



"Time To Paint Our Town Red": Student-Athlete Banners Showcased Throughout Community

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Craig and Amy Lombardi, Madeline Eades, and the Alton Athletic Association, along with Al Womack of the Alton Boys & Girls Club, formulated a brilliant idea this summer for a program to boost the Redbird spirit in the community. Residents may have noticed banners of Alton High School athletes on poles throughout the area and it is because of the efforts of the association, the Lombardi family, and other volunteers.

"We met with Al Womack of the Boys and Girls Club this summer to talk about ways to boost Redbird Spirit in our community," Amy said. "We want to keep our athletes in Alton and not see students going elsewhere to high school. The purpose of the project is to showcase our students. We want to get our community excited about our Redbirds. It's time to paint our town red."

"We came up with the banner project from our conversation and created the Alton Redbird Beautification Diversity Program. We are proud of our students and love our Redbird community, and want others to feel the same way," she said. "Craig, Madeline Eades, and I had to present our project to the City of Alton at the City Council Meeting this summer. We requested to use 82 of the green light poles on Washington Avenue, College Avenue, and State Street."

Amy continued and said that after receiving approval from the City of Alton, "we decided we needed more poles. We identified 45 Ameren utility poles on State Street, Humbert Road, and College Avenue. We used Ameren poles with lights on them so

banners could be seen at night. We have not been officially billed yet from Schwartzkopf Printing for the banners and hardware, so this is just an estimate. The project will probably cost around \$13,000.

"We received a \$3,000 donation from Alton Township to help offset our costs and the rest of the total will be paid for through our fundraising efforts. We have a committee of 10 members that met this summer and decided on the criteria needed to be chosen."

Committee members for the project include Superintendent Kristie Baumgartner, Alton High School Principal Michael Bellm, Educational Equity and Programing Coordinator Amy Golley, Alton High School Athletic Director Chris Kusnerick, Alton Middle School Athletic Director Amy Cotton, Al Womack of The Boys and Girls Club, Carrollton Bank President Steve Thompson, Alton Athletic Association President Madeline Eades, Craig Lombardi, and Alton Athletic Association Secretary Amy Lombardi.

High School Athletes were selected on the following criteria:

- 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Team All-Conference Players
- State Qualifiers and Medalists
- Scholar-Athletes from each Varsity Sport

Athletes that obtained those criteria were automatically chosen. Committee members then chose the remaining athletes with a random drawing. They placed all varsity athletes from each sport in a "hat" and drew names. The number of names drawn from each sport depended upon the number of participants for that sport. Every IHSA-sanctioned sport was represented as well as Special Olympic athletes.

Middle School athletes were chosen based on their accomplishments at state-level competitions, since the southwestern conference does not recognize middle school athletes with conference awards.

"We hired Missy Struif, of Missy Struif Photography, to take pictures of the athletes in two photo sessions," Amy continued. "She has been wonderful to work with and has even let some of our athletes come to her house to get their pictures taken when they couldn't make the two sessions at school. She's done a beautiful job taking pictures and has captured a lot of personality in the pictures."

"The banners were created by the team at Schwartzkopf Printing who have printed and sewn all of the banners. We are very happy with the finished product. We have hung 122 banners all over town. A team of parents spent two weekends working to hang them all. We chose to hang the banners in highly trafficked areas around town where they

would be seen the most. We chose to hang them on Humbert Road so everyone going toward the high school could see them.

"All of our middle school athletes are displayed on College Avenue on the way to the middle school. We could not add names to the banners due to some Ameren Illinois regulations and since our athletes are minors. The community support we've been given has been overwhelming. We are thankful to Mayor Goins and the City of Alton, Alton Township, Ameren, The Upper Alton Association, The Boys and Girls Club, Macias Insurance, Schwartzkopf Printing, and Missy Struif."

Amy said overall, the best outcome "has been the pride we see in our Redbirds."

"When you see kids pointing and yelling, 'That's me!' out their car windows, or parents stopping to take pictures of their child's banner, you can't help but feel pure joy. It's really very amazing to witness these bursts of pride in our youth in our community. It's long overdue," she said. "We have something really special here at Alton High School and it's important that we celebrate it. Once a Redbird, always a Redbird."