

In The

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TLIGHT



Ricky Monhollen with his 2 year-old daughter, Nicole, in the Learning Gardens at St. Rita

Ricky Monhollen, Class of 1988

Like many students today, Ricky Monhollen rode on a bus to school each morning. His daily bus rides were probably the typical scenario; a bunch of rambunctious kids talking, laughing and passing notes, trying to get a little bit of fun in before the school day started. Gazing out the window during the long forty-minute bus ride was an easy way for him to pass the time. There were many things to see on his route to school. There was one particular building off of Cincinnati's Interstate 75 that always caught his attention. There were usually kids outside swinging or just running around having fun. With his eyes glued to the bus window he looked for the kids every morning. For a few short seconds he saw a different world where all the kids were deaf and knew sign language. He wanted to know more about them and more about their school, as he watched the name of the building fade into the distance time and again. That building was St. Rita School. Seeing the word, "Deaf", on St. Rita's school building just about every day prompted Ricky to ask some questions. He wanted to know if there was really a school just for deaf kids like him. After talking it over with his mother, they both decided it was time for a change.

When Ricky was twelve years old his familiar bus route changed a little. St. Rita School for the Deaf wasn't a place he just passed by anymore on his way to public school. St. Rita became his final stop. He soon found himself running around with some of the same students he had seen so many times from his bus window.

Ricky is a 1988 graduate of St. Rita School. As a student he enjoyed being a part of the soccer, basketball, football and baseball teams. He also participated in three drama productions. He says one of his fondest memories is driving to Kentucky for a pig roast with the grade school classes and religion teacher, Father Wysong. After graduating from St. Rita, Ricky went on to attend the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. Two and a half years later he received his diploma in manufacturing processes. Ricky's first job was with the Northend Gear and Machine Company where he operated a gear machine. He was the first deaf person to be hired there. In 1991, a story was written in the Fairfield Echo about Ricky "breaking down barriers" in the workplace. He worked there for two years before accepting a job at the Ford Motor Company in Sharonville, Ohio. Again, Ricky was the first deaf person hired at the plant. This August will mark ten years with the company. His mother, Linda Long, who was a receptionist for eight years at St. Rita after Ricky graduated, believes her son is a *trailblazer* for the deaf. She said, "It's hard opening doors because people aren't always willing to give deaf people a chance." Her husband, John Long, was a Ford employee for forty years and was very instrumental



in getting deaf people employment opportunities at Ford. Being a longtime employee at Ford gave him a loud voice, which he used to get deaf people the chance they deserved. He even postponed his own retirement until he knew his voice had been heard. It wasn't until he saw several other deaf people hired by Ford that he decided to retire.

Ricky's parents continue to be wonderful advocates for him and the deaf community. But opening the door is just the first step. It takes courage, perseverance and a positive attitude to walk through the door and turn the opportunity into a success. Ricky has done the work and is a shining example of what is possible for deaf people. He owns a home in Fairfield Township where he and his girlfriend of eight years are raising their two-year-old daughter, Nicole. Their daughter is hearing but is learning sign language at St. Rita's LOFT (Language Opportunities for Tots) program. Ricky says he is going to tell his daughter that anything is possible. He wants to teach her to believe in herself, work hard and never give up. These are lessons he learned from his supportive parents and St. Rita School for the Deaf, with whom he shares the credit for his own success.

