

Out of the Ashes

By: Maddie Bader and Brenna Jones

For some people, a job is simply a job, a place you go every day, work for a few hours and go home to live your life. For others, a job is an important part of their lives and they work to better not just themselves through their work, but the people who surround them. Those people are true examples of the American Dream. For Hoss Bloch and Valerie Hernandez, the night shift custodial staff, their jobs are not just about sweeping floors, they are about maintaining a safe place for the students of Hermann High School. When Bloch is not doing janitor duties, he can be found driving school buses and talking with the different students throughout the high school.

On September 13th, Bloch and Hernandez were working the night shift cleaning the high school. As Bloch went about his rounds, he knew something was off. The school's electronic system alerted him and Valerie that there was a fire in a certain classroom, but Bloch immediately went towards the agricultural shop, for different machines and equipment in the shop occasionally set off different smoke alarms. When he arrived, he realized that the fire was in the Industrial shop instead.

"Well, first of all, the alarms go off in the office, and I met Hoss and he said it was down in the Ag department. We proceeded to go down the FFA hallway and we went into the Ag shop to find out where it was. We could see the smoke," said Hernandez.

A fire had started in the woodshop and the possibility of it spreading was a grim reality. With the woodshop siding up to the agricultural shop, classrooms, band room, and the gym, there was a lot of possible damage.

"The fire started due to rags. There was a spill [of paint varnish] and it wasn't taken care of correctly," High School Principal, Gary Leimkuehler informed.

"Hoss used five fire extinguishers while Valerie [another custodian at the high school], called 911," Leimkuehler added.

Previously to working at Hermann, Bloch served as a firefighter for the Hermann Fire Department, which provided him with the experience needed to control the fire as much as possible while waiting for the fire department to arrive.

"I went and got a fire extinguisher and hit the fire with a fire extinguisher. Then I went and got two more fire extinguishers and did it again. Then I got two more fire extinguishers and did it again. Then I got overcome with smoke, so I left," Bloch said.

As Bloch unloaded extinguishers on the flames, Hernandez called 911 to get more help.

“The fire department was putting fans in the building, and it was so smokey, it was black smoke, you know. We just started taking dust mops and pushing and mopping the water,” said Hernandez, who remained with Bloch and countless other school volunteers and officials to help clean up after the fire was out. “It think it was 1:30 when Dr. Hankins said we got all the water up and to go home for the morning.”

Without these individuals, the amount of damage done to Hermann High School would have been unimaginable. They are an example of the American dream through the dedication and service they have towards bettering something that is larger than themselves for the future generations.