

# Ritenour NEWS

A Ritenour School District Publication | November 2024

## Ritenour High School's JROTC Nearly Doubles in Size and Opportunities During Program's Second Year

In just its second year as a full program, Ritenour High School's Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) has experienced significant growth, nearly doubling its enrollment from 60 to 110 cadets for the 2024-2025 school year.

Senior ROTC Instructor Tonia Jennings, who piloted the program as a club in 2022-2023 before launching it fully last year, continues to grow the initiative. To accommodate the influx of new cadets, instructor Monica Baker has joined the team, ensuring each student receives the attention and guidance they need.

"Our cadets are extremely motivated and excited to do new things," says Jennings. "They want to be involved with as many activities in the community as they can. Their energy and excitement motivate me."

Some of the cadets' activities this fall included a Color Guard ceremony on Sept. 11 in Overland, marching in the Ritenour Homecoming parade, learning saber skills to introduce the homecoming court, and preparing for several Veterans Day ceremonies. They also motivated fans with pushups for every Husky touchdown at home football games.

Competition is another important extracurricular activity for JROTC. This fall, cadets began learning how to operate drones. Their critical thinking and coordination skills in flying, landing and maneuvering the drone through tunnels and other obstacles prepared them for their first competition in late October. Cadets are also getting in shape to be part of the Raiders

Team to compete in November at Fort Leonard Wood in a physical and teamwork-based challenge.

Cadet Randy Lewis, a junior, said the JROTC program has given him skills and strong values that will help him be successful beyond graduation.

"The program really reinforces respecting yourself and others, and being brave no matter what," said Lewis, who plans to enter the U.S. Army after graduation. "Our goal is to become better citizens."

Last year, cadets raised \$3,000 to pay for their extracurricular activities and competitions. As their schedule grows with more events this year, Jennings said the group aims to raise about \$5,000.

During the second semester, cadets will begin learning marksmanship and archery skills at an off-campus location. Cadets must pass a written test with a perfect score before they can participate in these activities, reinforcing the importance of safety and discipline, said Jennings.

One of the program's significant perks is that cadets who complete at least three years of JROTC in high school can enter the Army as a private first class, earning \$500 more per month than those without JROTC experience. The program also sets students up for significant college scholarships. Last year, RHS cadet Alba Valenzuela earned an \$80,000 scholarship to attend the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Jennings takes pride in witnessing the personal development of her cadets.



"It's wonderful to see the transformation that happens with a cadet who is shy and timid and then becomes a leader," she says. "I'm most proud when I witness this growth."

(from top)

The Ritenour High School (RHS) Army JROTC program has grown from 60 to 110 cadets in one school year.

Cadets actively engage in the RHS school community, motivating fans at home football games.





# Ritenour Works Hard to Keep Students and Staff Safe Every Day

## Superintendent Dr. Chris Kilbride



This fall, we are navigating through some challenging times as a school district. In the past few months, our schools have experienced several cyber threats that have disrupted the daily work of our school community. While many of these threats originate from national or international sources, some are local - including from students within our community. These threats are not only extremely disruptive, but also as per Missouri statutory language, they are “Prejudicial to the Good Order of the School.”

We cannot combat these threats alone. Although we have become efficient in identifying the source of threats in partnership with local law enforcement that have resulted in several arrests, each incident takes a toll on our staff and students. As educators who deeply care about every student, it is heartbreaking to have to take actions that lead to the arrest of students facing serious charges. More importantly, each time our students are exposed to these threats, it distracts them from their primary goal at Ritenour, which is learning and growing each and every day.

To address cyber threats and cyberbullying, we have implemented the following actions:

- All students are made aware of our district’s acceptable use policy for technology, and we’ve provided refresher training to reinforce these guidelines.

- Families and students receive our student handbook electronically, which clearly outlines school expectations and consequences.
- We limit cell phone access during the school day to minimize distractions in the classroom.

Despite these challenges, there are positives to acknowledge. Our community has shifted from amplifying threats on social media to using the appropriate channels for reporting, such as the Courage2Report line and the Ritenour Safeline. Information about these tools is available on the page 7 of this edition of *Ritenour News* and on the Ritenour website.

We’ve seen an 800% increase in reports to Safeline this year compared to last year. While the number of threats has increased, so has the number of parents and community members using the proper channels to address them.

We also have strengthened safety measures at Ritenour High School and Husky Academy by introducing the OpenGate weapons detection systems.

Students and the community have become more aware of the serious consequences associated with making school threats. These actions lead not only to long-term school disciplinary measures but also significant criminal charges.

The negative impact of cell phones and social media on our students’ lives is undeniable. Many students are struggling with the pressures associated with social media. As a community, we need to

## Ritenour School Board Candidate Filing Begins Dec. 10

Ritenour residents interested in running for the April 8, 2025, Ritenour Board of Education election will need to file for candidacy at the St. Louis County Board of Elections, 725 Northwest Plaza Drive in St. Ann.

The filing period for the April 8 election opens Tuesday, Dec. 10, and closes at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 31. Two positions will be on the ballot, as the three-year terms of Dr. Stacey Albin-Wilson and Jennifer Lohnes expire in April 2025.

Missouri law requires a person to be a U.S. citizen, at least 24 years old, a resident taxpayer of the district and to have resided in Missouri for one year immediately preceding the election.

Visit [www.ritenourschools.org](http://www.ritenourschools.org) for more information.

seriously consider our next steps in addressing this issue if we are to keep every student and staff member safe.

We know these challenges weigh heavily on all of us, but by continuing to work together and stay vigilant, we will navigate through this difficult time.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to keeping Ritenour schools safe.

**“Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to keeping Ritenour schools safe.”**

**-Dr. Chris Kilbride**

## RITENOUR Board of Education



Dr. Brad Thomas  
President



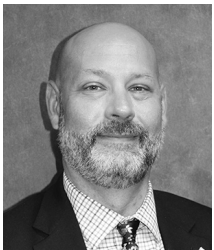
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# Ritenour Board of Education Sets 2024 Tax Rates

The Ritenour Board of Education set the district’s new tax rate at a special meeting on Sept. 24. The district raised the residential real estate rate by 12 cents per \$100 of assessed value and increased the commercial real estate rate by 19 cents. The district’s personal property tax rate remains unchanged from the previous year.

A portion of the increase in the residential and commercial rates is due to recoupment of taxes not collected last school year, said Ritenour Chief Financial Officer Phillip Pusateri. “In September of 2023, our assessed valuation was over \$860,700,000, and, at last year’s September tax rate hearing, Ritenour was required to set taxes at a lower rate due to the large growth in the assessed value,” Pusateri said. “The assessed value had jumped from \$700 million to \$860 million in just a year. By Dec. 31, 2023, the St. Louis County Assessor had lowered Ritenour’s assessed valuation by \$4 million. This decrease meant that our tax rate was lower than it should have

been. If the tax rate were set to the correct final assessed valuation in September, our rates would have been higher, and we would have collected the proper amount of revenue.”

The Missouri State Auditor’s Office reviews and monitors all tax rates before they can be set to ensure districts are in compliance with all state laws. Ritenour sets its tax rates to help produce the revenues required to sustain the schools within the district for the current school year, meet principal and interest payments on the bonded debt of the district, and provide the funds to meet other student and school needs. Revenue is budgeted assuming a 94% collection rate of taxes.

“The combination of lowered overall assessed valuation and recouped taxes from the prior year led to an overall increase in tax rates of about 3% for residential property and about 4% for commercial property, with no increase in rates for personal property,” said Pusateri. “Ritenour has a long history of being good

stewards of our taxpayers’ money, and we will continue to do so to ensure that our students have the resources they need to learn and grow.”

Ritenour has received national awards for its budgeting and financial management practices. For 23 of the past 24 years, Ritenour has received the Meritorious Budget Award for excellence in the preparation and management of its annual budget. The 2024 tax rates, which include debt service to retire bonds, are listed below:

Ritenour School District  
2024 Tax Rates

	2024 Tax Rates*	2023 Tax Rates*	Change
Residential Real Estate	\$4.23	\$4.11	+\$0.12
Commercial Real Estate	\$4.86	\$4.67	+\$0.19
Personal Property	\$5.24	\$5.24	\$0.00

\* Tax rates are per \$100 of assessed value.

## Ritenour Purchases Former Holy Trinity Parish Property in St. Ann

In August, the Ritenour Board of Education approved an agreement to purchase property located at 10901 St. Henry Lane in St. Ann. The purchase price was \$1 million.

The 3.92 acre site was the former location of Holy Trinity parish and school (formerly St. Gregory). The property includes 30,000 square feet of total building space - featuring a main school building and a separate building with five additional early childhood classrooms.

The district plans to use the property to expand programming for students. The International Welcome Center (IWC) and Center for Gifted Education will move to this new location. In addition, Ritenour will open new early childhood classrooms at this location. Currently, the district has a waiting list of about 80 students to attend its award-winning School for Early Childhood Education.

Ritenour Superintendent Dr. Chris Kilbride said he is excited about the possibilities the newly acquired property will offer to the Ritenour community.

“Ritenour is committed to serving the whole child and the entire community,” Kilbride said. “Additional space like this is crucial for supporting our growing educational needs. Our IWC has outgrown the classrooms in the north wing of Hoech Middle School, and our Gifted Center is in need of additional space for students and staff,

as well. “We are thrilled to possibly eliminate the waiting list for our School for Early Childhood Education so we can offer children in our district at least one year of an early childhood learning experience before entering kindergarten,” he added.

The district plans to use certificates of participation (COPs) to pay for the property. This financing spreads out the payments over a longer period instead of making a single large payment. A COP is a low-interest, lease-financing agreement used to acquire real property and for capital projects. School districts, municipalities, and local government agencies often use COPs to purchase property and make renovations. Programs could begin moving into the new space as soon as the second half of the 2024-2025 school year.



Ritenour purchased property located at 10901 St. Henry Lane in August 2024.



# A Weekend of School Spirit and Community

# 2024 Homecoming

Ritenour's 2024 Homecoming weekend was a vibrant celebration of school spirit and community pride, embodying the theme "Once Upon a Ritenour: A Place Where Dreams Come True."

The festivities began on Sept. 20 with the Ritenour Hall of Fame induction ceremony, honoring alumni Robert Courtney (class of 1957) and Greg Ransom (class of 1978), along with Lifetime Achievement Award recipient Cathy Nickens. The ceremony, attended by a record 280 people, set a tone of excellence and achievement for the weekend.

Despite the unseasonable heat for mid-September, the Homecoming parade was a resounding success, featuring 32 floats and walking groups. Organized by RHS Leadership Parade Chairs Giana Fouché and Ada Volpitto, with assistance from Ashley Reyes Moreno, the parade showcased the creativity and enthusiasm of the entire Ritenour community.

Parade participants competed in various categories, with the Class of 2025 winning first place in Class Floats. In the Community Floats category, Hoech Middle School and Ritenour School for Early Childhood Education tied for first, while Ritenour & Junior Husky Cheer secured top honors in the School Clubs category.

Fouché expressed pride in the community's efforts, stating, "The parade allows us to bring our community together, and I hope everyone was filled with a sense of Ritenour pride."



*The Homecoming parade featured 32 fun and creative floats and walking groups. The theme was "Once Upon a Ritenour: A Place Where Dreams Come True."*





# Community Pride at Ritenour High School Homecoming Weekend

The excitement continued at Moore Field, where the Ritenour Huskies faced the Pattonville Pirates in a thrilling football game. In a nail-biting finish, the Huskies narrowly fell 43-37 in the final seconds. The halftime show featured outstanding performances by the cheerleaders, marching band, flags, twirlers, and Rhythmettes, keeping the atmosphere electric throughout the game.

A highlight of the event was the introduction of the homecoming court, who walked through a Royal Sword Arch formed by JROTC cadets, creating a majestic moment fitting the day's fairy tale theme. In a historic first, three individuals were named to the 2024 Ritenour High School Homecoming Royalty: seniors Ronald "RJ" Johnson, Patrick Pitts, and Jasmine Kpomblekou.



*(Clockwise from top right)*

*The Ritenour High School football team fell by a score of 43-37 to their rivals, the Pattonville Pirates, in an exciting Homecoming game.*

*The Huskies marching band, cheerleaders and Rhythmettes entertained the crowd at halftime of the football contest.*

*2024 Ritenour High School Royalty includes (l to r) seniors Ronald "RJ" Johnson, Jasmine Kpomblekou, and Patrick Pitts.*



*Scan this QR code to view more photos and videos from Homecoming weekend.*





# Ritenour Community Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month



Students at Marion Elementary School took part in a celebration for families during Hispanic Heritage Month.

Ritenour School District proudly joined communities across the U.S. in celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15. This annual celebration holds special significance for our district, as nearly 30% of Ritenour students identify as Hispanic and represent our fastest-growing population. Ritenour's celebration honors the rich cultural tapestry woven by students and families from Mexico and Central America and South America.

Each Ritenour school engaged students in learning projects, events and activities that tap into the history and culture of Hispanic trailblazers who have significantly impacted American history, as well as enjoyed authentic Latin American music, dance, art and cuisine. Here's a sampling of how some Ritenour schools recognized Hispanic Heritage Month:

- **Buder Elementary** students participated in Hispanic Heritage Month assembly that highlighted students singing, presentations, poetry and highlights of different Latin American countries.
- **Kratz Elementary's** Fiesta Hispana on Oct. 15 allowed families to learn more about the different countries in Kratz's Hispanic community by collecting flags, trying new snacks, and playing bingo in Spanish.
- **Iveland Elementary** culminated the month with a large family event that included performances that spotlighted countries represented at their school.

- **Marion Elementary** held a celebration event for families that included Hispanic dancing and singing by staff and students, crafts, and free children's books. Throughout the year, students are learning about various Hispanic cultures and important people of Latino heritage who have positively impacted society.
- **Marvin Elementary** students learned about famous Hispanic Americans during morning announcements. They participated in music mania and voted for their favorite Hispanic songs, and also created art pieces influenced by Hispanic artists and culture.
- **Wyland Elementary** students honored Hispanic Heritage in their classrooms. Their learning culminated with an assembly that featured two fourth graders who narrated a "Journey of Identity." A group of fifth graders performed a traditional ballet folklórico. Another highlight included a Marion Elementary staff member who wowed the crowd with traditional Mariachi music.
- Students at the **International Welcome Center (IWC)** kicked off Hispanic Heritage Month with a visit from guest speaker Jose Jones, who is from Panama and represented Boxing Therapy in St. Charles. Students also enjoyed hearing the journeys from guest speakers who are immigrants from Latin American countries and now work in careers in the St. Louis area. IWC finished the month with a cultural celebration at Tiemeyer Park in St. Ann.

## Ritenour High School Senior Makes History at St. Louis Community College



RHS senior Nadyah Majeed-Ali is set to graduate in May of 2025 with an associate's degree and high school diploma.

Ritenour High School superstar senior Nadyah Majeed-Ali, who is dual enrolled at St. Louis Community College-Florissant Valley (STLCC-Florissant Valley), walked into a surprise celebration in the college's STEM Academy in early September after making history with academic honors that no other student had earned while still in high school.

Majeed-Ali was surprised with a certificate, honors cord and medal for earning the prestigious designation as STLCC's youngest student who not only earned the status as a STLCC Honors Scholar but completed the rigorous requirements quicker than any other student in the history of the college, according to Dr. Elizabeth Perkins, Campus President and Chief Academic Officer of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley.

"In STLCC history, you are the first student ever to do that, and that's never been done by a junior in high school," Dr. Perkins said to Majeed-Ali. This is such a big deal!"

During the 2023-2024 school year, Majeed-Ali finished four rigorous honors research projects in chemistry, sociology, Spanish and precalculus algebra on top of her honors coursework and maintained a 4.0 GPA.

While she immerses herself in her academic endeavors, she also puts 100% into her extracurriculars -- playing on the RHS tennis

and soccer teams, and volunteering with children at Wyland Elementary School, the Little Creek Nature Area in the Ferguson-Florissant School District, the St. Louis County Library Rock Road Branch and Hope Church.

Majeed-Ali will graduate in May with an associate's degree and a high school diploma. She plans to attend Missouri S&T next fall and major in aerospace engineering.

Dr. Bruce Green, Ritenour's assistant superintendent for secondary education and administrator of Ritenour High School, was among the Ritenour and STLCC leaders who surprised Majeed-Ali with her honors bling. After presenting her with gifts from Ritenour, Green shared that her passion for learning is heartwarming to witness.

"It's clear that Nadyah pursues her passion by diving into subjects that interest her and finding solutions to make this world a better place," said Green. "There's no greater joy than witnessing how students use their learning experiences to higher levels and apply them to the real world. I have no doubt that we will be hearing a lot more about Nadyah in years to come and how she's making a positive difference in the world. I'm humbled by her passion and her drive to pursue her dreams and commitment to giving back to her community."



# Ritenour Adds Three New Hall of Fame Members

Two outstanding Ritenour alumni and one Lifetime Achievement Award recipient were inducted into the Ritenour Hall of Fame on Sept. 20 in the Ritenour Auditorium. A record audience of more than 280 friends, family members, and Ritenour staff attended the celebration.

The Ritenour Hall of Fame Class of 2024 included:

- **Robert (Bob) Courtney** | Class of 1957, a revered civic leader and successful businessman who has helped create life-changing opportunities for young people in the community
- **Greg Ransom** | Class of 1978, a successful business and community leader who is known for his impressive and award-winning charitable endeavors that changed the lives of countless people in the St. Louis area and beyond
- **Cathy Nickens** | Lifetime Achievement Award, a retired Ritenour educator who has made a positive impact on the lives of thousands of Ritenour students, teachers, and the entire community

Ritenour Hall of Fame member Mike Stewart, Class of 1978, was the emcee for this year's event. After the unveiling of their portraits on the Hall of Fame wall in the Ritenour Auditorium lobby and dinner, the Hall of Fame ceremony celebrated the

inductees' achievements as a Husky, along with their road to success in their careers and their commitment to their families and communities.

The Ritenour Hall of Fame was established in 1997 to honor graduates who have demonstrated outstanding professional accomplishments, civic involvement and community service.

The portraits of the 108 Hall of Fame members and 12 Lifetime Achievement Award recipients are proudly displayed in the lobby of the Auditorium at Ritenour High School.

Nomination forms for the 2025 Hall of Fame ceremony are now available. The deadline for submission is March 1, 2025. More information and nomination forms are available at [www.ritenourschools.org](http://www.ritenourschools.org).



(Above) The Ritenour Hall of Fame Class of 2024 included (l to r) Greg Ransom, Cathy Nickens (Lifetime Achievement Award) and Robert (Bob) Courtney

## Ritenour Provides Resources to Support School Safety

The Ritenour School District is proactive in providing resources for the community to help keep students, staff, visitors, and community members safe.

### Safeline (Anonymous Reporting)

Safeline is a safety reporting system for individuals to report safety concerns. Students, parents, staff, and residents can use Safeline anytime they have information about possible illegal activity, a potential threat, or any type of safety issue affecting Ritenour students or schools.

**Ritenour's Safeline phone number is (314) 493-6205.** The safety tip line can also be accessed on the Ritenour website ([www.ritenourschools.org](http://www.ritenourschools.org)) or mobile app which can be downloaded from the app store on your mobile device by searching for "Ritenour Schools".

Ritenour's safety page also includes information about how to report threats to the Missouri State Highway Patrol Courage2Report line and non-emergency numbers for local police departments.

**Scan the QR code (right) to visit the website.**



### Intruder Training

All Ritenour students and staff members have taken part in safety training drills to teach them what to do if an intruder enters a school or district building. The training is called the 4E's (Educate, Evade, Escape, Engage). The training teaches staff and students how to quickly decide whether the safest course of action in a given situation would be to remain inside a barricaded room, try to escape, or engage the intruder.

### Visitor Management

Thanks to the Proposition S bond issue passed by Ritenour voters in 2020, each Ritenour school now has secure vestibules at the entrances. Once a visitor has signed in and been identified as an authorized visitor, the doors from the vestibule area to the school are electronically unlocked through a video intercom system. This feature provides a double-layer barrier for visitors to keep our students and staff safe.

### Emergency Response Information Plan

The Ritenour School District has implemented a comprehensive Emergency Response Information Plan, which includes safety/security procedures for numerous situations. Ritenour continues to work with local, county and federal officials to update district procedures in the event of an emergency.

### Additional Security Measures

Because safety and security is a top priority for all students, staff and families while on campus, Ritenour takes the following safety precautions:

- School Resource Officers are posted at each of the secondary schools. Local police officers also make regular visits to elementary schools and conduct random walk-throughs.
- Ritenour staff have a safety app on their phones or mobile devices designed to report emergency situations.
- All schools have video surveillance cameras.
- Ongoing safety drills and training with district staff prepare them for multiple hazards, including fires, severe weather, intruders, etc.
- Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) are located in every school.
- The district meets at least twice a year with local law enforcement agencies to keep current on best practices for safety and security.



## Ritenour’s Early Childhood Program Receives Top State Honor

The Ritenour School for Early Childhood Education (RSECE) has been named the 2024 Early Childhood Program of the Year by the Missouri School Boards’ Association FutureBuilders Foundation.

RSECE’s free program serves 224 preschoolers. There is also a waiting list for families to get into the award-winning program.

“Our amazing educators take care of each child with love - nurturing the whole child, and building on the strong foundation our families have

established,” said Principal Dr. Jennifer Singleton. “We are partners with our families and the community to give our youngest Ritenour students a beginning that celebrates childhood and prepares them for future learning and growing!”

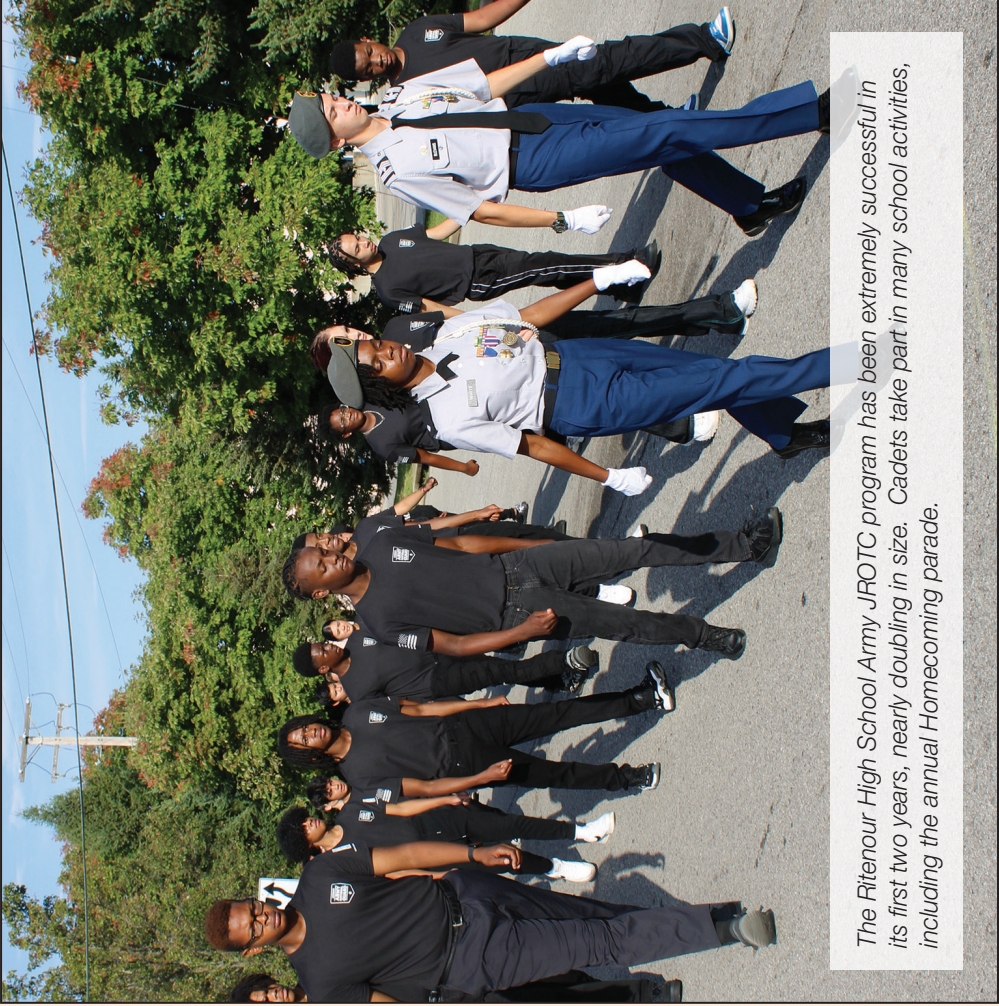
Superintendent Dr. Chris Kilbride said he is proud of the tremendous impact Ritenour’s early childhood program makes on the district’s youngest scholars.

“We know the children who get a stellar foundation at the Ritenour School for Early



Childhood Education enter kindergarten more prepared than those who do not attend our preschool,” said Kilbride. “We also know we don’t have enough classrooms to serve all the families who want their children to attend, so we are getting to the point when, as a community, we need to think about if and how we can expand this vital program.”

RSECE received the award on Oct. 19 at the Missouri School Boards’ Association annual conference.



The Ritenour High School Army JROTC program has been extremely successful in its first two years, nearly doubling in size. Cadets take part in many school activities, including the annual Homecoming parade.

## Ritenour’s New Army JROTC Program Experiences Growth and Success