

Academy

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and everything stopped. They may have come from homes where the parents were struggling simply to get by and there was no one at home to watch and guide them. Here they are, at 17 or 18 years of age and they have 6 high school credits or less. Our biggest challenges seem to be with math. Our math on the GED is where we have the most struggles with our students.

Where are you from?

I'm originally from Los Angeles.

Wow, this is a little bit different than that, right?

I spent 21 years in the Marine Corps. My wife was a Navy brat growing up. Her dad had retired out of Great Lakes in 1990. We met in Newport, Rhode Island, at an officer-commissioning pipeline event and started dating. I chose to go to Marquette University for my commissioning program and she went to the Naval Academy for a couple of years before deciding it wasn't for her. We got married in 1997 and I've drug her around the world. We lived in Washington, DC, from 2010 until 2020. We moved here in March of 2020.

Did you ever push boots when you were in the Marines?

No, I was never a drill instructor. I started as an enlisted mortar man and became a staff sergeant before I was commissioned. My options for my B billet were to go either recruit training or to go to MESEP, the Marine

enlisted college education program and so I decided to go do that. I never had any desire to go to University, but I looked around and decided that I could make decisions that were just as good as those in charge, so I decided to put my money where my mouth was and get commissioned.

Is there a difference in commanding troops and commanding these cadets?

Absolutely. I retired as a Major, and I had two commands, one in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. On the active-duty side, we have the Uniform Code of Military Justice. I don't have that here. Additionally, Cadets are here on their own free will, so if they decide they want to leave, they want to quit, they can drop on request. Motivations factors are different. Because we don't have a draft, those who are on active duty have a much higher motivation level. You find out after a couple of weeks in the program here that many of the young men and women's parents had pressured them to come here. Sometimes it's 'go there or leave home.' What are you going to do at that point? So, we end up with a lot of young men and women like that, and believe it or not, they do fairly well because they've got something to lose. During the interview process, we talk to the young men and women alone and we tell them that if you're coming here to please someone else, you might not do too well, but if you're coming here for yourself, we have a lot to offer. It's going to be discipline and military structure. They're usually

up at about 5 in the morning to do their morning hygiene. Get them out no later than about 5:45 for PT and they're back in about 6:30 to wash up and then they'll go to chow. They eat chow as a team here, and at 8:00 a.m. they go to academics. Everyone here is in academics from 8 until noon, whether it's GED prep or credit recovery. I teach GED history as well as US History for credit recovery. Our deputy director teaches Math for the GED side, but we are streamlined compared to other schools. We're going to offer the basics, reading, writing, math and social sciences and hard sciences, as well.

How does the vocational piece fit into that?

The vocational piece is relatively new. The idea there, especially for the GED cadets, is to offer them a skill set so that when they graduate, they can have a job that they can start immediately. Vocationally, we're trying to find areas that are compatible with what the needs of society are, so CNA, EMS HVAC, welding, things like that. Skills that will immediately make money but also have the potential for growth. We try to schedule the vocational class time for the afternoons so that we can free up the educational piece for the entire day. If we have students who are "gun decking" it, for lack of a better term, we won't allow them to go Vocation. Why should we allow them to do what they want to do when they're not done with what they need to do? I've had many conversations with young men and women about the fact that

just because you have a vocation, if you don't get your GED, you're probably going to tap out at minimum wage for the rest of your life. So if I'm going to really change your socio-economic status for the future, let's finish the GED or high school recovery. With the GED you can work with the ICCB and get a scholarship to continue your vocational training to earn certification. You can get an entry-level certification in HVAC, but you're only getting 3 credits for a semester of welding. ICCB is going to give you \$4,000, or \$1,000 a semester for four semesters, to cover that opportunity. We have military recruiters who come in from all the service branches. We don't get as many who choose the military route. That's probably a result of where we're at as a society right now. It's not a slight at anybody, but some of these men and women would not do well in the military. We also offer a driver's education piece, both in the classroom and behind the wheel, and with this class, we started an automotive tech program with Parkland. Parkland's been a great partner for us.

Parkland's involvement is kind of what drew me to this. I know that there are young people in Douglas County who are struggling and maybe they aren't even aware of this opportunity.

It is rigorous for most of these young men and women, because they come from all over, but just don't fit in the modern school model. The traditional model utilized repetition, whereas the modern model uses comput-

ers, and a lot of these young men and women just don't fit that.

What is the timeframe for applying?

What we do here is our program is five and a half months in residency and a year in post-residency. If a candidate comes here for his or her GED and doesn't earn it while they're in residency, we will pay for retests for the 12 months post-residency. We don't just quit on them. We ask for them to have a mentor when they come in, someone that they can trust and who will keep them accountable. Many of our cadets will form a relationship with a staff member while they're here, not in a weird way, but as someone they can look up to. I coach Rugby and Softball here, and former Cadets will call me and ask if I know if there are any rugby matches coming up. What we're trying to do here is make a difference and let them know their worth. We provide 3 meals a day. We provide them with hot showers and personal hygiene supplies at no cost to them. The entire program is at no cost to the family. It costs the state about \$28000 per cadet, but I think it's well worth it because many of these cadets were headed down a path that could lead them to prison or having some sort of dependence on the state, and we don't want people to be dependent on the state, we want the state to depend on it's people.

Who is a prime candidate for LCA?

Prime candidate number one needs to have an attitude to want to change their

life. We can take any young man or woman who has hit hard times in life, and we can work with them IF they want to change their life. I was a high school dropout for a year, and this program didn't exist back then. I would have been a prime candidate for this program, trying to change my life and learn a different way because there was no discipline or structure in my home. My mom felt overwhelmed and didn't care enough to be involved in those sorts of things. That's going to be the key. We want someone who wants to change their life. There's no height and weight limit. There's no bodytype preference. There's no kid who's a perfect cadet because they only need 5 credits to graduate. The perfect cadet is the kid who comes here wanting to change their life. If they really, truly don't want that, then there's not much we're going to be able to offer. The military discipline and lifestyle that we provide here for 5-1/2 months isn't for everyone, but I think every kid should try it at least to understand it is a different way. Getting up and making your bed first thing every day may suck sometimes, but it's what you have to do and it's one thing you can look back on and say, 'at least I made my bed this morning, or 'at least my wall locker was locked,' or 'at least I made it to class on time.' It might be because they marched me over there, but I made it. Maybe I paid attention in class and learned a new word today. If they're willing to do that, they're a perfect candidate.

School

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paraprofessionals who receive health insurance through the district. The employee must set up the HSA account and provide the district with the financial information necessary to make deposits no later than April 28.

Paraprofessionals will receive 14 sick days per school year and two personal leave days.

TESPA Secretary Kim Martin and TESPA Secretary Rachel Haste, who were on the negotiating team, both said, "We are grateful that we had the opportunity to work with the Tuscola School Board and come to an agreement on our contract. It's our first contract. That is a huge accomplishment and we look forward to continuing to work with the School Board and move forward with the students and the school. We're pretty pleased with what we have and were pleased with the contract. We are thankful for their [the Board's] time and effort too."

In other news, three Board members were installed after being re-elected: Darold Spillman, Bob Devlin, and Chris Rennels.

The Tuscola School Board installed Gary Alexander as

pro-tem president and Darold Spillman as the pro-tem secretary during the reorganizational meeting held prior to the regular meeting Monday.

Devlin was elected the Board president; Jesse Young was elected vice president and Spillman was elected secretary.

Two seats are still to be filled on the School Board. The Board will take applications and interview candidates for the positions as they have previously. The Board did not yet set a date to conduct interviews.

Brad Ingram thanked the Board after attending his final School Board meeting.

"I feel like when I started four years ago, to the point where we are now, we've come a long way. We've made a lot of changes and we've made a lot of moves; some of them have been harder than others and most of them have been of benefit to the school district and all the kids," said Ingram.

Alexander said he received a census from the County Clerk's office. Township 16N A East has a population percentage of 76 percent, meaning it will have four representatives, while every other township will have three.

The School Board discussed the blueprints for the new auditorium in the high school. In the newest plans, the stage

extension has been made permanent and stairs leading to the stage would be movable. The Board noted that having the stairs fixed in place would bring in more requirements for ADA compliance. They discussed the sound booth in the back of the auditorium and weighed the pros and cons of having the booth become elevated to fit potentially more seats. They also discussed stairs leading to the booth as well.

The current auditorium, shared with the cafeteria, fits roughly 175-200 people, while the new construction would fit 269 movable seats. However, Alexander noted that none of the discussed plans would be final yet. However, the goal is to have everyone happy with the plans so far.

The cafeteria is being relocated to the former industrial arts shop.

The School Board approved the IESA membership, which costs \$1,060.

The School Board approved the intergovernmental agreement with Education for Employment #330 which has received small changes in its update.

The School Board approved and accepted the resignations of Nolan Woller as the 7th grade boys basketball coach and Lydia Miller as 8th grade and TCHS volleyball coach.

Athletic Director Ryan Hornaday was listed on the agenda to resign as TCHS Athletic Director. However, the Board did not accept or mention a resignation from Hornaday as athletic director in the meeting.

The School Board approved Mark Sweeney's retirement at the end of the 2025-26 school year.

The School Board approved the 2023-24 Coaches List and approved Haley Sappenfield as TCHS dance coach.

North Ward Elementary School Principle Jason Wallace said students will participate in the Tiger Trot and the Special Olympics Young Athletes with Kindergarten program on May 5.

In his report, Wallace found that the Pre-K screenings went well. Texas Roadhouse will host a Dine to Donate on May 9.

Field Day will take place at North Ward on May 12, with a rain date on May 19.

Wallace noted that the kindergarten went to the Douglas Hart Nature Center on April 27, while Pre-K will visit on May 1. The 1st grade will travel to Scovill Zoo on May 9 and the 4th grade will visit Shedd Aquarium on May 22.

For the Special Olympics, Noah Southworth earned a gold medal in the 25-meter freestyle swimming earlier in April and will compete in

the 50-meter run and softball at the Spring Games on April 28. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) paid for a bus to bring Southworth's entire class to watch him play.

PTO Book Fair will take place May 8-12, including the evening of May 11.

The 3rd and 4th-grade music program is set for May 11 at 2:30 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Park Days were scheduled for May 23-26, and rain days were scheduled as well.

Wallace congratulated Miley Rennels and Owen Lauwers for being selected by North Ward Staff as representatives for North Ward at the IPA breakfast on May 9 at the I-Hotel.

Wallace also thanked all of the paraprofessionals, teachers, Aramark staff and substitute teachers at North Ward for all their work and flexibility.

Jared Vanausdoll thanked everyone who helped at this year's tracks meet.

IAR has been completed as well as the Science Assessments. Vanausdoll thanked Angie Gough for managing the tests, as well as the staff and students.

EP Scholastic Bowl will compete in Regionals on April 29 at Mahomet. The first match will be at 4:30 p.m.

Eighth Grade Promotion will take place on May 26 at

7 p.m. at TCHS. Vanausdoll minted all board members to attend.

The Spring Music Concert will take place on May 7 at TCHS.

EP yearbooks have been distributed. Vanausdoll thanked the yearbook staff and Mrs. Logan for their work with the publication.

EP Science Club went on a trip to Staerkel Planetarium and Lake of the Woods on April 27.

Alexander congratulated Jackson Barrett, who broke the school record for running 300 meters in 9.15 at the Palatine meet. He noted that the record would have won state last year. Alexander also congratulated Josiah Hortin, who also had a good performance at the Palatine meet.

Alexander thanked Mr. Bozarth for the productive SAT testing, which he described as productive. Alexander also noted that Tuscola received second place in agriculture and third place in botany in the Organized Illinois Science assessment.

Alexander also gave a reminder that Honors Day takes place on May 19, during which scholarships are handed out to TCHS seniors. Graduation for TCHS will take place on May 27.

City

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water line replacement in the Meadowview subdivision.

The sewer department revenue was budgeted with only a slight increase of \$5,450 despite a small rate decrease. Interest income accounts for the change.

Expenditures for the sewer department, however, are projected to increase by \$170,000 over the previous year's budget, mostly due to capital outlay.

The motor fuel tax budget is higher for 2024 by nearly \$1 million due to expected engineering costs for the city's next road project (South Washington, Parke Street and North Central Avenue).

In other business, the Council waived formal bidding and approved hiring Cross Construction for emergency repairs on U.S. Rt. 36 near Niles Avenue. Drew Hoel, city administrator, said he expects

the repairs to exceed \$19,000, which was the cost of recent repairs on Carico Street, but not significantly more.

The work was needed to replace a valve that served an abandoned water line; the new valve does not feed that line.

City Fireman Denny Cruzan said three of the four bolts securing the valve had rusted completely off. "If the fourth one went, the whole town would have gone dry," he said.

Hoel said he had hoped to delay the work till the next fiscal year, but the work wouldn't wait. It is done now, and the closed lane on U.S. 36 will be opening back up in the next day or two after the new concrete cures.

Holding a private pool party this summer will cost more than last year. The Council raised the rate from \$125 to \$200 for a 2-hour rental for up to 50 people. Treasurer Alta Long said that last year's rate did not cover the personnel costs associated with a pool

party. The rates for daily and season passes did not change.

Mayor Dan Kleiss said the pool will still lose money. For 2024, pool expenses were budgeted at \$145,000 against anticipated revenue of \$63,900.

Following a closed session, the Council hired Dalton Donnals as a patrol officer at a wage of \$27.70. Donnals is also a city fireman and was promoted to lieutenant there. Brook Ray was promoted to fire prevention coordinator at the fire department, and three new fighters were approved. They are Cahill Dixon-Derra, Brad Donnals and Kyle Stewart.

The Council also approved the list of 45 summer workers, including two part-time people that Hoel said will hopefully help fill the void left by Rob Geiler, who retired after more than 45 years of service.

Kleiss said Geiler doesn't like the limelight but thanked him for his many years of service.

Also, Monday:

Mayor Kleiss said the National Day of Prayer will be observed at 12 noon Thursday, May 4 at Forty Martyrs Catholic Church; the public is invited.

Approval was given for a special use permit to Adenium Solar for a solar project at 1298 Egyptian Trail following changes recommended by the planning commission. Paul Bottum of Cultivate Power, which is building the project, said the company agreed to a wider setback from the Southland Acres subdivision. He said construction is expected to start in 2024.

Kleiss jokingly asked if goats would be used to keep weeds down, and Bottum said the company would do that if that's what the community wants. He clarified later that sheep, not goats, could be used. "Goats eat cables," he said. There are no current plans to use livestock for grazing there, and Bottum said one would need to take that under

consideration when deciding what type of vegetation to plant.

He added that he thinks that due to the vegetation management, the soil will be even better for farming after the solar project expires.

Alderman Tim Hoey said it looked like the solar company did everything it could to try to satisfy everyone with the project.

The Council approved a payment of \$21,867 to Donohue of Champaign for master meter station engineering.

The Council approved a payment of \$15,880 to Clark Dietz of Champaign for phase 2 engineering on downtown alley improvements.

A payment of \$74,900 to Ezell Excavating was approved for demolition of the former Castle Mall on South Main Street. The former Presbyterian Church burned last summer.

City Attorney Andrew Bequette said he wanted to publicly congratulate Kate Watson

on her appointment as circuit judge. Bequette had also applied for the position. He said he plans to remain active in the county and looks forward to continuing to serve as city attorney. He added that he loves the community here.

The Council approved the annual list of board and commission appointments. Kleiss said there were no changes.

The Council approved closing part of Van Allen Street all summer during renovations at the high school. The south parking lot, which includes the east end of Van Allen, will be closed.

The city approved the annual write-off of delinquent water and sewer bills. Long said the debts are not discharged, but the city will stop sending notices. If the people owing money return to the city and seek water and sewer service, they must pay the amount in arrears.