

Nandua High School principal rolls with life's punches, to the benefit of Eastern Shore education

by Laura Emery, Field Editor

As he walks the school halls, George Parker's smile never fades. He greets passing students by name, shaking their hands and warmly patting their shoulders.

Parker, principal at Onancock's Nandua High School the last two years, is not your traditional principal. He has a third-degree black belt in martial arts. He's coached high school football and track and field. He spends a lot of time at the local YMCA maintaining the health of his 6-foot-1 physique. He puts more emphasis on connecting with the school's students than the work done behind the principal's desk.

What stands out most about Parker is his positive energy. "People ask me why I'm always smiling. Well, I smile because I love what I do," he explains.

Parker's dream wasn't always to be a high school principal. He says, "Sometimes

we choose our future. Sometimes it is laid out for us."

More than 20 years ago, Parker was just like most of the students he passes in the halls at Nandua High School — young, passionate, and eager to begin down life's path. "I was enrolled in medical school. I was so excited, because it was all I had ever wanted to do," he says. "While the other kids were out playing football, I was the M*A*S*H-obsessed kid out in the field with my science kit catching frogs and dissecting them." At the Medical College of Virginia, now known as VCU Medical Center, the young Parker was prepared to make his dreams come true. It was the culmination of five years of undergraduate work at Virginia State University and then the College of William & Mary.

But before Parker could sit through his first class, he received devastating news. "My father was diagnosed with lung cancer. It had metastasized and quickly moved to the brain. I decided to come home and be with my parents," he explains.

Not wanting to leave his mother alone to deal with the rigors that come with dealing with someone who has cancer, Parker put his dream on hold.

For the next several years, Parker devoted his life to helping his parents. During that time, he was offered a job at North Accomack Elementary School (now Kegotank Elementary School) as a math specialist. "I was asked to teach a small group of students and try to bolster their math skills. I figured I could do it until I could get back to medical school. It was just something to keep my mind off what was happening with my father," he explains.

But, soon, Parker fell in love with teaching. "I really enjoyed teaching — but



LAURA EMERY PHOTO

George Parker, principal at Onancock's Nandua High School the last two years, puts more emphasis on connecting with the school's students than the work done behind the principal's desk.

I also enjoyed coaching football and track and field, which I had started doing during that time. I got into it, and put my heart and soul into it," he says.

Though he was finding fulfillment in his temporary vocation, the desire to return to medical school never went away.

His father's cancer was aggressive. "He succumbed to the cancer pretty quickly. My father died when I was 25 years old," Parker says. After his father passed away in 1993, Parker waited a year before broaching the topic of returning to school with his mother. "I wanted to give her time to get settled in after my father's death. When that happened, I told her I really wanted to go back to medical school. To my relief, she told me she wanted me to go ahead and pursue my dreams," he recalls.

With his mother's blessing, Parker reapplied to the Medical College of Virginia and was accepted back. "I remember being elated; I was so excited to return to medical school and get my medical degree," he remembers. "My life was back on track."

But, again, fate intervened.

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Right: Parker speaks with a pair of students during their art class recently. He makes usual rounds throughout the building checking in on classes and interacting with students. Below: Parker, left, watches Victor Esteban's form as he completes a set of dumbbell presses at Eastern Shore Family YMCA. Esteban and Irving Saucedo, right, are some of Parker's students at nearby Nandua High School.



academically. "You're never too old to stop learning. The world of academia is very important to me," he says. Parker earned master's degrees from Old

and encouraging them at the same time." While lifting weights with students, Parker uses it as an opportunity to educate them about the importance of physical fitness and healthy eating. "These kids can take that with them forever — a love of the gym and healthy living," Parker says.

That same year, his mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. "I was devastated by the news. Obviously, I wasn't going to leave my mother while she was in the throes of cancer. I didn't know what she was going to be dealing with, whether it would be aggressive like my father's cancer or slow-growing. She thrived, in spite of having the cancer, for 13 years. But, at that point, I gave up hope that medical school would ever happen for me."

Parker decided that perhaps his life's trajectory had been rerouted for a reason. "I started to accept the fact that my life was being laid out for me. I decided that teaching was where I was meant to be," he reflects.

And it doesn't matter who he is teaching. Parker taught adult literacy for two years at Eastern Correctional Institute in Princess Anne, Maryland. "When I went in to teach the inmates for the first time, I was taken aback. In came a rough-looking cadre of 25-30 inmates and I was there all by myself. I was intimidated," he admits.

It wasn't long before Parker realized he was making a difference in the lives of the inmates. He was instilling in them the power that comes with education. "Eventually, I could pull up a chair and teach them with little concern for my well-being. They were no longer prisoners to me; they were my students."

Throughout his career, Parker has consistently focused on advancing himself

Dominion University and Salisbury University, and did graduate work at University of Maryland at College Park. "I was working on my doctorate when my mother died seven or eight years ago. That's when I decided I wanted to be a principal," he explains.

In the fall of 2015, Parker took his position behind the principal's desk at Nandua High School. "Before that, I had been assistant principal for eight years at Nandua High School and one year at Arcadia High School," he notes.

In his role as principal, Parker feels fulfilled. "I hope my personal legacy will be the connections I have with these students. I always say that they won't remember what you say or what you taught them, but they will remember how you made them feel," he says.

"Mr. Parker has always been very dedicated in working with the students. He has been a tremendous role model, especially as a coach and as a mentor," says Dana Wright, a teacher in the Accomack County School system.

Teachers and students laud Parker with highest acclaim, noting that Parker truly cares about people, even outside of the school environment. Andre Elliot, executive director of the Eastern Shore Family YMCA, says, "Everybody here at our YMCA knows George. He works really well with the kids he brings in. He keeps them straight, but he is always motivating

As an administrator tasked with providing visionary and practical leadership for the school, Parker also has the best interests of his faculty at heart. "We all know that his door is always open and he is always more than willing to listen. As a result, the faculty feels supported and comfortable expressing their thoughts, ideas and concerns. Mr. Parker is so dedicated to Nandua High School that he never misses a day and works diligently to ensure that Nandua is the best," says a 24-year veteran teacher at Nandua High School.

Parker tries to inspire students to aim high. "When they're trying to figure out what they want to do with their life, I try to get them to find something they're passionate about, something that will bring them joy every day. Because if you have passion for it, more than likely, you'll be successful," he says.

Still, Parker acknowledges that even the best-laid life plans can be diverted. "You can try to plan your life out, but sometimes plans are laid out for you. Such as was the case with me," he says.

Though happy in his role as principal, Parker refuses to completely let go of his medical goals. He plans to enroll soon at Eastern Virginia Medical School to train as a physician's assistant. He says, with a laugh, "I'm determined to work in the field of medicine at some point. I will get there."

Director Election

Directors are elected from the membership to represent you on the Board. This is your Cooperative and there are several ways in which you can nominate your Director. Those methods are as follows:

- (1) A Nominating Committee, representing the areas to elect Directors, is appointed. The Nominating Committee will select a slate of candidates to be placed on the ballot at the Annual Meeting. This year's Nominating Committee is scheduled to meet on **June 20, 2017**. Should you have a recommendation, you may want to notify a member of the Nominating Committee prior to its scheduled meeting. The members of this year's Committee are included in this article.
- (2) Member Petition Nominations. Members may nominate additional individuals to run for election for any Director position for which Members are scheduled to vote at any Member meeting ("Member Petition Nominations"). Members may make Member Petition Nominations by delivering to the Secretary at least seventy-five (75) days prior to the Member-meeting in writing for each Member Petition Nomination ("Member Petition"): After verifying that the member Petition complies with this Bylaw, the Cooperative shall post the Member Petition Nomination in approximately the same location as the Nominating Committee Nominations. All nominations are due in by **June 16, 2017**.

No nominations shall be made from the floor at the Annual Member Meeting.

Please visit our website for the complete version of A&N Electric Cooperative's Bylaws.

MESSAGES FROM YOUR CO-OP

- Visit us at www.facebook.com/ANElectricCoop and "like" us.
- Visit www.anec.com to sign up to receive Beat the Peak emails or text-message alerts.
- The **Touchstone Energy® Co-op Connections® Card is FREE to all ANEC members**. The card offers discounts at participating local and nationwide businesses, including prescription drug discounts.
- **The Cooperative will be closed Tuesday, July 4, in observance of Independence Day. Have a safe and happy holiday!**



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Students selected to represent ANEC at annual Youth Tour



The winners of the annual essay contest to determine which local students represent A&N Electric Cooperative at the annual National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour have been selected. Students were graded anonymously by a panel of judges who selected a winner to represent each participating high school. The winners are (pictured from top):

1. **Sheridan Wells**, the daughter of Norman and Carla Savage-Wells of Onley;
2. **Anna Sexauer**, the daughter of Brook Sexauer of Belle Haven;
3. **Hannah Birch**, the daughter of Susan Birch of Chincoteague;
4. **Cameron Evans**, the son of Norwood and Hope Evans, Tangier; and
5. **Caroline Williamson**, the daughter of Butch and Sheryl Williamson of Quinby.

A&N Electric Cooperative's local representatives will join more than 1,500 students from across the United States in a trip to Washington, D.C., from June 11-15. While there the students will have the opportunity to meet with their U.S. representatives and senators and will tour several museums and other monuments and memorials in our nation's capital.

The Electric Cooperative Youth Tour has brought high school students to Washington, D.C., for a week in June every year since the late 1950s.

Are You Ready for Hurricane Season?

June 1, marks the official start of the hurricane season, with the peak storm threat occurring from mid-August to late October.

A&N Electric Cooperative wants you to be prepared in the event of one of these dangerous storms. Keep your family safe with these handy tips.

BEFORE THE STORM:

- Put together an emergency kit and plan. Communicate the plan with your family.
- Know the elevation level of your property and whether the land is flood-prone. This will help you prepare for the storm surge and any tidal flooding.
- Secure your home: cover all windows with either storm shutters or boards, clear loose and clogged rain gutters, and bring all outdoor furniture indoors.
- Learn your community hurricane evacuation routes.

DURING THE STORM:

- Listen to the radio or TV for information, if possible.

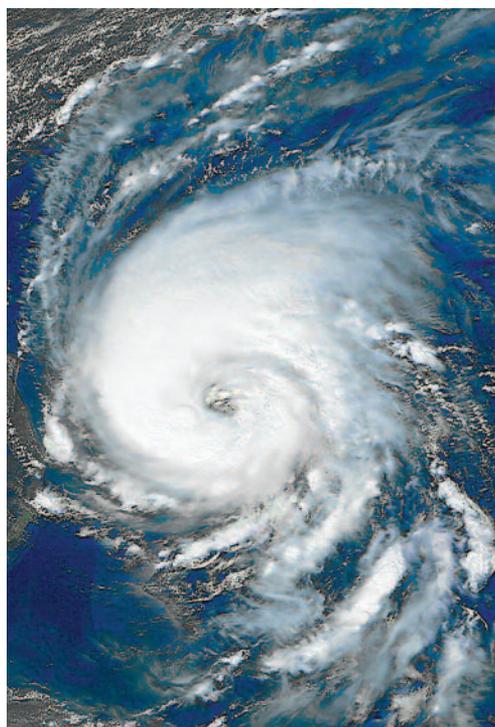
- Avoid using the phone, unless there is an emergency.
- Turn off utilities if instructed to do so. Otherwise, keep the refrigerator thermostat on the coldest setting and keep the doors closed.

AFTER THE STORM:

- Keep away from loose or dangling power lines and report them immediately to A&N Electric Cooperative.
- Drive only if necessary and avoid flooded roads. Watch out for fallen objects, downed power lines, and weakened walls, bridges or sidewalks.
- Never use a generator inside homes, garages, crawlspaces, sheds or similar areas. Deadly levels of carbon monoxide can quickly build up in these areas.

For more tips on planning before, during and after the storm, visit www.ready.gov/hurricanes.

Source: www.ready.gov



Hurricane Watch vs. Warning

HURRICANE WATCH:
The conditions are favorable and there is a good chance that the event may happen.

HURRICANE WARNING:
The event is imminent. Act immediately to safeguard life and property.



Be Ready Before a Storm Strikes

Lights out? Store these items at home in case of an outage.



Water
Three-day supply, one gallon per person per day.



Tools
Flashlight and extra batteries, can opener, wind-up radio.



Food
Three-day supply of non-perishable, high-energy food.



First Aid, Medicine
First aid supplies, hand sanitizer, and at least a week's supply of medications for the family.



Documents
Include copies of passports, birth certificates, and insurance policies.

Learn more at www.Ready.gov.

Source: American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency