

EDUCATION

By Tony Johnson

Oh how fast the summer goes by!

Seems like the kids just got out of school, and we're already back at the mall buying school clothes for the mid August start.

The new school year brings out many different emotions. The students are excited to be back with their friends, but nervous about having to get back into the school routine. Teachers are focused on developing their teaching plans. And parents are relieved to get the kids out of the house!

But I see the start of each new school year as time of opportunity. A critical time when the educational and social building blocks for the future are being built. This is also a point in time in which new commitments, goals and dreams can begin.

Like most parents, I drive my children to be the very best they can be, especially in school. And the start of school is a great time for one my "pep talks".

Recently, Missy (my daughter) was looking through an old scrapbook from my college days. She came across a tattered piece of paper that was a copy of my football scholarship acceptance for the University of Illinois. Inspired by the letter and a summer full of basketball camps, Missy informed me that she has a goal of playing college sports.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, I determined this was fine time for one of dad's "pep talks".

"What do think it's going to take to play in college?" I asked. "Hard work, practice and teamwork" she said. "Good answer" I said (proud of her recognition of teamwork).

"But do you know what the most important thing is? Your education and the effort that you put into school."

"How's that?" Missy asked.

From there, I explained how my good grades and performance on the ACT had been the biggest reason I was able to take that big step from high school to college. My athletic accomplishments were commendable, but it was the academic performance that opened the doors of opportunity to schools like Harvard, Notre Dame, UCLA, Vanderbilt and Illinois.

At each point of our academic lives, there is measuring stick that allows you to advance to the next level. If you don't put the effort and focus in your education so that you meet those measures, you will be limited in the number of opportunities that are open

to you. It may not matter how many points, touchdowns, goals or home runs you hit. The academic measures are what really counts.

For example, according to the University of Illinois admissions website, incoming freshman averaged a score of 26-30 on their ACT and were in the top 4%-17% of their graduating high school classes. Without these academic achievements, you probably won't be able to get into Illinois. Even scholarship athletes must meet tough academic standards.

And there's the step beyond college. To get into a Marketing position at Caterpillar for example, a student must have a four year college degree and have a cumulative GPA of 2.8 out 4.0 or better. Once again, if you don't achieve in college, you won't have the opportunity to work at Caterpillar.

In the Treasure Life program, I re-emphasize the importance of education to the students. It is the start of everything. It will take you the places you want to go.

Remember, "Treasure Life ... Everyday!"



Quote to remember:

The opportunity is laid before you every day you go to school. Make the most of it.

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"Treasure Life" is a positive life message created by Caterpillar manager and Peoria Pirates coach, Tony Johnson. The program encourages students to be "pirates" by filling their "treasure" chests each day with some of life's most valuable traits, values and experiences. The "Treasure Life" program has been recognized as one of the Arena Football League's best community relations program.