

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter to recommend Mr. Joshua DeWaard as a recipient of the 2019 Business Record Forty Under 40 Award.

My association with Josh goes back more than a decade. At the time we met, I was an educator at Pella High School and he was an up and coming student-athlete. As the years have flown by, Josh has never ceased to amaze me. As an athlete, he overcame rather ordinary God-given talents to become a noted performer in three varsity sports. In the classroom he was always among the leaders at a highly acclaimed secondary school. Upon graduation he matriculated at nearby Central College where he continued to excel, having graduated with honors with a degree in biology.

If this recommendation were based purely on his scholastic record, I would put Josh in the “extraordinary” category. However, his accomplishments go far above and beyond this rarefied level.

Immediately after leaving Pella High, Josh and a close friend launched what is now a wildly successful non-profit, faith-based organization. They saw an opportunity to provide an entertainment option, a Christian rock concert, in an otherwise sleepy community and parlay the revenue into providing scholarships for disadvantaged young adults to attend an out of state youth rally. In two years, their organization outgrew any feasible venue in Pella. Rather than simply allowing their growth to stall, Unite Midwest as it is now called moved to Des Moines. As a result, their late summer music festival attracts thousands of fans and along the way hundreds of young adults have had an opportunity to develop their faith through various trips. Additional background about United Midwest will be provided in a separate document.

Josh has also flung himself full force into utilizing his position as a coach to positively influence young people. Last year, he came to East High specifically because he wanted to work with the neediest students in our community. As a varsity basketball assistant, Josh developed extremely close, yet appropriate relationships with many students who perhaps had never had a caring, positive adult male role model. He did such an exemplary job that this year he was invited to become a coach on our varsity football team. Again, Josh’s impact went far above any X’s and O’s or physical skills. The young men who Josh taught and mentored became better people. In my role as an At-Risk Coordinator at East, I see daily evidence of improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance by his guys. Even more impressively, several of Josh’s athletes are now leaders at school who are making the same conscious decision to reach out to those in most need.

Please consider for a moment what you just read. We now have students at East who themselves live in desperately challenging circumstances who are now actively looking to make a difference in the lives of others. This is the type of transformative leadership which this community is in desperate need.

Finally, please consider that Josh is not a full-time community activist. Rather, he has launched a successful career as a residential real estate agent. True to form, much of Josh's professional attention is in helping lower middle class families find an affordable first-time home purchase within Des Moines' burgeoning distressed neighborhoods.

To the selection committee, I cannot possibly recommend more highly Josh's qualifications for your award. Please contact me if I can be of any further assistance to you.

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