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Lifelong Mule Spearheads Distinguished Alumni Project

JANUARY 30TH 2019 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - Wesley Lewis is a true mule. Since he is the person who coined the term, he owns the right to define it.

“A true mule is not just a Poplar Bluffian,” the lifelong R-I employee explained. “This is a society of people that loves to see the town progress, with that hard-headed determination of a mule.”

Poplar Bluff is where Lewis was born, raised a family, spent his career and plans to some day retire. He returned to the school system from which he graduated with the Class of 1979, and has served in some capacity for nearly three decades.

Being employed as a security officer for the bulk of his tenure in public education, Lewis has come to be relied upon for his observation skills, among other intangibles. As the watcher of the hallways over the years, it is befitting that he was charged with memorializing the history in those very halls.

Since the High School moved to its present location in 2016, Lewis has taken it upon himself to gather all the trophies, plaques and banners, and completed a series of displays in the building in time for the recent ShowDown Basketball Tournament.

“Not only does he know our history, he’s a part of it,” stated PBHS Principal Mike Owen, who regards Lewis as the school historian. “I had a vision for the walls, and he changed that vision. And I’m OK with that.”

During the relocation to Oak Grove Road, the trophy cases remained in E.T. Peter’s Gym at Victory Lane. Over time, Lewis secured most of the items and came up with a commensurate system to honor his fellow distinguished alumni at their alma mater.

Through his meticulous efforts, the new campus now contains generations of history, including names of valedictorians from 1902 to present, portraits of All-State athletes dating back to 1947, undefeated team photos as early as 1966, and the jerseys of Mules who made it all the way to the professional ranks.

“Kids gotta know where they came from,” Lewis commented. “We had some great people lead these halls. Those folks’ faces up there are the pride of our school.”

Although his picture is not currently on the wall, Lewis was a standout student-athlete in his own right in the 1970s. Besides good coaches, he said he remembers being inspired by pictures of local stars such as Derland Moore and Eddie Moss, who respectively made it to the NFL.

The wall of fame is a work in progress, Lewis noted. He continues to research and track down memorabilia, and has additional plans throughout the facility to recognize Poplar Bluff natives who gained national recognition beyond the field, court and classroom.

“All our kids are great,” Lewis asserted. “I wish I can plaster them all on the walls.”

Lewis is known by his co-workers for ‘telling it like it is.’ Having started his career in transportation and maintenance, his position was essentially created around his unique skillset.

“I know every kid, their mom, daddy, dog, cat, rat,” Lewis said, half-jokingly. With an intricate knowledge base of the community and its residents, he has been able to reach students in a way others simply cannot.

“We’re all here for the same purpose: to help these kids get a balance out of life,” Lewis continued. “I tell them, ‘We’re trying our best to promote you so you can take over my job one day.’”

Pictured: Longtime security officer Wesley Lewis stands next to his trophy display in the front addition of the High School at Tom Hoover Way.

Article and photos submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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