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Kerns goes from trucker to teacher

Class Act

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PIQUA - When Mathew Kerns graduated from Tippecanoe High School in 1995, his goal was to either be a truck driver or a teacher. Little did he know that the former ultimately would lend itself well to the latter.

Though he was a keen student, he also had a passion for trucks and traveling that dated back to early childhood. "I remember as a little kid, I loved being in the car, going places. My eyes would be fixated on trucks. I could name every make and model of truck," Kerns said.



Mike Ullery/Staff Photo
Piqua High School math teacher Mathew Kerns works at his desk earlier this week.

Because of his academic excellence, friends and family were stymied by his desire to hit the road in a big rig. "I graduated high in my class, so people were like, 'Why do you want to drive a truck? You had good enough grades to own the company!' but I never had any interest in that. Up until I graduated high school, I had never been out of Ohio; I wanted to see the country."

And see it he did. After earning his Commercial Driver's License at Clark State Community College, he would go on to see almost every state in the Lower 48 and two Canadian provinces as a driver for Schneider International, Inc. for 13 years. "Being a driver gave me my first experience crossing state lines, which was phenomenal to me at the time," he said.

As a driver, math factored largely into Kerns' everyday duties. "If you have a cross-country trip, you have to be able to plan, to figure out how many hours it takes to go a certain distance," he said. "We also had to be able to figure out the outage (how much a liquid expands) of the products we were carrying - from gasoline to tar. We had to calculate that doing a stick test; depending on how many inches were in the tank, we had to calculate how many gallons there were, so we had to do a lot of conversion.

"The old stereotype of truck drivers is gone. These days, because everything is so high-tech, we really had to know a lot of math to survive on a daily basis."

During his last three years with Schneider, Kerns' yen to teach led him to become a truck driving instructor. "It sort of reignited my desire to teach. Watching people go from never seeing the inside of a semi to going up and down the highway, just watching that transformation in two weeks' time was wonderful," he said.

But the teaching bug kept biting at him, so Kerns started attending Wright State University,

where he majored in something he'd had much experience with as a truck driver - math. He earned two degrees from WSU - a bachelor's in Pure Math, followed this year by a Master of Education in Integrated Mathematics, and also taught as an adjunct professor at his old alma mater, Clark State.

Now, the 36-year-old Kerns is proud to be one of the newest staff members at Piqua High School, where he teaches algebra from the freshman to senior level. He was drawn to Piqua City Schools because of its reputation for excellence and especially because of the vision of PCS Superintendent Rick Hanes.

"Mr. Hanes was my sixth and eighth grade science teacher 23 years ago and I knew he was leading the school toward being the best," Kerns said. "He was pushing technology before technology was even big. I had a lot of respect for him, so I decided to apply."

Kerns said he had no fear or trepidation about his mid-life job change - "I got in just in time to be able to work many years before retiring"- and though he's moved on from being a road warrior, there's no chance he'll ever forget his trucking roots. The proof? He keeps his CDL up to date.