

David Allen Bell
 ■ School: Tennessee State University
 ■ Major: Civil Engineering
 ■ Notable: Sexton senior's assistant coach



Dominical Langa Brown
 ■ School: MSU
 ■ Major: Music Education
 ■ Notable: High school football "Dream Team"



Kevin Joe Butler
 ■ School: Prairie View
 ■ Major: Sociology
 ■ Notable: All-America football at Grant High School



Richard Carter
 ■ School: University of Northern Iowa
 ■ Major: Chemistry educator
 ■ Notable: Eagle Scout



Jarrell Cooper
 ■ School: Cleveland College
 ■ Major: Education
 ■ Notable: Sexton running back; now plays for Ohio



Tyion Samuels Walker
 ■ School: WMU
 ■ Major: Education
 ■ Notable: Received WMU football honor for college play



Young Lansing men are Brothers for Life, or simply ...

The BFL

Carvin Donald
 ■ School: Alabama A&M University
 ■ Major: Education
 ■ Notable: DJ in high school and college



Anthony Tyus Jr.
 ■ School: ODU
 ■ Major: Exercise science
 ■ Notable: White a book for Spanish-speaking kids



Gregory Green
 ■ School: LCC
 ■ Major: Criminal justice
 ■ Notable: Loyalty award in football at Sexton



Andre Tyus
 ■ School: Tennessee State University
 ■ Major: Honors electrical engineering
 ■ Notable: Co-validator, Sexton



Jon Green
 ■ School: LCC
 ■ Major: Criminal justice
 ■ Notable: All-conference in football at Sexton



Reginald Arthur Gleason Rieder
 ■ School: Wayne State U.
 ■ Major: Criminal justice/pre-law
 ■ Notable: 3.0 GPA, Sexton



DAVID DUNLAP/Lansing State Journal

Together: Many of the Brothers for Life reunited before returning to school this semester. The men have stuck together through childhood, adolescence and the first semester of college.

Hard work, self-respect key to bond

By Sheila Schimpf
 Lansing State Journal

When a guy has 16 best friends and their families have the same rules his family has, he gets the message in a chorus of voices. Work hard in high school. Go to college. Respect yourself. Say "Yes, ma'am" and "Yes, sir." Stay away from alcohol and sex. Don't get in trouble. Help others.

After awhile, it becomes like one big family. Or in this case, a group of members call Brothers for Life. In the seven years the Brothers have been in exist-

ence, the 17 members — nearly all from the classes of 2000 and 2001 at Sexton High School — have won recognition in academics, athletics and community service.

Along the way, they discovered another payoff for living up to the group's standards: being able to pour out your heart at any hour to someone who understands.

"When we started, people surrounding us saw how much we supported each other, got involved in each other's life," says David Bell, 18, one of the founders.

Members have a hand sign

that incorporates the initials "BFL," but there is no initiation or ceremony that marks membership in the informal group. Football is big in the Brothers' lives, but not all of them are star quarterbacks.

The 15 who have graduated have finished one semester of college. A few are on full scholarships — academic or athletic — and most of the others get some scholarship money.

The differences among them disappear in a bond of friendship that goes back at least as far as sixth grade at Dwight

Please see BROTHERS, 50

Kevin DeShawn Holte
 ■ School: Tennessee State University
 ■ Major: Biology pre-med
 ■ Notable: Salutatorian, Sexton



C.J. Quinley
 ■ School: Currently at Sexton, graduate in the spring
 ■ Notable: All-conference football player



Marcus Darryl Jackson
 ■ School: Currently at Sexton High School, graduate in spring
 ■ Notable: All-conference football player



Larry Christopher Moon
 ■ School: West Michigan University
 ■ Major: Mechanical engineering
 ■ Notable: Sexton all-conference defensive back



Alvin Anthony Mask Jr.
 ■ School: Wayne State University
 ■ Major: Pre-med
 ■ Notable: Sexton honor roll



Brothers: Group has lifelong bond

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Rich Middle School. That friendship has sometimes meant groggy Brothers staying up to help other Brothers with late-night study or ball sessions.

"We sacrificed. It didn't matter what the color, the problem, the size difference," Bell says. "Our families have brought us up to respect and brought us up to work as hard as we can and to have God first in our life."

It's too early to tag words such as "success" on Brothers who have barely just started career paths in civil engineering, medicine and law enforcement.

But the Brothers have stuck together through childhood, adolescence and the first semester of college — and are still best friends.

"It's unusual," says Diana Rose, Sexton-area director for the Lansing Public Schools. "Anything this positive we would like to duplicate."

That will be hard to do, the Brothers say. Their organization represents a bond in friendship.

It is so strong and so long-lasting that other adults have noticed.

"These guys are unbelievable," says Shirley Carter Johnson of Lansing, who chaperoned a special "brothers' senior trip to California. "These guys are role models for any child. These children changed the lives of so many adults and children."

Johnson says her two younger sons look up to the Brothers. On the trip to Los Angeles, her son, Eldred, fell asleep on a bus and did not get off at the right stop.

Alvin Mask Jr., one of the Brothers, ran two blocks after the bus, which had turned a corner and was out of sight, Johnson says, and got her son off the bus. "He's my hero," she says.

The Brothers themselves credit their parents and each other for their accomplishments, which include class president, co-valedictorian and salutatorian at Sexton, full scholarships to some colleges,

lic service.

One of their goals is to establish a scholarship at Sexton. Details are still being worked out.

"We're giving a scholarship back to Sexton for a graduating senior for the class of 2001," Bell says. "This is pocket money. Between \$300 and \$500. We took it out of our own pockets."

Because 15 Brothers are in colleges around the country, they rely on e-mail and telephones to support each other.

"It's really a family," says Kevin Hollis, who founded the Brothers with Bell and Regie Rieder when they were in sixth grade at Dwight Rich. "It's something special. We all used to pile in the back of a Chevy Cavalier and go to a football game. We had lunch together."

Long-distance friendship is not new to the Brothers. Kelly Butler, who started at Sexton, graduated from Grand Rapids Union High School. David Bell's family moved to Pittsburgh and he spent his last year at Sexton living with his grandmother.

Rieder says the e-mail is nonstop. "I'm as concentrated on what they're doing as anything else," he says.

Like a family, the number of Brothers grew slowly. C.J. Quinney, still at Sexton, was one of the last members to join. "I just became a part of it," he says. "Nothing was really said."

Like a family, they know which member to ask for help with weight training, cars, computers or music. They have inside jokes.

Like a family, they know each other's strengths and weaknesses. Some are gifted academically and want to be doctors or engineers. Some are better at sports than others.

They don't judge. "It's all about acceptance," Hollis says.

They played football together and on opposing teams, testing each other, respecting each other. In the 1990 season, when the older Brothers



SHILO SCHIMMEL/LEY HILL Journal
Friends for life: Kevin Hollis (left) and David Bell (right) founded Brothers for Life with Regie Rieder when they were in the sixth grade.

were seniors, their Sexton team had a perfect 9-0 regular season and was the Capital Area Conference champion.

All three years of football gave rise to nicknames such as "Jax" for Rieder, "Milky" for Gregory Green and "Bad News Brown" for Dominick Brown.

It also revealed their true character.

Gregory Green, they say, has the most heart. Smaller than most, Green would sometimes get tackled by Brown, who now plays for Michigan State University.

"He taught us to work hard, work through everything," Hollis says. "If he'd get smashed by Dominick, he'd get back up."

They check ESPN for each other's

scores on football Saturdays. Some of the Brothers for Life were red-shirted as freshmen and didn't play, but even so, they practiced and some traveled with their schools' teams.

Some like Brown who were used to playing in high school found it hard to sit on the bench in college. He turned to the Brothers, who peppered him with late-night calls and e-mails to get him through the season. At the MSU football banquet, Brown won the team humorist award.

In addition to Brown playing for MSU, Richard Carter plays for the University of Northern Iowa. Tyrone Walker plays for Western Michigan. Larry Moon, Mask and Rieder play for Wayne State. Kelly Butler plays for Purdue. Kevin Hollis and Andre Tyus play for Tennessee State. Anthony Tyus Jr. plays for Central Michigan. James Cooper plays for Olivet College.

"The initial thing that bonded them was football," says Anthony Tyus, father of Andre and Anthony.

"They learned to work as a team. My goal was to have football help them pay for college. Get an education. Get a good job. Make a living."

The parents who raised the young men required decent grades if their sons were to continue. Tyus Sr. says.

"Sports helps kids," he says. "More kids have goals of playing at the next level, of getting their schoolwork done."

Brothers sometimes call each other's mothers Mama, as in "Mama Hollis" or "Mama Moon."

"They spent so much time at all the different houses, we became a mother figure to each and every one," says Jean Moon, mother of Larry.

Researchers at Michigan State University a few years ago explored why some students succeed and some fail. Children who succeeded, MSU professor Joanna Keith found, frequently had family support, the support of other adults, family stan-

dards, time at home, responsible friends and involvement in school activities.

Those are all big in the Brothers' lives.

"They beat the odds and they came out on top," Jean Moon says.

The two Brothers still in high school — Quinney and Marcus Jackson — are seniors at Sexton and all-conference football players.

"We are well-respecting young men who were taught to give respect to any and everyone," Jackson says. "We look at ourselves as the men who will be running the country in just a matter of time."

Several of the Brothers have long-standing relationships with girlfriends, but no women are in the group.

"Boys do things differently than girls," Carter says.

"This is the type of organization," Hollis says, pointing to another Brother. "I can tell him anything. When you bring in girls, you start putting in guidelines on things you can't say."

Trust and honesty are keys for the bond between Brothers.

"I know my 16 Brothers will be there for me whenever I need them," Mask says. "We've been there for each other ever since we were young. Now that we are older, the bond between us is stronger."

When the Brothers started in 1993, public attention was focused on kids who dropped out, lived on the street and turned to drugs.

"It was so unique to witness that many young men who made a bond and a commitment to each other," Jean Moon says. "With all the different obstacles — with all the things like hanging around the streets, dropping out of school, no career goals — these young men made a commitment to themselves. It wasn't to the parents. It was to each other."

"For seven years," she adds, "that bond has never broken."

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