

Cougars ready for Friday nights on the gridiron

Donnell Suggs
IVN Contributing Writer

The football season is just a week away and the Illinois Valley High School (IVHS) Cougars are opening the 2018 campaign on the road at Culver High School Friday, Aug. 31.

There are a number of reasons for the Cougars to be excited about getting started after weeks of camp and practice. "We started to really gel and started to do things I have not seen since I have been here," said IVHS head football coach and athletic director Bruce Reece, who has been with the program the past four years. "The players were up at 6 a.m. to practice on their own. That may not seem like a big deal to some people but it is here." That new approach to the pride necessary to become a winning football program again - the Cougars were 3-6 overall last season - is something Reece and his team will bring to the field this season, in particular from returning veteran players.

Senior quarterback Caleb Hess is back for his fourth season under center. Hess will also be starting at free safety; his versatility is something Reece has not taken for granted. "Caleb is a

really good athlete and great play maker," said Reece of the three-year starter.

"If we let him call plays he'd do just as good a job as I do," joked Reece.

The running game has yet to be solidified in regards to a starting back but according to Reece there are six players looking to get the lead position. "It's up for grabs right now; I'm excited about our prospects," said Reece. Amongst the backs in competition are junior Isaac Williams, Jr., Roseburg High School transfer Justin Davis [Davis transferred to IVHS last year] and two other juniors and two freshmen.

On Davis' progress, Reece explained, "He's working hard in practice and is going to be a good player for us."

The most interesting position battle of the early season may come from the kickers and punters. "We have a couple of young men competing for that top spot," said Reece. Those young men, junior transfer Jonathan Wood and sophomore Andrew Mendoza, are at the top of the list to start. Having two players that can handle the important kicking duties is a luxury that most 2A programs can't say that they have. Wood, an



Rayes Dugas makes a play during a 2017 loss to Lost River.

(File photo, Illinois Valley News)

Oklahoma native, is at IVHS from Honduras where he lived with his family and will also help out at tight end and on the offensive line. IVHS defeated Culver at

home last season but according to Reece, they are not taking their season opener lightly. "We're not going to overlook them. It is definitely a game that we have

circled on our schedule."

The Cougars will host their home opener Friday, Sept. 7 against Gold Beach High School at 7 p.m.

Lynn Johnson - this year's Labor Day Parade Grand Marshal!

Annette McGee Rasch
IVN Senior Contributing Writer

For 46 years the Illinois Valley Lion's Club has put on the annual Labor Day Festival and this year's Grand Marshal for the Monday 10 a.m. parade is none other than Lynn Johnson, owner of Illinois Valley Real Estate.

I.V. Lion Marty Haynie said, "The club always votes for a citizen who does a lot for the community, and now, she'll be honored and ride on the back of a convertible in the parade!"

Johnson initially earned her real estate license in California in 1974, and then became licensed in Oregon in 1980.

"When I first started here, homes were on the market for five years. You almost couldn't give anything away. Since then, we've been through some good markets and some bad markets." She added that the most recent primary driver was "the 'Green Rush,' but now, we're seeing a lot of them exit."

Still, the local real estate market remains "super busy" and while the "housing inventory has improved" she said it's still pretty low. But

if properties are priced right you're probably looking at homes being on the market for 60 to 90 days.

"Prices are going pretty strong but are also stabilizing," she added. "We have seen a few price reductions that we hadn't seen before, so there's some market softening - but it's definitely not crashing."

Johnson has noticed changes in the Valley over the years. "Lately it seems like a lot of homeless people are just touring the city. We get comments from people going through town and it does not make the town so attractive. Like other business owners, I'm not happy about this - we have to work to protect our businesses."

She added that while the "green industry was good in some ways because it brought money into the area, it's also causing hardships for businesses trying to fill jobs. People were making twice as much money trimming pot." Now, she hopes more workers will come back to hourly jobs, though she acknowledges how it's tough to make a stable living on minimum wage.

Johnson was born in Santa Barbara but grew up in Southern California.

"I was a Valley Girl

before I moved here in 1980," she said. "I moved here for the beauty of it and wanted to get out of Southern California because it is no place for young children."

Johnson is married to Steve Koeck, who retired last January from Providence Hospital, where he'd worked as an IT technician.

Johnson has a daughter, Justine Johnson, who has worked with her at I.V. Real Estate for several years, doing property management and administration. She also has five grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

"My world is my work, pretty much 24/7. And I enjoy my home, family and the outdoors." Admitting how she currently works five or six days a week for about eight to 12 hours per day, she added "I am looking forward to cutting back some."

The Labor Day parade will provide a fun break for Johnson, who said she was pleased by the honor of being chosen for Grand Marshal.

Haynie said the I.V. Lions, which currently has 29 members, has been around since 1933.

"We give out scholarships, provide eyes glasses and eye exams for those who can't afford it, and hearing tests too," he said. "We put on the Easter egg hunt at Jubilee Park and quite a few other projects as well."

A key Lion's Club initiative that countless Valley residents have benefited from is their ongoing medical equipment loan program. A substantial inventory of equipment and supplies is made available to anybody in need. Call Marty Haynie at 592-4262 to donate or receive equipment.

Haynie also wants to extend an invitation to potential "new members who

want to join the Lions and help out the community."



(Photo by Laura Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

2018 Grand Marshal Lynn Johnson

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