

Leukemia battle gives Tyson chance to know hero



Louisburg High School senior Christopher Tyson poses with a picture of his great-grandfather Kenneth Virgin at the Punchbowl National Cemetery in Hawaii where his grandfather's name is honored at a memorial. Tyson is currently battling leukemia and was given a Make-A-Wish opportunity. He chose to go to Pearl Harbor where he got to see his grandfather's name for himself.

In 2013, Christopher Tyson sat down to write about his hero – a man he had never met.

It was for a school project, and a pretty big one actually. Christopher, then a sophomore at Louisburg High School, was charged by band director John Cisetti to write a paper about a veteran in his family as the band prepared to travel to New York City to march in the annual Memorial Day parade.

Christopher's great-grandfather, Kenneth Virgin, was one of 34 sailors that was killed on the USS Colhoun during the battle for Okinawa in World War II. He heard stories about his grandfather from his mother, Rhonda.

No doubt, the paper took Christopher back in time wondering what it was like to serve in the military at a time filled

with tension and loss of life. It was hard for him to fathom what his great grandfather went through.

Christopher finished his project, traveled with the LHS Marching Band and did his best to honor him by playing his trombone through the streets of New York City.

Less than a year later, Christopher would go through a battle of his own. It was one that didn't involve war, guns or conflict.

It was a personal battle – for his life.

GOD'S GOT THIS

At the beginning of his junior year, Christopher joined the rest of his Louisburg High School cross country teammates for a little running.

The season was just getting underway with the first day of practice, and right away Christopher could tell something wasn't right.

"I went for two miles and I could just feel the pulse pounding inside my head and I was just exhausted the whole time," he said.

The next day, the same thing happened.

On the third day, he ran with Wildcat coach John Reece, and pretty quickly Reece realized something wasn't right.

"I didn't notice anything at first with Christopher because it was very hot and everybody was struggling," Reece said. "The thing that I noticed was him not finishing the workout. When I talked to him he told me he had been sick with the flu while visiting family.

"I mentioned to his mom that his skin color was off and that

it might not hurt to have a doctor check him out again since he had just gotten over the flu.”

That afternoon, Rhonda and Christopher went to a walk-in clinic in Paola and the doctors didn’t notice much. They drew some of his blood and told them they would give them a call in a day or two when the results came back.

It turned out to be a lot shorter than that.

“We went to Walmart and weren’t there for 15 minutes before we got a call back from the doctor and said that he was anemic and all three of his blood counts were low,” Rhonda said. “He really wanted us to go see a doctor at Children’s Mercy the next day. He told us not to let Christopher do anything.”

The Tysons eventually made their way up to Children’s Mercy and got the result no child or parent wants to hear – it was cancer. More specifically, Christopher was diagnosed with pre-B-cell leukemia, which is a cancer of the bone marrow and blood.

If there was any good news in the diagnosis it was that doctors told the family his pre-B-cell numbers were the best of anyone they have ever seen and it was the earliest they had ever caught it.

After talking with the doctors and telling her of the diagnosis, Rhonda looked at her son, who was lying the hospital bed joking around after having a bone marrow pull done – not exactly the reaction most people have after an invasive procedure is done.

She looked at him and asked how he was doing.

“Mom, God’s got this,” Christopher told her.

“I hope so Christopher,” Rhonda said. “Because my world is just spinning right now.”

It was spinning enough that Rhonda and her husband Roger didn't bother to tell Christopher of his diagnosis, on accident, of course. The two figured the doctors had told him of the news.

"He said he didn't find out about it till the next day when he overheard us talking to the doctors about it," Rhonda said. "I felt pretty small as a parent when he told me. I just assumed that when he said 'God's got this' that he knew what God had."

Through it all, Christopher wasn't worried much. He had faith, knowing that God would get him through this one way or another.

His faith was tested right away.

BEATING CANCER

Shortly after being diagnosed with leukemia, Christopher aggressively began chemotherapy treatments.

Every Friday, he made his way up to Children's Mercy for chemo and would spend days in the hospital over the next few months. It wasn't long before he started feeling the effects.

After returning home from a treatment one day, Christopher couldn't move the whole left side of his body.

"We thought he was having a stroke," Rhonda said.

By the time they got back up to the hospital, Christopher couldn't move at all. His father, Roger, pulled him out of the car and carried him into the hospital.

As Christopher lay in the hospital bed, there wasn't much Rhonda could do so she went home with her daughter.

"I went home later that night and I just prayed and asked God how we were going to take care of him," Rhonda said. "I was

just so scared. Then I go back up about six hours later and I see him walking in the hallway with the nurse. That was a miracle as far as I was concerned because I know the kind of shape he was in when I left.

Doctors took an MRI and found a white spot in the middle of his brain. It wasn't a stroke, but Christopher was suffering from methotrexate toxicity. He was allergic to methotrexate they were giving him during chemotherapy treatments.

They gave him medicine to help counteract some of the reactions, one of which was over-the-counter Delsym cough medicine, of all things.

The treatments continued and so did the reactions. Even with all that, Christopher wasn't about to miss one of the highlights of his year – the LHS Marching Band Electric Light Show.

"I really enjoy marching band and the sports I am in," Christopher said. "I just wanted to get back out there."

Just a little more than a month after the diagnosis, Christopher put on his marching band outfit, laced with lights and tried to get back to some form of normalcy. The chemo would wear on him, however.

He had a lumbar puncture the day before his performance and suffered from a major headache that made it difficult to even stand up.

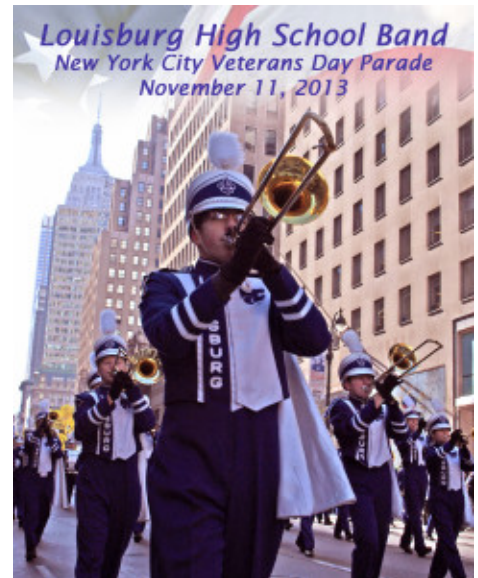
"He was laying down in the truck and when they were ready to go in, he went out and did his thing," Rhonda said. "Then he came back and laid down in the truck again as we were trying to get all the lights off him."

It was enough to raise the eyebrows of his band teacher.

"I did not expect Christopher to be there that night, but I was not surprised because I know that Christopher is dedicated

beyond belief,” Cisetti said. “He has a keen sense of loyalty to the group and goes the extra mile for his classmates.”

Christopher also made an appearance at the Wildcats’ home cross country meet in October. He watched as his team ran with orange ribbons on their uniform in honor of his fight against leukemia.



Christopher Tyson made the cover of the LHS Marching Band book as they marched through New York City in the Labor Day Parade back in 2013.

“Christopher is an awesome kid,” Reece said. “He is a hard worker both in and out of school. While he was going through the first stages of treatment, he was often more worried about school than what he was going through.

“He wanted to be back in school with his peers and be as close to normal as he could be. His body worked hard to put his leukemia in to remission. He is a warrior and he put his faith in God to help him get through this difficult time.”

He had plenty of classmates and teachers to help him get through the difficult times. Early on, Cisetti brought a little present to cheer him up – something from that special day in New York City.

“I told the band parents on our photography committee that I wanted a good picture of one of our band students marching in front of a famous landmark,” Cisetti said. “As it turned out, Christopher is the one they got in a picture in front of the Empire State Building. When I made the souvenir trip book, that picture went on the front. The books arrived from the publisher the same week that Christopher got sick. When I visited him in the hospital, I took him the very first copy.”

The book brought back a lot of great memories for Christopher, one of which was of his great grandfather.

MAKE-A-WISH

While in the hospital, Christopher was told he would be granted a wish through the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

The foundation provides sick children with the opportunity to go somewhere with their family, meet a famous athlete or celebrity or anything a child would want to do.

They told Christopher to start thinking about where he would want to go. It didn't take him long to answer.

“Pearl Harbor,” he said.

Everyone's eyes perked up.

“He told them he wanted to go to Pearl Harbor and not Hawaii, which puts a whole different spin on it,” Roger said.

He wasn't thinking about the sunny skies, the blue ocean or the sandy beaches, Christopher was thinking about one thing –

his great-grandfather. He wanted to go see his grandfather's name that is engraved on the wall at Punchbowl National Cemetery, which is a tribute to the soldiers killed in the 20th century wars.

Christopher was eventually granted his wish as it was revealed following a service at their church in Olathe. The Make-A-Wish foundation provided him, his parents and a sister the opportunity to spend a week in Hawaii.

The only problem was Christopher had two sisters, so the church raised money for both of his sisters, Ashley and Emily, to go and the whole family took off for Hawaii in late July.

It was a memorable trip for the entire Tyson clan.

Their hotel was right on Waikiki Beach, and their room on the top floor of the Sheraton featured views from two balconies and had multiple flat-screen televisions.



Christopher Tyson stands next to the USS Bowfin during his tour of Pearl Harbor.

"We didn't turn those on once," Rhonda said.

After doing some touring of the islands, they made their way to Pearl Harbor where they toured the USS Arizona memorial and

then took a tour of the USS Bowfin, Christopher's favorite spot, before finishing up with the USS Missouri.

"We were able to go into the captain's cabin, barber shop and the brig and those were some of the spots that people usually don't get to go to," Christopher said of the Missouri. "It was a pretty awesome."

A couple days later, the family finally made their way to Punchbowl National Cemetery and Christopher was on the lookout for his grandfather's name. It was like looking for a needle in the haystack with the thousands of soldiers honored at the memorial.

With the help of a guide, he finally spotted it.

"Virgin, Kenneth D, Fireman IC, USNR, Kansas"

Christopher took out a piece of paper and rubbed the etching as keepsake to take back with him. As it turned out, finding his grandfather's name was just the beginning of a very special day.

Earlier in the day, the Tysons were informed they were invited to attend the disinterment of five coffins from four grave sites. It was a military exhumation process to help identify the remains of soldiers killed aboard the USS Oklahoma during the Pearl Harbor bombing of 1941.



Christopher Tyson (middle) stands with members of the military during the disinterment ceremony at Punchbowl National Cemetery.

As a part of the ceremony, Christopher was asked to be a part of the honors platoon. He stood next to a 2-star general and a member of the Pentagon.

“It was just really amazing to be a part of something like that,” Christopher said.

When their day was coming to a close, Christopher got one more surprise. He was presented with the American flag that flew over Punchbowl on the day of their visit and was put in a frame.

The day capped what was an amazing getaway from their normal life that was filled with worries of leukemia and chemotherapy.

“The people with the Make-A-Wish Foundation are just amazing,” Rhonda said. “They, along with all the sponsors that help kids get to experience these wonderful things is just awesome. For a lot of these kids, their wishes are just a light for them to look at what sometimes is at the end of a very long tunnel.”

For Christopher, that light is getting brighter every day.

Getting back to normal

The Tyson family received good news a month after Christopher's diagnosis. All the chemotherapy he received was paying off as they eliminated 99.9 percent of the cancer.

Christopher will now be in maintenance for the next two years to make sure all of the cancer is gone. Currently, he goes in for chemo once a month and takes medication.

He will also have to go in for yearly checkups the rest of his life. However, Christopher and his family are more than thrilled with the result thanks to some divine help.

"Anything can happen," Rhonda said. "But you just have to put your faith and trust in God and hold on."

It was a wild ride that came full circle. It started as a homework assignment for a trip to New York City and ended in Hawaii – the place where Christopher got to see where his grandfather, his hero, was honored.

Sandwiched in the middle, Christopher found out a lot about himself and his faith in God. Through all the hardships, he admitted he never wavered.

"God's got this," Christopher said. "He always has."

Wildcats run strong at Ottawa

triangular



Louisburg's Savannah Reinhart finished in third place during Thursday's triangular at the Eisenhower Road Course in Ottawa. Reinhart ran a time of 25 minutes and 55 seconds and was one of nine girls to earn medals.

OTTAWA – The Louisburg High School cross country team took a little different approach from its usual routine.

Normally, the Wildcats will compete in large invitationals against several teams. Louisburg scaled it down a notch Thursday when they traveled to Ottawa.

Louisburg took to the Eisenhower Road Course, and for the only time this season, will run together as one team. The Wildcats competed against Ottawa and Spring Hill in a triangular and left with nine medals on the girls side and five on the boys.

"This meet is great for our kids," Louisburg coach John Reece said. "It is a small setting and having them run together really lets them see how they rank within the team. It really benefits the new runners having their teammates around them.

"I really like the triangular format early in the year. It takes some pressure off of the kids and lets them run."

Sophomore Savannah Reinhart led the Lady Cats with a third place finish in the 5-kilometer race. Reinhart ran a time of

25 minutes and 55 seconds and was just 30 seconds off of the first-place pace.

Junior Madelynn Yalowitz also had a big day for the Lady Cats as she was fourth in 26:11 and fellow junior Kaitlyn Gaza was sixth in 26:28. Senior Abby Bergman (27:07) came in eighth and junior Liz Hildreth (27:57) was 12th.

Mara Justesen (30:40), Lexie Reece (30:42), Maddie McDaniel (30:44), Tomi Frederes (31:20) finished 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th, respectively.

Lilly Mick (20th), Lily Cook (21st), Bryn O'Meara (22nd), Alex Miller (23rd), Alexa Goodspeed (24th), Hailey Crowder (26th), Cierra Rose (27th), Ryan Caldwell (29th) and Grace Rolofson (30th) also ran for the Louisburg girls.

Sophomore Wyatt Reece ran a time of 20:49 to finish eighth overall to lead the Louisburg boys. Senior Devyn Small came in 10th in 21:57 and fellow senior Zach Minor was 12th with a time of 22:06.

Junior Austin Raetzel (23:09) and sophomore Jarod Rose (23:38) also had top 20 finishes in 16th and 17th, respectively.

Eddie Murphy (24th), Spencer Rogers (25th), Michael Shaner (27th), Gareth Baus (28th) and Kennedy Unthank (32nd) also ran for Louisburg.

"For those who ran with the team last year, we saw improvement when compared to last year's performances," coach Reece said. "My new runners ran better races even if time did not show it."

Although they were competing against two teams, it was the course that provided the biggest test for Louisburg. Like in

their previous race, the Wildcats had to deal with a lot of steep hills.

“All courses have their challenges and Ottawa has their hills,” coach Reece said. “They are so proud of the hills that they have named one of them Big Buddha. The hills always seem to pop up at inopportune times like right after the first mile and in the last half mile of the race.”

Louisburg will get back to its normal invitational schedule this Thursday when it travels to Wellsville. The first race is set to begin at 4 p.m.

Four Wildcat runners medal at opening meet



Louisburg sophomore Isabelle Holtzen stays with a group of runners during the Jerry Howarter Invitational on Thursday at the Garnett Golf Course. Holtzen led Louisburg in 14th place and was one of four varsity runners to medal.

GARNETT – For the last several years, the Louisburg cross country teams have started their season at the Jerry Howarter

Invitational in Garnett and it is considered one of their toughest races of the year.

It didn't seem to bother many of the Wildcat runners – even the new ones.

Louisburg medaled four varsity runners between the two teams, including two newcomers to the team. Isabelle Holtzen, Savannah Reinhart and Liz Hildreth picked up medals on the girls side, while Wyatt Reece got some hardware in the boys division.

The Garnett Golf Course features several hills in the 5-kilometer race, including a steep climb to the finish line that doesn't give the runners much time to relax.

"Anderson County is always tough because it is the first meet of the season and the course has long gradual up-hills which really work the legs, and the up-hill finish does not help much either," Louisburg coach John Reece said.

Holtzen, a sophomore, led the Wildcat girls team as they ran their first-ever 5K race. Holtzen finished 14th in 24 minutes and 1 second, as the top 30 in each varsity race picked up medals.

Reinhart and Hildreth, both newcomers to the team, also garnered medals. Reinhart, a sophomore, came in 19th overall in 24:20 and Hildreth, a junior, was 30th with a time of 25:29.

"I was very happy to see them run well," coach Reece said. "With Savannah and Liz competing for the first time made it even better. Isabelle ran a great race to lead the team."

Junior Kaitlyn Gaza was fourth on the team as she ran a 26:20 to come in 36th. Senior Abby Bergman finished 39th in 26:33.



Louisburg senior Devyn Small leads a pack of runners up a hill during Thursday's season opening meet in Garnett.

Senior Maddie McDaniel (30:17) and sophomore Lilly Mick (30:49) came in 45th and 47th, respectively, to round out the Lady Cat team. As a team, the Lady Cats were fifth with 98 points, just seven points out of third.

Baldwin won the meet with 19 points and Eudora was second with 77.

On the boys side, sophomore Wyatt Reece had a strong opening race to get his first medal. Reece came in 27th overall in 20:10 to pace an inexperienced Wildcat team.

"Wyatt earned his first medal of the year with a solid race," coach Reece said. "He is also joined by a few new runners to the sport that gained much needed experience. I am excited to see how they continue to improve as the season continues."

Senior Devyn Small finished just outside of medal contention as he came in 39th overall in 21:26. Fellow senior Zach Minor

came in 47th in 22:10 and junior Austin Raetzel took 51st in 22:37.

Senior Ben Brummel (22:52), sophomore Jarod Rose (23:14) and senior Spencer Rogers (23:45) rounded out the Wildcat team in 54th, 56th and 60th place, respectively.

As a team, the Wildcats were seventh with 198 points. Baldwin came in first with 27 points and Eudora was second with 47.

Junior Madelynn Yalowitz normally runs with the varsity girls, but she is working her way back from an injury and is currently running on the junior varsity level. She had a strong finish as she ran 25:58 to finish fourth and also earned a medal.

Lexie Reece (28th), Alex Miller (30th), Tomi Frederes (31st), Mara Justesen (32nd) and Alexa Goodspeed (36th) also ran for Louisburg.

Eddie Murphy (16th) led the junior varsity boys in 22:58 and Michael Shaner (50th) ran a 27:23.

Anderson County also held a beginner's race as several Louisburg runners got their feet wet in the shorter 2 mile run.

Bryn O'Meara came in third overall in the girls division in 18:05 and teammate Lily Cook was fifth in 18:38. Hailey Crowder (ninth), Cierra Rose (11th), Ryan Caldwell (17th) and Grace Rolofson (19th) also ran for the Lady Cats.

Freshman Bryce Kuhlman led the boys side in second overall with a time of (14:17). Gareth Baus (10th) and Kennedy Unthank (13th) also competed for Louisburg.

Louisburg returns to action Thursday when it ventures to Ottawa. Races are set to begin at 4:30 p.m.

Wildcats running with team concept



Louisburg High School cross country runners (from left) Abby Bergman, Eddie Murphy, Spencer Rogers and Wyatt Reece complete a run during a practice last month. The Wildcat team opens their season Thursday in Garnett.

It is easy to consider cross country an individual sport.

After every race, the runners are given individual medals depending on where they finish and it is all about how fast you can get to that finish line. Although that is all true, the Louisburg cross country team is taking in this season on how it finishes – as a group.

The Wildcats have 31 runners out this season, and while they have several returning from a season ago, it has been all about getting better as a team.

“This is a great group of kids this year,” Louisburg coach

John Reece said. "They work hard to encourage and push each other during workouts which makes the team even stronger in an individual/team sport."

Louisburg has a big contingent of girl runners this year with 19 and it has featured tough competition in practice according to Reece as 10 runners are vying for seven varsity spots. The Wildcats are looking for their first state participant since 2013.

Sophomore Isabelle Holtzen, who ran well a year ago, has emerged as the team's No. 1 runner. Junior Madelynn Yalowitz is also one of the team's top returning runners, but is working her way back from an injury.

Seniors Abby Bergman, Maddie McDaniel and Cierra Rose are also competing for a spot in the top seven.

A big difference for the girls will be their jump from 4-kilometer races to a 5K. It is roughly a half-mile longer than they were used to last season, but Reece knows they will handle the change with no problems.

"The girls are fine with the 5K," Reece said. "We have just upped our workouts to prepare for the difference from last year."

On the boys' side, half of their roster is filled with seniors, but it will be another sophomore to lead the way. Wyatt Reece has separated himself as the team's No. 1 runner as he tries to build on what was a solid freshman campaign.

Coach Reece says he has eight runners competing for the seven varsity spots and some of those six seniors are likely to be on it. Ben Brummel, Zach Minor, Eddie Murphy, Spencer Rogers, Michael Shaner and Devyn Small are all in their final season for the Wildcats.

"Practice has been going great," coach Reece said. "The team

is training very well and my summer runners continue to increase their miles as we progress.”

The Wildcats also have a unique schedule this season as they will have two home meets. They will have their annual Louisburg Invitational on Oct. 8 at Lewis-Young Park.

The next week, Louisburg will also host the Frontier League meet Oct. 15 on the same course.

“It is nice to have home course advantage for league, but the caliber of our league is such that there is no home course advantage,” coach Reece said. “We always set our goals high and we want to compete strong in league and take that momentum into the regional meet. State as a team is never out of the question as it often depends on what teams we run with at regionals.”

Louisburg opens its season Thursday when it travels to Garnett for the Anderson County Invitational. The meet is set to begin at 4 p.m.

2015 LOUISBURG HIGH SCHOOL CROSS COUNTRY SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	@ Anderson
County	4 p.m.

Sept. 10	@
Ottawa	
4:30 p.m.	

Sept. 17	@
Wellsville	
4 p.m.	

Sept. 24	@ Prairie
View	4 p.m.

Oct. 1		@
Pittsburg		
4 p.m.		
Oct. 8		Louisburg
Invitational		4 p.m.
Oct. 15		Frontier League
@ Louisburg	4 p.m	

Opinion: Rough patch leads to new beginning



I am just going to come right out and say it, "I'm scared."

Yeah, it is an unusual way to start out an opinion piece, but there is no two ways around it – I am petrified. But believe it or not, it is what keeps me going.

We have all had at least one point in our existence where our lives changed for better or worse. I have had more than a few of those in my life, but the latest one came on Jan. 9.

It started out like all the other Fridays over the last seven years. I reported to work, spent a few hours in the office getting ready for what was a busy weekend of prep coverage ahead. It was the first action after Christmas break and I was

ready to get back into the swing of things.

That never took place.

My bosses came into my office early that afternoon to inform me I was being let go. The job of covering Louisburg athletics was no longer mine. I packed up my things, turned in my key, went home, punched the wall a couple times and cried.

I was scared.

After all the tears came the questions. How was I going to support my family? What am I going to do for a job? The list went on and on and I couldn't come up with many answers.

As it turned out, one of the worst experiences of my life turned into one of the best.

Thanks to a lot of prayers, and support from family and friends, I decided to start Louisburg Sports Zone. Yep, that's right, I went from being unemployed to starting my own business for the first time in my life.

Not exactly the best way to alleviate fears.

However, when I kicked off the site just a month later, I was overwhelmed with the amount of support from students at Louisburg High School, employees throughout the district, parents and several others who offered encouragement and supported my new venture.

I finished the last half of the winter season and all of the spring doing what I took for granted the previous seven years. I got the chance to cover Louisburg athletics again.

You know, this whole starting your own business thing might not have been a bad idea after all. I would have never had the courage to go out on my own had I not been pushed in that direction.

Fast forward to the present and I am still alive and kicking, ready to start my eighth season of roaming the Wildcat sidelines with camera in hand, waiting to tell that next story.

This fall brings a lot of story lines to the Wildcat programs. The football team is looking to improve off its 3-win season a year ago and find its way back to the playoffs with a veteran group returning.

Volleyball is primed and ready to make its fourth consecutive state tournament this year after placing in the top four in the last three years. The Lady Cats return five seniors that have a lot of state experience and that bodes well for another trip to Salina.

The Wildcat soccer team returns an experienced group from a year ago as they try to crack the top of the Frontier League standings. The cross country team also has several returning runners who will try and qualify for the state meet.

There is a lot to be excited about when it comes to Louisburg sports, but for me personally, I am just fortunate enough to still be a part of it in a small way.

I take a lot of pride in what I do and I hope that it shows when you read stories or look at pictures on this site. I started this business knowing that I will never be rich, but it gives me an opportunity to continue to do what I love.

Thanks to all those who have supported me and for the more than 23,000 views on the site in the last six months. I have said it before, but I am extremely blessed to live in a community that supports each other through good times and bad.

Every day I am fortunate enough to be able to go to work and support my family doing what I know how to do. That is all I have ever wanted, so thank you Louisburg for allowing me to do it.

I am still scared, though.

It is that fear that drives me to do the best I can in what I do in my job and in life. I don't want what happened on that day in January to happen again and I will do everything to make sure it doesn't.

Right now I am living the good life. I have the opportunity to work for myself, support my family and do what I enjoy. I can't ask for any more.

I am living the American dream.

I just don't want to wake up.

LHS cross country hits ground running



Members of the Louisburg High School cross country team (from left) Austin Raetzel, Spencer Rogers, Abby Bergman, Wyatt Reece and coach John Reece wrap up a morning workout Wednesday at the school.

Nearly every morning during the summer, Louisburg High School

cross country coach John Reece woke up before the sunrise, laced up his running shoes and got ready for a nice jaunt around Louisburg.

More than a dozen Wildcat runners joined Reece on his daily routine to help get in shape for the upcoming season. Instead of holding just a week-long camp, Reece wanted to give his runners a chance to work out on a daily basis throughout the summer.

"I am here for them five days a week and I am here if they want to run," Reece said. "Coach A (Arianne Seidl) comes over 2-3 times a week, brings her youngest son, puts him in the stroller and away we go. The core group has been better this year and hopefully that will pay off come this season."

So around 7 a.m. every day, the group of Wildcat runners racked up the miles in an effort to put themselves in the best possible position to find success for the 2015 season.

Reece also got strong leadership throughout the summer from a few different people. Senior Spencer Rogers and sophomore Wyatt Reece were there most days for the boys team, as was senior Abby Bergman for the girls squad.

"Spencer has been here almost every single day to work out," Reece said. "He is a good person to work around and is a great kid and a great student. He is an all-around kid that has put in the time here and he, and our team, is going to benefit from it. Wyatt has been here unless he was at cross country camp or we were on vacation and he has stepped up to become a spiritual leader and talking everybody up.

"Abby has been great and has been here almost every day as well as a senior. She ran six miles for the first time the other day and she was thrilled about it. She has put the time in and will be a good leader and running from the middle of our group. She will keep the other kids honest with her work ethic."

There was a big change made to the Kansas cross country landscape in June when the Kansas State High School Activities Association voted to move all girls postseason competitions from a 4-kilometer to a 5-kilometer race – the same distance as the boys.

Each school that hosts a meet has the option to keep the 4K or move to a 5K, but postseason races will go to the new distance. Reece is in favor of the change and doesn't think his girls will have a big problem adjusting to the new format.

"We won't change a whole lot with them," Reece said. "We will increase their long run base a little bit and that should help them out a little. I think it is great that we are running the 5K now. College coaches are excited about it. Some high schools coaches aren't, and some girls are a little iffy about it, but it is less than a half-mile farther and that is what they have to understand. It is not a huge change.

"We are planning on running the 5K at our home meet because that is the meet before league and I believe they (the Frontier League) will decide to run the 5K to prepare them for regionals and state. Eventually all invitationals will do it in the near future."

In just a matter of days, Reece will have his entire squad working with him as the first day of practice begins Aug. 17 and he is hoping he can duplicate the strong turnout from a year ago.

"We had a few freshmen run with us this summer, but I am not sure what the turnout will be," Reece said. "I hope to hit 30 again, but not sure if we will get there. I had some girls say they aren't coming back because of the increase to the 5K, but we will just have to see. I am happy with the group I have coming back though."