

The Courier News

75¢
Wednesday, December 21, 2016

Robert Morris' newspaper of choice in Clinton, Tennessee • Volume 130 Issue 19



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Welcome back scholars

'Don't tell
anyone you
can't succeed'

Heather Miller
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It's that time of year again: time for Coal Creek Scholar's Day, a special day of the year set aside for former Briceville Elementary School students to return to BES and share with current students inspiring success stories.

Barry Thacker, a Knoxville-based engineer and President of the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation, has said time and again Scholar's Day is his favorite time of the year because of the uplifting messages former students deliver every year to the next generation of



Coal Creek Scholars Casey Prosis Swindall and Jonathan Towe were two of the 14 former scholars to attend the 15th annual Coal Creek Scholar's Day program held at Briceville Elementary School early Monday morning, Dec. 19. — Heather Miller

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Here comes Santa Claus ...

The jolly hefty man himself, Santa Claus, was in his traditional spot during the annual Clinton Christmas Parade sponsored by the Anderson County Chamber of Commerce. Santa always rides on top of one of Clinton City Fire Department's fire trucks. — Photo Courtesy Anderson County Chamber of Commerce.

Welcome

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Coal Creek scholars.

This year 14 former Briceville Elementary students returned to Briceville Elementary School for the 15th annual Coal Creek Watershed Foundation Scholar's Day to offer current fourth and fifth grade BES students words of advice and encouragement for the future.

Coal Creek Scholars arrived early at the school on Monday morning, Dec. 19, and spoke to an attentive crowd of fourth and fifth graders inside the BES music classroom about the paths each of them took to success once they graduated from BES, and shared with the students glimpses of what the future could hold for them if they decide to follow in their footsteps.

The common theme that emerged from the talks was "don't let anybody tell you, you can't succeed," said Coal Creek Scholar Casey Prorise Swindall, who provided The Courier News staff a recap of the morning's program.

Swindall, a 1995 graduate of BES and a 2003 graduate of Anderson County High School, was one of 14 scholars to attend the annual Coal Creek Scholars Day.

Swindall recently obtained her real estate license and is planning on jumpstarting a career as a real estate agent. She was humble when she spoke of her accomplishments—to the point she did not mention that she accomplished her goals while she simultaneously juggled her responsibilities as a stay-at-home parent. Anyone with a family and children knows this is no small feat.

A bright student-like all Coal Creek Scholars are—Swindall told how her most memorable experience from BES was the opportunity she

had to move up an entire grade level one year early.

"BES didn't have enough teachers when I was in school and what they did was they put the top five students from fourth grade and moved them into the fifth grade classroom. I was one of the students they moved to fifth grade, so that was quite an experience," said Swindall.

The Coal Creek Scholar's Program was established in 2002 by the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation (CCWF) to provide Briceville Elementary School graduates assistance paying for a college education.

The program gives scholars the opportunity to get involved in community service projects and encourages them to celebrate their heritage.

Thacker and his assistant, Carol Moore, have spent a number of years working with teachers, staff, and students at BES to help promote Coal Creek's rich history and to preserve the area's natural resources.

Scholarship recipients serve as mentors to current BES students. Once they begin their college studies, scholars return to the school to encourage other students to do the same.

Another Coal Creek Scholar who attended Monday's event was Jonathan Towe.

Towe, a 2003 graduate of BES and a 2011 graduate of ACHS, is in his second year of medical school.

Towe's word of advice for current students is to "take advantage of the opportunity Barry and Carol give you."

"Education is a way to open up doors for the future and you can do whatever you want to do," Towe continued.

Scholar Kyle Leinart, a 2010 ACHS graduate, is working as an engineer and running a business he started in Knoxville called Lunarpunch Interactive, a company that specializes in educational

apps and virtual reality hardware and software.

Leinart participated in every program Coal Creek Watershed Foundation offered BES students, received Coal Creek's 2011 Nantglo Scholarship, and attended UT's College of Engineering.

Leinart recalled his time at BES fondly, and said he vividly remembers a profound experience he had in fifth grade that set him on the trajectory he eventually chose to follow.

Leinart was an impressionable fifth grader when Barry Thacker and Carol Moore invited Amy Crabtree Dugger, Coal Creek Watershed Foundation's first scholarship recipient, to BES to speak to his class about the opportunity she was given through the program to go to college at Lincoln Memorial University and receive her degree thanks to scholarship money.

"I remember that day well. Listening to Amy talk about the opportunities she had been given gave me the incentive to do the same. Because of her doing that is why I am here today," said Leinart.

Leinart has been attending the annual Scholar's Day event since 2011.

Coal Creek Scholar Kaleasha Welch, a surgical technologist at Yale medical center, offered this word of advice to students: "if you make a wrong choice, don't let it drag you down because it's learning by experience that you make better choices."

As of 2016, the program has helped a total of 45 former BES students attend college. During this time, more than \$400,000 in scholarship money has been awarded to the program's recipients, said Thacker's assistant, Carol Moore. After speaking with the fourth and fifth graders, former scholars visited students in each classroom and passed out Christmas gifts to all the students at BES.