



The local Rokcastle County FFA Chapter attended Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner James Comer's visit to the Rockcastle County Extension Office in Mt. Vernon last Thursday. During the visit, Comer encouraged local residents to make a voluntary donation when they renew their farm license plates. The donation will be split evenly among the Kentucky 4-H, Kentucky FFA and Kentucky Proud. Shown above front row from left are: Hannah Prewitt, Lacey Gastineau, Tiffany Bowman, Charity Adams, Allison Burdette and Elizabeth Lawrence. Middle row from left: Laiken Coffey, John David Hurley, Commissioner Comer, Billy Cameron, Eric Bullock and Erica Clouse. Back row from left are: Larkan Prewitt, Sarah Pigg, Chris Sowder, Josh Bullock, Kyle Peacock and Bethany McKinney.

"Cromer"

(Cont. from front)

"We both became very miserable living in a big city and missed the country way of life back home," Cromer said. "So we eventually came to the conclusion that my long drive to work was not as miserable as having to live in the city."

In 1980, Pepsi-Cola promoted Cromer from a factory worker to a semi-truck driver. Although Cromer didn't have a CDL or GED, he said Pepsi-Cola promoted him to the position because of his 15 years of experience with the company.

"I worked my way up through the company and they hired me on as a driver," Cromer said. "Back then you didn't have to have a CDL to drive a semi."

The United States Congress passed the Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act in 1986 which required all commercial truck drivers to obtain a CDL license in order to operate commercial vehicles on the highway. Cromer said he didn't have to take a driver's test as he was "grandfathered" into the program based off his six years' experience as a semi-truck driver.

Cromer's life would change drastically in 1994 when he was diagnosed with histoplasmosis in his right eye, which significantly reduced his vision in that eye. Cromer said he had laser surgery on his right eye to help his vision so he could still drive a truck and support his family.

"The surgery helped my vision but the doctors said the histoplasmosis could flare back up again at any time and cause me to go blind in that eye," Cromer said. "At that time I was still able to drive a truck because in Kentucky you could still have a CDL if you only had histoplasmosis in one eye."

However, Cromer later discovered in 2001 that he had histoplasmosis in his left eye as well. Since being diagnosed with the serious infection, Cromer had three laser surgeries in his left eye to help him once again regain his vision.

"The laser surgeries helped me regain some of my vision back in that eye," Cromer said. "The surgeries really cleared up my vision but the doctor said the histoplasmosis could come back at any time and cause me to go blind in either one of my eyes."

Despite the numerous laser surgeries, Cromer was still forced to retire in 2001 as he couldn't renew his CDL license due to his histoplasmosis.

"I had to retire early because I couldn't get my CDL license after having histoplasmosis in both

eyes," Cromer said. "It was hard for me to grasp at first because I had spent 31 years with Pepsi-Cola and planned on spending many more with them. But I also came to realize that I was putting people's lives in danger by driving a semi."

After his early retirement, Cromer helped his youngest son, Brian Cromer, with his concrete business until Brian passed away in June 2011. Cromer then said he applied for a bus monitor position with the Rockcastle County Schools in order to supplement his retirement income.

"I applied for a bus monitor position and would have been hired until they saw my education level," Cromer said. "They told me I had to have a GED before I could be hired as a bus monitor. So that is when I started looking into getting my GED."

Cromer started taking classes at RCAE on August 20th of last year. He said the course work was hard for him, especially the math sections.

"When I went to school we only had spelling, English, History and basic arithmetic," Cromer said. "We didn't have any letters in our math problems like they do today."

Cromer said that there was many times that he thought about quitting and giving up but that his wife pushed him to complete the course and get his GED.

"I remember telling her I didn't see the need for me to have it and that I was going to quit," Cromer said. "She would quickly tell me it was something I needed to do and that I needed to hang in there. She was always there to encourage me when I got down."

Cromer went on to say that he also wouldn't have received his GED if it wasn't for the staff at RCAE as well as Matt Rodriguez and Amy Russell at the Somerset Community College Assessment Center.

"They were all a wonderful staff, that was for sure," Cromer said. "They have the patience to work with people like me who have been out of school for a long time."

Since receiving his GED, Cromer said that he has now officially applied for a bus monitor position at Rockcastle County Schools and that he is expecting to hear something back from them soon.

Cromer said that receiving his GED was one of the most important milestones in his life and that he would encourage others who have dropped out of high school to seek their GED as well.

"With today's technology, I would encourage everyone to have some type of education," Cromer said. "The world is moving at a really fast pace and everyone needs at least a high school diploma or GED to keep up with it."

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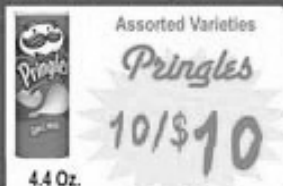
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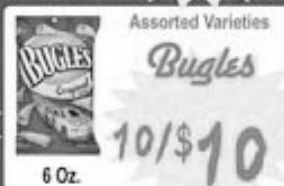
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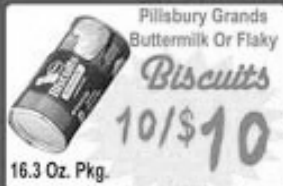
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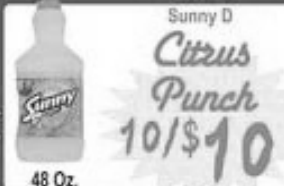
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