

Janitors having issues cleaning up the mess

The janitorial staff is looking for help to keep up with the demanding cleaning needs of JHS

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A dozen pieces of Tuesday's homework balled up, a few spots of crushed cheddar Goldfish from two days ago and a milk carton from first period's breakfast on Monday.

That's what the floor might look like in an average Jeff High classroom at the end of the week.

However the mess is not the fault of the janitors slacking on their job. Instead, it's a culmination of being understaffed, and not having enough qualified applicants to fill those positions.

"We are just trying to get the stuff done that needs to get done," said janitor Chris Schwinn. "It all comes down to time management, working extra hours on the weekend and overtime to get stuff that must be completed done. We can't pay attention to things like washing every window in the school.

"We've got to take care of other things that are more important: cleaning the bathrooms, taking out the trash, sweeping up the hallways, stuff like that," Schwinn continued.

On a normal school year, JHS would expect to have three day-shift and eight night-shift janitors each weekday. This year, it has gotten as low as two in the day, and only two at night.

Also adding to the chaos is the illness of veteran custodian William (Willie) Thornton, who has been out since the beginning of the school year. Thornton, who has worked within Jeff High for over 29 years, has experienced health issues that has prevented him from attending work, where he is the lead custodian.



Photo by Makiyah Owens

Custodian Bridget Morrow takes out the trash gathered after lunch. Due to William Thornton's absence, the janitors have had more daily tasks to take care of.

"We had our two-day custodians, Chris and Bridget, step up and have done everything we asked them to do and more in Willie's absence," said assistant principal Timothy LaGrange. "The building is in great shape. At times, we've had a sub for that third spot, but not consistently. I don't know when we will get that third position filled. In Willie's situation, if he came back, we want what's best for Willie."

According to LaGrange, there are a few

obstacles that have made it challenging to hire custodians this year. The biggest challenge is that other businesses, like Amazon and the newly-erected River Ridge, are offering more money for employment, which is cutting the application pool.

tion could spend more money on that or anyone's position. Everyone deserves to make more than they are making, so how do you do that? Right now, we are in dire need of custodians, so how do you do that? It's not an easily solvable work problem."

Despite the hiring difficulties, the school isn't far away from being back to full staff. At the time of print, LaGrange says JHS is two custodians away from full strength.

To make up for the less hands on board,

that is a larger, economic issue," LaGrange continued. "There are a lot of jobs available, like River Ridge, (which) has created a little bit of competition for us."

A creative way in which Greater Clark County Schools has tackled this challenge is by offering custodial job opportunities to high school students.

The position offers \$9 per hour to work up to three hours after school, everyday.

The hope for the hires is to give the custodians an extra hand while they are still filling in the other main positions.

"We've had a few people who have applied, we are going to hire a pool of high school students very soon to fill in and help us out as well," said LaGrange.

"I am excited for that and we've got some good candidates by the people I've talked to, we could use some more good people and high school students that want to work," he continued. "It's a very good part-time job for high school kids."

"But we are understaffed and some of

"It's a challenge to meet our standards."

-Tim LaGrange, asst. principal

some weekends or long breaks require JHS to bring in multiple custodians from other schools for a "blitz." The blitz lasts one or two days, and the entire school is cleaned.

"It's a challenge to meet our standards," LaGrange said. "(It's) not because of the people we have aren't doing a great job because they are doing a great job. They are great workers, dedicated and do a great job.

"But we are understaffed and some of

“They’re running low on janitors because they don’t want to pay us enough. That’s the whole (issue) right there.”

- Unnamed night janitor



In the back of a JHS classroom, student trash is left behind on the ground. With limited availability of janitors and vast size of the school, some classrooms aren’t vacuumed daily.

“I know we are understaffed and they have a lot to do; plus we’ve had people like William be out. I understand it’s not going to be as clean as it’ll typically be. I don’t know, I just wish my room would be touched more often because it sometimes feels like the only time it might get cleaned is if I offer extra credit to a student to do it.”

- Aaron Dorman, Social Studies teacher



Custodian Chris Schwinn pushes an empty tub outside the cafeteria to collect trash after lunches. *photo by Makiyah Owens*



Bits of trash on the floor are scattered throughout a JHS classroom. Administration is working hard to hire more janitors. *photo by Tristan Jackson*

Where’s Willie?

Not having 29-year veteran custodian William Thompson has been felt throughout the entire janitorial staff

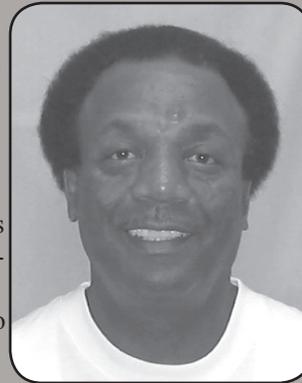
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For over 29 years, William “Willie” Thornton has strolled the halls of Jeff High, cleaning up messes along the way. However despite being at JHS for nearly three decades, Thornton hasn’t been seen in months.

Willie is battling health issues, which have kept him from coming in to do the job he loves.

“I like my job and I like the people I work with,” Thornton said. “It’s up to the doctors on if I can return or not. I really want to come back.”



William Thorton. *submitted photo*

The impact of his absence can be noticed around the janitorial staff, as every one of them who has worked with Thornton mentioned his dedication to the school.

“We miss Willie’s leadership,” said Michelle Grut, a day janitor at JHS. “He has put lots of years into this school, and we truly, truly miss him.”

As for a possible return to work, Thornton (and his doctors) have until March to decide on whether he will be able to return to the janitorial staff.

“He’s been an anchor for our custodial staff for years. He’s a tremendous worker,” said assistant principal Timothy LaGrange. “He’s had some health issues, so losing him was a big blow to us during the day. I personally miss him alot, he had a great sense of humor and I just enjoyed being around him. In his situation if he came back, we want what’s best for Willie.”