

New class inducted into Smithtown Hall

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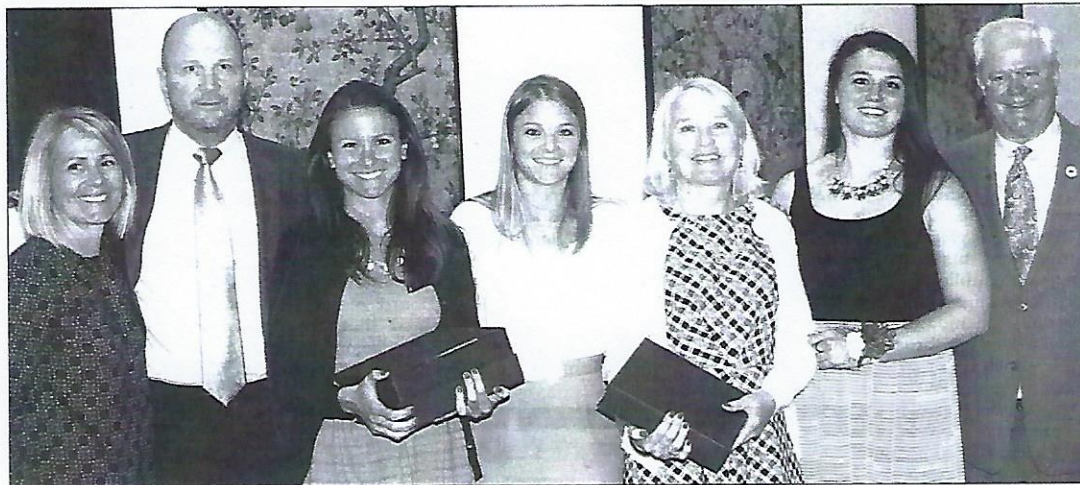
made an impact on him.

"Most importantly, I want to thank my family," Gatto said. "My mom, my dad, my brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins; they all gave me the love and support each and every day. It was endless and it meant the world to me. They are the most important people in my life. I'm proud to be from Smithtown, and I'm forever grateful to have their support."

Matt Hull

The Smithtown East boys' lacrosse team is in the midst of one of the most successful runs in the history of Suffolk County. The Red Bulls have advanced to the county semifinals in each of the past four years, and won the county crown twice in that span.

But while he hasn't played on the team in over a decade, 2007 Smithtown East graduate Matt Hull's impact can



Cathy Eagan, Geoffery Giffuni, Jamie Giffuni, Kerry Giffuni, Kristin Giffuni and Bill Hamilton

The Giffuni Family

The Giffuni sisters, Jamie, Kerry and Kristin, each made a similar, but different mark on Smithtown Athletics. All three excelled in different sports, but all three also left a positive impact on their respective teams.

Jamie, a 2004 Smithtown graduate, excelled on the lacrosse and soccer teams. Kerry, a 2006 Smithtown graduate, was a decorated gymnast. Kristin, a 2009 Smithtown East graduate, was a leader and top performer on the Smithtown Swimming and Diving team.

"I'm so proud to be inducted alongside my sisters," said Jamie, who spoke on her siblings' behalf. "We were a success in so many sports, it's a little scary to people."

The Giffuni sisters also credited their parents with giving them the freedom to take their own separate paths. "They were at every game, meet and match; rain, snow or sun, taking it all in," Jamie said. "They tried their best to support us as individual athletes. They always told us when we had a good game, and didn't hold us accountable when things didn't go our way. They taught us the value of hard work and responsibility, and how to communicate with others in difficult situations."

Smithtown Children's Foundation

The Smithtown Hall of Fame's Community Service Award is given to those who have made the community a better place, and the Smithtown Children's Foundation might be the best example of that. When Christine Fitzgerald, Christina Carnemolla-Alcure, Kristy Pagari and Krissy Leonetto joined together to form the foundation, it led to the hundreds of thousands of dollars being given back to the community and those in need.

"Our mission is to provide financial and emotional support to families in the community," said Fitzgerald, who spoke on behalf of the foundation. "We originally formed to help a little girl with Stage IV Neuroblastoma, when we started putting fundraisers together. Since then, we've put about \$700,000 back into the community. We may have spearheaded it, but it takes a village."

Fitzgerald closed her speech by

asking others to make the world a better place just as the foundation has. "As products of the Smithtown School System, I challenge you to give back to the community you grew up with and call your home, to the community you live in now," she said.

2002 Smithtown girls' soccer team

As Smithtown girls' soccer coach Bill Hamilton took the podium to introduce his 2002 county champion Bulls, he held up his iPhone to the microphone, which was playing "Lose Yourself" by Eminem. As the players walked to the podium with nostalgic smiles, Hamilton explained the team adopted this song as its entrance theme for that season, and has been used ever since.

"Because you only get one shot," he said. "Don't blow it."

Following the musical introduction, the longtime soccer coach regaled with tales of the team, and their impact made on the soccer program. "You can read about the accomplishments in the program, but there is only one thing I would like to stress at this point," he said. "I would like to thank these young ladies because they changed the culture of girls' soccer in Smithtown. Prior to 2002, no Smithtown team advanced beyond the quarterfinal. That changed since they believed in themselves well

before anyone else did."

"In the 14 years since, a Smithtown girls' soccer team has made the finals seven times," Hamilton said. "It trickles down from one generation to the next, and that is what makes a Hall of Fame quality team."

Following Hamilton's speech, Lauren Fornuto, one of the team's captains, spoke. "When I asked the girls the memories of the team, we all talked about how special we were and how we defied the odds," she said. "We played a lot of teams with big skills and big-name players, but we were a tight-knit group of girls that wanted it. We had the heart, determination and the right amount of crazy."

Nicole Cooper, another of the team's captains, spoke of the inspiration the 2002 team received from prior Smithtown teams. "The display we showed was not a one-year thing," she said. "It was the culmination of four years of great role models. Our team was about tradition, and the pride we felt being a part of it was incredible."

"What really made us great was our undying desire to succeed," Cooper said. "We weren't the most skilled team outside of Fornuto and Kelly [Eagan] but the heart we played with was a recipe for success."



Christine Fitzgerald speaks on behalf of the Smithtown Children's Foundation.



Matt Hull

still be felt. "Matt is the measuring stick all Smithtown East lacrosse players are measured against," Smithtown East lacrosse coach Jason Lambert said. "Matt was the face of the new franchise in its earliest days."

During his speech, Hull talked about the honor he felt being inducted into the Hall of Fame, as it was an extension of the best of the community he grew up in. "This whole event is humbling in so many ways," he said. "I want to thank everyone who devoted the time and energy to athletics. The values and commitment to life lessons I learned in the athletic arena can never be understated."

Hull also spoke about what it meant to be a Bull in his high school days and beyond. "I was honored to represent my town in three sports then represent it for another four years of Division I lacrosse at Harvard," Hull said. "But there is nothing like taking the field for a big game with my friends in front of my family and community. That is why this award is the culmination of my career."

"I wasn't always the fastest or the strongest, but I could control how much I wanted to win and how hard I played," Hull said.

Embrace immortality

Smithtown HS Hall of Fame inductees reflect on successful athletic careers

By ANTHONY LIFRIERI

The Smithtown Booster Club held its annual Hall of Fame ceremony to induct its newest class at the Stonebridge Country Club in Hauppauge, Saturday, May 13. This year's class included Francesca Busa, Shneeka Center, Demmianne Cook, Drew Desmarais, Anthony Gatto, Matt Hull, the 2002 Smithtown girls' soccer team and the Smithtown Children's Foundation.

Francesca Busa

Francesca Busa, a 2011 Smithtown High School East graduate, helped lay the foundation for both Smithtown East's softball and volleyball teams.

"She helped put Smithtown East softball on the map," said Smithtown East coach Glenn Roper in a letter read at the ceremony. "We made the playoffs every year she was on the team, and a run to the Final Four her senior season. But what I'll remember most about Francesca is her fierce, competitive spirit. She gave everything she had on a daily basis and made everyone around her better. The teams were stronger because of her. She is all you could want in a Smithtown East softball player and athlete."

Smithtown East assistant softball coach Ed Shivokevich, who introduced Busa, recognized her greatest quality, that of being clutch. "Great athletes have great stats, but a higher level athlete isn't measured by what they do in stats," he said. "They're measured by what they do at the most important time. When I look back on Francesca, I wouldn't look at her going 3-for-4 in a game, I'd look at that big hit she got that we needed in the third inning to break the game open, or that big fielding play with the bases loaded and two-outs to stop the other team."

During her speech, Busa talked about the very competitive spirit that drove her to be such a clutch performer. "Everyone knows I'm a competitive person," she said. "What attracted me to sports wasn't winning, it was playing. I loved going out there and making plays. I always wanted to win, but it was never why I played."

Busa also expressed gratitude for those who helped her along the way. "I met the most amazing people in my life playing sports," Busa said. "Each person has helped me develop into the person I am today. They never cared about what I did on the field, they cared about the reputation I had and how I made others feel. They taught me how you treat people is how people remember who you are."

Shneeka Center

With over 2,200 points to her resume, Shneeka Center may not be the greatest player in the history of the Smithtown West girls' basketball team, but the entire Smithtown basketball program as a whole. The 2010 Smithtown West graduate anchored the Bulls in their run to the semifinals in 2010, beating perennial powerhouse Northport for the first time in the playoffs that season.

"Not every player makes an impact beyond their time, but Shneeka Center is one of those kids," Smithtown West coach Katie Combs said.

"On the court she was an unstoppable force, which still resonates today,"



Francesca Busa

Combs said. "I still show the girls the team video of her rebounding. We never beat Northport in the playoffs until her, where she scored 30 points and grabbed 33 rebounds. It epitomized the player she was. She just wanted to win — and no one was going to stand in her way."

In her speech, Center credited those around her for her success. "All the people supporting me have had such a profound impact on the player and person I am today," she said. "As I step into the role of becoming an educator, I'm starting to realize not everyone teaches the importance of values. I'm so thankful to those who taught me, so I can now teach others."

Demianne Cook

In the infant days of the reopened Smithtown High School East, Demianne Cook helped establish the Red Bulls' girls' lacrosse and basketball teams. After graduating, she made her mark at the collegiate level by winning two Division II National Championships, then making her mark at Stony Brook in Division I by becoming a Tewaaraton finalist.



Shneeka Center hugs Katie Combs.

"She's played a key role in the growth of lacrosse on Long Island and throughout the U.S.," Smithtown East girls' lacrosse coach Ann Naughton said.

"As far back as her freshman season, it was easy to see her speed and quickness was lethal," Naughton said. "She also had a refusal to admit defeat, which is the reason she went on to become an All-American in college."

Although Cook now coaches high school lacrosse in Florida, she conveyed her happiness returning to her home town during her speech. "Being back here feels like home," Cook said. "I feel like I'm a 14-year old again, carrying the heaviest backpack and my lacrosse stick. There is no way that kid would think where we went 10-years later."

Cook also said she tries to use what she learned in Smithtown in her coaching career. "Every time I step on the turf, I try to reach new heights every day," she said. "My main goal is to impact young players and be the best role model I can be. If I can do



Drew Desmarais

"Everyone here in the audience had a part to play in our careers. The mark you leave on others is the legacy you leave on a program."

"I want to leave everyone with the same sense of support I got here in Smithtown, not just from family members but the booster club itself" Desmarais said. "I'm lucky to be a part of a program that puts its athletes in the best position to win."

Anthony Gatto

Few athletes made an impact on three programs the way 2011 Smithtown High School West Anthony Gatto made on the football, basketball and baseball programs. So numerous were Gatto's accomplishments that his former coach and current Smithtown East assistant principal Jason Pettis said it was a great challenge introducing him.

"I was a little torn," Pettis said. "It's easy and difficult at the same time to speak about him because there's so many good things to talk about. At the same time, it's difficult because you don't want to leave anything out."

Gatto spent much of his speech regaling previous games, sharing memories and thanking those who

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Demianne Cook and Ann Naughton.

that, I'm winning no matter what the score says."

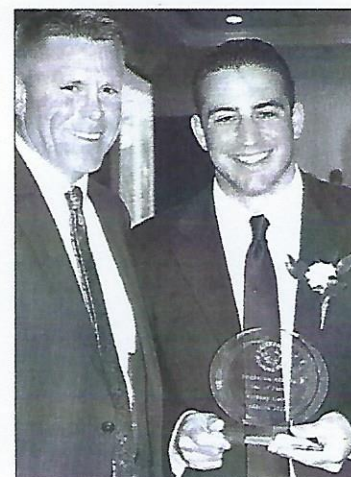
Drew Desmarais

While many of the athletes of the 2017 Smithtown Hall of Fame class helped play a key role in the founding of the separate Smithtown East and West athletic programs, Drew Desmarais was one of the final superstars of the combined Smithtown High Schools. The 2005 Smithtown graduate starred on the gridiron as the Bulls' starting quarterback as well as the team's emotional leader.

"The person going into the Hall of Fame is a great example of the type of person that comes out of Smithtown athletics," said former Smithtown basketball coach Lou Gambeski, himself a Smithtown Hall of Famer. "Drew represents the kind of environment where young people can reach their potential, and Drew very much did so."

"He wasn't our high scorer, but he was the glue that held the bricks together," Gambeski said.

Like many of his fellow Hall of Famers, Desmarais conveyed gratitude towards those who helped him along the way. "The theme of many of us is we have a lot of support," he said.



Anthony Gatto and Jason Pettis