

Tragic fire consumes childhood pictures

By Nicole Brown

As graduation rolls around, senior Austin Mizer is faced with the harsh reality that there will be no pictures of him before eighth grade to display at his graduation party.

That's because his life was changed forever five years ago when at the age of 13, he had to watch his Durant home reduced to a pile of ash.

"All the pictures and the baby books, all the baseball cards, everything that was sentimental is gone," Mizer said. "Everything from my childhood was just ashes."

The cause of the house fire was never known, according to Mizer. No one was hurt in the fire, but Mizer lost two pets.

Mizer began that spring morning as he always had, not knowing the events to come.

"I woke up and ate breakfast with my mom because my dad was still sleeping," he recalled in an interview last month.

He went to school as he would any weekday, and after classes were over,

he went to track practice.

His parents went into town to do some grocery shopping. He believes that if his mom hadn't woken his dad to go to town, he would have been in the house when tragedy struck.

Mizer's grandma showed up during track practice to pick him up. She approached him with tears flowing down her face.

"Everything is gone," she told him.

Mizer still feels the effects of this horrible day years later. However, he believes that this day made his family closer to each other.

"It hurts to look back on and think about what happened, but at the same time it made me into the person I am, so I'm thankful for that," he said.

One of the hardest parts of the fire was knowing he would never get to go back to his home again. It was also hard for Austin knowing that he would never hold his trophies again.

Not only did he lose trophies and his home, he lost his companions. His dog Lily and his cat Milo were lost in the fire.



Photo by Shannon Head

Wrestler Ethan Gast and bowler Kayden Johnson both qualified individually for their respective state tournaments.

Juniors qualify for state

By Ally Happ and Koby Paulsen

The month of February has been a special one for two Durant juniors. Bowler Kayden Johnson and wrestler Ethan Gast both represented the Wildcats at their respective state meets.

Johnson had quite a season for himself, suffering through a hyperextended ring and middle finger on his bowling hand and still placing fifth overall in 1A individuals.

State bowling was held in Waterloo. **See STATE, page 4**

80% of Durant staff to receive COVID-19 shots

By Zachary Pearlman

Eighty percent of the Durant staff, including teachers, associates, and substitutes, are in the process of receiving the vaccine for COVID-19, according to school nurse Mrs. Mary Dorris.

Mrs. Dorris is the person responsible for administering the two-dose Moderna vaccine to the staff.

The state of Iowa is 32 days into Phase 1B of their COVID-19 vaccination program, which includes PK-12 school staff, early childhood education, and childcare workers.

Mrs. Dorris explained that the vaccines are specifically given to the staff members on Fridays.

"I have tried to administer Covid-19 vaccinations on Fridays, as there can be mild side effects," said Mrs. Dorris.

"While these side effects show that the vaccine is doing its job in ramping up one's immune system, administering them on Fridays allows staff to have a couple of

days to rest if needed and allows the District to maintain staffing needs."

Math teacher Mrs. Abigail Straube said she will have the option to receive her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine on March 19.

Others teachers have already received their first or second dose. Mrs. Straube said getting immunized will help her feel safer going to school for work.

"I think the more people that get vaccinated, the safer we'll feel," she said.

"So if I can do my part to help others out, it will help me feel safe."

Mrs. Straube isn't the only educator to feel safer when they have the vaccine.

A poll from the National Education Association said that "70% of teachers would feel safer about working in-person as a result of the vaccines."

Despite having a large majority of the staff vaccinated, Superintendent Mr. Joe Burnett said there will be no change in the current regulations on masks and social dis-

tancing.

"We will follow what the CDC and the department of health recommends in regards to when adults and students are recommended to unmask," Mr. Burnett said.

However, Mr. Burnett is concerned about students and staff alike getting mask fatigue but is proud of how everyone is handling the masks that have given students the opportunity to learn in-person.

"We've been full time since day one as far as on campus learning, and I feel that we are in a much better spot than districts that are starting in-person classes next Monday," Mr. Burnett said in an interview last month.

"There have been some districts that have been hybrid or remote all year. In my opinion, the isolation and the loss of education that those students have experienced in those schools outweighs the mask fatigue."

Although there is always a small possibility that Durant may have to go

to remote learning if Durant has a severe COVID-19 outbreak, Mr. Burnett believes getting the staff vaccinated is another key step in reducing the chance of online learning.

"I think everyday that passes, it's less likely, but who knows," he said.

"One of the keys has always been the staff, to have the staffing in place. And once a major majority of our staff gets that second shot, we should be in a much better spot as far as less likely to go remote."

As the risk of going remote continues to drop, Mr. Burnett wants to have the opportunity to open up the next school year without masks.

"Honestly, my goal is to get the school started in the fall of 2021 without masks, if possible," he said.

"And I say that's my goal, that's my hope. I hope that we are at a point where, in the following school year, we can put this behind us. But again, there is a lot of things that...we have no control over in that regard."

Durant drama department back in action after yearlong break

By Kiley Stineman

The Durant drama department is back after a yearlong hiatus with its very first play debut this year, *Left to Their Own Devices*.

"It is a vignette play, which is a play made up of many short scenes for a few actors all related to a theme, in this case: our devices," said drama director Ms. Cinnamon Kleeman.

This play was originally going to be performed earlier this year, but with quarantine and timing issues, it was pushed back.

"Because doing a virtual play requires performances ready to go about two

weeks earlier than a normal production, I could tell that the only way to continue with the play would be to really rush it," said Ms. Kleeman.

"We all discussed it and decided that we would focus on other theater learning until the second semester."

The play is currently scheduled for March 19-21, and the drama department is working its hardest to make sure it happens.

"Now that we're here, we're refreshed, and ready to tackle this challenge for March," Ms. Kleeman said.

The cast is made up of 15 high school students with two other student direc-

tors.

With the extra time for planning and preparations, the cast and crew are excited to show everyone what they've been working on.

"With COVID, it's been actually really hard to learn our lines with everyone being gone, so I'm actually kind of glad that it was cancelled because it wouldn't have come out as good as it could be," said junior Christian Durham.

The drama department strives to keep a COVID-friendly environment and that even means virtual viewings of the play, which Durant has never done before.

By showcasing the play virtually, the cast has more freedom in their acting. If the play was to be done in person, the cast members would have to wear masks on stage and social distance, but there would still be a risk of having a live audience.

The students are able to tape their scene at home or at outside locations on their own time, and some are able to record their respective scenes at school during their skinny.

"In the end, doing a virtual play was the best solution for everyone, and I am so excited to see the students rise to the challenge," said Ms. Kleeman.