

MISSOURI

“Friday Night Lights”

By Missouri 2020 Teacher of the Year Misty Grandel

The field lights flicker on and then fill the dusky air as the scoreboard flashes 20-20. Fordland High School Senior Joe Hart, lanky and solemn, leads the group of young men onto the grass, gloves tucked under their arms as they jog lightly to their place on the field. The final season he had planned for and dreamed of is now a faded hope. The last season, the last game, the last inning, the last at-bat, the last pitch – they will never be played.

The baseball, held lightly in Joe’s hand, is slightly damp with the tears that his fingers have wiped away. Yet, as it’s released and travels to his teammate’s glove, Joe cannot help but feel a weight lifted and a small smile begin to grow. His eyes travel to Coach Waterman, the mentor who makes these “Friday Night Lights” a ritual because he recognizes the joy that the smell of dirt and the texture of rawhide always bring his players.

teachers and businessmen watch their boys. But soon enough, calls of greeting and quiet laughter narrow the gap that six feet makes seem so distant.

Joe will walk across the stage and receive his diploma now in July, rather than May. He then leaves to serve as a missionary, just as he has planned for most of his life. He’ll help strangers in their time of need and work to fill a void that they may face. The impact he will have on those lives will be just as significant as the effect he has had on his own small town, bringing us together, reminding us to hold onto hope and building us back into a community.



Joe Hart, Senior

Friday night at the Fordland High School baseball field has become a time for these young men to do something they love and to honor this senior who lives for the game. But it has become so much more. When the town learned that the lights will come on at exactly 8:20 (20:20) each Friday, community members left isolation and loneliness to join together to support their team during this trying time. At first it’s quiet as the students, farmers, factory workers,