” he said. “We started exchanging waves and grins, and it went from there. It’s just what people in the country do.”

Jennifer Plummer drives bus No. 89 and takes about 10 students to Maple Grove Elementary School every school day.

Plummer has been driving the route for the past two years. Almost immediately, she noticed the friendly walker who waved at every vehicle that passed by.

“Usually it’s just a smile and a wave, a tip of the hat and we’re gone,” she said. “He goes on and we go on, but you feel better once you’ve passed him.”

On Wednesday morning, the students on Bus No. 89 hoped they would get to see their Yellow Man one last time before Christmas break.

Most sat quietly in their seats, looking out the window or nodding to the carols playing on the bus radio. But when they sensed that they were getting close to their yellow-clad friend, they strained to see where he might be.

Jack Pringle, 7, smiled as he talked to Pat Blankenship, the school bus aide sitting next to him.

“I had to take my hat, so I can tip it at the Yellow Man,” Jack said, proudly displaying a stocking cap in his hands. Other students were ready as well.

Sydney Zenor, 8, leaned close to the window to see Moore outside. Jeff McAtee, 5, made sure his hat was in hand by the time they passed by.

Jeff’s mother, Cindy McAtee, said that he talked about the Yellow Man when he came home, comparing him to one of his favorite storybook characters.

“We’re always reading ‘Curious George’ books, so he’s made that connection with the Man in the Yellow Hat character,” she said.

On the occasions when Moore is not outside, the children are disappointed, Plummer said. Letting their imagination wander, they picture where he might be. Sometimes he’s vacationing in Florida. Other times he’s visiting his family across the country.

Around the bus garage at Center Grove, Plummer started hearing how more and more people noticed Moore. One woman mentioned it would be nice to leave him a note, letting him know how much his waving meant to the kids. Plummer decided that Christmas was the perfect time to do that.

Picking out a card that read, “Because you’re very special to all of us,” she signed the students’ names and included a drawing of their bus.

She also penned a personal message to Moore, saying, “You’ve been a very important part of our school year. We look forward to your smile and the tip of your hat. Please know you’ve touched the kids. We love our Yellow Man.” When Plummer handed it to Moore on her route one day, he was moved to tears.

“For everybody to take the time and effort to do that, for somebody they just see now and then, really touched me,” he said.

Moore was moved to thank the kids on Bus No. 89 personally. He wrote his own letter, walked two miles to the Center Grove administrative building and left it for Plummer to find.

“Your act really fulfilled the spirit of Christmas – giving happiness to others,” he wrote. “You filled my stocking to overflowing.”

The exchange illustrates that something as simple as a smile or wave can mean so much.

Plummer challenged her kids and others to take the time to make others feel good. When they are on the receiving end of a nice gesture, say, “Thank you.”

Moore echoes those sentiments.

“My mother always told me a wave or a hug or a gesture like that means more to the living than all of the flowers you can buy the dead,” he said. “Let people know you appreciate. You don’t know how much it can overwhelm them.”

Best Profile Feature/Category 9

Director of values

Kasey Husk

The Herald (Jasper)

Her arms tucked behind her back, Pat Koch looks like a general surveying her troops before battle as she marches the length of the gate at Holiday World & Splashin’ Safari’s front entrance, where eager patrons wait for the park to open in just a few moments.

But while Koch – who celebrates 50 years with the park this year – rallies her forces to meet the park’s “unbelievably high standards,” she herself is not above taking on tasks like sweeping the park, cleaning bathrooms and even mopping up vomit.

That’s something that comes as a surprise to many guests, but says Pat: “To me, it’s strange. ... Why wouldn’t I clean it if it needs cleaning?”

After half a century, it’s an attitude that doesn’t seem likely to change for the 78-year-old, who typically works about 12 hours each day. Since she married the owner of Holiday World, then called Santa Claus Land, in 1960, Pat has been one of the park’s biggest cheerleaders, its hardest workers and, above all, its moral compass. Her title today, director of values, says it all.

“She gets things done; she’s a taskmaster for sure,” says Samantha Ramsey, the park’s director of training and development and one of Pat’s protégés. “She sees everything. I really don’t know how she sees so much, but she does; she sees all the little things that other people don’t see.

“She is the glue that holds this place together.”

Even after the tragic death of her eldest son, Will, of diabetes-related complications at age 48 on June 13, Pat was back at the park the next day.

“I thought the family, the employees and the guests needed to see me to know the park was going to go on,” she says. “It was kind of an immediate response of that’s the only thing I could do. ... It was hard for me, but I knew it was what I should do and what Will would want me to do, and it kept me busy.”

In many ways, it seems perfectly natural today that the former Patricia Yellig should have married the son of Santa Claus Land founder Louis J. Koch and in time become a pillar of the Santa Claus community like her parents and her in-laws.

After all, the Mariah Hill native was the daughter of the man who was Santa Claus for generations of children visiting the town, the iconic “Santa Jim” Yellig.

The man that would become her husband, Wil-liam “Bill” Koch, meanwhile, was a close friend of Pat’s family as she was growing up, thanks to her father’s relationship with the park.

She remembers one business trip to a convention in Miami, when she was about 16 years old and Bill would have been about 33.

“I can remember this like it was yesterday, sitting in the lobby of that hotel ... and Bill Koch coming up and asking my mother if I could go out with a group of people that night,” she recalls, smiling at the memory. “And I’m 17 years younger than him, and my mom thought that was just perfectly OK.”

After high school Pat’s life seemed to be on an entirely different course. A devout Catholic, Pat had decided to become a nun, and left her family to become a sister in a nursing order, the Daughters of Charity. She lived and worked as a nurse in St. Louis for years and perhaps would have remained if not for her father falling seriously ill. After being forbidden to take off to care of him – standard practice for the order at the time – she decided to leave the sisters and return home.

It was Bill that her family sent to pick her up from a train station in Washington on a snowy February night in 1960. Their friendship and romance blossomed from there, even after Pat returned to St. Louis for several months to work as a nurse at a veterans hospital and “learn the world and take care of myself and learn how to live.”

The son of the man who founded Santa Claus Land and the daughter of Santa Claus married in December 1960, less than a year after she’d left St. Louis. She was 29 years old, and he was 45. It was the first marriage for both of them and, as Pat so succinctly sums it up, “it worked.”

The marriage, which by all accounts was a very happy one, produced five children between 1961 and 1967. The eldest, the late Will, was the president of Holiday World, a title Pat’s younger son, Dan, who works as an attorney in Florida, has now taken over. Her son Philip lives in Santa Claus and runs the Lake Rudolph Campground and The Christmas Store, which opened last year. Daughter Kristi Koch-George, a neurologist, lives in Indianapolis and daughter Natalie lives just across a pond from Pat in Fulda and recently started a dairy farm.

Pat says that in her life she is the most proud that her children are all working and contributing to their communities in a positive way.

After Bill's death in September 2001, Pat moved into his office at the theme park but left most of his personal effects, including photos, awards and even his calendar from 2001, as they were. Still there have been additions, including photos of the couple's now 13 grandchildren and Pat's newest diploma. At age 70, she completed a master's degree in pastoral ministry. The former nun has always been interested in theology and spirituality, and wanted to learn more, she says.

On a typical workday, Pat arrives at the park before 8 a.m. and reads the newspaper in her office and looks over the day's projected attendance numbers. Shortly thereafter, she heads outside to begin her rounds for the day and to "do my puddle," she says mysteriously.

The meaning becomes clear as she grabs a broom and starts vigorously attacking a puddle that forms every day in front of one of the entrances of Kringle's Kafe as the walkways are washed down. If it is not tended to, the offending water, known formally as "Mrs. Koch's Puddle," invariably causes patrons to track dirt and mud all over the white floor of the café.

A puddle is no match for the will of a woman who in 1997 took over the management of the newly formed sweeping department for two years because she did not feel the park was clean enough. She sweeps the water away each day, sometimes more than once.

"It's like it's after me, it keeps coming back," she jokes.

After the morning ritual is complete, Pat heads into the café's kitchen to check on preparations there and sweeps the café a bit more where dirt has been tracked in. Then she heads out into the park.

"Sometime I fuss, and sometimes I'm nice," she says of her morning inspection of sorts.

Nothing escapes her eagle eyes as she walks through the park, stopping frequently to pick up any stray debris that has escaped an earlier sweeper's attention. She pops into every women's bathroom she passes on her way through the park, picking up flecks of wet toilet paper and flushing toilets that were left unflushed. There's no doubt that she has played an enormous role in the park being consistently ranked as one of the cleanest in the nation.

She expects the same behaviors from her employees, as those in the sweeping department were trained by her during her two-year stint as the department head. During that time, she always wore an apron and carried a broom and dustpan, like the rest of her employees, according to Ramsey, who started working for the sweeping department in 1997 at age 14. The fact that Pat did the same work that the employees did had a big effect on her, Ramsey says.

"She has such a strong work ethic," agrees employee Brandon Berg, who has known Pat for 22 years and, like Ramsey, says she's like a second mom to him. "She would never ask anybody to do anything that she wouldn't do herself. She does it all."

Before 9:30 a.m., Pat is always at the front gates waiting to welcome people to the park as they enter. She'll stand outside and welcome the visitors, as well as answer their questions and direct them out of the path of the shuttle buses.

"I always say, 'I have a degree in nursing and ministry, and I'm out here directing traffic,'" she quips. Invariably, people come up to her and say hello, request a photo or, most amusingly, point and say "You're the lady on TV!" She and Will have always been in the simple commercials filmed in-house at the park. "Oh, it's awful. It's the worst to see yourself on TV," Pat says after filming of one of the commercials earlier this summer. "It's like pictures. (You think,) 'Oh, gracious, do I look like that?'"

Pat recognizes many patrons from years past, and oftentimes they walk away with a hug or, in the case of children, a kiss on the head. On a recent Wednesday, she received many condolences on the loss of her son, though the number of patrons offering sympathy is slowly tapering off, she says. Immediately after Will's death, she was bombarded with sympathy from patrons, which she appreciated but she had to maintain a stoic façade to keep from breaking down.

The sadness that Pat carries since Will's death is obvious; her frequent laughter is less quick and less joyful, though her spunky personality remains. She believes that she's become less patient with people in recent weeks but says she knows that it will pass in time. Meanwhile, she plans for the future of Holiday World with son Dan, intends to groom Will's three children for roles in the park and, above all, looks to God to sustain her in her grief.

"It's been pretty awful, but you have to have faith," she told one man who stopped to offer his condolences late last month. "And I have faith."

Later, Pat walks around the park again to check on bathrooms, make sure people are dressed appropriately and keep an eye out for trash. She once wore a pedometer and learned that she'd walked 14 miles during the course of that workday. On average, though, she puts the numbers at closer to nine miles a day.

"Part of it is my German genetics, I'm a very hard worker and I think I don't even think about it being long hours or hard work," she says of how she continues to work such long hours. "Part of it is caring so much and wanting it to be so perfect, and feeling that if my presence helps make it that way, then it's worth the time."

As the lunch rush hits, Pat heads over to Kringle's Kafe to give her employees – most of whom are teenagers or college students – a hand with whatever they need. She starts making hot dogs, while a couple other employees get busy creating allergen-free lunch items in a part of the kitchen designed to help the parents of children with serious allergies. The allergy-free meals were an idea born from the fact that one of her young granddaughters has serious food allergies, and as a way of continuing to make the park even more family friendly.

Pat usually stays at work until at least 6 in the evening, though on this particular day she plans to leave “early,” at 5 p.m., to have dinner with three close friends.

On other days, and in the off-season, she has plenty more to keep her busy. Her father started helping answer letters to Santa that came to the Santa Claus Post Office in 1930, and she started answering them by age 11. Today, she continues the tradition by heading up a group of volunteers called Santa’s Helpers, who answer the thousands of letters that arrive each holiday season.

Volunteers meet in the Santa Claus Museum, another brainchild of Pat’s brought to fruition about four years ago. The museum contains memorabilia that Pat had since her parents, in-laws and husband died, as well as other items tracked down or donated over the years. It even includes a recording on her father’s distinctive Santa laugh, something that still has the ability to move her to tears.

“One day at (a Holiday World employee training event), I asked how many people had sat on Santa Jim’s lap. . . . I was surprised there was only four or five,” she says of one reason why she started the museum. “I thought, they aren’t going to remember him, and that would be awful.”

In another effort to preserve the story of Santa Claus, Pat also helped write a book about the history of the town. Meanwhile, she is also working on her own biography and often gives motivational speeches to groups.

Pat has no intention of retiring, she says, unless she is asked to do so. Based on the attitudes of the people around her, it seems unlikely they’d let her leave, much less encourage her to. But if she decides to give up her work, she would not be idle.

“If I would retire, I would find a place to go to school to get a doctorate,” she says. “I’ve always wanted a doctorate and I love to study. I’d love to be with people who were studying philosophy, theology and that sort of thing.”

Best In-Depth Feature or Feature Package/Category 10

The problem with pills

Matt Thacker
The News & Tribune
(Jeffersonville)

At any given time, there are about 200 people staying at the Henryville Correctional Facility, a minimum security prison for the Indiana Department of Correction located off Winding Road.

The inmates are there for various offenses, all non-violent crimes and mostly class C felonies or below. There is one thing that almost every inmate who walks through those doors has in common.

“Almost all of them (are addicts). I would say everyone here has struggled with addiction at some point in their life,” said Anne Terwilliger, substance abuse coordinator for the prison.

The Henryville facility is not unique in that regard. Throughout the Department of Correction, it is estimated that more than 90 percent are drug addicts.

Sentencing reform was one of the most hotly debated topics during Indiana’s last legislative session with lawmakers seeking to reduce sentences for non-violent drug offenses.

Drugs have taken a toll on the state’s prisons but also on other services. A 2009 study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse found that substance abuse and addiction cost federal, state and local governments at least \$467.7 billion in 2005 alone.

While drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine receive a lot of the attention and the harshest sentences, the non-medical use or abuse of prescription drugs has become the fastest-growing drug problem in America, according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Clark County Deputy Prosecutor Jake Elder, who handles drug cases, said pills are found during almost every drug case.

It’s almost like a secondary charge, Elder said.

“I would say 75 to 80 percent of all cases I handle, whether it be meth or cocaine, also had some sort of (prescription drug).”

According to the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, about 52 million Americans ages 12 or older, or 20.8 percent of that population, reported non-medical use of any psychotherapeutic at some point in their lifetimes.

The problem is that prescription medications are so readily available. Some doctors are better than others at determining whether a person really needs medication, Elder said.

“Anyone can walk into a doctor’s office with a complaint of pain and get medication,” Elder said.

Every day in Clark County Superior Court No. 2, Elder sees defendants who have had their lives changed drastically by addiction.

One example is 51-year-old Brenda S. Hanna. She was sentenced April 26 to three years in prison after a jury found her guilty of class D felony possession of a narcotic drug.

Hanna looks more like a typical grandmother than someone whose rap sheet includes 21 convictions since 1997, but hers does. All are for misdemeanors and class D felonies, mostly theft and conversion.

During her sentencing hearing, Hanna admitted she has been addicted to opiates since she was 26 years old. She said all of the times she stole it was to support her addiction.

“Fifteen years ago, heroin wasn’t on the streets of Clark County, but it’s back now,” Judge Jerry Jacobi said at the hearing.

Elder said it is becoming more common for people to move from prescription medication to heroin because it is much cheaper.

Hanna’s attorney, Mitch Harlan, said drug addiction is a “scourge in society.”

“It impacts relationships with spouses and parents and children,” Harlan said. “(Hanna’s) biggest disappointment is that she disappointed her family. Her situation is probably emblematic of what we see so often.”

Harlan said many of the clients he represents are nice, intelligent people who started taking prescription medication or street drugs and turn to harder drugs and crime to support the addiction.

“A lot of prescription pill cases come from valid reasons, but then it gets out of hand,” Elder said.

In 2009, the Clark County Prosecutor’s Office filed 1,868 felony cases, and 446 were drug cases. Of those, 125 involved hydrocodone, 93 involved Xanax and 75 oxycodone.

More cases in Clark County involve hydrocodone than any other drug except marijuana. Prescription drugs are also the most abused drugs, other than marijuana, among youth.

An Indiana Prevention Resource Center survey found that 3.5 percent of 12th graders and 4.3 percent of 10th graders had abused prescription medication in the past month. The same survey found 5.8 percent of 12th graders and 4.6 percent of 10th graders had abused prescription pain killers.

Elder said there have been reports of “pill parties” for juveniles. Teenagers find medication in their parents’ medicine cabinets and swap pills with others.

The Department of Correction has recently started placing more emphasis on rehabilitation programs, according to Darwin Groves, administrative assistant in charge of programs at Henryville.

Experts all agree there is no easy answer to fixing the problem of drug addiction.

More drug take-back days are being scheduled, in which people can drop off expired or unneeded medication. Elder said educating doctors is also important.

Another component is treatment. Prosecutors and judges are also working to find treatment programs as part of plea agreements and sentencing.

In an interview last month, Terwilliger estimated 60 current inmates at Henryville were in substance abuse treatment. She wishes more would take advantage of the program but says they have to want the help.

“My philosophy is that a lot of treatment is superficial. There’s something under-neath,” Terwilliger said.

When addicts start revealing their past, she finds that many have a family history of addiction, were sexually abused or have been unable to cope with a loss.

“What makes treatment successful is the therapist-patient relationship,” Terwilliger said. “Getting them to open up is the most important thing.”

Andrew Tesch, 42, of Pekin, served time at Henryville until January after he was convicted in October 2009 of robbery in Floyd County.

Tesch said Terwilliger’s belief in him turned his life around, and he is now preparing to study law.

“That’s what it took, someone believing in me. That’s what made me decide I had to do the right thing,” Tesch said.

In tomorrow’s edition, the News and Tribune will continue its examination of prescription drug abuse with a profile Tesch’s former life as a career criminal who would drive back and forth from Kentucky to Mexico to purchase OxyContin and how a new federally funded program is helping him turn his life around.

Best Sports Event Coverage/Category 11

Lady Rebels win track crown

David Campbell

The Madison Courier

They say good things come in small packages. That was never more true than during the Ohio River Valley Conference Track and Field Championships on Thursday.

Southwestern, which entered the meet with just 11 athletes, made the most of its small girls team to edge defending champion Switzerland

County by three points and win the ORVC crown at Madison's Cub Field.

The Lady Rebels set two school records and won seven events to score 110 points and win its fourth ORVC crown but first since finishing off a three-peat in 2007.

"We have only about 11 (athletes), but we all pulled through and we all did our part," said sophomore Morgan Mahoney, who was involved in both school records and won three events in all. "It turned out great."

Switzerland County won just one event but used its depth to score 107 points and nearly nip the Rebels at the line. South Ripley finished a distant third with 80 points.

"There were a lot of really good individual efforts tonight. We set several personal records again tonight," Switzerland girls coach Adam Dennis said. "It is tough to lose by three points, but Southwestern had a really good effort tonight. They did a good job and competed hard."

Rising Sun had little trouble in walking away with the boys crown, compiling 139.5 points to beat runner-up South Ripley's 92. Switzerland County finished third with 91.5, a half-point out of second.

Mahoney joined with Cass Lawson, Savannah Hubbard and Shelby Auxier to win the 400-meter relay in 52.44 and finally break a Southwestern school record they have been chasing all season.

The old mark of 53.06 was set in 2005 by Bethany Schroeder, Brittany Williams, Tina Maloney and Emily Phillips.

"They have been stoked about breaking that (relay) record all year," said Southwestern assistant coach Jay Crawford. "We actually broke it at our only home meet but they were outside of the transition area. So they were pretty excited to get it tonight and put it on the books before sectionals. We're very, very proud."

Mahoney had little time to rest after that effort before she had to toe the line in the 400-meter dash. The lack of break between events didn't effect her as she raced to the win in 1:02.85, beating her own mark of 1:03.00 set last year.

Along with the two record wins, Mahoney also won the 100-meter dash in 13.12 and just missed a fourth victory when South Ripley's Kasey King beat her by less than a second in the 200-meter dash.

Mahoney wasn't the only Rebel to have an outstanding day. Lawson ran away from Switzerland's Bre Hinman to win the 1600-meter run in 6:00.05 and won the long jump at 14 feet, 10 inches. The Rebels also won both throwing events. Bethani Kleopfer took the shot put at 33 feet, one-half inch and Kaitlyn Brooks won the discus with a toss of 99 feet, 4.5 inches.

With only 11 athletes, Southwestern needed to make every point count.

"In every event that we had people in we were in the top four," Crawford said. "Obviously we didn't score in events we had nobody in, but we got points in every other event."

Paige Ridener had Switzerland County's lone win, taking the 3200-meter run in 13:45.44. The Pacers did have top three finishes in eight different events.

Shawe got all 12 of its points from two different athletes. Taylor Miles placed third in the shot put at 29-feet-even and Laura Hesse was third in the 800-meter run in 2:44.41.

Switzerland County's boys got wins in three different events and were in position to win the conference title before Rising Sun made a late surge to pull away.

Clint Swanson won the 200-meter dash in 23.00, Alex Curran took the high jump at 6-feet-even, and Quinn Meyer won the long jump at 18 feet, 5.5 inches.

"I want to congratulate the boys on a great effort tonight, especially Clint Swanson, Alex Curran, and Quinn Meyer for their first place finishes tonight," Switzerland boys coach Sean McGarvey said. "These three individuals along with the rest of the team have had a great season."

Shawe placed sixth as a team with 24 points. The Hilltoppers' top finish came from William Craig who placed second in the long jump at 18 feet, 1.5 inches. Jarrod Rampy was third in the 300-meter hurdles in 49.04.

Southwestern's top finish came courtesy of Michael Perry who was fifth in the 200-meter dash in 24.15.

The meet was the last for all teams involved until the IHSAA Sectionals kick off on Thursday. Both Southwestern and Shawe will compete at Jeffersonville while Switzerland County heads to East Central.

Best Sports News or Feature Coverage/ Category 12

**Humility, guile define Ranger's style
Brendan Perkins
The Herald (Jasper)**

If you didn't know better, you might pass on Nathan Bromm when drafting players for your pickup basketball game. Or you might think it'd be easy to pick a fight with him.

Caleb Williams, in fact, sometimes does. Williams, the husky football lineman, will playfully push Bromm around, trying to toss his pencil-thin Forest Park basketball teammate who's the same height except 65 pounds lighter. It's akin to Gumby trying to fend off He-Man.

Turns out Gumby can push back. Hard.

"He tries to throw his weight around, but I try to show him a thing or two. He might outweigh me, but I'll try to do something to get him off me," Bromm said with a laugh. "I normally try to hold my own."

That's Bromm's gig, which seems to defy convention.

Whatever you'd expect out of Bromm and his wispy 6-foot-4 frame – which Bromm says is 160 pounds before admitting he's fudging it by about five pounds – he delivers a whole lot more.

He's applied a golden touch to all three of his sports as the pacesetter and top scorer for the state's top-ranked Class 2A basketball team, the No. 1 singles player on a tennis squad that marched through an undefeated regular season last fall, and the catcher for a baseball team also rated tops in 2A much of last year.

Not that he'll trumpet any of the deeds, though.

After a big game, he politely backs away from questions dealing with his individual output, instead steering the subject to the big-picture success of a team four wins away from the program's first unbeaten regular season.

When Ranger coach Nate Hawkins told Bromm last season he'd been picked for a high-profile underclassman showcase event at New Castle, Bromm barely registered a reaction. It's not that Bromm's the detached type. He simply operates with a mix of silent guile, confidence and leadership most high-schoolers don't possess.

No one can really explain it or quantify it. But they swear it exists.

"I don't know what it is," Ranger baseball coach Jarred Howard said. "I wish I did know, that way we could teach it to other kids. I wish I had it (when I was younger). Some kids just have it."

"You can definitely tell it's not the same when he's not out (on the floor)," said Grant Welp, part of a trio of three-year starters along with Bromm. "It's more of a confidence for everybody else whenever he's out there. That's how I feel, anyway. He brings so much to the table."

Bromm simultaneously impresses and never overwhelms. In tennis, he lost just four matches this year and usually had the bludgeoning baseliners muttering to themselves as he sliced, dinked, volleyed and kept them on the run. He does only scattered baseball workouts in the off-season with the focus on hoops. Still, Bromm became the first catcher in Howard's 10 seasons who was given the liberty of calling pitches himself. And the point guard guessed that he's dribbled behind his back maybe once during a game "cawhen he was handling the ball, unguarded, near midcourt while running out the clock at the end of a quarter. Bromm is self-described "old-school," and for a guy who doesn't like to discuss himself, it's one quality about which he seems to project pride. Humility and simplicity reign, though, and Bromm guessed his past plays a role in that. Bromm never knew his father, who died in a freak accident when Nathan was 11\da2. On a windy day, Larry Bromm was outside his home checking on a trampoline that had become dislodged from its anchor. A gust flipped the trampoline and it struck the back of his head. He died nine days later.

Nathan's sure he takes some of his demeanor from his mom, Betty, who forged on and raised him and older siblings Curt, Emily and Crystal, who were all 11 or younger when Larry died.

"A lot of it goes as a credit to my mom and how she raised us," Bromm said. "She had a decision to make ' she was young and a tragedy happened in her life, and she decided her kids were the most important thing in her life, and she supported us and provided for us and did everything she could to make our lives as good as they are. I give all the credit to my mom and I love her dearly and just thank her so much for all she's done for me."

Nathan's remained tightly affixed to family ties. His grandparents, Othmar and Irma Bromm, many times drove him to AAU tournaments in Evansville, and these days Nathan drops in on them a few times a week to play cards or just chat. On most snow days, he'll drive from St. Anthony to Ferdinand to see his little nephew, Conner. He turns into a dad, making breakfast and lunch and playing with Conner and his toy Jeep and mini basketball goal.

Bromm said other father figures have assisted through life and basketball. One is Ron Wilgus, the father of Bromm's teammate Kyle Wilgus, who coached the current Ranger seniors from fourth-grade AAU basketball until they reached high school. And through his uncle, Bromm also gained an all-access pass into the Ranger basketball and baseball programs.

Gene Boehman, a former assistant in both programs, invited Nathan to tag along on bus trips for away games "Right when he mentioned it, I was ready to go then and there," Nathan recalled of the first adventure when he was 9 or 10. He sipped on his own Powerade, just like the players.

And he wasn't bashful about mingling with high-schoolers or coaches, fitting with his current nature of confidently carrying a conversation with an older age bracket.

"He'd sit there (on bus rides) and talk, and already then, it seemed like you were talking to an adult. Now, it's not like you're talking to a high

school kid,” Boehman said. “Even when he was really young, he’d just sit there and watch the game. And, of course, a lot of the other little kids are running around.

“Obviously, he took everything in. He was always kind of ahead of his time.”

Boehman is still on call. A few weeks ago, Bromm ‘he of the .824 free throw percentage’ asked Boehman to help him brush up on foul-line shooting. Irritated after missing five straight free throws near the end of a game last month, Bromm shot for an hour before practice as Boehman injected reminders: Focus your eyes on the front of the rim, don’t move your eyes from that target.

Bromm still scored 17 points and splashed his final five free throws in that perceived off-game against South Spencer, and in games where the Rangers need him ‘like his 24-point night in beating Class 3A No. 1 Washington and late flurry against then-unbeaten North Posey’ Bromm’s usually at his best. “He probably wouldn’t admit it,” Hawkins said, “but those situations, he thrives on them.” By now, folks in Ferdinand are accustomed to that. For the uninitiated, Bromm will continue to surprise. “He’s not a real big flashy guy that everybody’s going to go, ‘Wow!’ when it’s over with,” Hawkins said. “But bottom line is, he’s a winner.”

Best Sports Columnist/Category 13

A cheesy high Scarlett Syse Daily Journal (Franklin)

I have been literally beside myself this week. Can’t sleep. Can’t concentrate. Can’t sit still.

Just thinking about the epic game Sunday at Soldier Field makes me break out in one big cheese-eating grin.

My beloved Packers vs. the archrival Bears. The legacy of Vince Lombardi and George Halas. A 90-year-old rivalry. Football the way it’s meant to be played – outdoors on a crappy field in blistering cold weather with wind whipping off Lake Michigan.

All of that and a trip to the Super Bowl on the line.

I cannot contain myself.

I bleed green and gold. I am a proud owner of the Packers, and my husband proposed to me at a Packers game. I had my cheesehead on, and he still asked me to marry him.

As a kid, I can recall only two seasons – when the Packers were playing and when they weren’t.

When they were playing, everything changed.

Cows would wait to get milked on Sunday evenings because we were watching the Pack.

A noontime start meant church services would end a few minutes earlier and that we would get to eat in the living room instead of at the kitchen table.

Green Bay, population 102,000 and by far the smallest NFL market, over-comes many obstacles in just fielding a team.

Try getting a superstar to play in subzero temperatures, in a town with a nightlife the folks of Mayberry would find boring and in a state that considers cows, bowling and the polka cool.

In my mind, the Packers represent a throwback to football’s glory days, when greed was not good and when moving vans hauled away furniture not football teams in search of fancier skyboxes.

Lambeau Field is not yet the Nike Dome. Green and gold have not given way to the hipper teal and orange.

And in Titledown U.S.A., the people own the team.

Green Bay Packers Inc. is nonprofit corporation owned by about 112,000 stockholders. They will never receive a dividend on the initial investment.

Titledown’s latest super-stars seem to understand that connection with the people. When they score a touchdown, they don’t do the dance of joy alone in the end zone. They leap into and onto the fans at Lambeau Field.

I already have started erecting my shrine for Sunday’s game.

My Packer stock certificate. My Packer necklace. My Packer earrings. My Packer sweat shirt. My Packer posters. My 15-year-old box of Wheaties with Vince Lombardi on the cover. My Paul Hornung autograph.

And, of course, at the head of the display is, in all its glory, my wearable wedge, the cheesehead.

I can’t wait. Go Pack Go.

And yes, this fun run by the Packers has mended my broken heart. My ban on the F-word (Favre) has been lifted.

