

May 2021 Issue No. 9



# LEGACY LEDGER

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER OF LEGACY NAFC



*A Message From NAFC Education Foundation  
Executive Director, Tyler Bliss*

As this school year comes to a close, we'd like to take a moment to recognize the incredible teachers, staff, administrators, nurses, food services workers, bus drivers, custodians, and so many more who made a difficult and unprecedented year a success for NAFC students. Our educators have worked tirelessly, handling every twist and turn of the past year with grace and professionalism. We owe them a great deal of gratitude. Thank you, school professionals, for all you have done for our students, our schools, and our community!

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

At the core of the two profiles below, there is one wonderful word: storytelling. It's a skill set for many. It's a career for some. To be a good storyteller has been groomed in our DNA for countless generations, just as important as hunter/gatherer, provider or parent.

Storytelling is at the heart of the performing arts. If you're like many of us who cherish our years in the NAFC school system, chances are that storytelling was one of the key reasons.

Hundreds, even thousands of alumni from both New Albany and Floyd Central can cite one single name: Tom Weatherston, who elevated the quality of storytelling and the rigorous commitment to doing it well, in our school system. His career began here in 1953, the same year that I was born. On a personal note, my path crossed with Mr. Weatherston when I was ten years old.

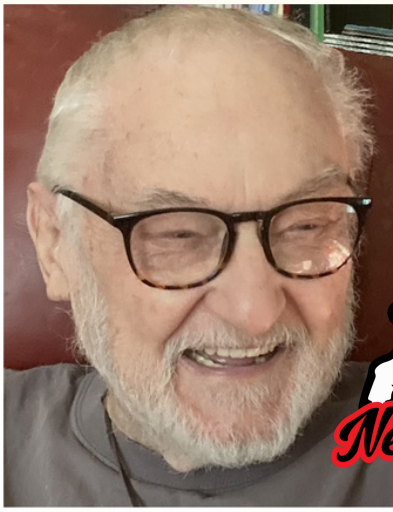
Melissa Combs came to Floyd Central in the fall of 1971 (yes, it will soon be fifty years ago!) and over the next four years, her experiences in the performing arts were a total game-changer in her life. It was the beginning of a pathway to her entire career.

One final note: be sure to read all the way to the bottom of the column for a very special request, directed particularly to those readers headed soon to their seventieth birthday.



Preface: In a departure from the usual newsletter format, a happy decision has been reached to share with you the story of Tom Weatherston's first four years after high school, via the internet. It could not be properly put into writing in the space available here. Moreover, it would take a full hour to tell the fabulous tale of a bygone era, aboard one of the last real showboats in America: the Majestic. The good news is that the Weatherston family captured just such an hour as a video for posterity (now on YouTube).

Click [here](#) to watch. It tells a story that you will not soon forget.



## **TOM WEATHERSTON, NAHS FACULTY, 1953-1991**

Tom graduated in 1947 from Jefferson High School (Ohio), about an hour northeast of Cleveland. He enrolled at nearby Hiram College, where the showboat Majestic was his real education. His summers on the showboat introduced him to almost every job in this self-contained traveling theatrical world. It's the subject of the video mentioned above.

After three riverboat summers, 1951 brought big changes: marriage, graduation from Hiram and the draft. As conflict engulfed Korea, Congress brought back the Selective Service and Tom served two years in the Army. Even while enlisted, Tom was in various "soldier shows". After his military service ended, Tom was able to re-connect with a playwright from Louisville, an acquaintance from his riverboating days on the Ohio. The friendship led to introductions throughout Kentuckiana. That included getting his name in the hands of New Albany's superintendent, Harry Davidson. A job opened up, unexpectedly in August 1953 as an English teacher, and the 68 year adventure began.

It's hard to put a timeline on what Tom built over the next four decades. What he demanded of his students in theatre was always exceeded by what he demanded of himself. In the early years, he extended himself to the Clarksville Little Theatre and the Upward Bound (Great Society) Theatre Project in Bloomington. When Floyd Central opened, he split himself in half for six years and directed major productions at both schools. He was driven to do big shows and little ones and everything in between. There were grand Broadway musicals, but also 22-minute productions that traveled to... and unloaded and packed back up, eight times in a given day, for grade school audiences. Dearest to his heart perhaps was "the Classroom Theatre", quite literally a performance space (in the Annex, second

floor) with seating for 90 students. Students performed for their schoolmates, doing one act in a single period, spread out over multiple days in one week. In the course of a school year, virtually every student at NAHS got the chance to see two entire plays.

His career spanned 38 years in the NAFC schools. He never stopped innovating. He initiated spring break student trips to New York, attending actual Broadway musicals. Ordinary superlatives just cannot describe the foundations he built, the legacy of excellence he left, the productions he directed from the grand and glorious to the small and intimate.

The accolades and honors are almost too numerous to list. In 1986, the NAHS Theatre department established the Weatherston Award Scholarship. The Arts Council of Southern Indiana presented a “Lifetime Achievement Award” to him in 2007. In 2008, the Theatre Arts classroom was designated the “Tom Weatherston Classroom Theatre. He was inducted into the NAHS Hall of Fame in 2009.

A widower for 37 years, Tom celebrated birthday number 92 last week with his two sons, Doug and Rex, along with daughter Emily. And a surprise visit brought the full complement of four generations to the table with a granddaughter (one of seven grandchildren total) and two of the nine great-grandchildren.

I asked Tom to tell me about something that’s been fun for him in the years since he retired from his NAHS years. It did not surprise me that it still involved innovating in the world of theatre.

He had this to say: “One thing that I have really enjoyed has been at the Kentucky Center for the Arts, serving as an Audio Describer to those who have very little eyesight or none at all. It has allowed me to take part in the storytelling experience in a fresh new way. The visually impaired can attend a play or musical and get most of the story from songs or dialogue. But there’s more that can only be seen on stage. Using special headphones, the rest of the story gets explained to them, by volunteers like myself, serving as Audio Describers. It’s been very rewarding.”

From the showboat Majestic to helping fill in the “mind’s eye” in the twenty-first century, Tom Weatherston has been painting these pictures and stories for all of us, for a very long time. May we never lose those visions.



## **MELISSA COMBS, FCHS CLASS OF 1975**

Melissa came to Floyd Central in 1971 from Our Lady of Perpetual Help after the eighth grade. She had anticipated going to Providence, but there was no easy school bus solution to get her there. It turned out to be a lightning-bolt stroke of good fortune. She'll tell you, without a doubt, that her four years at FC absolutely changed her life. Receiving a scholarship to Purdue, she was cast as the lead in three main stage musicals and two graduate student plays. No first-year student had ever done that in the history of the theatre department there. She credits the experiences she had at Floyd Central to go to college and stick out as uncommonly "stage-ready", for a student fresh out of high school

Still, she decided that she would not learn acting in college. Like many who seek a career in singing or acting, the road took her on a dizzying odyssey. She was eager to see what her chances might be in New York or Los Angeles. But they both require a kind of life that just never did appeal to her. Time and time again, she came back to Kentuckiana. She was instrumental in the first renovation of New Albany's Grand Theater when it became the Grand American Music Hall. Upon its re-opening, she performed there, week after week as the opening act.

From an early age, Melissa loved all kinds of musical performers she saw on television. One idol, in particular, was country singer Marty Robbins. It felt like karma when she learned that he was appearing at Clarksville's Derby Dinner Theatre. Quite out of the ordinary practice for a headliner, she lucked into meeting him in person, backstage. His routine advice to "send me a demo" turned out to need many more steps along the way, before he really gave her a proper listen. Once he did, he invited her to come to Nashville. For nearly five years after that, Melissa's world revolved a great deal around his mentoring, his teaching and coaching. In 1982, Robbins' sudden and unexpected death from a heart attack left many of her unfilled "what ifs" crushingly uprooted.

She was only 25. Sometimes, it still feels like yesterday.

As numbing as that was, Melissa's commitment to a life performing meant one thing: find work, go where the work is, do commercials and "the Holiday Inn circuit", sing lead for bands that are here today and gone tomorrow, appear in bars and cabarets. Demand for her appearances rose. She's been on the Nashville Network, together with The Kentucky Opera, the Louisville and Bowling Green Orchestras, and traveled with the Kentucky Youth Orchestra as principal vocalist. Sometimes, the callings are far from lucrative. One opportunity that she's come to love is the WHAS Crusade for Children telethon. She first sang for the Crusade with no expectation of ever coming back. This year marks her twenty-ninth. She's become a perennial crowd-pleaser, performing the theme song "One Dream, One Heart".

She was inducted into the FC Alumni Hall of Fame in 2016 and last year, she became the first Hall of Fame inductee to serve on the Floyd Central Alumni Board.

In her personal life, she remains close to her brothers, Bret and Mark. As the lockdown restrictions have begun to ease, there are opportunities again. Derby Dinner remains a good friend, decades since her first experiences on stage there. She was one of just a few performers who appeared there, in solo concert, last year. Half-capacity restrictions meant that many loyal fans were unable to see her. Those who were there will swear they got twice the entertainment. Just last week, she began a six-week run of "Dearly Beloved", a fast-paced wedding comedy, small-town Texas-style. Does this show bring her lifetime tally of plays and musicals up to a hundred? She's not sure. Maybe it's close to that!

A personal note: I want our readers to know about Melissa's great contribution, performing at the Floyd Central memorial tribute, held just two months ago. It was organized to honor former faculty and staff who left us during this long, hard year of challenges. After the service, dozens of guests commented on her singing, and so I asked Melissa: "Tell me what it means to you, to perform sacred songs"

She replied "God gave me a talent in my voice that seems to reach people. Just like many entertainers, when I'm on stage, I love the focus to be on me. But at church, I prefer to be in the balcony, out of sight for those who have come to worship. I want the focus to be on the Cross, not me. The songs I sing there fill my heart with joy and a feeling of gratitude. I feel truly blessed if I am an instrument, through songs, to help someone feel the presence and love of God."



Postscript: this is an appeal, as I have made before, to any readers who would be willing to take a stab as a guest contributor to this column. There are still many dozens of great stories to share, from the archives of both the NAHS and FCHS Hall of Fame printed programs. Thanks to Melissa Wiseheart of The Floyd County Library, my collection of all of the FCHS Hall of Fame printed programs has now been augmented with all 13 years (2007-2019) of the NAHS Hall of Fame pages as well.

But, there is a special reason to make this request now. I could not prepare this column, using the word “storyteller” without noting the tragic loss, last month, of one of Floyd County’s truly great storytellers: the phenomenal Mark Seabrook, NAHS ’70.

Of course, what many of us remember about Mark - - that smile, that laugh - - was nothing compared to his devoted public service to our community.

And I must confess: this one is personal to me as much as the profile of Tom Weatherston is. I first met Mark Seabrook at Fairmont Elementary School in 1960 (three years BEFORE I met Mr. Weatherston). We walked to school together every day.

I have normally favored sharing here the stories of inductees into the Hall of Fame, but it has already been established that it is not a requirement. Besides, I am also making a simple plea to the NAHS Alumni Committee, responsible for the Hall of Fame selection process: let’s get this one thing done before winter arrives. Mark’s induction alone would be a huge reason to get the NAHS Hall of Fame back on the 2021 calendar.

**Contributor: Rex Bickers, FCHS ‘70**



**MARK SEABROOK**

**MARCH 16, 1952 - APRIL 5, 2021**

# Inaugural Romeo Langford Academic Scholarships



The Education Foundation was honored to award a record amount of scholarships to graduating seniors from NAHS and FCHS at Class Night ceremonies this month. Three students each from FC and NA received \$1,000 through the generosity of Teachers Credit Union and the Education Foundation. We are also excited to announce five additional seniors from NAHS received the first Romeo Langford Academic Scholarships through the generosity of past student and basketball superstar, Romeo Langford and his family. Congratulations to all our graduates!



# Play FORE! Education Golf Scramble - July 16th

**AssuredPartners**

Play **FORE!**  
Education  
CHARITY GOLF CLASSIC

**FRIDAY, JULY 16TH**

***Morning Flight***  
Donuts and Coffee  
7:30 am Registration  
8:00 am Morning Shotgun Start

11:30 am Lunch Served

***Afternoon Flight***  
12:00 pm Registration  
1:30 pm Afternoon Shotgun Start  
4:00 pm Snacks Served

**1820 Champions Club Ln.  
Henryville, IN 47126**

**Champions Pointe Golf Club**  
FUZZY ZOELLER'S

**New Albany-Floyd County  
Education Foundation**

Join us for the 13th annual Play Fore! Education Golf Scramble at Fuzzy Zoeller's Champions Pointe, in Memphis, Indiana on Friday, July 16th, 2021.

Accepting sponsorships and teams of 4. More information can be found at: [bidpal.net/PlayForeEd](http://bidpal.net/PlayForeEd)

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**NOT A MEMBER YET?**

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The New Albany Floyd County Education Foundation is a not for profit organization which works in conjunction with NAFC Schools to provide privately funded supplemental resources and programs to students, teachers, and schools. NAFC Alumni Nation is an alumni program of the NAFC Education Foundation. Legacy NAFC is the official support group of NAFC Schools, NAFC Alumni Nation, and the NAFC Education Foundation.



[www.NAFCEdFoundation.org](http://www.NAFCEdFoundation.org)

<https://nafcalumni.nationbuilder.com/>

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