

Press Clippings

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Education initiative expanding U-46 career fair, launching new efforts

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY

An annual career expo for Elgin Area School District U-46 eighth-graders is being expanded next school year and will be held at a larger venue.

Last year's career expo, held in October at Elgin Community College, drew roughly 700 students. The fair featured more than 45 businesses and organizations showcasing over 65 careers.

"We are moving to an expo format where all eighth-graders will be able to participate in the program," said Nancy Coleman, executive director of the Alignment Collaborative for Education, or ACE which organizes the expo with the U-46 Citizens' Advisory Council. "This year we will be able to serve over 2,800 (students)."

Coleman said the expo will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sept. 12 -- a Wednesday instead of during the weekend as in years past -- at the Sears Centre Arena in Hoffman Estates. There will be parent information sessions at each of the middle schools before the event.

"We are working very hard to recruit business and community exhibitors across the 11 communities," Coleman said. "Last year, we bumped around 45 to 50 exhibitors. I'm hoping with us moving to the Sears Centre we even have more room that we may be able to attract additional exhibitors."

ACE, which began in 2015, is a partnership among U-46, Central Unit District 301, ECC, Judson University, the city of Elgin, the village of Hanover Park, Advocate Sherman Hospital, the Grand Victoria Foundation, United Way of Elgin, and other nonprofit, business and community groups. Elgin-based ACE's goals are to build more business and industry partnerships to train a future workforce better aligned to market demands, to support early childhood education intervention, to provide trauma-informed care in schools, and to support and expand career and technical education opportunities.

Coleman and other leaders updated the U-46 school board Monday night on those efforts.

Officials are working to bring together community partners to join a national campaign on grade-level reading. The group has started a series of roundtables with industry partners and plans to survey businesses about workplace-based learning opportunities. It also is piloting a trauma-informed care approach to teaching at five U-46 schools this year with employees being trained on resiliency.

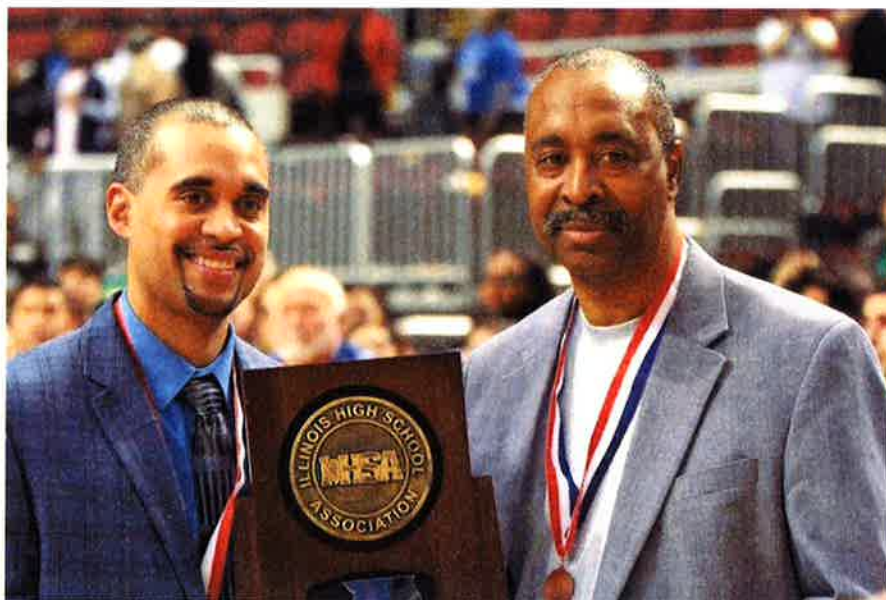
Local businesses and governments help fund ACE, providing more than \$450,000 in the last three years. U-46 has granted another \$75,000 to the group over the next three years.

The group will launch a new website by month's end, publish newsletters starting in April with regular updates and an annual report, Coleman said.

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Final reflections of the weekend in Peoria

BY JOHN RADTKE



Larkin boys basketball coach Deryn Carter and his dad, Deryl, display the class 4A fourth-place trophy Saturday night at Carver Arena in Peoria. Deryl Carter served the Royals as a volunteer assistant coach.

PHOTO COURTESY MARLENE CARTER

Today's post-state tournament column comes with a disclaimer.

This past weekend was the first time since 2006 that I've attended the Class 4A boys state basketball tournament in Peoria. Since then the opportunity just hasn't presented itself.

But it did this year, thanks to Larkin's magical run to the Final Four. And despite the fact the Royals went 0-2 and brought home the fourth place trophy, the weekend was entertaining and exciting, especially for this longtime Elgin resident who last got to see an Elgin boys team at state 20 years ago.

So here's some reflections on a weekend in Peoria and Morton, which is where I chose to stay as opposed to downtown Peoria.

Larkin could have been a sacrificial lamb and folded the tent when it got down double digits in both games but the Royals fought and never gave up, even though the mountain they had to climb was a big one.

When they got down to eventual champion Belleville West by 18 points in the semifinals, we couldn't help but think the Royals would become Belleville's latest 30-point victim.

But Larkin battled back and Pierre Black's 3-pointer with 94 seconds to play brought the Royals to within 7 points.

And even though they eventually lost 64-53, the Royals gained the respect of the entire Illinois basketball community for not folding up the tent.

Saturday was a much tougher game to play and it's not often a team gets behind in the third place game that it comes back to win. Larkin had the energy early on but Evanston took over midway through the second quarter and never let the Royals threaten its lead through the rest of the game, eventually winning 61-49.

Even so, Larkin battled to the final horn and when you go downstate and realize late in that third place game that it's not meant to be, it's awfully hard to keep battling. But Larkin did and that's a testament to coach Deryn Carter and his staff, which included his dad, Deryl, who has now had the rare privilege to coach in the state finals with both his son and his daughter. Deryl is also an assistant girls coach at Whitney Young, where his daughter, Corry Irvin, is the head coach.

We've long known Deryn Carter is a really good coach and motivator and that was proved this past weekend by the way his team battled on the court and conducted itself off the court and then during the awards ceremony following the championship game.

Should it go or should it stay?: Even though I haven't been to Peoria in over a decade, the question that seems to get raised every year was raised again this past weekend: Should the state tournament remain in Peoria?

There are plenty of reasons to debate the question. The current contract with Peoria runs through the 2019-20 season, which will become the 25th year of the tournament being played at Carver Arena.

The city of Peoria does an excellent job of hosting the tournament and you won't find another city where hotels and good restaurants are so close to the arena.

What Peoria has had going for it since the tournament moved there from Champaign in 1996 is the Peoria Civic Center. In reality, you never has to leave the building from morning until night if you don't want to. The March Madness Experience can take up your time, or there are plenty of places to sit and grab a quick nap between sessions if you so desire.

As for the basketball part of the tournament, which should always be the priority, Carver Arena is far from the best venue in the state. It's a hockey arena that gets transformed to a basketball facility for Bradley University games and the IHSA state tournaments. It's far from media friendly, for whatever that's worth, and it's just not great for basketball.

There are other venues around the state that would be better for basketball -- State Farm Center in Champaign, Redbird Arena in Normal and several venues around Chicagoland, such as Wintrust Arena on the DePaul campus, Allstate Arena in Rosemont or the Sears Centre in Hoffman Estates.

Only Champaign and Hoffman Estates, in addition to Peoria, bid on the tournament the last time the contract came up for renewal and next year when that process begins again it's likely those two will again.

But it's going to take one heck of a proposal to wrestle the tournament away from Peoria, as long as Peoria chooses to continue to host, and there's no reason we've heard of that it won't.

Yes, attendance has dwindled over the years. The best guesstimate this past weekend is that about 6,000 was the high water mark in an arena that holds 11,000.

But attendance has dwindled at state final events in every sport across the country, so it's nothing Peoria is doing wrong that has kept people away.

Illinois' four-class system hasn't helped attendance, and the fact that Chicago Public League schools don't travel well hasn't helped any either.

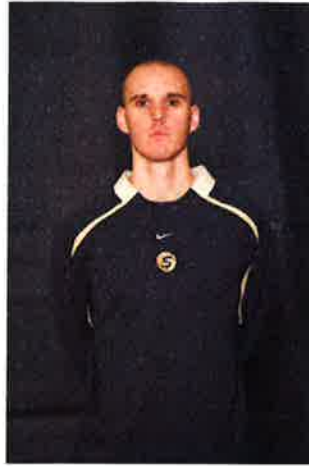
Would attendance increase if at least the 3-4A tournament was held in Chicago or Hoffman Estates? Maybe, maybe not. That's a question I doubt we'll ever get an answer to because as long as Peoria wants to keep hosting the tournament, the safe bet is it will stay there.

We just hope it's not another 20 years before another team from Elgin is playing in Peoria.

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Kowalyszyn steps down at Streamwood

BY JERRY FITZPATRICK



Coaching a high school basketball team requires time and attention to detail.

Caring for a newborn baby is a full-time job.

Thus, something had to give in the Kowalyszyn household after varsity coaches Paul and Jill welcomed daughter Brady to the world on Oct. 18.

Both coaches recently completed their seasons -- Paul with the Streamwood boys basketball team and Jill with the Maine East girls -- with the help of various family members who pitched in to care for the baby on game days when each teacher/coach might work for up to 14 hours.

The couple got through it, but it was a grind. Paul stepped down as Streamwood coach once the season ended.

"The baby is the main issue," he said. "With Jill coaching, too, it was tough. Sometimes you get up at five, don't get home until 10 p.m. and the next day do it all over again. At the beginning of the season, I told my staff this was a possibility depending on how the season went. I kept them updated so this isn't a shock. At the end of the day, I felt I didn't have enough time to devote to the kids and the program that needs to be done.

"I'm not done coaching by any means, but at this point my priorities are much different from they were five years ago, 10 years ago. I'll take some time, recharge the batteries and probably pop up again somewhere as an assistant coach."

Streamwood made headway this season. The Sabres posted an 11-19 record after finishing 8-24 the year before. They went 31-121 in Kowalyszyn's five seasons, during

which time he and Jill helped develop a Streamwood feeder system that could impact the program positively for years to come.

"For the most part I think we got them moving in the right direction," he said. "I feel I did everything I could to help the Streamwood basketball community. I just felt it was time to step aside and let someone else have a crack."