

# Maroon & Gold

ELDON ALUMNI MAGAZINE

FALL 2024





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**21-22 2015 GRACIE BLANKENSHIP/NORMAN**







## Contact Us

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*Left to right: Stacey, Brody, Ken, Joyce, Todd, Sarah and Jude Rader*

*Ken Rader*

## **A PILLAR OF THE ELDON COMMUNITY**

Ken Rader, a proud Eldon High School graduate from the class of 1964, has spent a lifetime dedicated to his family, his work, and his community. His journey began in Eldon, where he worked at Gerbes during high school and continued after graduation. Ken's early work ethic set the stage for a successful career and a life full of meaningful connections and contributions.

Ken's professional journey took a significant turn when he joined the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) as a Senior Account Technician. Over his 32-year career, he was instrumental in setting up road projects' financing so the department could track expenditures of a project. His dedi-

cation and expertise ensured that many vital infrastructure projects were successfully completed, benefiting countless Missourians. Ken retired from MoDOT on September 1, 1998, leaving behind a legacy of diligence and commitment.

In September 1965, Ken married Joyce, who had graduated from Osage in 1964. Joyce's own career path was equally impressive. After briefly attending Southwest Baptist College in Bolivar, she seized an opportunity to work for Union Electric (now Ameren Missouri) in November 1964. Joyce's commitment to her work mirrored Ken's, as she devoted over 37 years to Ameren before retiring on February 1, 2002.



Ken and Joyce have two children who both graduated from Eldon High School. Stacey graduated in 1991 and is currently employed as a Product Manager with London Stock Exchange Group. Todd graduated in 1995 and is Senior Vice President at Central Bank of Lake of the Ozarks. He married his high school sweetheart Sarah Scrivner in 2001. Sarah is the Manager of Business Services for the Eldon School District.

Ken fondly recalls his time at Eldon High School, cherishing memories of teachers like John Dowler, Coach Hodge, Roger McCreery at the Middle School, and John Murphy. He attributes his positive experiences and lifelong love for Eldon to the good people and friendly business community he encountered daily. This sense of community has kept Ken rooted in Eldon throughout his life.

One of Ken's greatest passions is building houses, a hobby he has pursued with enthusiasm. Since starting remodeling houses in 2003, Ken has constructed many homes in Eldon, with his family contributing in various capacities. This



*Ken with one of the construction crew at a house currently under construction in Eldon*



*Ken and his wife Joyce in front of their home in Eldon*

family collaboration underscores Ken's belief in hard work and the importance of family.

Ken also enjoys traveling and spends quality time with his family, especially his two grandsons, Jude and Brody. He takes great joy in following his grandsons' sports activities, supporting them every step of the way. Additionally, Ken cherishes his daily 5:00 AM coffee meetings with a group of friends at McDonald's.

Ken Rader's journey from an Eldon High School graduate to a respected community builder and family man exemplifies the values of hard work, dedication, and community spirit. His story serves as an inspiration to current EHS students and fellow alumni alike. Ken's contributions to Eldon, both through his career and his passion for building, have helped shape our town into the wonderful community it is today. We are proud to call Ken Rader an alumnus of Eldon High School and a true pillar of our community.



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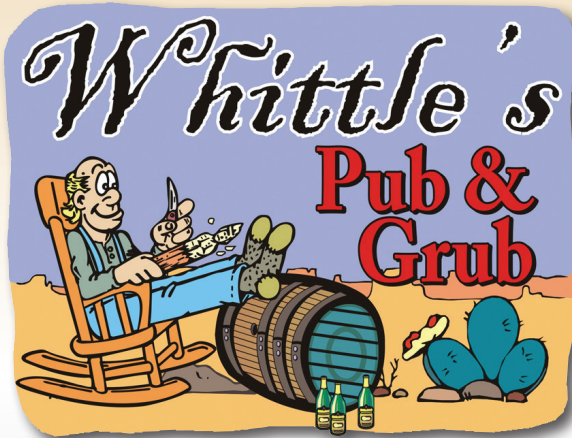
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# MUSTANG EXCELLENCE - 2024

ELDON SCHOOL DISTRICT - RANKED AS THE 24TH BEST IN THE STATE

1ST PLACE AT STATE: SKILLSUSA HEALTH KNOWLEDGE BOWL

STATE CHAMPION BEEF CATTLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROFICIENCY

ELDON FFA RANKED 10TH BEST CHAPTER IN THE STATE

ELDON FBLA EARNED GOLD LEVEL CHAPTER OF THE YEAR

ONE STUDENT RECEIVED THE "I BELIEVE" SCHOLARSHIP FROM MISSOURI FBLA

TWO ELDON FFA STUDENTS SELECTED TO ATTEND THE HYMAX ACADEMY

MR. JACOB BLANK SELECTED AS THE CASE INNOVATION AWARD WINNER

1ST PLACE AGRISCIENCE STATE FINALIST IN POWER, STRUCTURAL & TECHNICAL SYSTEMS

FCCLA STUDENT DEVELOPED SERVICE PROJECT "BIRTHDAY BOXES" FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED STUDENTS

13 STATE FFA DEGREE RECIPIENTS

3 SAE GRANT WINNERS IN ELDON FFA

ELDON FBLA EARNED "SHAPING SUCCESS" AWARD

TWO ELDON FBLA STUDENTS COMPETED AT THE NATIONAL FBLA CONTEST IN COMPUTER GAME & SIMULATION PROGRAMMING

TWO STUDENTS SELECTED TO ATTEND MU ANIMAL SCIENCE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY & EARNED \$500 IN SCHOLARSHIPS

\$1.3 MILLION IN SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED AND OVER 900 COLLEGE CREDITS EARNED

INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY - 5 STATE CHAMPIONS

MARENA TELLMAN - STATE CHAMPION AND NATIONAL ARCHERY QUALIFIER

SCHOLAR BOWL - STATE QUARTERFINALIST

7TH & 8TH GRADE CONCERT BANDS - EXEMPLARY RATING AT ST. JAMES MUSIC FESTIVAL

MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS TRACK - CONFERENCE CHAMPIONS, STATE CHAMPIONS

SARAH TILLINGHAST - MSTA CENTRAL REGION ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR, QUALIFIED FOR STATE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

JACOB KOELLING - MSTA CENTRAL REGION'S NEW PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

ELDON HIGH SCHOOL CONCERT BAND - EXEMPLARY RATING

ELDON HIGH SCHOOL CHAMBER CHOIR - EXEMPLARY RATING

ELDON THEATRE - TWO OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCES

TWO STUDENTS ENTERING THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

ELDON LEAP FTC ROBOTICS STATE QUALIFIER

ZOE MARTONFI AWARDED FOUR-YEAR SCHOLARSHIP TO YALE

SOUTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - AWARDED THE STRETCH AWARD FOR IREADY FOR THE MOST GROWTH IN THE STATE

WELDING PROGRAM STARTED AT ELDON CAREER CENTER

ONE STUDENT PLAYED IN THE NATIONAL FFA BAND AT THE NATIONAL FFA CONVENTION IN INDIANAPOLIS

INDOOR TRAINING FACILITY OPENED

FOOTBALL - 7 ALL-CONFERENCE PLAYERS, 7 ALL-DISTRICT PLAYERS, 1 ALL-STATE

GIRLS GOLF - ONE GOLFER EARNED 5TH PLACE AT THE STATE TOURNAMENT

VOLLEYBALL - THREE ALL-CONFERENCE PLAYERS, TWO ALL-DISTRICT PLAYERS, ONE PLAYER EARNED ALL-STATE HONORS

CROSS COUNTRY - TWO STATE MEDALISTS, BOYS' SCHOOL RECORD BROKEN

SOFTBALL - ONE ALL-CONFERENCE PLAYER, TWO ALL-DISTRICT PLAYERS

BOYS BASKETBALL - ONE ALL-CONFERENCE PLAYER, ONE ALL-DISTRICT PLAYER

GIRLS BASKETBALL - CONFERENCE PLAYER OF THE YEAR, DISTRICT PLAYER OF THE YEAR, ALL-STATE PLAYER

WRESTLING - THREE CONFERENCE CHAMPIONS, ONE DISTRICT CHAMPION, TWO STATE MEDALISTS

BASEBALL - THREE ALL-CONFERENCE PLAYERS, CONFERENCE PLAYER OF THE YEAR, SIX ALL-DISTRICT PLAYERS, ONE ALL-STATE PLAYER

BOYS GOLF - CONFERENCE CHAMPIONS, DISTRICT CHAMPIONS, STATE - TEAM 2ND PLACE, TWO STATE MEDALISTS

BOYS TRACK - CONFERENCE CHAMPIONS, DISTRICT CHAMPIONS, STATE - TEAM 2ND PLACE, 7 INDIVIDUAL STATE MEDALISTS, 1 STATE CHAMPION

GIRLS TRACK - CONFERENCE CHAMPIONS, DISTRICT CHAMPIONS, STATE - TEAM 2ND PLACE, TWO STATE MEDALISTS, 1 STATE CHAMPION X2

AMERICORPS ELDON WAS NOMINATED AS MISSOURI'S CANDIDATE FOR THE NATIONAL OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

NEWSPAPER IN EDUCATION - 2ND AND 3RD IN THE NATION





# Debbie Leffert

## A LIFETIME OF SERVICE AND DEDICATION



*Rachel, Debbie and John Leffert*

Debbie Leffert's remarkable journey from a dedicated student at Eldon High School to a beloved member of the Eldon community is a testament to her unwavering commitment to family, faith, and service.

Debbie graduated from Eldon High School in 1974, and in 1973, she married her high school sweetheart, John Leffert. Their life together has been a beautiful blend of love, family, and community service. John and Debbie have raised three wonderful daughters—Sarah (class of 1995), Rebecca

(class of 1999), and Rachel (class of 2016)—all of whom graduated from Eldon High School, continuing the family legacy of community involvement and excellence.

Debbie's professional career has been marked by dedication and a strong work ethic. She worked for the Family Support Division of the Missouri Department of Social Services for 28 years, retiring in 2014. However, her passion for helping others led her back to work just ten months later, and she continues to contribute 20 hours a week. Debbie cherishes her time

at Family Support, describing her colleagues as family, with shared pranks, laughter, love, and tears making work an enjoyable experience.

John, her supportive husband, started working at Paul's Grocery store in Eldon in 1973 in the meat department. He continued working there after Wood's bought it until his retirement in 2021, mirroring Debbie's long-term commitment to the community through his dedicated service.

Debbie's volunteer work is another pillar of her life. She has been an ac-





*Debbie accompanying Ethan Hanks at Music Contest*



*Left to right: Lucas, Samuel, Jeffrey and Rebecca Schulte*



*Left to right: Isabelle, Sarah, Logan Benedict, Madeline Benedict, Mark Amsinger*



*Debbie performing in the spring Drama showcase in 1973*

tive volunteer at Our Father's Table, where she serves with a group from her church, offering meals and support to those in need. Her love for sewing has led her to create beautiful dresses for Operation Christmas Child boxes, and she finds joy in making quilts, sharing her talents to bring comfort and happiness to others.

For over 50 years, Debbie has played the piano for the First Baptist Church of Eldon. Her musical talents have been a cornerstone of the church's worship services, children's choir, and various church activities. She has also served in the nursery, as a Sunday school teacher, and has been a devoted accompanist for Eldon High School band students for over 30 years. Her commitment to supporting students in their musical endeavors involves weekly practices from February through May, culminating in conference, district, and state competitions. Debbie's passion for music and her dedication to helping young musicians is encapsulated in her words: "Until I can't play the music and help the kids, I'll keep playing."

Debbie and John are blessed with five grandchildren, who bring immense joy and pride into their lives. Family is at the heart of everything Debbie does, and her strong faith has been a guiding force throughout her life. Her involvement in church activities and her dedication to playing the piano for worship services reflect her deep-rooted faith and commitment to serving others.

Debbie Leffert's life is a shining example of service, love and dedication. From her early days at Eldon High School to her extensive professional career, volunteer work, and musical contributions, Debbie has touched countless lives in the Eldon community. Her story is a testament to the impact that one person can have through unwavering commitment and a heart full of love.

As we celebrate Debbie's incredible journey, we are reminded of the values that make Eldon a special place: family, community, and service. Debbie Leffert embodies these values, and we are proud to honor her as a cherished member of the Eldon High School alumni community.



# Jonathan Grantham

## FROM EHS TO ORTHOPEDIC SURGEON AND COMMUNITY BENEFACTOR



Jonathan Grantham, son of Judge Jim and Nancy Grantham, is a name well-known in the Eldon community. Growing up in Eldon and attending school from K-12, Jonathan's journey from a small-town athlete to a distinguished orthopedic surgeon is an inspiring tale of dedication, hard work, and a passion for giving back.

Jonathan's formative years were marked by a deep involvement in sports, participating in football, basketball, and track at Eldon High School (EHS). His brothers Scott and Stephen also graduated from EHS, making the Granthams a prominent family within the school community. "I loved sports and the camaraderie that came with it," Jonathan recalls. "The experiences of laughing, dreaming, competing, encouraging, and occasionally getting into trouble with friends are memories I cherish deeply."

After graduating from EHS in 1986, Jonathan pursued a six-year medical program at the University of Missouri Kansas City, where he obtained his MD degree. His medical journey took a pivotal turn during his surgical internship at the Naval Medical Center San Diego, where he met his wife, Angela. The couple married in 1994 and embarked on a remarkable journey together.

Following a two-year stint with the Marines at Camp Pendleton, Jonathan returned to Kansas City to complete an orthopedic residency, graduating in 1999. He then served as an orthopedic surgeon at the Naval Medical Center Bremerton in Washington for two years before settling in Joplin, Missouri. In Joplin, Jonathan continued his practice, and in 2010 he and his partners founded Ortho Four States—a comprehensive medical complex featuring a hospital, surgery center, and two office buildings. This endeavor marked a significant milestone in Jonathan's career, culminating



in the recent sale of Ortho Four States to Mercy Hospital System out of St. Louis.

Jonathan and Angela are proud parents to two children: Kellen, 26, and Quinn, 21. Reflecting on his journey, Jonathan emphasizes the pivotal role that the Eldon school system played in his life. “Eldon gave me the tools I needed to compete in my chosen field. Throughout my career, I’ve never felt outgunned academically,” he states.

A recent visit to Eldon High School left Jonathan deeply impressed with the progress and excellence that the institution continues to uphold. “Touring EHS and meeting with the faculty and administrators reinforced my belief in the school’s enduring legacy,” he shares. “It was clear that the school had not only maintained its standards but had demonstrably gotten better. Year after year in the Maroon and Gold,



*Jonathon with his wife and two sons before Quinn’s high school graduation*

we saw impressive numbers of National Merit Scholars, high ACT scorers, and students excelling in the arts, sciences, and athletics. We felt like we were investing in a winner.” Motivated by gratitude and a desire to give back, Jonathan and his family decided it was time to support an institution that had given him so much. His contributions and ongoing involvement with EHS exemplify the spirit of giving and the enduring bond between alumni and their alma mater.

Jonathan Grantham’s journey from Eldon to a successful medical career and back again to support his roots is a testament to the strength of community, the power of education, and the impact of giving back. His story serves as an inspiration to current and future EHS students, proving that with the right foundation, dedication, and a generous heart, anything is possible.



*Jonathan Grantham, Shane Matzen, Paul Otto and John Potter after winning the Eldon Tournament*



# Kris Harwood

## A LEGACY OF LOVE AND EXCELLENCE



*Left to right: Chris, Kendra, and Truitt Allee, Kris and Jeff Harwood, Kara, Kinsley and Bryant Dinwiddie*

On Friday, April 26, the Eldon Chamber of Commerce recognized Kris Harwood as the Distinguished Citizen of the Year during the annual chamber dinner. This honor reflects her extraordinary contributions to the Eldon School District and her impact on the community. As Harwood retired from her role as principal of Eldon High School at the end of the school year, she leaves behind a legacy of remarkable achievements and heartfelt dedication.

Kris Harwood is the daughter of

Doug and Lois McConnell. She has two sisters, Angela Rush and Kim Mueller, and one brother, Doug McConnell, Jr. Harwood's father worked as a flight engineer for TWA, leading the family to move several times. Born in Kansas City, she spent a few years in Oregon before returning to Missouri, finally settling in Eldon at the age of ten.

Reflecting on her path to education, Harwood shared, "I received an excellent education, graduating Salutatorian from Eldon High

School, Class of 1988. I knew I wanted to work with kids and have a schedule that would benefit my family." Influenced by her mother and her grandmother, Wilma Kilgore, both dedicated Sunday school teachers, Harwood found her calling in teaching. She pursued her education at Mid-America Nazarene University and later at Lincoln University, where she completed her bachelor's degree in education with a major in mathematics in three years.

Kris Harwood's career in education





*Kris speaking at an EHS pep assembly*



*Kris with co-workers, Steve Henderson (Athletic Director) and Amy Pratt (Assistant Principal) after her Retirement dinner in May*



*Kris with her granddaughter Kinsley at an EHS football game*

began at Helias High School, where she taught for three years before joining Eldon High School in the fall of 1994. Over the next 16 years, she taught various levels of mathematics, touching countless lives with her passion for teaching and her belief that every student could grasp mathematical concepts with the right instruction.

In 2007, Harwood transitioned to the role of Instructional Specialist, working with Debbie Lacy-Anderson on curriculum and teacher training. Two years later, she became the assistant principal at Eldon High School, working alongside Principal Ryan Neal. Harwood played a pivotal role in the school's partnership with High Schools That Work, embracing the mission to graduate every student prepared for post-secondary education or a career.

In 2012, Harwood was named Assistant Principal of the Year for the State of Missouri and subsequently became the principal of Eldon High School. Under her leadership, the school rose from ranking in the 400's to 24th in the state, achieving numerous academic milestones and fostering a supportive, positive environment for students and staff alike.

Harwood credits her faith and the support of her team for her achievements. "God put me in this position to stand for every student, teacher, and parent. On my own, I would never have lasted. With God, all things are possible, and the blessings are never-ending."

Kris's deep connection to Eldon extends beyond the school walls. She cherishes the supportive and friendly community, which she describes as essential to her and her family. Her favorite memories as principal range from academic achievements to personal moments of impact with students and their families.

Kris is also a devoted to her own family. Her daughter Kara Dinwiddie, a State Trooper with the Missouri State Highway Patrol, and her other daughter Kendra Allee, a sixth-grade social studies teacher, reflect the values of service and education that Kris holds dear.

As she steps into retirement, Harwood plans to



indulge in her love for camping, hiking, kayaking, and biking across the United States. She looks forward to spending more time with her grandchildren, Kinsley and Truitt, and catching up on family moments she missed due to her professional commitments.

As Harwood reflects on her legacy, she emphasizes the importance of her team. "Mr. Davis always asks us what our legacy is. It finally dawned on me that my legacy is my teachers and administration team. I thank God for every opportunity to demonstrate His love and ask for forgiveness for the times I

failed. My ongoing prayer will be for the people and legacy I leave behind. I have every confidence in them because our students are worth our very best effort every single day. Go Mustangs!"

Kris Harwood's journey is a testament to the impact of dedication, love, and community spirit. As Harwood expressed, "It simply comes down to LOVE YOUR PEOPLE." Her career exemplifies this motto, and her impact on Eldon High School and the broader community will be felt for generations to come.



*Kris' senior photo from 1988*



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## LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

I am so glad you are reading the eleventh edition of the Maroon & Gold! Our goal is to keep our patrons connected with what is happening in the school and with Eldon Alumni. I know we all have some great memories of our school. It could be your favorite teacher, your best friend that you haven't seen for years, your coach, your bus driver, or the cook that made you smile. We want to do our best to remember those days but also focus on the great things that are currently happening. In order to accomplish this, we need you to send us ideas about who to interview for our stories. I believe the Maroon & Gold is going to be the venue that allows Eldon Alumni to stay connected. Send your information to [wendy.winters@eldonmustangs.org](mailto:wendy.winters@eldonmustangs.org) or mail it to her at 101 South Pine St. Eldon, MO, or call Wendy at 573-392-8010 ext. 1009



Another idea I want you to consider is coming back home. We continually strive to make our school and community one of the best places in the state. I believe you and your family will make an economic impact on our community. You will help us build an even better community that has a great infrastructure, great schools and great people. I feel blessed to live in Eldon; I know you will, too.

We are including information about some job opportunities in the area. Please take a look at them and see if any of them fit your needs.

I hope you enjoy the Maroon & Gold!

Matt Davis  
EHS'95

## JOIN THE ELDON ALUMNI ASSOCIATION FOR ONLY \$10 PER YEAR

Money will be used to keep you connected through the Maroon & Gold

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You may also find us on Facebook at Eldon Mustangs or Eldon High School Alumni.

# Brian Kidwell

## DEDICATION TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SERVICE



*Left to right: Taylor Whittle, Eleanor Whittle, Delanie Whittle, Cainan Whittle, Christy Kidwell, Brian Kidwell, Tiffani Kidwell, Trenton Kidwell and fiancée Libby Cochran*

Brian and Christy Kidwell's story is a testament to their enduring commitment to family, community, and service. Hailing from the outskirts of Eldon, Missouri, their journey is deeply rooted in the values and spirit of their hometown.

### **Brian Kidwell: From Farm Life to Chief of Police**

Born in 1975 to Garland Dennis and Cynthia Kidwell, Brian was raised on a family farm in Barnett, Missouri, alongside his grandfather and uncles. The farm, which raised

turkeys, cattle, and swine, instilled in him a strong work ethic. "We didn't do a lot outside of working on the farm and attending church," Brian recalls. Except for a brief period in Utah due to his father's job with Gibson Discount Center, Brian has spent most of his life in Eldon. At the age of nine, his family returned to Missouri, and he later became an older brother to Caitlin when he was 14.

In 1998, Brian married Christy. They have three children: Trenton, Taylor, and Tiffani who all gradu-

ated from EHS. In 2023, they experienced the joy of becoming grandparents for the first time. Brian began his career in law enforcement in September 1999, balancing full-time work with academy training. By 2001, he became a peace officer. His tenure with the Miller County Sheriff's Department saw him take on various roles, from road deputy to detective. In 2008, he joined the City of Eldon Police Department as a detective, later rising to the rank of police captain. In 2018, Brian was elected Chief of Police, a role





*Brian receiving his certificate from the FBI command course in 2024*



*Brian and Christy*



*Brian and his son Trenton at a summer baseball game before Trenton started high school*

that allows him to lead by example and make a significant impact on his community. “This position allows me to make a difference and help people while continuing to work cases as needed,” he shares. Despite the challenges, he finds his work immensely fulfilling.

Brian fondly remembers his time at Eldon High School, where he built lasting relationships with peers and coaches. “Coaches Marriott, Kline, Herriman, and Campbell were always willing to talk and assist us whenever they could,” he notes. Although he wasn’t a standout athlete, the bonds he formed have endured, and he still refers to his former coaches as “Coach.”

What Brian loves most about working in Eldon is the people. “As a law enforcement officer, you deal with 10 percent of the population 90 percent of the time,” he explains. “Despite the negative sentiments towards law enforcement in many places, every single day someone from town sees me and the officers and simply thanks us for the jobs we do. The hate has not reached Eldon, and I am thankful for the values of this community and my small place in it.”

Outside of work, Brian cherishes time with his family. They enjoy swimming, laughing, and playing games on game nights. Golf has become a favorite hobby for Brian, something he never imagined he would enjoy. He also loves deer hunting, an activity he recently began sharing with Christy. Looking to the future, Brian envisions a peaceful retirement on a piece of land where he can run a few head of cattle, fish in a pond, and hunt.

### **Christy Kidwell: Supporting Students and the Community**

Christy’s journey is equally inspiring. Nearly a decade ago, she applied for the position of Middle School Secretary to be more involved in her children’s lives. “Walking into the position, I did not expect to be welcomed the way I was,” she recalls. The support and dedication she witnessed during her first year made her feel part of a family rather than a workplace. After eight years as a

secretary, Christy took on the role of Community Health Worker (CHW), driven by a desire to extend the same support to others. As a CHW, Christy is a vital resource for students and the community. She works closely with each school to ensure that students in need receive the necessary support, whether it's dental, vision, or medical assistance. "Sometimes it is a struggle for guardians to take off work to make these appointments," she explains. She also collaborates with school administrators and families of chronically absent students to identify and address underlying issues, such as transportation or poor sleeping habits. Additionally, Christy supports the community through initiatives like the Mustang Packs, providing

essential resources to those in need. The Eldon School District and the surrounding community have a strong family atmosphere, something Christy deeply values. "The Eldon School District as a whole gives off this strong family feeling, as well as the community around it. There is support from someone around every corner for the students, but also employees and community members," she notes.

Brian and Christy Kidwell embody the spirit of dedication and service that defines Eldon. Their contributions to law enforcement, education, and community support reflect their deep-rooted commitment to making a difference. As they continue to serve and inspire, their story remains a shining exam-

ple of the values and spirit that make Eldon a special place to call home.



*Brian's individual football photo from Eldon Middle School*

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**ELDON HIGH SCHOOL'S 11TH ANNUAL**  
**ALUMNI REUNION**  
**WEEKEND**

**September 27th - 28th 2024**



**FRIDAY:**

**2:00 PM HOMECOMING PARADE**

**5:30 PM ALUMNI TAILGATE PARTY - VICTOR FIELD (food provided)**

**7:00 PM HOMECOMING FOOTBALL GAME**

**SATURDAY TURKEY FESTIVAL 5K**

**7:30 AM CONTACT: ELDON PARKS & REC 573-392-2156**

**10:00AM TURKEY FESTIVAL PARADE**

**10AM -4PM TURKEY FESTIVAL**

**ALL DAY ELDON GOLF CLUB WILL BE HOSTING AN ALUMNI GOLF TOURNAMENT. ALL PROCEEDS WILL GO TO THE ELDON MUSTANGS BOYS & GIRLS GOLF TEAMS.**

**1:00 PM TOUR OF EHS BEGINS AT THE OLD GYM**

**7:00 PM ALUMNI REUNION STREET PARTY AT THE POCKET PARK ON MAPLE STREET  
FOOD AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT WHITTLES  
MUSIC 7:00PM - 11:00PM**

**For more information contact**

**Wendy Winters - (573) 392-8010 ext. 1009**

**wendy.winters@eldonmustangs.org**



*Sarah Tillinghast*

## **FROM ELDON HIGH TO AWARD-WINNING EDUCATOR**

Sarah Tattershall Tillinghast, an esteemed alumna of Eldon High School, has made remarkable strides in her educational career, earning accolades and inspiring countless students along the way. Graduating from EHS in 2004, Sarah's journey from a high school student involved in band and speech and debate to an award-winning educator is a testament to her dedication, passion, and lifelong commitment to learning.

Sarah pursued her Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood and Elementary Education at Evangel University, graduating in 2008. Her career began with an adventur-

ous start as she spent her first year teaching first grade overseas at Grace International School in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This international experience broadened her perspective and deepened her passion for education.

Upon returning to the United States in the summer of 2009, Sarah continued her teaching journey at Eldon South Elementary. Over the years, she has taught third grade, first grade, and kindergarten, touching the lives of many young students in her hometown. Her dedication to her profession and her students is evident in her creative and engaging teaching methods, which she

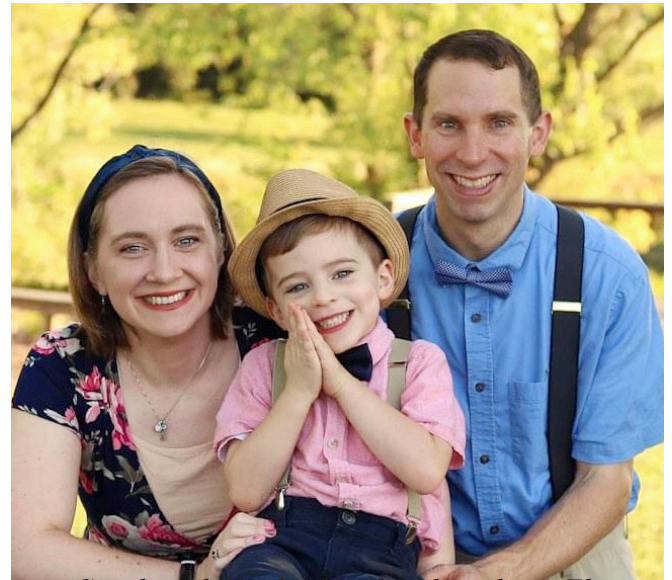


continually refines through ongoing professional development.

In 2016, Sarah married Seth Tillinghast of Jefferson City, Missouri. The couple welcomed their son Eli in 2019, bringing joy and fulfillment to their family life. Sarah seamlessly balances her roles as a dedicated educator and a loving mother.

In 2018, Sarah earned her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from William Woods University, further enhancing her expertise and leadership skills in education. Her hard work and innovative teaching approaches did not go unnoticed. In 2021, she received the prestigious Whole Brain Teachers of America Educator of the Year award, which recognizes her excellence in utilizing research-based strategies and best practices in her classroom.

Sarah's dedication to her profession continued to be acknowledged in 2024 when she was honored with the Eldon R-1 School District's Educator of the Year award. Later in the year, she was also named the Missouri State Teachers Association Central Region Elementary Educator of the Year, and then Missouri Regional Teacher of the Year, a testament to her outstanding contributions to



*Sarah with her husband Seth and son Eli*

education at both the local and state levels.

Reflecting on her high school years, Sarah fondly remembers her involvement in the band, which she participated in all four years. "Even though I was not the most proficient musician, band was a great way to start the first hour of my day at school," she recalls. Additionally, her participation in the Speech and Debate and Drama Club during her junior and senior years pushed her out of her comfort zone and challenged her to grow. One of her favorite memories is winning a first-place trophy at her first Speech and Debate tournament during her senior year.

Lately, Sarah has been passionate about learning all the research-based strategies and best practices for teaching students to read. Her commitment to literacy and education is evident in her continuous pursuit of knowledge and improvement. Outside of school, Sarah enjoys being a mom, reading, and trying new recipes, balancing her professional and personal life with grace and enthusiasm.

Looking ahead, Sarah aspires to become a reading specialist teacher, a role that would allow her to focus even more on her passion for literacy and helping students develop strong reading skills. Her career goals reflect her unwavering dedication to making a positive impact on her students and the



*Sarah with one of her students*



field of education.

Sarah Tattershall Tillinghast's journey from Eldon High School to an accomplished educator is an inspiring story of dedication, passion, and the pursuit of excellence. Her achievements serve as a beacon of inspiration for current and future EHS students, demonstrating that with hard work, continuous learning, and a commitment to giving back, great things are possible.



*Sarah with friends in Mr. Bailey's class*

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# Wren Rodriguez

## FROM MUSTANG TO PRO: TACKLING SUCCESS ON AND OFF THE FIELD



*Left to right: Renly, Wren, Asher, and Darian Rodriguez, Iris Rowland*

Wren Rodriguez, once a standout player for the Eldon Mustangs, has transformed his high school passion into a thriving career in arena football while nurturing the dreams of young athletes in his hometown.

Wren's journey from the Eldon High School football field to the professional arena is nothing short of inspiring. As a key player for the Ozarks Lunkers, "Perseverance through Every Play" isn't just a motto for Wren; it's a way of life

that has propelled him from Friday night lights to the professional stage.

Wren's high school record speaks volumes about his potential. His ability to force a turnover in every game he started is a testament to his relentless spirit and skill – qualities that undoubtedly contribute to his success in the arena.

Wren's influence extends beyond

the football field. His success has become an inspiration for young athletes in Eldon. "I want kids from Eldon to know that going pro isn't just a pipe dream," Wren shares. "If I can do it, they can too. It's all about believing in yourself and putting in the work."

Wren's commitment to nurturing local talent is evident in his involvement with youth sports. As a coach, he's not just teaching the fundamentals of the game; he's in-





*Wren during an EHS football game his senior year*



*Wren on the sidelines during his first year as head-coach for Asher and Iris' flag football team.*



*Wren celebrating after his first interception in his first game with the Lunkers*

stilling the values of perseverance, teamwork, and community pride that have been integral to his own success.

Behind every great athlete is a strong support system, and Wren's is no exception. His high school sweetheart turned wife, Darian Rodriguez, has been his biggest cheerleader from the sidelines of Eldon High to the professional arena. Together they're raising three children – Iris, Asher, and Renly – who are at the heart of Wren's motivation both on and off the field.

When he's not dodging tackles or coaching young athletes, Wren can be found running his businesses, A.B. Construction and D and W Pressure Washing. This entrepreneurial spirit showcases Wren's ability to diversify his skills and build a legacy beyond sports.

Looking ahead, Wren's ambitions are as bold as his plays on the field. His ultimate goal? To return to where it all began and become the head varsity coach for the Eldon Mustangs. "I want to be the bridge that connects Eldon to the world of professional sports," Wren explains. "It's about elevating the quality of coaching and instilling belief in our young athletes."

Wren Rodriguez's story is more than just a tale of athletic success; it's a narrative of community, perseverance, and the power of hometown roots. As he continues to make strides in his professional career and community involvement, Wren stands as a living example that with hard work and dedication, Eldon dreams can indeed become reality.



*Left to right: Asher, Wren, Renly, Darian and Iris*

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Cole Hamels  
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*Gracie and her husband Zach Norman*

# *Gracie Blankenship / Norman*

## **A JOURNEY FROM ELDON TO ADVOCACY**

Gracie Blankenship Norman's path from the small town of High Point, Missouri to a successful career in law is a testament to her dedication, hard work, and the strong values instilled in her from an early age. Growing up on a cattle farm with her two sisters and brother, Gracie learned the importance of diligence and community. This foundation has carried her through her academic and professional journey, making her a proud representative of Eldon High School alumni.

Gracie attended Eldon High School, graduating in 2017. Her high school years were marked by a diverse

array of activities that showcased her multifaceted talents and interests. In the fall, she could be found on the softball field, while the spring saw her active in the FFA building. Gracie was also a member of the Chamber Choir, where she served as the accompanist, putting her years of piano lessons to good use.

After high school, Gracie pursued higher education at the University of Central Missouri, where she majored in Criminal Justice and minored in Psychology. It was during her time at UCM that she worked with the Midwest Innocence Project, an organization dedicated to exonerating the



wrongfully convicted. This experience solidified her passion for justice and advocacy, leading her to apply for law school.

Gracie moved to Kansas City to attend the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. It was during this time that she met her future husband at their church and began planting roots in the Kansas City area. Today, Gracie works as an associate attorney at Cook Ellis Law Firm in Independence, Missouri, where she primarily handles probate matters, civil litigation, and municipal traffic violations.

Reflecting on her favorite teacher at EHS, Gracie fondly remembers her high school chemistry teacher, Mrs. O'Donnell. "There are a lot of teachers in this world; some people are born to be teachers, others are not. But Mrs. O'Donnell was born to be a teacher," she recalls. Gracie credits Mrs. O'Donnell's ability to connect with students and her unwavering support as pivotal to her academic success. Even years after graduating, Mrs. O'Donnell's influence remained, as she wrote a letter of recommendation for Gracie's admission to the Kansas Bar.

Gracie's high school memories are filled with significant



*Gracie celebrating her graduation from law school with her niece Leah*



*Gracie during an EHS softball game her senior year*

achievements and cherished moments. One standout memory is winning the district title in softball during her senior year, the first team in school history to do so. "Winning districts was such a special moment," Gracie reminisces. Another highlight was delivering her State-winning speech to the Missouri Cattleman's Association, a culmination of dedication and countless early morning practices with her ag advisor, Mr. Shikles.

Outside of her professional life, Gracie cherishes time spent with her family. She became an aunt for the first time in 2022 and enjoys being closer to her niece, Leah. Gracie and her husband love outdoor activities and games, with a particular fondness for playing cards.

Looking to the future, Gracie aspires to continue growing in her ability to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves and to assist families through challenging times. She also hopes to see her family grow and dreams of returning to High Point to raise her own children in the community she loves. "My plan was always to settle back down in High Point,



where my family still lives. I hope one day, I do just that,” Gracie shares.

Gracie Blankenship Norman’s journey is a shining example of how the values and experiences from Eldon High School and her hometown have shaped her into a dedicated advocate and successful attorney. Her story is a source of pride for the Eldon High School alumni community.



*Gracie with her family after her wedding in October of 2023. Left to right: Missy Blankenship, Ryan Wood, Leah Wood, Terry Blankenship, Lucia Wood, Mackenzie Blankenship, Gracie Norman, Zach Norman, Sharon Cooce, Logan Blankenship, Chawn Cooce*



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4X100M RELAY -



**MALLORY EDWARDS**  
WRESTLING - 6TH



**SYDNEY HALDERMAN**  
BASKETBALL



**HUNTER HEES**  
BASEBALL



**TEAGEN HULL**  
GOLF - 6TH



**MIKALA HUCKABEE**  
HIGH JUMP 6TH



**VIJAY JONES**  
FOOTBALL  
DISCUS - 2ND



**ZOE MARTONFI**  
XC - 5TH  
300M HURDLES - 2ND  
1600M - 1ST  
3200M - 1ST  
TRIPLE JUMP - 3RD



**JACI MUELLER**  
VOLLEYBALL



**NATE REYNOLDS**  
XC - 19TH  
1600M - 6TH  
3200M - 4TH



**WILL RICHARDSON**  
HIGH JUMP 1ST  
4X100M RELAY - 3RD



**JESIAH SIMMONS**  
WRESTLING - 2ND  
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GOLF - 6TH



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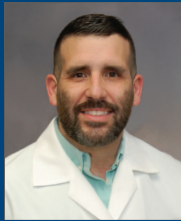
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