

Piercy

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Works building. Can you tell me a little about that?

It's going to be attached to the existing public works building and we'll have access between the two buildings. You'll be able to move smaller pieces of equipment between the two. Public works needed more storage space for equipment, and what we're providing will be a heated, climate-controlled space.

How many employees are working for Ridgeline?

Right now, there are 5 of us.

What are some of the more interesting jobs you've completed?

That's really hard to say. All of them have their appeal. Some of the new homes we've built in the past are things that we're proud of.

Have you built any new homes in Villa Grove?

No, not in Villa Grove. They've been up in the Homer

and Sidney area, mostly. Most of what we've done has been additions and that sort of thing.

What's your favorite part of having your own business?

I wouldn't say it's flexibility, because it's much more time-consuming when you have your own business, but I think it's looking back and projects when they're completed and knowing that you had a big part in them. The kids just 'love' it when we're driving down the road and I say that I worked on a particular home or building. They say, 'Yes, we know, dad. We've been by it a hundred times.'

What's the biggest challenge facing you today?

The biggest challenge right now is really the changing material pricing and extended lead times on ordering materials. I'm looking at hiring someone to work in the office this spring, and that will help me with growing the business, as well.

I'm sure you always have future projects in the hopper, right?

We have several. We have another addition we're going to be starting here soon. There are always a handful of projects. We have several roofs lined up for this spring, as well as some exterior projects. We always try to have some interior projects going for when the weather gets really bad.

Balancing between your outside work and interior finish work is probably challenging, right?

It is. It seems like we always end up with at least one inside project in the summer when we want to be outside and in the winter, we're out freezing and framing a pole barn!

Has the price of building products leveled off at all?

They have definitely come down from where they were, but they're still a lot higher than they were before the pandemic.

I'm sure you had jobs bid out at the time. Were you able to collaborate with the customer as prices escalated?



DAVID PIERCY'S latest project, an 1800-square-foot addition to the city building in Villa Grove. Photo by Tony Hooker.

We were. Luckily when the big price increase in lumber hit, we didn't have any new home construction projects or anything that big, so we got lucky there. I knew some other guys

in the trades who had to share the bad news with their customers as prices tripled.

Has there been anything with the city building, any hidden challenges or things like that?

No, this one's been pretty straightforward. Pole buildings are usually pretty simple. The next step is to have the plumber come in and put a drain in and do some underground plumbing. Then we'll do some concrete, a little bit of light electrical work and then insulation and it should be good to go.

Have you had any issues getting overhead doors or anything like that?

No, we went through Graber in Sullivan, and they'll supply us with C.H.I doors when the time comes. We haven't had any problems with any materials.

What's the future looking like for Ridgeline?

We're just going to keep plugging away and keep taking on whatever projects we can. I'd like to thank the guys on the crew for really stepping it up and helping, especially during these cold, rainy, snowy days when they're out there with me, trying to finish things up.

Scoreboard

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met with Daktronics representatives. The company designs and manufactures electronic scoreboards, programmable display systems and large-screen video displays. The company claims to have an 80 percent market share in college-level scoreboard manufacturing.

Salesmen Chris Brokowski and Brian Egel showed the audience the features and dimensions of the scoreboard as well as the sponsorship opportunities to fund the high-end video board.

The scoreboard would need four "Anchor Partnerships" sold at \$10,000 per year for a five-year term and five "Founding Partnerships" sold at \$6,000 per year for a five-year term.

Daktronics said the scoreboard is under a five-year warranty if purchased and includes parts, not labor. After the five years are over, the school could purchase a maintenance contract. However, Daktronics salesmen were unsure of the costs and claimed it could range from \$5,000 to \$7,000 per year. There are also service providers in Champaign and Bloomington.

Alexander said that insurance for the scoreboard would fall under the umbrella cost of the school property.

Alexander said that after

the scoreboard equipment is paid off, they would continue to use ad revenue to pay for a replacement of the scoreboard and fund the maintenance.

Daktronics said that schools that have paid off the equipment make, on average, between \$40,000 and \$50,000 in advertising revenue per year.

Alexander said there would be no intention to use advertising money as an additional revenue stream for the school district if they purchased the equipment and paid it off.

Wilcox added that after the equipment is paid off, they could potentially offer advertisements for local companies at lower rates. However, he didn't offer any concrete numbers. The sponsorships they are currently seeking are aimed at larger businesses in the region.

Wilcox said he had contacted Sarah Bush Hospital, Carle Clinic, John Deer, OSF, Syngenta, Ford of Tuscola, advertisers such as Corey Kleiss, Caleb Englehardt, and insurance companies like State Farm, Country and Loman Ray.

Athletic Director Ryan Hornaday said that the school football schedule is changing and will include Bloomington area schools. The change to the football conference would attract a geographically wider audience, which could be



DAKTRONICS SALESMEN present the proposed scoreboard for Tuscola High School during a meeting Jan. 11. Photo by David Porter.

more attractive to potential sponsors, he said.

Board member Darold Spillman said they want to use taxpayer dollars to serve students better by taking care of infrastructure and facilities first. Spillman said they don't want to use money that can be used for facilities to pay for the scoreboard. He added that community members don't want to spend taxpayer money on the new scoreboard.

A large part of the presentation focused on student and teacher involvement in the management of the scoreboard. Daktronics said they provide a curriculum that involves students in content

creation for the scoreboards whether that be filmed commercials or graphic designs. The scoreboards could be used to showcase things besides sports, such as a student of the month or similar highlights.

Daktronics said the curriculum could help students get into industries heavily involved with similar technology, such as marketing, sports entertainment and more. They offer a free program called Crew Connect, to schools with a Daktronics video display. The program can help students receive education and jobs in event production after high school or college graduation.

Wilcox said that 30 students at the University of Illinois run its scoreboard, some of which have received scholarships.

Tolono Unity purchased similar boards from Daktronics; a football scoreboard four years ago and last year during the fall, another scoreboard for the gym.

Tolono Unity Athletic Director Scott Hamilton said the school is currently doing limited work with the scoreboards but plans on creating a graphic design class to incorporate work with the scoreboard.

"I think it's kind of like anything else with technology. You can always do more.

If we had more students involved with it, there would be a lot of opportunities for growth," said Hamilton.

Hamilton says that right now, the scoreboard is working out for the schools. He said they are getting good feedback after games.

"I think it provides a lot of great opportunities for the kids. We use it in our PE classes, so it's used in education," said Hamilton.

Alexander said that staff would have to be involved in the management of the scoreboard. He said the school would lean on Tracy Hornaday, who received a degree in graphic design. She said there could be potential for a digital marketing class with the new scoreboard.

According to Daktronics, the new scoreboard would have a longevity of 10 to 15 years. Alexander said the original scoreboard was purchased in 1985.

Ryan Hornaday said, "We got more than our money's worth on that. It's time for an upgrade of some sort."

Some of the advocates for the new scoreboard believe that it would be an investment in the students.

"I'm not denying that those aren't big chunks, but it's an investment for the kids," said Wilcox.

Elder

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ries were at each year's Special Olympics.

"It was a big deal for us every year. It was so fun to see them so excited," said Elder.

She remembers when the entire high school showed up when the bus returned from the Special Olympics. They had a gauntlet where the kids got high-fives and hyped up the kids as they were coming back.

"The kids would wear their medals and it made them feel special and loved," said Elder.

Elder remembered going to Chicago with Bryant Price. Elder said that he loves trains and was motivated to do school work in order to work on his trains. The train in Chicago brought him right to the Museum of Science and Industry, which was a highlight both for her and for Price.



MARY ANN ELDER shows off her award for serving 17 years at Tuscola High School. Submitted photo.

Some of the best parts of her career were watching students succeed in a subject and learn something successfully.

"I love those moments when the lightbulb goes on and the student understands what you are teaching them," said Elder.

Working as a teacher's aide meant she had to help students keep up with their education, but it was also important for her to make a personal connection.

"I do whatever I can to keep them motivated, but most importantly, to connect with them as a person," said Elder.

In the last six years of working at the Tuscola School district, her job changed and she started working more in the high school with a larger number of students in regular education, instead of just one at a time in special education classes. Elder said it was a welcome change for her

since she had worked with students one-on-one for so many years.

With those many years of experience, she gave some advice to people just getting started in the field.

"My counsel would be to make sure the students know you care about them as a person first. Once they know you really care about them, they will be more receptive to learning," said Elder. "I would also encourage them to always teach from their hearts."

Over the years, she's found that some key qualities can make you a successful aide. Patience, treating everyone with respect, flexibility and communication between students and teachers. She also placed importance on staying faithful to your mission as an educator, even when it gets difficult.

"I feel that my work with so many wonderful people over the years has been

much more than a job, but rather a calling from God to invest in others," said Elder.

Now that she's retired, she plans on spending more time with her husband in the ministry at church. Her husband, Darin Elder, is the pastor for the Eagle Mountain Assembly of God in Tuscola. She plans on helping with marriage counseling, pre-marital counseling, weddings and more.

Elder is also in charge of the women's ministries at church and helps organize potlucks, speakers for events and some pastoral visits.

Of course, she plans on going on more vacations and camping trips with her husband as well. Now that she has more time, she also plans on spending more of it with her family and prioritizing them more.

"It's an important mission," said her husband Darin.

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