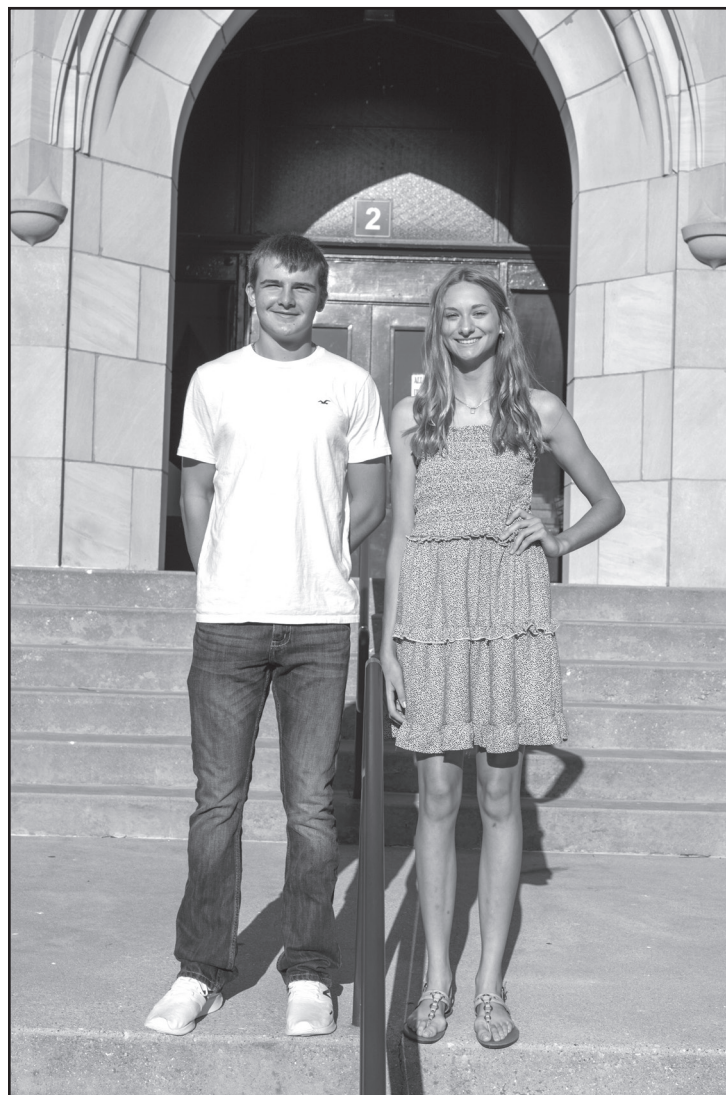


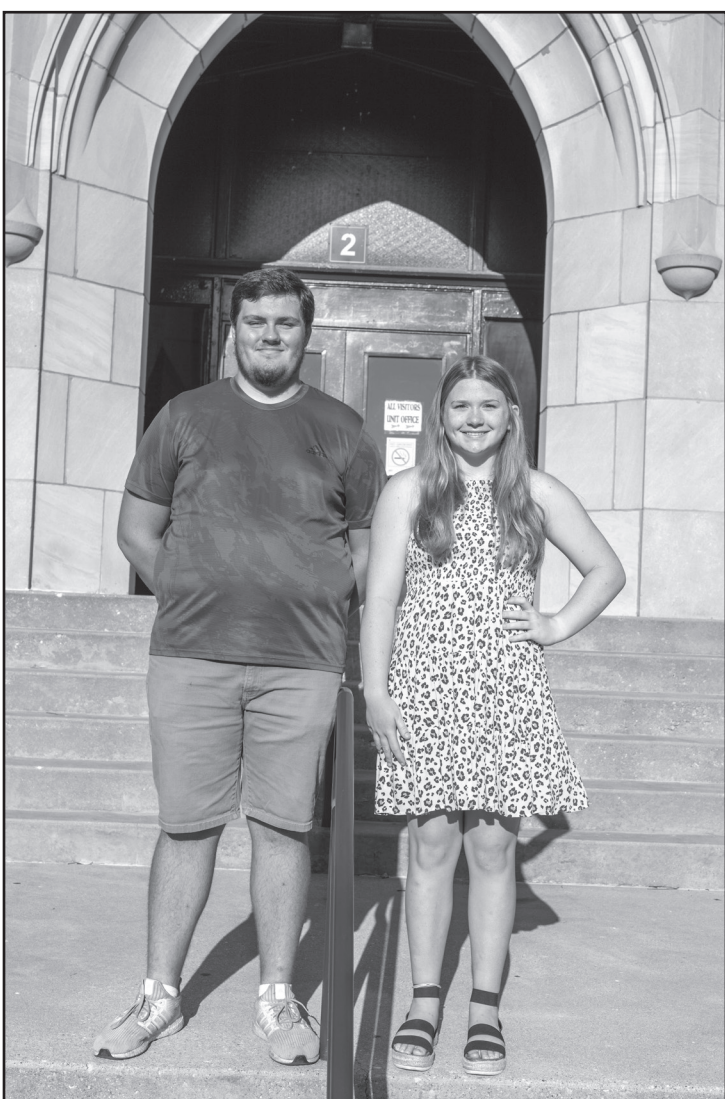
Submitted Photo

Freshman Villa Grove homecoming attendants Lukas Shadwick and Madeline Wicklander.



Submitted Photo

Villa Grove sophomore homecoming attendants Brady Clodfelder and Logan Lillard.



Submitted Photo

Villa Grove junior homecoming attendants Garrett Dale and Samantha Hunt.

my Personal side

By Craig Hastings



It's late Saturday night, September 11, and most of the television stations I watch have had all day programming recalling the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on New York's infamous Twin Towers and the Pentagon. If you watched any of the documentaries I'm sure you became teary eyed as did I. Twenty years later and some of the events from that day still bring tears to my eyes. The rest of the events anger me wanting revenge. I was home watching CNN (never again) after hearing a radio broadcast that a plane had struck the first tower. Right before my eyes I witnessed the second plane hit its mark. I felt at that moment the carnage had just begun. I had no idea who or which country might be responsible. This day began my new found interest in keeping up on what is going on in the world. My first born had just taken his first breath a month earlier. I had reason to be concerned now. I've never worried much about myself but becoming a parent changed me...a lot. An instinct to protect your own became strong with me and even more so with my newborn's mother. I've learned over the years I wasn't alone. I wasn't the only parent of this generation of new Americans that feared for their children's futures after September eleventh. After all, this attack happened within the shores of America. The attacks tallied 2,977 dead, 6000 injured, and thousands more lives affected then and still today.

How was it that with all of the capabilities including money, personnel and other resources our intelligence agencies had at their disposal they missed this? Not that they had just missed red flags by a few days but for several years! Osama bin Laden had completely outplayed the people who were supposed to be the best in the world at the counter intelligence game. So began the Afghanistan twenty year war. A war that would turn into America's newest Vietnam. Some argue it has been worth all the death and permanent injury to our military personnel. Has this kept America safe from another attack, maybe? These same people might argue that President Biden was wrong to pull all American assets out of Afghanistan. Others argue, as do I, that leaving was overdue. We feel America was spinning it's wheels getting nowhere. Terrorism training camps were moved from Afghanistan to other countries. Nothing changed other than the location of the training and planning. Did President Biden completely screw up the American withdrawal? Absolutely. The appearance was one of a beaten and weakened country which America is not.

Enough of the politics. On to what I really want to talk about. The History Channel aired a program called "Aboard Air Force One". This told us the moments, first to last, of then President Bush on September eleventh. The President was at an elementary school in Sarasota, Florida when the news that a plane had struck the first tower was whispered to him in a classroom. What happened in the hours after astonished me! Did you know that our president doesn't necessarily get to go where and when he chooses? Did you know that while in country, Air Force

One has no fighter escort? On September 11, 2001, there was much confusion as to who actually makes the decision to scramble fighter protection for Air Force One when airborne within America's own borders! It took hours to locate and scramble any fighter escort aircraft to intercept and protect the President of The United States! How can this be possible?! It gets better. The pilot of Air Force One made the decision, the appropriate decision, to climb to 45,000 feet where no other air craft should be flying. This way it would be easier to spot an enemy aircraft trying to catch Air Force One.

However, at this height the communications aboard Air Force One all but failed! What?! Air Force One is alleged to be the most sophisticated aircraft in the world. A flying White House if necessary. Well it was necessary and it's s—t didn't work! The President wanted to fly directly to Washington DC from Florida. His request was denied by the Secret Service agent in charge and aboard Air Force One. Yep, if this guy deems the request as a risk to great to the president he can deny the president's request and he did that day! For eight hours Air Force One was flying around, stalling, waiting for the appropriate time to land in DC. It was all too clear that the people responsible for the President that day reacted to the event as an attack on America as a whole and not an isolated area of the country. Many things went wrong aboard Air Force One that day fortunately without consequence. It did serve as an excellent training and learning experience for the personnel responsible for protecting the president.

When I watched President Bush move, speak, and react as the events unfolded I remember thinking that this is absolutely the attitude I want leading the charge and defense of this country should we ever be attacked and our shores breached. This man was large and in charge throughout the day and the days and weeks after. He's tough and he's a leader. The last three guys...not so much in my mind. President Bush was a fighter pilot himself and knew the drill. He wasn't afraid and he wanted to be right in the mix immediately. He would have been had his request not been denied by the Secret Service Agents in charge. Lastly, I would have never believed that the most important and responsible government agencies for America's safety couldn't even understand each other's coded communications! I felt as though each agency wanted to be the most important, so important, that they kept their own security communications and planning to themselves. This can never happen again. Of course who would ever had thought that the shores of The United States of America, the most powerful and sophisticated place in the world, could ever be breached and suffer the death and carnage it did on September, 11, 2001?

(The views and opinions expressed in the submitted columns are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of The Journal.)

COMMUNITY

Continued from 4

What was your response as a family?

We were all in shock, and then all I could think was "Oh, (no) I'm getting to have this baby and then I'm going to have to pack up my stuff and leave.

You were in the military at that time?

Yes. I knew I would be getting deployed, and less than a year later I was.

Where did you deploy?

We packed our bags and headed for Rota (Spain) because we were supposed to build a base in Turkey and then move into Iraq.

Do you think the events of that day still resonate?

Somewhat. I'm kind of like Mary, I think that military, first responders, and those types remember. I think there are a lot of people who've forgotten about it.

Did that day change you in any way?

I spent the next ten years being deployed every two years.

Thank you for your ser-

vice.

Darren Gilles, Gilles True Value Hardware

Do you remember exactly where you were and what you were doing when you became aware of the horrific terrorist actions on 9/11?

I had just returned from a sales meeting, and I was watching CBS this morning.

What was your initial reaction?

Until we knew it was a terrorist attack, I thought it was just a crazy accident, with that plane flying in there. Once I learned all the details, I realized how terrible it was.

How did your organization react?

The company I worked for actually had a floor in one of the towers, and some of the people in those offices were killed. We tried to go "business as usual", but we remembered those people.

What company was that?

Thompson Learning, at the time.

Do you think the events of that day still resonate?

Absolutely.

Did it change you in any way?

It did. It made me more patriotic.

Mike Zylstra, Villa Grove Christian Church

Do you remember exactly where you were and what you were doing when you first became aware of the horrific terrorist action on 9/11?

I was living and preaching in Litchfield, MN. My calendar for that day says that I had a 10 a.m. meeting and then a luncheon meeting with the director of our local Community Education program. I can't remember if I attended those meetings or if they were cancelled.

What was your immediate reaction?

I don't turn on the TV in the mornings, and there was no TV in my office, so I didn't know about the attacks until later in the day. I don't even remember where I was when I first heard about or saw the replays of the attacks. I wasn't scared or anxious. Mostly curious and in disbelief. I felt sadness and empathy for all those who died.

How did your organization respond?

Our church congregation joined with and supported other churches in town who were arranging services of memorials. We put the event on our prayer chain and prayed a lot.

Do you think the events of that day still resonate?

Yes, it still resonates. But not the same way with every generation or with every person. After the attacks people

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