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Byron Area Schools

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Hello Byron Community,

My name is Bob Cassidy. I'm excited to begin working with all of you to make a difference in this community and in the life of every Byron student and employee as your new superintendent.

The journey to Byron began years ago when one fateful misstep set me on the road to where we are today. We were visiting friends in the Upper Peninsula when our family took a hike in the Porcupine Mountains. About a mile into our trek I decided to take a photo of Conglomerate Falls from the middle of the Black River. Stepping from the grassy bank onto the first of many small boulders I fell onto a boulder and shattered my kneecap. Sitting waist deep in the icy river, I didn't know it then, but my life had just changed dramatically!

The rest of that day played out like a very bad movie. After splinting my leg with shoe laces and branches so I could make it out of the river, crawling up the hillside, gingerly walking back to our van while the kids told one-legged jokes, my wife drove us to the nearby hospital where x-rays confirmed the damage.

Have you ever experienced a life changing moment? One moment everything is normal then it isn't? When everything you thought you knew about yourself suddenly wasn't true anymore? I have.

Since falling on that rock I've come to know myself and build a life with a family and friends that I can only attribute to divine intervention; for which I'm eternally grateful. In that singular misstep I traded a knee in order to discover my life's purpose. I also discovered that I can't always control what happens, but I can control my reaction to what happens. Best trade I ever made!

During the next several years our focus as a family changed considerably. No longer was I gone from home for long periods of time traveling from construction site to construction site as a plumber or pipefitter and welder. Rather, I became a househusband and family chauffeur. Surgery repaired the knee and with several years of therapy I learned to walk again without a limp. I also enrolled in college at Saginaw Valley State University and became a teacher at Bridgeport-Spaulling Community Schools.

The administrators I worked with in Bridgeport encouraged me with a variety of experiences and expanded my responsibilities as an educator. When I realized how much an administrator can help people grow and become successful I returned to Saginaw Valley for a master's degree in educational leadership.

By then I had taught a variety of grades and subjects and felt the desire to expand my influence beyond the classroom. That desire took us on the west side of Michigan to Fremont, where I was the principal of two different elementary buildings for almost eleven years. During my tenure, our lower elementary earned an "Overcoming the Odds" state distinction for helping children succeed with reading and math. We became known in the county as an excellent environment for children to learn to read. Because of that success my boss transferred me to the upper elementary where over time that staff and I transformed the special education and Title 1 programs to better meet the needs of all students. Again, we became acknowledged among county educators and parents; this time as a school where students learned through reading.

As time passed, I again felt called to expand my influence so I enrolled in leadership classes at Grand Valley State University and earned an Education Specialist degree which provided the foundational knowledge for becoming a superintendent.

That call led me to become the superintendent in Springport, in central Lower Michigan. In many ways Byron is very similar to Springport which has a phenomenal FFA program, exceptional performing and visual arts programs, celebrated athletics, effective teachers, and is enthusiastically supported by the community. The best part of being a superintendent is attending school events and chatting with community members. Twice each month I hosted informal conversations where local people would join me to discuss whatever was on their mind while we drank coffee and ate cookies. At monthly township and village meetings I shared news of the district and learned more about the community. Every week I spent one day working in each school building so the staff and I could become better acquainted with each other. Often I visited classrooms so students and teachers would know me and I would know them as well as what was being taught and who was teaching it.

During my years in Springport I learned quite a bit from the students and staff. I learned to be a better listener and communicator by being present in the moment; that appreciation and affirmation comes in all shapes and guises; that everyone's voice matters; and that strength comes from being vulnerable. I also earned two Central Office endorsements through the Michigan Association of School Administrators. This coursework significantly broadened my knowledge of the superintendent's role and the understanding of the connections within the broader local community and among educators and learners.

Which brings me back to arriving in Byron. The opportunity to become your superintendent was too attractive to pass up! The Byron area is very similar to the Birch Run area where my wife and I grew up. We want to be part of a close-knit community where everyone knows everyone else; where people care about and support each other; where young adults return to raise their families among extended family and friends; where school employees know (and are known by) students and parents; and where the school works alongside of families for the success of their children.

Moving to the Byron area will also allow us to live closer to our parents, children, grandchildren, extended family and friends. For the past thirteen years we've lived far away from them because of my job. This past year the global pandemic revived our desire to reconnect with family and friends. Both my wife and I are looking forward to renewing those relationships and building new ones in this community. There's also the many woods and waterways that provide the hiking, kayaking and snowshoeing opportunities we enjoy.

Education is the great equalizer that enables anyone to rise above their circumstance. I am far from the at-risk child I was so many years ago in grade school. Growing up, my siblings and I had enough but not much more even though our parents worked hard. Our home wasn't exceptional except in the amenities it lacked. We moved often and changed schools frequently. We learned to make friends, get along and appreciate what we have. Not everyone in our family graduated from high school or attended college but everyone made their own way. The family I grew up with is blended; my mom is a lasting role model, as is both my dad and step-dad. The family I made with my wife is also blended and we are blessed beyond measure for it.

My fervent goal, as Byron's superintendent, is to make sure that every student has the opportunities and resources they need for developing their talents and skills and that they feel supported by caring, capable, adults who appreciate them for their uniqueness.

Hopefully we will get to know each other soon and begin working together to make that goal happen.



Bob Cassidy
Byron Area Schools
Superintendent