Five-Minute Fitness Focus

Why teenagers aren't built for early mornings

HEALTH AND FITNESS COLUMN

BY JESSICA JONES
FOR HOMETOWN GIRARD

▸▸ School is back, which means alarm clocks are once again going off painfully early in homes everywhere. But if your teenager seems especially offended by being awake at 6 a.m., there may be more going on than a bad attitude. Biologically, teenagers really are different from younger children when it comes to sleep.

Sleep needs change throughout childhood. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends 11–14 hours per 24 hours for children ages 1–2, 10–13 hours for ages 3–5, and 9–12 hours for children ages 6–12. Teenagers ages 13–18 still need a substantial 8–10 hours. Research has linked adequate sleep in children and adolescents with better attention, learning, memory, emotional regulation and physical health.

Here's where things get interesting: teenagers don't simply need sleep—they begin wanting it at different times. Around puberty, changes occur in the body's circadian rhythm, essentially shifting the adolescent internal clock later. Teens naturally become more alert during the afternoon and evening and may have difficulty falling asleep early even when they make an effort to do so. Research reviewed by the CDC notes that an adolescent's biological clock can keep them awake until around 11 p.m. or later.

Then we ask many of them to wake up extremely early for school. That's why major medical organizations have questioned early school schedules. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that middle and high schools begin no earlier than 8:30 a.m. Research examining delayed start times has generally found that students actually sleep longer when school begins later—they don't simply stay awake equally later. Studies have also associated later starts with improvements including less daytime sleepiness, better attendance and less tardiness.

Of course, families can't individually change the school bell. So what can you do? Start shifting sleep schedules before school begins when possible, rather than expecting a teenager's body to change overnight. Once school starts, consistency matters. Keep bedtime and wake time reasonably predictable, reduce bright screens and stimulating activities late at night, and avoid letting an enormous weekend sleep-in completely reverse the weekday schedule. Morning sunlight and activity can also help reinforce the body's wake cycle.

And don't separate sleep from fitness. We tend to teach teenagers that fitness means sports, running, lifting weights or staying active. Recovery belongs in that conversation too. Insufficient sleep has been associated with lower physical activity, obesity and metabolic problems, as well as poorer academic and mental-health outcomes. An exhausted teenager may have less energy to train, play sports or simply be active throughout the day.

So as the school year begins, don't automatically label the teenager dragging out of bed as lazy. Their biology may genuinely be fighting the clock. We spend plenty of time worrying about whether kids are exercising and eating well. This school year, let's remember the third piece of the fitness equation: recovery. Sometimes one of the healthiest things a growing teenager can do is get another hour of sleep.

Jessica Jones, a 2003 Girard High School graduate, is a NASM-certified personal trainer, nutrition coach, and behavior change specialist. She specializes in senior health and wellness with a focus on spreading group fitness opportunities to smaller communities in Southeast Kansas.

Disclaimer: The information shared in this column is not intended as a substitute for medical consultation. To minimize the risk of injury, please consult with a healthcare provider for exercise prescription and safety precautions before beginning any exercise regimen.

USD 248 School Board Meeting: August

BY TUCKER HUDSON
HOMETOWN GIRARD

▸▸ The USD 248 Board of Education met at the Board Office for their monthly meeting Thursday, August 14th.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the Board approved the Agenda.

The board approved two donations: $69,449 from 21st Century Grant and $8,369.36 from Dan Smith for GHS Baseball.

New USD 248 staff members then introduced themselves to the Board.

The board accepted the resignation of Board Member Henry Ashbacher. They then established a date for the RNR Hearing for September 10th, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. and a date for the 2026-27 Budget Hearing for September 10th, 2026 at 7:05 p.m.

The board approved the 2026-27 District Classified Handbook.

Following an executive session for non-elected personnel, the board approved Classified, Director and Administrator raises. They also approved the resignation of Jessica Buckingham as GHS Secretary and Margaret Scott as RVH Para.

The board approved the employment recommendations of Abby Lehman as GHS Secretary as well as RVH Para and Focus Room Para positions.

Superintendent Todd Ferguson discussed At-Risk Accountability plans.

Following discussion about Southeast 637 Interlocal, the meeting was adjourned.

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Gorilla football set to kick off exciting season on August 27

BY PRESTON FRAZIER
HOMETOWN GIRARD

▸▸ There is plenty of buzz around Pittsburg State University this school year. From the developments at the new Kelce College of Business to the downtown Legacy 1903 shop and the new Nike partnership, conversation is centered on the Gorillas. Topping it off, the Pittsburg State football team kicks off its season at home next Thursday in a primetime matchup against the top-ranked team in the nation, Ferris State University. The Bulldogs from Ferris State roll into town after going 16-0 and winning the NCAA Division II National Championship last season.

Expectations are high for the Gorillas under third-year head coach Tom Anthony. After a season in which they finished 10-3 with an 8-1 record in the MIAA Conference, the team has been recognized across many preseason ranking outlets. The Gorillas garnered the recognition to be ranked 4th in this year's American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) NCAA Division II Top 25 poll. This is the fourth straight year the team has been in the Top Ten in this particular preseason poll. In addition, in the MIAA Coaches preseason poll, the Gorillas were voted as the top team in the conference. As part of that voting process, Pittsburg State received 7 first-place votes. The second-place team, Northwest Missouri State, only received 3 first-place votes.

Amid the high expectations, the team is returning many important pieces, but also saw some changes in the offseason. On the coaching staff, for example, former passing game coordinator Mark Smith was promoted to Offensive Coordinator in December following the 2025 season. Smith served as the passing game coordinator the previous two seasons, but now aims to bring an offense that complements the defense and adds points to the scoreboard. Last year, the Gorillas were 4th in the MIAA, averaging 29.2 points per game.

Other changes include who will be under center for the Gorillas, as All-MIAA performer and quarterback Jackson Berry transferred to conference rival Fort Hays State in the offseason. All signs point to returning contributor Jake Wolff getting the nod at the quarterback position. Returning players include talented wide receivers Kuron Parchmon and Greyson Holbert, as well as Girard native and tight end Luke Niggemann. All three were All-MIAA picks last season. The MIAA Special Teams Player of the Year from last season, Austin Schmitt, returns for the 2026 campaign as well. As a whole, 39 letterwinners from last year's team are back for another run.

Their opening game against Ferris State will get national recognition as two of the top teams in the country face each other in this exciting matchup to start the year. The game is set for a 7 p.m. kickoff at Carnie Smith Stadium and is the MIAA Game of the Week. After their tilt against the Bulldogs, Pittsburg State welcomes another tough opponent in Emporia State on September 5 for Family Day.

Coal camp music takes center stage with "Music From Our Roots" presentation at Miners Hall Museum

BY PHILIP STEVENS
HOMETOWN GIRARD

▸▸ Music that was carried into the Southeast Kansas coal fields by immigrant families did more than provide entertainment. Different traditions met in homes, dance halls and community gatherings, eventually becoming part of the distinctive sound and culture of our county.

This musical history will be explored this coming Sunday August 23, when Pittsburg State University Music Instructor Isaac Hernandez presents "Music From Our Roots" at Miners Hall Museum, located in Franklin, Kansas.

The program begins at 2:00 p.m. Sunday at the museum, 701 S. Broadway. Doors open at 1:30 p.m. Admission is free and refreshments will be served.

Hernandez will use a presentation, video recording and examples played on piano to explore the music of the region, including accordion tunes, polkas, waltzes, fiddle music and country. Familiar music will also be part of the program, including "Home on the Range."

Piano, fiddle, bass and accordion were among the instruments Hernandez identified as common to the musical traditions of the area. Music could be heard on front porches and at parks, county fairs and barn dances.

Miners Hall Museum's Phyllis Bitner said photographs in the museum's collection also illustrate how common music was at family gatherings.

"The accordion or button box was very common along with several horned instruments," Bitner said. "We have many photos of family gatherings and they always included an accordion."

The music was not confined to family homes. Bitner said the mining communities had dance halls, taverns and even "open air dance halls," while informal musical gatherings frequently broke out in homes and backyards.

In Franklin, immigrants from diverse European backgrounds often lived in different sections of town, but the community hall served as a common gathering place. Bitner said Italians, Slovenes, Croatians and others could be found there together on any given Saturday night for a dance.

That mixing of people and traditions is an important part of the story Hernandez plans to tell.

"It was a very diverse region where music from different origins came together; that distinctive blend became the music of the region," Hernandez said.

The upbeat music of a Saturday night could include polkas, waltzes, tarantellas and, later, ragtime, according to Hernandez. Bitner also points to polka as perhaps the music most closely associated with the coal camps.

Hernandez said he finds it particularly interesting how music can bring cultures together, even when those cultures do not necessarily begin close to one another.

"To me, it's very interesting how music has always been a huge factor in blending cultures, even when they are not necessarily close together," Hernandez said. "That happened in the region with such a big, diverse group of immigrant miners; the music was a great factor in combining traditions and sounds into one."

Some of that history remains preserved at Miners Hall Museum. Bitner said the museum has a display of accordions and sheet music along with historic photographs, while much of what is known about the music of coal camp families has also been passed down through family histories.

Hernandez said understanding folk music offers another way to understand the people who created it.

"That folk music carries the true feelings of one community, and that folk music can help us understand some of the general characteristics of a community," Hernandez said when asked what he hopes someone unfamiliar with folk music will take away from the program.

Bitner described that same connection from the perspective of the immigrant families who brought their traditions to the coal camps, saying music was more than entertainment. It was "a connection to home, family, culture and community."

If Hernandez could talk with one of the musicians who lived in a Southeast Kansas coal camp 100 or 125 years ago, he said he would want to better understand how that musical culture developed.

"I would love to know how they started some of the ensembles together, what influences inspired them, and how meaningful music was in their daily life," Hernandez said.

"Music From Our Roots" is being presented in conjunction with the museum's quarterly exhibit, "Blueprints of American Grit: McNally and 150 Years of Pittsburg Progress," on display through September 26.

The exhibit is hosted by Celebrate Pittsburg, Pittsburg 150 and is part of Miners Hall Museum's 2026 programming commemorating Pittsburg's 150th anniversary and the 250th anniversary of the United States.

Those planning to attend Sunday's program are encouraged to call the museum at 620-347-4220 so adequate seating can be provided.

Miners Hall Museum is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission to the museum and its programs is free.