

Winfield native makes hometown home

By Tessa Castor
Staff reporter

A coach's life consists of more than practices, conditioning and games. In the case of Joe Wood, instructor in health and physical education and head women's soccer coach, time is spent focusing on family, faith and soccer.

Wood transferred to Southwestern in 2003 as a pre-dental major. After two years at Johnson County Community College, Wood returned to his hometown of Winfield, to a school he never considered attending before.

"Southwestern was a backburner school for me," said Wood. "I had no desire to go to Southwestern. I wanted to get away from Winfield, but I compared every school to SC, and SC was the full package."

When he completed his Leadership senior capstone project, a free soccer camp for children, Wood was invited to begin his coaching career at Southwestern. He's been coaching ever since.

During this time, Wood met his soon-to-be wife, Brae Johnson, class of 2007. The two married and have three daughters, Annabelle, Karaliese and Emmalynne. His family plays a big part in his coaching career.

"One of my favorite things about having a family and coaching is the players get to be a part of my family," said Wood. "My family helps keep me grounded and be a better coach."

Ailinn Enriquez-Chavez, accounting sophomore, plays on the women's soccer team and serves as president of Newman Club, a student organization on campus dedicated to developing the spiritual wellbeing of Catholic students. Wood and his wife, Brae, sponsor this organization.

"Since the beginning, he always had his family around in soccer, Newman and everything," said Enriquez-Chavez. "He's told us before, 'I only want people on this team who I feel comfortable to be around my family.' The girls like us and



ABOVE: Joe Wood with his wife, Brae Wood, and their three daughters, Annabelle, Karaliese and Emmalynne. Wood has been coaching at his alma-mater since graduating from Southwestern in 2003.

they play around with us, and it's nice. It makes you feel comfortable."

Kailee Turner, mathematics senior, plays on the women's soccer team. She babysits for the girls, and her foster parents for soccer are Wood's parents.

"I think family completely influences Joe," said Turner. "I think that's really shaped our team as a whole. All the girls he recruits have good character. It's nice to be a role model in the girls' lives."

Turner said she came to SC largely because of Wood's influence.

"I had two really bad experiences with college coaches recruiting," said Turner. "I chose SC because he cares about you as a person. Compared to other coaches, he was more personable and friendly."

Wood said the biggest thing he's learned as a coach is to follow the "golden rule" – but with a twist.

"I've learned that, instead of treating the girls how I want to be treated, I need to treat them

the way they want to be treated," said Wood. "I need to say what they need to hear."

Aside from that, Wood said coaching women isn't much different than coaching men. Wood said he encourages his players to fight the norm that being a female equals drama. Rather, he encourages maturity and confidence in his players, and he reminds them they have the same goals.

"I like how, even though it's a team and we're there for soccer, he makes it very family-oriented to where he cares about us as people rather than just players," said Enriquez-Chavez.

Turner said, "He taught me a lot about leadership, and he taught me what community was and how to be active in the community. He's invested in all of his players."

Wood said he wants his players and daughters alike to learn three things from him, to maximize their potential, produce a good work rate and be honest. He said he ultimately wants the

women around him to learn to balance confidence and kindness, particularly in the social media era.

"Joe's motivated me to be a better leader," said Turner. "During my time at SC, I improved more as a person than as a player under his influence."

Brae Wood is now director of Leadership Southwestern, and they are in different buildings across campus. Despite this, Wood said their conversations are better than if the two weren't both employed at Southwestern. This commonality, Wood said, revolves around the "life coach" aspect of his and his wife's positions.

The difference between Southwestern and other schools, Wood said, is the "X factor," allowing students to develop academically, athletically and personally.

"What I like about SC as an employee is getting to sell a product I believe in," said Wood. "It's nice to be able to put your heart into it."

Amber Good, head softball coach, has known Wood since 2003.

"He cares about each person on his team, who they are and what they represent," said Good. "He creates a positive culture in his program and teaches his players how to be a good person."

Good believes Wood would do anything for anyone at Southwestern.

"Joe's one of those people who makes you want to be a better person," said Good. "He's a great Builder and team player."

As co-sponsor of the Newman Club and a coach, Wood said the beauty of Southwestern's ministry is its ability to be present but not forced, allowing students to do what is best for their faith path.

"SC is a religious school where religion is optional," said Wood. "It doesn't encourage students to be a good Christian – it encourages them to be a good person."

Enriquez-Chavez credits Wood with getting her out of her comfort zone. Before coming to Southwestern, Enriquez-Chavez had only attended Spanish-speaking churches. Wood encouraged her to begin attending an English-speaking Catholic church in Winfield, which she said is very different than what she was used to.

"Joe and Brae created an environment where we could practice our Catholicism," said Enriquez-Chavez. "My faith was already there before I came here, but we go to a Methodist-based school. We have friendships now based on that."

Wood's inspiration comes from when the lightbulb comes on for those he coaches. "It's the moment of growth," said Wood. "I want to maximize the potential of the players on my team. It's inch-by-inch, but it's what turns them from an 18-year-old knucklehead to a graduate years later."

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