

Henry County Local

Bell first in history to graduate early

By Melissa Blankenship

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Travis Bell is in a hurry to get on with the rest of his life.

After fulfilling all the requirements, Bell, a senior at Eminence High School, became the first EHS student to graduate early last Thursday. He was handed a diploma, turned his tassel and received a standing ovation in a graduation ceremony for one.

"Travis is the first student in the history of Eminence to graduate early," said EHS Principal Shannon Treece. "He has chosen a field of service in our military. He had a clear vision and a desire to serve his country and he has worked diligently to complete all of his requirements. He is a special young man."

Eminence Schools recently amended their policy regarding graduation, making it possible for Bell to earn his diploma now. Treece said Bell approached her earlier this year with the request to graduate early. She advised him that it wouldn't be easy, but that it could be done and that the school would work with him to help him achieve his goal. Bell's parents were also supportive.

"When he finds something he wants to do, he's focused and driven," said Travis' father Joey Bell.

"We met with Mrs. Treece and she told him what he needed to do. We left it up to him. It was his decision," Tonia Bell, Travis' mother said. "He chose to serve. He cares about other people."

Bell has already signed up with the U.S. Air Force and will be shipped off to basic training in mid-April. After eight and a half weeks there, he will attend twelve to fourteen weeks of technical school to become a security forces specialist. After serving four years active duty and earning college credits along the way, he hopes to finish his degree and become a Kentucky State Police trooper or a crime scene investigator.

"I chose the Air Force because it was the best option for success for me," Bell said. "I didn't feel like I was using my time very productively and I knew I could knock it out early."

Bell has many family members who chose to serve in the military and he hopes to be the first in his family to earn a college degree. He downplayed his December graduation.

"I'm just an average student. I'm not the smartest person in class; I only have a 3.48 GPA," Bell said. "It's all about your effort. Anybody can do it if they work hard and start early."

Bell doubled up on some classes and worked ahead in others to earn the necessary credits to graduate early. He did this while playing sports, being active at church and working a part-time job.

"You just have to be organized," Bell said with a smile. "I had a little bit of free time in there."

Bell said he doesn't feel like he'll miss out on much "senior stuff," having attended two proms already.

"I will miss my senior baseball season, but at least I got to play football this year," Bell said. "And my friends Danny Lloyd and Kevin Brewer will probably miss me at lunch."

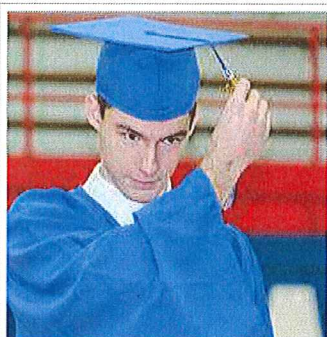
But Bell is ready to start the next chapter of his life and career and said he was humbled by the attention he received at the early graduation ceremony.

"That was pretty cool, pretty neat," Bell said. "I didn't think it was going to be that big of a deal."

His parents and teachers are very proud of his accomplishments and his desire to serve.

"The Air Force is lucky to get him," said Lynn Wilson, a former teacher of Bell's and his youth group leader.

"I can't wait to start my military career. And it's not about war or killing anybody," Bell said. "It's about helping other people and keeping people safe. I'm willing to take the brunt of something to keep other people safe."



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In a graduation ceremony Thursday morning, Travis Bell became the first EHS student to earn his diploma early. Above, he moves his tassel to designate his transition from student to alum.