

NAFC
alumni



LEGACY LEDGER

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER OF LEGACY NAFC ALUMNI



Pictured: (Left to Right) Julia Hott, Katie Sutter, Matt Uhl, Paula Merrill, Amanda Braden, Karen McKinley-Boyd, Tony Toran, Braydon Hobbs

A Message from the NAFC Education Foundation ***Sherri McKeen, Alumni Coordinator***

Last Friday night, our NAFC community came together for one of our favorite traditions, the crowning of the *Legacy NAFC Alumni Royal Court*. With a packed house at Floyd Central and excitement building ahead of the New Albany vs. Floyd Central boys varsity basketball game, we celebrated all eight candidates and felt the pride that makes this community so special.

Because of our alumni, their families, friends, and sponsors, this year's Royal Court raised more than \$50,000 to support the work of the NAFC Education Foundation. Congratulations to our 2025 winner, **Amanda (Hines) Braden**, NAHS Class of 1994. Amanda's heart for service, especially through her work with Blessings in a Backpack Floyd County, reflects exactly what this campaign is all about.

From all of us at the Foundation, thank you for showing up, giving, and cheering on our alumni. Wishing you and your family a joyful holiday season and a wonderful start to the new year.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Amanda Beam, Guest Contributor

In Southern Indiana, Santa Claus isn't just coming to town. He and the Mrs. live here.

Much like a Christmas tree's dazzling lights, our alumni this December brighten lives and bring wonder to the Hoosiers of all ages through their portrayals of Santa and Mrs. Claus. Not only do they bring holiday cheer year after year, but each has also dedicated decades to nurturing NAFCS students' arts and education.

Vicki Hays Pierce (FCHS, 1970) transformed into Mrs. Claus with a mission of encouraging kids to read. In addition to her 25 years of costuming Floyd Central plays and musicals, the grandmother of six visits elementary classrooms during the holiday season, creating magical moments along the way.

After standing in for the legend for almost 40 years, **Delbert Hillegas (FCHS, 1970)** personifies Santa and all his kind, jolly ways. He even went to school for it! Chances are if you've had a Santa photo taken at an NAFCS school event, Delbert's gentle smile is in it. When not in his red suit, Mr. Hillegas taught printing at Prosser and other area schools.

Thank you to Delbert and Vicki, as well as all the teachers, staff, volunteers and nonprofits that help make this holiday season so special to our students. Happy holidays!

Vicki Hays Pierce (FCHS '70) Bringing holiday cheer through reading and love



*Vicki with her daughter,
Casey Street (FCHS '03)*

It's the Christmas season, and among the sleighbells' jingling and ring ting tingling, a familiar scent wafts through the room.

Peppermint.

Candy canes are plentiful this time of year, but take a deeper inhale, and you'll trace back the sweet smell to a smiling woman wearing a red dress, white apron and festive bonnet. While her cheeks sparkle like the frozen land from which she comes, there's nothing icy to her demeanor. She's the loving grandma to all the little ones who visit her... and to the six of her own.

Meet Mrs. Claus, aka Vicki Hays Pierce. Alongside bringing wonderment to area children as the First Lady of the North Pole, the 1970 Floyd Central graduate created onstage magic at her alma mater through costuming for more than 150 of its productions.

As with all of Vicki's wardrobe creations, the details make all the difference for Mrs. Claus. Brushing glitter on her

cheeks and dabbing peppermint oil on her wrists allows her to transform into the cookie-baking icon children adore.

"I want the kids to feel relaxed around me and to be able to approach me. I try to make them comfortable. I think just being sweet, being kind, lets the kids see that," Vicki said. "And I tell them how wonderful they are, because a lot of those little guys probably don't get that."

Vicki's creative journey began when she was a kindergartner, acting in a school play. By high school, she was singing in FCHS's choir and performing in plays. In the school's very first musical, she played the female lead, Nancy, in "Oliver". Before the school's auditorium was constructed, actors performed in the cafeteria on platforms. Unlike the orchestra accompanying the productions today, "Oliver" had only a piano and maybe a few drums.

"These kids just don't know what they have now for sure, but we loved it. We had fun. It was really close-knit," Vicki said.

Through the years, her children also became involved in FCHS theater, which reintroduced her to the program. For more than 25 years, the mother of three and a few others have costumed 1,000s of actors for the school's different musicals and plays. Now, some of these students have their own kids who are involved in theater, bringing their journeys full circle.

"It takes an army," said Vicki, who still helps out. "I still got my finger in there because I miss it. I miss the kids a lot. They're fun to be around and to see where they go in their future."

Serving as Mrs. Claus has given her another meaningful way to connect with children.

More than a decade ago, Vicki ran into the big man himself, Santa Delbert Hillegas. Delbert knew of his fellow FC classmate's creativity and asked her to be his Mrs. Claus at French Lick Hotel and Resort. She accepted, and her festive following grew from there.

This holiday season, you'll find Santa's Mrs. appearing at area NAFCS elementary schools- including her daughter Casey Street's 4th-grade classroom- where she reads books to students. The classic "Night Before Christmas" is one of her favorites, followed by a Disney alphabet book for the younger ones. Rudolph, the stuffed toy version, flies along with her on her visits to help lead sing-alongs.

"I want them to be interested in actually reading, and I stress to grab a book, not just look at your computer," Vicki said. "And I just love the little bitty ones when they start asking me questions like 'How did you get here?' and 'Who is your favorite elf?'"

The answer to the latter, she said, is Sebastian, who is more than 5,000 years old.

"I just wing it," Vicki said about her responses. "The little children are just so full of wonder. I just get such joy out of looking at their little faces."

That joy extends beyond the holiday season. In 2023, Vicki was crowned the Legacy NAFC Alumni Royal Court winner, a reflection of the generosity and commitment she brought to supporting students and educators across the NAFC district. Whether she is costuming a production, reading to a classroom, or stepping into character as Mrs. Claus, Vicki's gift has always been the same: making people feel seen, valued, and loved.

Delbert Hillegas (FCHS '70) Creating Christmas Memories for Thousands



Questions abound for our local Santa, Delbert Hillegas, from the children of Southern Indiana. Many ask about Mrs. Claus, his little elves or his high-flying reindeer, especially the glowing-nosed Rudolph. And with his full white beard and gentle smile, Delbert answers with a twinkle in his eye and love in his heart.

But after almost 40 years of donning the red suit, the 1970 Floyd Central grad has faced requests much harder- and more heartbreaking- to answer.

“They’ll ask questions like ‘My mom died, and what do I do?’ And it’s tough,” Delbert said. “Those are the negative sides, but they’re not really negative sides, because you get to love the kids a little bit, hug them and do right by them.

Helping others has been a lifetime undertaking for the Southern Indiana St. Nick. After graduating from FCHS, the teenager went out into the world and learned the printing trade. Knowing he wanted to teach others what he had

learned, he enrolled in Indiana State University where he earned a degree in Education. For 42 years, he taught students the art of the press, including six of which he served at his alma mater FC. Around seven years ago, he retired from Prosser after 16 years of providing trade instruction.

While he might no longer formally teach kids, Delbert continues to bring joy to young and old with his Christmas cheer.

His love of the holiday began with his family, who always assembled Lionel trains throughout their house during the season. He and Cathy, his wife of 50 years, carry on the tradition today.

“It’s part of what Christmas is to me,” Delbert said. “We used to get the Christmas presents of oranges and tangerines and peppermint sticks and stuff like that. That was the greatest thing in the world. We’d get them and we’d have them to eat as we played around with our toys. It was wonderful.”

A magician of 50 years, Delbert was introduced to the role of Santa by a neighbor who, in the late 80s, convinced him to dress up as the Christmas icon alongside him for a party in Louisville. Over time, he hung up the hang-on beard, opting to grow his own. His love of playing the jolly old elf also grew through the years.

So, what's his tip for being a great St. Nick?

"You got to listen to the kids," he said. "You can't do this job if you don't like what you're doing and you got to love the kids. The kids are the main key thing. If you don't love kids, you don't need to be putting a suit on."

Our Kentuckiana Santa even graduated from the Charles W. Howard Santa School in Midland, MI. Here he learned the history of Santa, his reindeer and the North Pole.

"I had no expectations. I thought I would learn a few things, see a few things, but I'll tell you what, it was a wonderful experience for me," Delbert said. "You learn about all the history and rules, and, in doing that, you basically portray the man in an accurate way."

Delbert now transforms into the man from the North Pole almost every day of the holiday season for various events throughout the area. He's also been seen at numerous NAFCS activities through the decades, sitting for photos with the kids and hearing their Christmas wishes.

And while he may not be shimmying down any chimneys, Delbert certainly will be around town spreading holiday cheer.

"Christmas means everything to me," he said. "To me, it's the most important time of the year."

Great Classroom Grants at Work



One of the most meaningful ways alumni support comes to life is through our Great Classroom Grants. In December, the NAFCS Education Foundation approved and funded 17 new grants, bringing Great Classroom Grant funding this school year to more than \$100,000.

These grants are intentionally simple and timely. Educators apply with a clear idea, a specific need, and a plan for how the funding will enhance learning. Once approved, funds are distributed quickly so teachers can act while

momentum and enthusiasm are high. That might mean adding new materials, expanding hands-on learning, strengthening classroom libraries, or creating experiences that spark curiosity and engagement for students.

By spreading funding throughout the school year, the Foundation is able to respond to real-time classroom needs rather than limiting support to a single grant cycle. December's grants reflect a wide range of grade levels, subject areas, and learning environments, all united by one goal: helping teachers bring their best ideas to life for students.

Thank you for being part of a community that believes in supporting educators where it matters most.

Celebrate with Us on Friday, February 20



Many of us carry lifelong memories from our years in New Albany and Floyd County schools. Teachers who challenged us. Classmates who became friends. Experiences that helped shape who we are today. Each year, the NAFC Education Foundation gathers to celebrate that shared history and the work that continues in our schools.

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On Friday, February 20, 2026, alumni, educators, and community supporters will come together at Huber's Plantation Hall for the 15th Annual Education Celebration Gala. This evening is about honoring the people and programs that keep opportunity growing for today's students. Since 2005, the Foundation has invested more than \$5 million into NAFC Schools, funding classroom innovation, student support, and opportunities that go beyond what public funding alone can provide.

The night will include a great meal, live and silent auctions, entertainment, and the Dream Vacation Raffle. Just as important, it is a chance to reconnect with former classmates, familiar faces, and the schools that helped set our paths in motion.

This celebration also shines a light on the educators, partners, and community members who continue to make a difference every day in NAFC classrooms. Their work builds on the foundation that so many of us benefited from as students.

Alumni are invited to attend by purchasing individual tickets or reserving a table to enjoy the evening together. Businesses and organizations with ties to NAFC schools can also participate through sponsorships that help extend the Foundation's impact.

Date & Time

Friday, February 20, 2026 | 5:30 PM

Location

Huber's Plantation Hall
19816 Huber Rd
Borden, IN 47106

Tickets and sponsorships are now available at <https://onecau.se/educationcelebration26>. We hope you will join us for an evening that celebrates our shared past and invests in the future of NAFC students and educators.

**2026 Education
Celebration GALA!**



JOIN US ON FACEBOOK!

Stay updated on your Floyd County classmates, discover thrilling events in your NAFC school community, and learn firsthand about the NAFC Education Foundation by connecting with us at facebook.com/LegacyNAFCAlumni.



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

For more information, contact Sherri McKeen at smckeen@nafcs.org or 812-542-2242 at the NAFC Education Foundation.

www.NAFCEdFoundation.org/alumni



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