

Special teacher focuses on special needs

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For The Daily Call
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PIQUA — Piqua Junior High School intervention specialist Josh Smith always knew he wanted to be a teacher, but after working at area residential group homes during the summers he went to college, he also knew he wanted to help people with special needs.

Smith graduated from Troy High School in 2001. He was a member of the Interact Club and was a guidance office aide. He played football for three years and threw the shot and the discus for the Trojans for four years. "I knew I wanted to be a teacher," Smith said. "A family friend Gary Weeks, and my grandparents Robert Smith and Francis and Lala Hunter, were very influential in my life, and they said I would be a good teacher."

After high school, he enrolled at Bowling Green State University and earned his bachelor's degree in secondary education: Social Studies in 2005. Later, he received a master's degree as an intervention specialist from Wright State University.

A big factor in Smith's college plan was paying for the education. "I have to thank the Future Begins Today Organization," he said. "The four-year scholarship they awarded me allowed me to go to BG." In addition, Smith worked part-time at the Meijer's Distribution Center in Tipp City and at residential group homes in Miami and Shelby counties.

It was while working at the group homes that Smith decided to focus his career goals on helping individuals with special needs. "That work had a big impact on me," he said. "I saw the challenges people with disabilities faced, and I wanted help students with special needs."



WAKE UP/LEWIS PHOTO
Piqua Junior High School teacher Josh Smith takes time out for a photo after school last week.

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After BGSU, Smith subbed in different areas schools, and that led to his job at the junior high. "I subbed for Ed McCord and Jeff Clark who were the principals at the junior high," Smith said. "When a position opened up for an intervention specialist, I was hired."

He is the teacher for students with an emotional disturbance at PJHS. Students in the ED room are working to overcome behavioral and emotional challenges. Smith teaches all subjects to an average of 8-12 students each year. "We also work on social skills and skills the students will need

later to be successful in a career," he said. "We are aiming at educational and social growth for each student." Robin Schlatter is the full-time aide for the ED unit. "Robin is a big asset to students. We work well as a team and form an effective partnership," Smith said.

Smith is the first to acknowledge that technology has drastically changed education. "Smartboards, iPads, Elmos, and the resources available on the internet have opened up whole new worlds for teachers and students," he said. "My students are able to maintain their interest

levels for longer periods of time and with higher levels of comprehension when using those devices."

Outside the classroom, Smith has daily morning duty and lunchroom duty. "I enjoy this time because it allows me to be with students who I don't normally see," he said. "And, I like to watch how the students interact with peers in a non-classroom environment."

Smith has coached a variety of sports at both the junior high and the high school. He coached eighth grade and freshman football over the past seven years and has helped with the junior varsity team. He keeps the stats for var-

sity basketball. Smith coached junior high track for three years and has coached varsity track for four years. He helps out with the strength and conditioning program for Piqua athletes.

At home, Smith enjoys travelling, visiting with friends, weightlifting, and running 5K races. He and his wife Katie, the health teacher and athletic trainer for the high school, have been married two years. They are active members of the Grace United Methodist Church. They have been preparing their home in Piqua for a new arrival. They are expecting their first child in early June.