

Jarred Opatz: Fifteen featured help provide county with staying power

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When we ran a story about Ashland High School graduate Kevin Priest returning to his hometown to join a local dental practice last spring, it gave me an idea for the 2016 Progress edition.

"Wouldn't it be interesting to do feature stories about people like Priest who grew up in the Ashland area and have decided to make their careers here," I thought.

After discussing it at staff meetings, we decided to go with our Staying Power theme.

There's a lot of talk about the "brain drain," of the area, but there's actually quite a few local high school graduates who have stayed in the area or have returned after a few years away to stay.

The 15 people we decided to feature in this section all have made that decision -- and not because they didn't have any other options. It actually wasn't easy narrowing it down to 15.

As you read the stories, you will quickly see that they all have talent to do what they do almost anywhere they want. It's people like these 15 who help make the area strong, and we are proud to highlight them.

How did we decide on our 15 personalities and not include Priest? We decided we wanted to feature people we either haven't featured before or haven't featured recently. Because we had featured Priest and his work as a military dentist in 2014, we decided not to include him.

We also decided not to go with other people who would have been good for this issue because they had been featured in past Progress editions or we did feature stories about them in the regular newspaper the past few years.

We also decided to focus on people who still are working and not retired, and write about a variety of careers. And we tried to not have all AHS graduates, but include people who have graduated from the surrounding smaller schools, too.

Because being a graduate of a local high school was one of the main criteria, I thought it would be fun to also run their high school graduation photos. Some of the people who are featured weren't too excited about that, but were good sports about including those photos.

Hopefully, you will have as much fun looking back at the old graduation photos and reading these stories as we had putting this section together.