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Helping students find success

Education field paved by family

BY JOHN HAUER
For the Daily Call

PIQUA - One of the two new guidance counselors at Piqua High School is Toni Riley. "I believe every student has their own special path to take," she said. "It is my goal to help them find this path and start them on their way to success."

Riley's path into the field of education was following her family's footsteps. "My mother Rhonda Clowers is an elementary teacher at Leawood Elementary in Columbus," Riley said. "My father Eric is a former high school English teacher, and my grandmother is an elementary school principal."

Riley was born in Jackson, Miss., but the family moved to Ohio. In 2003, she graduated from Gahanna Lincoln High School outside of Columbus. She was in student council, on the yearbook staff, played soccer for the Golden Lions, and performed in Stomp, a step dance group who did halftime shows at games. Riley was an active member of the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, a high school club involved in a variety of school and community projects.

The highpoint of her teenage years was becoming a debutante. A debutant is a young lady who has reached the age of maturity and as a new adult is introduced to society at a formal presentation known as The Debutant Ball, also called a Cotillion. Introductions and formal dancing are highlighted. "It was one of the best experiences of my life," she said.

After high school, Riley attended Wright State University, majoring in Integrated Language Arts. "I chose WSU because it was close, but not too close to home," she said. "I knew I wanted to be a guidance counselor, so as soon as I received my bachelor's degree, I entered graduate school and earned a master's in counseling."

While at Wright State, Riley continued her involvement in many activities. She was a member of the National Council for Teachers of English and president of the African-American Teachers Association. She helped freshmen through the Visions Mentoring program. "I served on a number of student panels that dealt with problems and issues on campus," she said. "All this gave me a good background in the skills I would need later on."

Riley landed her first counseling job in 2011. She was hired by Huber Heights City Schools and assigned to Studebaker Middle School. "I loved it there," she said. "The principal Tom Heid was very patient and encouraging with me. Amy Vandyke who was the other counselor became a valued mentor. She really cared for the students and was always positive and inspiring."



Mike Ullery/Staff Photo

Guidance counselor Toni Riley mans her desk in the guidance department at Piqua High School.

At Stuebaker, Riley organized a Career Day that brought in more than 30 local businesses. She coordinated a special program called Gift, a support group for 8th grade girls. She and Vandyke oversaw new student orientation and the Ohio Achievement Assessments testing.

Unfortunately after just one year, Riley was ruffed when budget cuts hit the district. In June, she was hired by Piqua City Schools to become the counselor for the freshmen at PHS. "Everyone has been very friendly and welcoming," she said. "The staff and community have made me feel like I've found a real home."

The ever smiling Riley has quickly connected with her students. "I'm trying to get acquainted with as many freshmen as I can," she said. Her efforts have included attending sporting events and volunteering at student functions such as the last pep assembly where she and fellow counselor Beth Rosenkranz were the dance stars of the faculty 'wobble' team.

"The freshmen have a lot to deal with, coming into a bigger building with more students," she said. "They went from being the top dog at the junior high to being the lowly little kids at the high school. They need social and academic counseling." Riley will follow the Class of 2016 thru their four years of high school.

At home, Riley enjoys reading, eating out, going to the movies four or five times a month, traveling once a month, and shopping. She has raised the fashion bar at Piqua with her stylist outfits and dress. She and her husband David, an accountant for Dayton City Schools, have been married four months. Their recent wedding spawned a new venture for Toni. She has formed her own company - Just a Touch of Ivy - as a wedding planner. "After my wedding, I have a good knowledge of what to do and not do," she said. "I want to help others have that perfect wedding."