

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR — PAGE 4C

— DJ Paul —

THE DANCING MAINTENANCE DIRECTOR AT UNION GAP SCHOOL



Paul Hails, maintenance and grounds director at Union Gap School, welcomes students to school Jan. 27 with dancing and music.
Emree Weaver,
Yakima Herald-Republic

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Photos by Emree Weaver, Yakima Herald-Republic

Paul Hails, maintenance and grounds director at Union Gap School, dances along to music as students arrive for school Jan. 27.

All hail the dancing maintenance director at Union Gap School

SARA RAE SHIELDS
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

DJ Paul doesn't set your alarm, but he's gonna do his best to make sure your day starts with a grin. Paul Hails has been the maintenance and grounds director at Union Gap School since April 2021. He meets students at the door every morning with a dance and smile. Hails arrives at school before everyone else, taking care of maintenance needs and getting the school ready for the day. Kids start showing up at 7:45 a.m., and he's ready with music, hollering "good morning," calling some students by nicknames and doing all he can to encourage a smile or a dance. "I love the kids here," Hails said. "If the only smile they get today is the one I give when they first walk in the door, then that's good. I want to know the students at least start the day out in good moods and happy when they come in that front door." The superintendent or the principal used to always greet the kids in the mornings, Hails said, and one morning he had step in to cover. "I'm just the maintenance guy, but they were busy and so I said, 'I'll do it.' And then I did it for a day or two," he said. "We've got a big speaker in the district office, one of those big boom boxes, and I asked one day to use that for playing music in the morning. "There's some out there twirling, doing the splits or just, you know, jumping around and dancing. They enjoy it." Hails sets up the speakers for

teachers in the morning as well; the staff also enjoys the music. And since last fall, Hails has been called DJ Paul, playing "Kidz Bop" songs and some of his favorites like Whitney Houston, "Jump Around" and songs students don't recognize. "I'll play pretty much just anything with a good beat to it because I like to dance around and get them moving and up," Hails said. The students miss Hails when he's gone. A couple of months ago, he had surgery and was absent for a week. The students signed a giant letter, expressing get-well wishes and decorating with cheerful drawings. "I got it the morning I came in and when I saw that, it got to me. So it's pretty special," he said. "I'm sorry, I teared up a lot. I do tear up a lot when I talk about the kids. My kids are just ... I have a soft spot in my heart for them." Hails has been interested in dance since he was kid. "I love to dance," he said. "My mom and dad used to dance three nights a week, every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And I grew up when they were Moose members, and I grew up with them taking me to the Moose Lodge and being around the music and dancing. So I danced a lot with my mom and just — I don't know, I guess I have a natural rhythm." DJ'ing isn't new to Hails, either: A retired 20-year Navy veteran, Hails spent time near a club in National City, Calif., where we would fill in when the DJ called in sick.

"I would sit in there and just mix and play records," he said. "The trick was, though, I don't remember names of songs, the groups who played a song. I had milk crates and all the albums in there were (organized) all by beats per minute. You pull out whatever beats per minute." He'd start with slower songs and build up to faster ones by just pulling records and checking the beats per minute marked on each. "I still have it in my blood," he said. "If I could just sit back and play, mixing and all that. I'd love to do that. I love the beats. I like music," Hails said. During his free time, Hails likes spending time with his wife, Kim. They've been married for 27 years and have four daughters and six granddaughters. Hails says they're a "Fortnight family," often playing the video game together. Hails also travels regionally for cornhole tournaments as a member of the Palm Springs of Washington Baggers. When he and his wife were younger, they spent a lot of time dancing. Now, they're happy staying in and binge-watching "Ink Master." Hails acknowledges he has one tattoo, which he got more than 40 years ago in Hong Kong. "I'd like to stay here," he said. "I'm 67 and I'd like to stay and work until at least the ones I know now who are through the school." "Of course, that gets kind of touchy, but I'll probably work just as long as I can work. It is truly the most rewarding job I've ever done." Here's a Q&A with Hails:



A sign made by students for Hails hangs in his office Jan. 27.

BIOGRAPHY

- Name:** Paul Hails.
Age: 67.
Occupation: Grounds and maintenance director at Union Gap School since April 2021.
Residence: Moxee.
Favorite date night spot: Cowiche Canyon Kitchen.
Favorite food: Chicken and dumplings.
Favorite drink: Alcohol? Jameson Caskmates or Crown and Diet. Non-alcohol? Iced tea.
Favorite color: Blue.
What do you want to be when you grow up: Someone who can help make others' lives better.
Proudest feat: My son!
Current album in heavy rotation: Nothing in particular. I listen to all kinds daily.
Rock, paper, scissors: Rock.

What is "DJ Paul's" impact?

I was dreaming about a young boy who was troubled that nobody liked him and he was questioning why he was born. It caused me to wake up, thinking about how to answer him. The answer I came up with: We are all here on this Earth for a reason. Each of us has a talent to share. Each of us has a natural talent or ability. Some of us will be artists or sculptors. Some will be talked-about athletes. Some will be scholars and teachers. What we are all here on Earth to do is find our talents, embrace them and then share them with the world. Life should be finding your talent and your passion and sharing it with others. You don't have to be famous and remembered like Einstein or Elvis. You will be just as famous to one individual whose life you helped and changed for the better. If just one person remembers me for something I did, then I did what I was put here to do. Find your talent or ability, then go start changing lives. You will be amazed at how your life changes, too.

What do you love about Yakima? I enjoy the wineries and breweries in the area. The local festivals are a great time also.

Areas of the interest in the Yakima Valley? I would love to learn more about hops and how beer is made. Same holds true for the winery business.

What's something (a thing or two) that not many know about you? I fell 85 feet from a derelict strip mine shovel when I was 16. I was exploring it in the dark and I stepped into a missing catwalk. I fell 35 feet and bounced off the machinery house, then fell another

50 feet to the ground below. Days later, they flew a helicopter over the shovel to survey the area around it. Around the entire shovel, there was stacked-up sheet metal, rocks, lumber, etc. It turned out, I landed perfectly in the only clear 4-by-6 area. A bishop from St. Louis came to see me while in the hospital, because he wanted to see and touch a miracle. I never lost consciousness through the ordeal and was only in the hospital for a week. Prior to the fall, I had a very strong feeling something was going to happen. Now I know to listen to that feeling if it ever comes again.

Friends/family from out of town are visiting. What do you suggest they see, do, eat in the Yakima Valley? I would recommend they take some winery tours or visit some of the great local breweries, if that interests them. We have some of the best restaurants. For breakfast I would recommend McGuire's or The Dutch. Lunch I would recommend El Mirador, Kyoto Sushi and Yakima Steakhouse or Miners. Dinner, I would recommend Cowiche Canyon Kitchen, Zesta Cucina, Provisions or Crafted.

What is something you can't live without? My wife, my family and my friends. Life would be pretty boring without them.

Five Favorite things. My wife. My family. Greeting the kids at school in the morning. Las Vegas. Playing poker.

● Reach Sara Shields at sshields@yakimaherald.com.



Hails hugs a student arriving at the Union Gap School.