

Personality

Holding hope for Grant County: Steve Sapp and Riley Tangamen

By Mikayla Marazzi

Steve Sapp, the director of Marion Housing Authority, is committed to Grant County. Though he grew up in Seymour, IN for the first 15 years of his life, he has called Grant County home for 35 years.

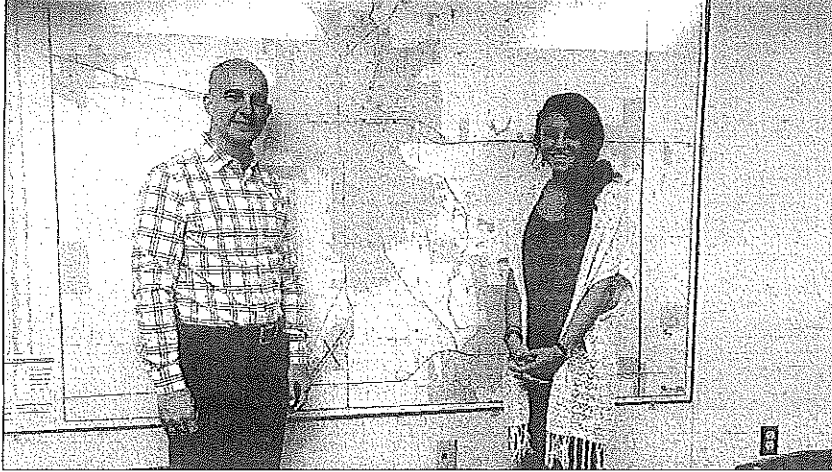
"This is my home; this is my community," Steve explains. He has had several opportunities to relocate outside the state, offered by various job possibilities, yet he has chosen to remain in Grant County—because he believes in his home.

Steve has now worked with MHA for 20 years, his anniversary coming up on September 2nd. He has seen challenging times in his positions with the housing authority, and though it would have been easier for him to take another job and leave, he never felt it was the right thing to do.

"In the end, in many ways, it paid off." Steve comments. "I wouldn't be the director and doing the projects I'm doing now." During the difficult years, Steve credits his faith for granting him courage and persistence. "When you truly believe in something, it gives you the strength and courage to see something difficult through," Steve explains.

Riley Tangamen, a new team member of Marion Housing Authority, echoes Steve's sentiments of heart and passion for the Grant County community. A recent IWU graduate, she has joined Steve in his work with MHA's non-profit branch "Building for

Riley sees this project as an opportunity to bring hope to the Grant County community. She's seen so many residents lose faith in their community. "The old hotel overgrown with weeds - it portrays that this city has failed or lost its sense of beauty," Riley says, "so this project will send a message that something is happening here, that there is hope in the downtown area."



Change," a project focused on revitalizing the old Hotel Marion building. As a student, Riley did an internship with Affordable Housing, where she learned that she had a deep interest in macro social work and community development—and that she was slowly falling more invested in the Grant County community. Thus, when Riley met Steve at a "Marion Round Table" discussion and learned about his intentions to transform Hotel Marion into an economic center, she immediately decided that she wanted to get involved. Riley began to pursue her dream job. She emailed Steve, offering him a well-thought out job proposal of how she could join the MHA team—though, at the time, the organization had no formal job openings. However, Riley's persistence, enthusiasm, skills, and passion earned her a spot on MHA's team—where Riley has added immense positivity and intellect to the team. "Riley's energy, positive attitude within the office, and her persistence in trying to accomplish things that are really difficult," Steve says, "are why Riley is an excellent part of the team."

Riley has found the MHA team to be far warmer and kinder than she ever expected for her first job out of college. After graduating IWU, leaving the friendly college bubble behind, she braced herself for a tough work environment. "I expected a harsh world out there, and instead, I found this community—one that's been like family," Riley says. As the youngest employee, she is often teased for her eagerness, yet it is precisely this energy that has brought a positivity

to the MHA office. Riley, too, has enjoyed interacting with her co-workers, learning from their wisdom and work experience. "It's been really cool to work with people who have witnessed the bad and good in Grant County but still choose to stick around," Riley explains. She sees her co-workers stay extra hours in the office, working tirelessly to help their residents get what they need. "MHA has been a better environment that I would have ever expected," Riley exclaims.

Since its opening in 1968, MHA has been creating new projects and expanding their role in the community. In recent years, they've had to navigate the aftermath of many funds being cut and new policies set in motion. "We need to find ways to assist our current residents, how to deal with funding loss and still meet our mission," Steve explains.

Their new project, revitalizing the old Hotel Marion building, offers a new way for MHA to meet their mission. With the reconstruction of the hotel building, they are seeking to meet the current needs of the community, from more than just a housing standpoint. Riley sees this project as an opportunity to bring hope to the Grant County community. She's seen so many residents lose faith in their community. "The old hotel overgrown with weeds - it portrays that this city has failed or lost its sense of beauty," Riley says, "so this project will send a message that something is happening here, that there is hope in the downtown area."

As Steve and Riley tackle their new project with the old Hotel Marion, they show persistence in the face

of new challenges. With this project, shifting out of the sphere of public housing and venturing further into economic development, they've dedicated them-

selves to rigorous research, expansive networking, and innovative design and problem solving. The new project has allowed them to connect with many people

in the community who share their passion for Grant County. "I've loved meeting a lot of people fighting the same fight, trying to do positive things for the community," Steve explains.

When Steve and Riley aren't working on MHA projects, they are enjoying their lives in Grant County.

Steve loves to visit Matter Park. "I travel quite a bit," he says, "and people don't understand that Matter park is such a great area, that it rivals areas in large communities like Boston or Chicago."

Riley loves exploring everything Grant County has to offer, from concerts in the parks to attending festivals to watching the sunset from the train tracks in downtown Marion. She sees beauty in even the most blighted areas and properties. Riley recounts how the other day she paused in front of an abandoned house, admiring it because it was her favorite shade of blue.

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