

15 MINUTES

Keeping Riverdale High School moving ahead

Assistant principal puts in long days, wears many hats

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@florida-weekly.com

Riverdale High School is in eastern Fort Myers, more rural than urban, at the northern end of Buckingham Road. Assistant principal Steve Adams sits at his desk in an office tucked into a hallway behind a reception bar where students greet and direct visitors. He was waiting for lunch to begin, which he would observe, he said, in a supervisory capacity.

"I don't think I'll take you in there with me," he said, declining a request to join him in the cafeteria. "I wouldn't want you to end up in the middle of something."

At the high school since 6:30 a.m., Adams spent the morning evaluating other teachers in social studies, English, art, and math classes. He came to Riverdale in 1980 after one year spent in Immokalee as the football coach. Adams has the presence for that role, a gently intimidating voice enhanced by all the reassuring physical prowess of a freight train.

"You can take all the pictures of me you want," he said, "but you're not going to be able to make me look good."

Adams married while in Immokalee and moved with his wife to nearby Lehigh Acres Now in his third year out



Riverdale High School assistant principal Steve Adams

PHOTO EVAN WILLIAMS

of the classroom and as an administrator, he recalled the previous 29 years, 16 of which he spent as a Math teacher.

"That was my favorite subject in school," he said. "It's just so cut and dry, right or wrong. It's logical. I guess I'm just left-brained."

Large posters in his office depict one-word suggestions on how to win at life: VISION, GOALS, TEAMWORK.

One states simply, "Success is a choice."

"The good thing about this job is every day is different," Adams said. "It's probably like no other thing in the whole wide world."

Two televisions on his desk provide varying views from 24 cameras that peer down hallways, and into classrooms and parking lots, the gymnasium and cafeteria. At

10:45 a.m., the cafeteria was empty. On another screen, two students, a boy and a girl, talked next to a drinking fountain. Someone with long, skinny legs in jeans sat in the driver's seat of a car in the parking lot with the door open.

"Really, when you wanna identify a kid that's doing something, it's tough," Adams said. "Those hallways are long and sometimes it's hard to see what's going on."

Adams is one of four assistant principals at Riverdale. Two of them handle discipline, one oversees the school's curriculum, and Adams is in charge of administration. His job includes acting as the situation demands in dealings with teachers, students and parents; sometimes he is the mediator, sometimes the counselor. He also supervises lunchrooms; evaluates teachers in classrooms, looks after kids in before- and after-school programs and holds parent-teacher conferences.

"Whatever needs to be handled, I have to handle it," he said.

For example, at a recent sports banquet, he said a mother asked him to talk to her son. He had been feeling a lot of pressure: sports, academics, peers, parents.

"He was doing a good job, working hard, in the (International Baccalaureate) program," Adams explained. "I tried to allay some of his fears, help him see the light at the end of the tunnel."

A bell rang, and on one of the television screens in Adams' office, tables in a cafeteria could be seen rapidly filling up with high school kids.

"There's someone here to see you," a student said, entering the office.

"OK," Adams said. Then after a beat: "Send her in." ■

DIAMOND AND JEWELRY

LIQUIDATION SALE

DUNKIN'S DIAMONDS

11500 S. Cleveland Avenue • Fort Myers • 277-1011
On US 41, 1/2 mile south of Page Field

Gulf Coast Town Center • Fort Myers • 267-4547
Off I-75 & Alico Road

www.dunkinsdiamonds.com

150 Ceiling Fans • 100 Bath Vanity Lights • 200 Outdoor
Lanterns • 500 Chandeliers ... **All On Display!**

Wishing your family the brightest of holidays.

Brothers Lighting Depot, Inc.
(239)277-0333
2050 Beacon Manor Drive • Fort Myers
www.brightestguys.com