

Menghini Named Rice Principal And Hose Co. No. 1 President

By **NICOLE FAY BARR**

Correspondent

Jason Menghini is an ambitious family man, volunteer, and educator, excited to be named the new principal at Rice Elementary and, simultaneously, the new president of the Mountaintop Hose Company No. 1.

“I’ve got my personal family, my hose company family, and now I’m happy and excited to be part of the Crestwood family,” Menghini told this reporter.

The Mountaintop resident spoke about his goals for leading Rice Elementary and his hopes for being a fixture at the Crestwood School District for the remaining years of his career.

He praised the employees and administrators he has already met and noted that he hopes to convey to his teaching staff that, “I’m looking at the role through the lens that I’m more of a teacher than a principal.”

Having gained leadership experience at his time with the hose company, he’s stepping into the president role, too, with confidence that he has learned much from his predecessor and he has a team he can rely upon.

Inspired To Teach

Menghini grew up in the Hazleton area and attended both public and private schools before graduating from Hazleton High School.

While he had many educators in his childhood, only a few stuck out to him as being impactful and inspiring. He decided he wanted to be like those teachers and make a difference himself, so he went to King’s College and studied elementary education.

Menghini always liked working with younger children, so elementary was a great fit. After his college graduation in 2006, his first job was teaching fourth grade in the Pleasant Valley School District.

Two years later, he was assigned to the Pleasant Valley Intermediate School, teaching math, science, and social studies and later becoming the district’s math specialist.

Meanwhile, Menghini met his wife, Amanda, a teacher at Pleasant Valley, and they lived for a few years in her

“Everyone has been very welcoming,” he related, from the teachers to other administrators to Crestwood’s superintendent. He noted his excitement to work with all.

As a principal, Menghini explained, the students and staff at Rice will come first. He will provide daily reminders and updates on school safety procedures and create a welcoming environment, “the type of place where people want to come every day.”

Managing the curriculums, supporting the teachers, managing student discipline and behavior issues, helping staff through challenges, and maintaining safety protocols are among his responsibilities, Menghini stated.

Rice Elementary has approximately 750 students in grades kindergarten through six, 32 homeroom teachers, as well as additional employees such as interventionists, para professionals, secretaries, and food service workers.

The school environment has greatly changed in his 17 years in education, Menghini said. The use of technology has dramatically increased, impacting the instructional practices that teachers’ use.

Because of technology, it seems students have shorter attention spans and require instruction that is more animated. Crestwood’s recent move to provide a ratio of one Chromebook (laptop) per student, he said, is positive when a balance is used.

“It’s a great educational tool, but it doesn’t replace great classroom instruction,” he said.

Violence in schools has also increased in recent years and, Menghini noted, “Safety is on my mind all the time.” Conversations at Crestwood are always ongoing about how security could be enhanced and what additions to safety are financially feasible.

Hose Company Volunteer

It’s a shame that most of the Rice Elementary students haven’t met Menghini yet, because they sure would have been impressed to see their new principal driving an enormous fire truck in the Mountaintop July 4 parade with his wife and kids proudly on board.

hometown of Wilkes Barre before having children and deciding that Mountaintop was the place they'd like to raise their family. The biggest draw was the Crestwood district which, to them, was the ideal place for their little ones to gain an education.

The couple – who now has three children, Gavin, 10, Luca, 8, and Via, 3 – have been in Mountaintop for a decade. In Menghini's new office at Rice, framed artwork from all three kids hangs on the wall and an assortment of framed photos sit on his desk. "Family is everything," he related.

Leadership Role

Menghini was excited when the position for Rice Elementary principal opened, but was still a little apprehensive about leaving the district where he spent 17 years. He deeply cared about the students and staff he had come to know.

But he had earlier pursued his principal certification because he felt that he reached his limit in the area he worked at Pleasant Valley. The Crestwood opening in his hometown seemed like the perfect next move.

Having been a teacher for 17 years and coming from a district that has had its shares of budget woes and furloughs, he went on, enables him to connect with the staff at Rice and come from a place of understanding.

Menghini hopes to stay at Rice Elementary, serving the rest of his career here, he said. He spent the last week of school at Rice meeting everyone and he's invited the teachers and other staff members to visit him in his office this summer, much like this reporter did, so he could open the lines of communication.

The Menghins have become an integral part of the community by their affiliation with the Mountaintop Hose Company No. 1.

His grandfather was a Hazleton firefighter for three decades, something that inspired Menghini to volunteer. Upon joining, he noted, he was amazed at all the volunteers do, from the training and skillsets they acquire to their willingness to get out of bed in the middle of the night and rush to the aid of so many.

This August, Menghini will take the reins as new hose company president after Dave Hourigan steps down after 40 years.

Menghini remembered the moment Hourigan asked him to be his successor. "I said, 'Dave, I'm not you. I'm building my legacy in Mountaintop and the hose company has a special place in my heart, but I'm not you.'" It turned out that Hourigan had faith in Menghini and his abilities. A big part of the job requires managing the hose company budget and finding money, through grants, fundraising, and sponsorships.

The hose company relies on a fire tax in Fairview Township, but that only contributes a small amount to the budget. The organization recently added a few paid drivers to its team, too, something that is costly but required as there is a volunteer shortage there and everywhere.

"We apply for as many grants as we possibly can and the grants exponentially help," Menghini said, adding, "Similar to education, you have to see what funds you have coming in and how they can be used to best serve the needs of the people."

The funds can be managed, but "money doesn't put out fires," he

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added, noting he and others are always brainstorming ways to recruit more volunteers. Meanwhile the ladies' auxiliary at the hose company has been reinvigorated with Amanda Menghini greatly involved.

Her husband noted that it is her love and support that has allowed him to take on two new, big endeavors at

hose company, Menghini said he found a way to lead and connect with adults.

That experience will serve him in his role as principal and will no doubt be used to make him a successful fire department president.

once – being head of a school district and fire department.

“I’m absolutely excited,” he said about both positions. “I want to continue the forward progress of this school district and of the hose company as well.”

He went on that he sees parallels between both jobs. “I learned a lot about certain leadership skills that I had after joining the hose company,” Menghini said.

Originally, he loved working with children because he felt they are easy to connect with but his ability to associate with adults was more challenging. Through his time at the

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