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Working with students is the highlight for an educator

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer
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Tommy Burrough, superintendent of McLean County Public Schools, stands inside his office Monday.
Freddie Bourne | Messenger-Inquirer

When Tommy Burrough graduated from Western Kentucky University, he wanted to teach and coach, and never imagined he would go into school administration, and eventually become the superintendent of McLean County Public Schools.

Burrough is originally from West Virginia, but moved to Kentucky when he was young.

He graduated from Henderson County High School, and was inspired by his baseball coach. He wanted to play ball, coach, and teach students.

He earned his teaching degree from WKU while also playing baseball for the university. Upon graduation, he moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where he played for a semi-pro team, what was then called Memphis Royals. He also taught health and PE and coached at an inner city school there that has since closed.



“In 1995, I wanted to get closer to home, so I got a job at McLean County High School as the head baseball coach, and I’ve been in McLean County ever since,” he said.

The day Burrough stepped into the MCPS central office to sign his contract, he met the woman who would become his wife, Sarah, who teaches kindergarten for the district. The two now have three daughters who all went through the MCPS system, Lily, Alyssa, and Emily, who is expecting a son with her husband, Jake, in June.

Burrough taught PE and health for six years before becoming the MCHS assistant principal.

From there, he became principal, and eventually went on to work for other school districts, Daviess County Public Schools and Hopkins County Schools, before ultimately finding his way back to Calhoun.

He was hired as the superintendent in 2017.

The thing that got him into teaching is what he misses the most about being a classroom educator, he said.



“You get into this for the kids,” he said. “Working with the kids, coaching them, that’s the highlight. You make relationships that you have for a lifetime when you coach and you teach.”

He considers the 14 years he coached “the best times,” but said there comes a moment when you have to move along and let a new generation of school leaders take over. He also wanted to spend more time with his family, and knew it was time to take a step back from coaching.

Teaching is not the same profession it was when he was in the classroom in the mid-1990s, he said, and that is one of the most difficult aspects of the job now.

“Teaching is much, much harder now,” he said. “Teachers have to do more for students and for their families, especially now with the pandemic. There’s no rule book for how to handle a pandemic, and you have to really love kids to still be teaching right now.”

The first year Burrough began teaching with the McLean school district, Ashley Troutman was a senior in high school. He knew of Burrough from seeing him around the hallways and the baseball field, but they didn’t become close until Troutman was hired as the assistant principal at McLean County High School in 2005.

When Burrough left the district a year later to seek an administrative position at Apollo High School, and eventually went to work with Hopkins County, he and Troutman kept in touch. Troutman would call him often to seek advice, or ask questions.

“I was calling him a lot more, trying to pick his brain,” Troutman said.

Burrough’s decision to leave the Daviess County Public Schools district to work with Hopkins County puzzled Troutman at first. Hopkins County was struggling at that time, Troutman said.

“When Tommy was there, he helped to turn it around, and it was an impressive turnaround,” he said. “I went a couple of times to his school to tour it and see how he changed things up for Hopkins Central.”

Burrough and his family still lived in McLean County throughout that time, so he and Troutman spent a lot of time outdoors together. They still hunt together, ride ATVs, and go fishing, among other things.

“We have a unique friendship,” Troutman said. “I consider him a trusted colleague, a mentor, and a friend.”

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