

Roy Elia:

A Lifetime of Community and Broadcasting

Born and raised in Walla Walla, Roy Elia is deeply rooted in the community. His journey reflects a lifelong passion for sports, education, and broadcasting. Known for his signature phrase, "Holy Toledo," shouted with excitement after a great play on the hardwood, Roy has been the voice of WaHi Blue Devil basketball since 2016. His dedication to sports reporting also includes 20 years of part-time work for the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin.

Throughout his career, Roy has drawn inspiration from legendary broadcasters like Bill King, Bob Blackburn, and Al Michaels, while developing a style all his own. Some of his most cherished moments include calling Walla Walla Community College's football triumph in the 1990 Valley of the Sun Shrine Bowl, and the 2024 thrilling WaHi boys basketball double-overtime playoff victory against Kennewick High School.

"To me, broadcasting is as much about the people as the games," Roy shared. "The support and kind words from WaHi staff, coaches, players, parents, and fans mean the world to me and make the December through February adventure so enjoyable."

Tune in to the action as Roy brings WaHi basketball to life on KGDC 92.9 FM and 1320 AM.



Longtime School Board Member Derek Sarley Elected President of Statewide Association

Derek Sarley, a dedicated member of the Walla Walla Public Schools Board of Directors, was elected president of the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) in November during its annual conference in Spokane. This prestigious role allows Derek to share his passion for education, advocacy, and leadership with school boards across the state.

Education has always played a significant role in Derek's life. Growing up in a family that deeply valued learning and community, Derek was inspired by his mother, a school teacher and guidance counselor, and his father, a Methodist minister. His father's work moved the family around the United States during his childhood, including a three-year stay in Louisiana and time spent in a farming community in central Pennsylvania. When Derek turned 12, his family settled in Tredyffrin-Easttown, a suburb of Philadelphia, where he graduated from Conestoga High School.

Reflecting on his upbringing, Derek describes family as the cornerstone of his childhood. Sundays were spent at church potlucks, playing with friends, and feeling the unwavering support of his parents.

After high school, Derek attended Rice University in Texas, where he earned his degree. It was during his post-college years, while working at a public relations firm in San Diego, that Derek met his wife, Erin. Their partnership would lead to countless new adventures, including their move to Walla Walla in 2011. Erin, a professor of psychology, accepted a teaching position at Whitman College, and the family embraced their new community with open arms.

Derek and Erin have two daughters: Evie, a junior at Walla Walla High School; and Calla, an eighth grader at Pioneer Middle School. As a committed family man, Derek has coached both daughters in softball and enjoys time at home watching sports—especially cheering on his beloved Philadelphia Eagles.

Derek's involvement in the Walla Walla schools began in earnest following the failed bond measure in 2012. Recognizing that his professional skills in marketing and public relations could serve the district, he decided to get involved. He was elected to the Walla Walla Public Schools Board in 2015 and quickly made an impact, including helping lead the search for a new superintendent. That effort culminated in the hiring of Dr. Wade Smith, a decision Derek considers one of the most significant achievements during his tenure.

Now, with nearly a decade of school board experience, Derek is eager to expand his leadership to the state level. As WSSDA president, he aims to champion issues like adequate school funding, embracing diversity, and promoting the vital role public schools play in a healthy democracy.

"Public education is the backbone of our communities," Derek says. "I'm honored to serve in this new capacity and advocate for schools and families not only in Walla Walla but across Washington state."

Derek Sarley's leadership, commitment, and deep-rooted passion for supporting children and families have made a lasting impact on the Walla Walla community. His work at the state level will undoubtedly continue this legacy, ensuring public education remains a priority for all.



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Walla Walla Public Schools is an Equal Opportunity Employer and complies with all requirements of the ADA.

Where Are They Now?

Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates



CHRIS CHRISTIANSON

In the heart of Walla Walla, Chris Christianson wears many hats. As the Collections Manager at Baker Boyer, he plays a crucial role in managing consumer loans with a focus on client support and financial responsibility. But perhaps his most notable achievement is the launch of the Finance Academy, a program designed to enhance financial literacy among students. This initiative equips young minds with essential life skills that will serve them well into adulthood.

Outside his professional commitments, Chris is deeply entrenched in community service. As President of the Exchange Club of Walla Walla, he leads initiatives that emphasize service and civic responsibility, including the National Day of Service, which fosters a spirit of giving back. His work with the Blue Mountain Action Council Asset Building Coalition advocates for financial literacy and economic stability.

His dedication to education continues as an executive board member of the Walla Walla Public Schools Foundation. Here, he helps secure funding for school field trips. His own educational journey began at Lincoln Alternative High School, where he credits his art teacher, Jayne Eacker, for believing in him during challenging times. "She showed me that I could overcome obstacles," he recalls, highlighting the lasting influence of educators.

At home, Chris is a devoted father to his two sons, Kevin and Giovanni. His family is his world. In their spare time, the trio enjoys motorcycle rides and exploring the stunning landscapes of the Pacific Northwest, creating cherished memories together. Through his work, he is not only shaping financial landscapes but also nurturing the potential of the next generation.

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Walla Walla Public Schools

Focus on Education

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Outdoor School 2025

DISTRICT FIFTH GRADERS HEAD TO OUTDOOR SCHOOL IN APRIL

This spring, all Walla Walla Public Schools fifth graders are invited to camp! Thanks to generous grant funding from Outdoor Schools Washington, secured by the Walla Walla Public Schools Foundation, this amazing program is completely free for all students. Students will stay at Camp Dudley near White Pass and go hiking and canoeing, play educational games, build a campfire, and enjoy stargazing and birdwatching. Fifth-grade level lessons will be woven into each activity. As one student said, "I learned things about myself, like the fact that if you're confident in yourself enough, you can do anything. I will always remember Outdoor School for the rest of my life." The Walla Walla Public Schools Foundation is pleased to play a part in reviving camp for fifth graders, which many parents will remember from their own childhoods. The WWPS Foundation also funds field trips for every K – 8 student, Wa-Hi's Into the Blue program, and Lincoln High School's Leadership Academy.

WWPS.ORG/OUTDOORSCHOOL



Superintendent's Message



Walla Walla Public Schools mails the Focus on Education newsletter to the homes of residents three times per year. This publication serves as a platform to keep our community informed and connected to the school district.

We appreciate your involvement and support. The Board of Directors and I value your input and welcome your ideas as we realize our Vision of Developing Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates.

Dr. Wade Smith
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The FUTURE is BRIGHT for Walla Walla Public Schools

As we ring in the New Year, there is much to celebrate and look forward to. Elementary staff are digging into their new English Language Arts curriculum, with a laser-focus on the Science of Reading, ensuring strong foundational skills are mastered by our youngest learners. Students in our Dual Language Program are being exposed to brand new instructional resources in order to ensure mastery of both Spanish and English languages. Through our Vision 2030 Strategic Plan, a focus on inclusionary practices is helping ensure our students with disabilities are exposed to high levels of rigor and peer engagement. And our attention towards 21st Century Skills and job-embedded learning is exposing more and more high school students to career-connected skill development. All of these initiatives, and more, are equipping Walla Walla students with the necessary knowledge, ability and disposition necessary to fulfill our vision of "Developing Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates."

Similar accomplishments are being realized outside of the classroom as well, as many local contractors are busy at work completing the final phase of our 2024 Capital Levy athletic and activity improvements. Over the next few months, the outbuildings, bleachers and site amenities will begin to take shape at WaHi's Blue Devil Stadium. Additionally, light poles will soon be erected at the district's Murr Sports Park, illuminating both the baseball and softball fields ahead of the 2025 spring season.

As we advance our Vision 2030 Strategic Plan and wrap up the last of the voter-approved projects, it is a fitting time for me to step aside after nine years at the helm of the district - making way for the next superintendent to continue building upon our 167-year legacy of excellence. Serving the Walla Walla community and our incredible school board over the past nine years has been one of the most rewarding roles of my professional career. I am deeply proud of all we have accomplished over the last decade together – we have closed achievement gaps, passed a historic bond and capital levy, enhanced and/or developed numerous student programs and opportunities through two strategic plans, demonstrated sound financial management, and strengthened our partnerships with families and stakeholders. I am incredibly grateful for the support of our dedicated school board, talented and hardworking staff, and entire community.

Walla Walla Public Schools, its board, staff, families and children hold a special place in my heart. On behalf of the district, I am deeply grateful for your continued support and will do everything in my power to ensure the prosperity of my successor and that of our district's administration, faculty and students. The future is bright for Walla Walla Public Schools!



WELCOME TO

BLUE DEVIL STADIUM

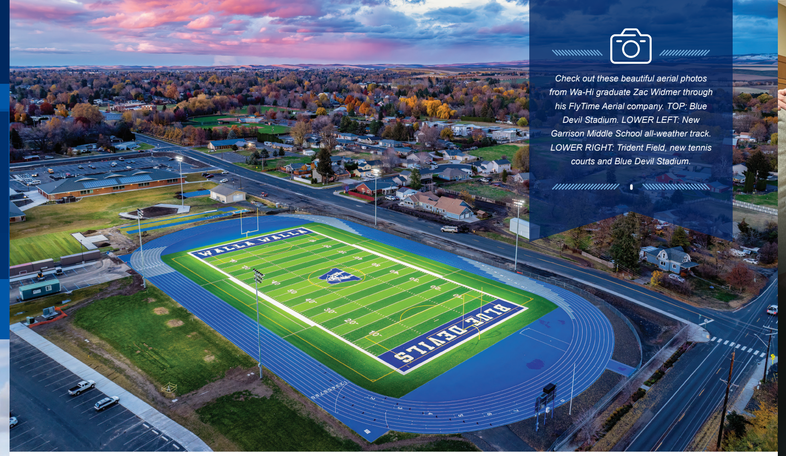
ON TRACK TO BE COMPLETED BY FALL 2025!



BLUE DEVIL STADIUM ARCHITECT RENDERING
(L-R) Concessions, Entrance, Restrooms and Fieldhouse

Work is officially underway on the final phase of Blue Devil Stadium, an exciting milestone made possible by our historic 2024 Capital Levy. Contractors are currently preparing footings for the new grandstands, concessions, restrooms, field house and site amenities.

The upgraded stadium will feature main grandstands with seating for approximately 2,300 fans and visitor seating for about 800 guests. These enhancements aim to elevate the fan experience for our entire community, creating a vibrant and welcoming space for all. The project is on track to be completed by Fall 2025. Thank you Walla Walla for making this vision a reality!



Check out these beautiful aerial photos from Wa-Hi graduate Zac Widmer through his FlyTime Aerial company. TOP: Blue Devil Stadium. LOWER LEFT: New Garrison Middle School all-weather track. LOWER RIGHT: Trident Field, new tennis courts and Blue Devil Stadium.





DELIVERING ON OUR PROMISE

Together, We are Building a Legacy of Excellence in Athletics and Activities

Walla Walla voters showed their strong support for Walla Walla Public Schools on February 13, 2024, when 58 percent voted YES on the Outdoor Athletic and Activity Capital Levy. This measure funded essential improvements for outdoor athletic and activity facilities at Walla Walla High School, Pioneer Middle School and Garrison Middle School.

Many of the Capital Levy improvements have been completed, with the remaining slated for completion by Fall 2025. These enhancements will provide safer, more equitable and higher-quality facilities for students, staff and the broader Walla Walla community. The district remains steadfast in its commitment to delivering on these promises and ensuring the success of each project milestone. Walla Walla Public Schools thanks the community for creating a brighter future for local students and families.



WWPS Committee Honored with 2024 Duane Wollmuth Catalyst Award

The Walla Walla Public Schools Outdoor Athletic and Activity Facilities Committee received the prestigious 2024 Chamber of Commerce Duane Wollmuth Catalyst Award. This recognition highlights the Committee's months of research, surveys and community outreach which culminated in the historic Capital Levy's approval last February. This enabled over $15M in facility upgrades at Walla Walla High School, Murr Sports Park, Pioneer MS and Garrison MS. Thank you to these dedicated community members for volunteering their time in support of our students and families.

Committee Members

- ★ Don Davis, *Chair*
- ★ Andy Coleman, *Vice-Chair*
- ★ Doug Hayes
- ★ Scott Shields
- ★ Julio Tapia
- ★ Stephenie Bowen
- ★ Lawson Knight
- ★ Dewight Hall
- ★ Denise Isenhower
- ★ Kelly Belcher
- ★ Robert King
- ★ Mark Thompson
- ★ Mike Monahan
- ★ Phil Shivell
- ★ Scott Krivoshein
- ★ Stacy Bergevin
- ★ Tim Wooster
- ★ Jaime Tiscareno
- ★ Colby Burke

Support/Advisory Members

- ★ Dr. Wade Smith, *Superintendent*
- ★ Heath Gardner, *Consultant*
- ★ Chris Ferenz, *Athletic Director*
- ★ Robert Foster, *Facilities Director*
- ★ Mike Kay, *Former Director/Advisor*
- ★ Dean Lodmell, *Volunteer Consultant*
- ★ Kathy Mulkerin, *School Board Rep.*