

Al Baker

Age: 33

Occupation: Academy director and head boys basketball coach at Woodstock High School

Residence: Woodstock

Hometown: Walworth, Wisconsin

Family: Wife Sara; children Charlie, 8, Martha, 5, and Simon, 4

Education: Bachelor's degree in English from Ripon College, master's degree in school leadership from Concordia University

Favorite McHenry County restaurant? BBQ King in Woodstock, specifically, a Pretzel Bomb with fried potato salad

Favorite book? "Catch-22" by Joseph Heller

First job? I was a caddie at Big Foot Country Club in Fontana, Wisconsin, when I was 12 years old.

One word that describes you? Reliable



Daryl Quitalig - For Shaw Media

Al Baker leads the Academy at Woodstock High School.

Blue Streak boys basketball team is coming off back-to-back winning seasons in conference play for the first time in more than 20 years. I also completed my master's program, and I'm finishing up training for my fourth marathon.

How do you give back to the community, and what drives your service?

I coach Little League and youth soccer, and my wife and I teach Sunday School and lead our church's Vacation Bible School. I've

done all of these things since long before we had our own children because I love working with young people. They inspire me, and that's what drives me.

What is something you have never done but want to do some day?

I've never been to Europe. I'd especially like to go to Spain because my wife is a Spanish major who has spent considerable time abroad, and Charlie and Martha are both in District 200's dual language program.

What is the best career advice you have received?

It's not exactly advice, but my dad was a high school teacher and coach, and I remember someone once saying of him, "Dick Baker has the longest fuse of any man I've ever met." I inherited some of his patience, and that's really critical to this job. I think that if you model good behavior and give students and players enough opportunities to make the right choice, they will get there eventually.

Which CEO would you most like to spend the day with and why?

He's not technically a CEO, but John Calipari. His book "Players First: Coaching from the Inside Out" has had a big impact on the way I teach and coach. We have some different philosophies when it comes to basketball, but I think we share that core belief in servant leadership.

Nominator's comment:

"As a teacher, [Baker] gives students the tools they need to help reach their academic goals. As a coach, he instills a sense of teamwork and pride in his student-athletes. As an extremely active parent of three young children, he somehow finds the energy to be a positive role model through the countless ways he gives back to the community. It is this strong sense of family - with his students, athletes, neighbors, friends and children - that make him worthy of consideration for this year's Best Under 40," friend Erik Morimoto said.

What is your job and what makes you good at it?

Jobs like mine are all about servant leadership. My students and players need to know that I'm here to take care of them. My job is to put their needs first and to help them to develop and perform at their highest potential. If they know that I'm committed to that, and they trust me with that responsibility, then I'm doing my job.

What accomplishments and innovations are you most proud of this year?

The Academy is a program designed to help students who struggle in a traditional classroom setting to stay on track to graduate from high school. We've helped about one in eight Woodstock graduates to accomplish that goal over the past six years; in 2014, 30 students earned high school diplomas with the help of our program. And the

Achievement is its own reward.

(But a little recognition doesn't hurt.)

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