

Iron Sharpens Iron

MEN SHARE COMMON GOAL OF PRAYER AND SUPPORT

by Julie Costakis



The sun is barely up one June morning when a group of men gather at 7 a.m. on the Heritage campus for prayer and fellowship. Many arrive a little early to enjoy some doughnuts, Starbucks coffee, and conversation. Some come dressed in coats and ties and others in jeans or sweats depending on where their day will take them. Among them are fathers, grandfathers, and relatives of Heritage students, as well as Heritage faculty and staff, board members, and the school's CEO.

By design, the group's come-as-you-are structure and come-as-you-can attendance helps men feel comfortable plugging in however and whenever they're able. Brad Hastings, the Heritage dad who spearheaded the group's formation in 2014, begins the monthly informal meetings with a greeting and enthusiastic welcome.

The men migrate to rows of chairs in the Eagles' Nest conference room with coffee cups still in hand. Some meetings include musical praise and worship led by a volunteer. On this particular morning, Guy East, who is this month's volunteer leader, shares a brief devotional message. He invites the men to join him in an a cappella chorus of the classic hymn *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* and shares a challenging and heartfelt message based on Psalm 19.

As East speaks, three Heritage students – all of them football players – slip into the room and take the only remaining seats in the back row. They and their senior classmates have been invited to attend as honored guests at this last meeting for the school year. East wraps up his message and Hastings encourages the men to "circle up." Each person stands, grabs his folding chair and carries it to the back of the room to form a large prayer circle.

In this face-to-face arrangement, a few prayer requests are mentioned and then the floor is open for the men to share other requests. With

their heads bowed, the group commences with popcorn-style prayers where men pray out loud for the very real needs that have been shared as they feel led. Heartfelt prayers follow, emotions surface, and occasionally a voice falters.

There's a palpable sense of community among these men who share a common goal of supporting and praying for the school that has had a positive impact on their families. Many of them have developed friendships in the group, sometimes with people they might not otherwise meet. "It's a safe place for men to be, where they know that people are walking with them, are present in their lives and are appreciating them in a quiet, confidential place where they can live life with other godly men," explains Hastings.

The men also devote time and energy into this group to connect with the heart of the school by supporting, building relationships with, and better understanding the needs of its faculty and staff. "Heritage has such an enormous impact and influence on our children," says Hastings. "It's important for us as fathers to understand first-hand that Heritage has an academic mission, but they're also here to disciple our children. I want to know the men and women who are discipling and speaking truth into our children. This group is just one small way to plug in and develop some of those relationships."

As the prayer time concludes, Hastings asks the three football players to stand in the center of the circle. The rest of the group crowds around the young men, placing hands on their heads and shoulders. The men ask God for His blessing on the young lives, an infusion of spiritual strength, and clear direction for their futures. When the prayers conclude, several wipe tears from their faces. This is why the group ultimately exists: to model for the next generation of Christ's followers what it looks and feels like for men to live in community.