

November 2022

To Our Fort Thomas Community:

I hope each of you is enjoying fall and will be ready to venture into the holiday season in just a couple of weeks! Halloween has come and gone, our Trick-or-Treaters have sorted all of their candy (and maybe eaten all of it, too), the streets are lined with stacks of raked leaves and we will soon be making our plans for Thanksgiving. It's a great time of the year in Fort Thomas!

This past week, while traveling to Washington, D.C. as part of a delegation from our District, our group made a very meaningful first stop before embarking on the festivities set aside for us. Woodfill Elementary School earned a second Blue Ribbon award from the U.S. Department of Education (to go with the first one in 2011), and our traveling contingent arrived in the nation's Capitol to formally accept the honor as one of just 297 public and private schools in the country to earn the distinction. I had been eagerly anticipating the trip for a couple of months, ever since we found out the great news in September. I was privileged to travel with Keith Faust, the former principal at Woodfill promoted to assistant superintendent this past summer; John Gesenhues, the current Woodfill principal; and Dawn Hils, a 4th grade teacher who has invested more than thirty years of her career in Woodfill students, families and colleagues. Since we had a little time before the programming began, we made our way to an important first stop;

Arlington National Cemetery.

In anticipation of Veteran's Day, it's incredibly humbling to visit the final resting place for dignitaries, presidents, diplomats, combat veterans and heroes of all kinds, including the namesake of Woodfill Elementary School: Major Samuel Woodfill. A Medal of Honor recipient that former Army officer John Pershing once described as "the most outstanding soldier in World War I," Major Woodfill was once one of our neighbors in Fort Thomas. In 1924, his wife gave an oil painting of Major Woodfill to the elementary school that carries his name and had just recently opened. The school foyer prominently features the artwork to this day. Our traveling contingent was so inspired to visit Major Woodfill's gravesite and it provided a heightened sense of purpose for our trip to accept the Blue Ribbon award.

I believe unequivocally in always remembering where one comes from. We stand on the shoulders of all of the students, staff, teachers and families that have built Woodfill into what it is today. I believe Mr. Gesenhues wrote it best, in a message home on Twitter, that our group in Washington, D.C. represents everyone currently in the Woodfill school family that worked diligently and with shared vision to earn the honor. "We are here. We are honored. We wish all of you could be here with us, because we wouldn't have earned this opportunity without all of your hard work," Mr. Gesenhues wrote.

Indeed.

In just a couple of weeks, we will celebrate Thanksgiving, my favorite holiday, and a golden opportunity for me to further express my gratitude to everyone in Fort Thomas that makes up our Blue Ribbon-caliber school community. The Kentucky Department of Education ranked our District as the top-performing K-12 public school district in the Commonwealth. In addition, the ACT results have come back, with our students at Highlands High School earning the highest average scores in Northern Kentucky. It's a privilege to see such a commitment to excellence and achievement on a daily basis. You all inspire me, and examples abound in our schools. At Johnson, Principal Ashley Dikeos, and Assistant Principal Kristina Sheehy are empowering students to take ownership for their education with a 5th grade Executive Council. Voices and student input are valued and encouraged in Fort Thomas, and learning how to articulate one's vision and ideas begins at an early age. At Highlands Middle School, Principal Erika Volpenhein challenged students interested in coding and programming to take an AP Computer Science course and potentially earn college credits as 8th grade students. At Moyer, students will soon be taking the lead and overseeing parent/teacher conferences by establishing an agenda for what to discuss. "What have I done well and how can I improve into the best version of myself?" It's a question students are pondering seriously, providing an inspiring compass for their education at Moyer and beyond. Our students are also truly learning what it means to be community-minded leaders beyond their classrooms and hallways. Kathleen Price and Katie Deshler, two students at Highlands High School, worked tirelessly for months with the Fort Thomas Police Department, the City of Fort Thomas and local businesses to re-launch the Homecoming Parade in October. The last time Fort Thomas held a Homecoming Parade was sometime in the 1990s, until this year, when a student-led vision turned into a fabulous community reality. It was a huge success, culminating in a pep rally at David M. Cecil Memorial Stadium, and all signs point to the parade growing and continuing to flourish in years to come.

I am thankful, both on Thanksgiving Day and every day, for the school culture we have created: Rich in Tradition, Focused on the Future, and fully embracing the privilege and responsibility that come with molding the next generation of leaders, right here in Fort Thomas.

If I don't see you beforehand, please accept my best wishes for a safe and restful Thanksgiving for you and your family.

Sincerely,

Brian