



November 2014

Keeping H.O.P.E. alive

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

On Sept. 20, the Avon Old Farms Winged Beavers varsity football team beat Brunswick 49-34. It was a fitting end to a day that began by celebrating a former student, player and coach, Frank DiCocco, who passed away last year from bone marrow failure at age 29. In honor of his life and work, the team dedicated

its season to DiCocco who graduated cum laude from the boys school in 2002.

Speaking at a special presentation on a bright, warm fall day before family members, school alum, staff and the varsity football team, Avon Old Farms Dean Kevin Driscoll reflected on the special person DiCocco. At the ceremony,

his parents were presented with the framed football jersey their son had worn while a player at the school. DiCocco's helmet was also presented.

In a conversation a few weeks after the game, Driscoll noted that DiCocco was an excellent writer. His hard work was also pres-

ent on the field, where he played as an offensive lineman, said Driscoll, who coached him.

"You knew he was special," Driscoll said. "He was always out to help kids. If he saw one of the younger kids sitting at the table by himself in the dining hall, Frank was the kid who would go over and talk to him. He naturally picked up the big brother mentality."

He took that with him when he graduated, Driscoll said.

Years later, DiCocco returned to Avon Old Farms as a football coach – a position he held at other high schools and colleges. The lessons on game plays and football form he

AOF alum Frank DiCocco honored for charity work



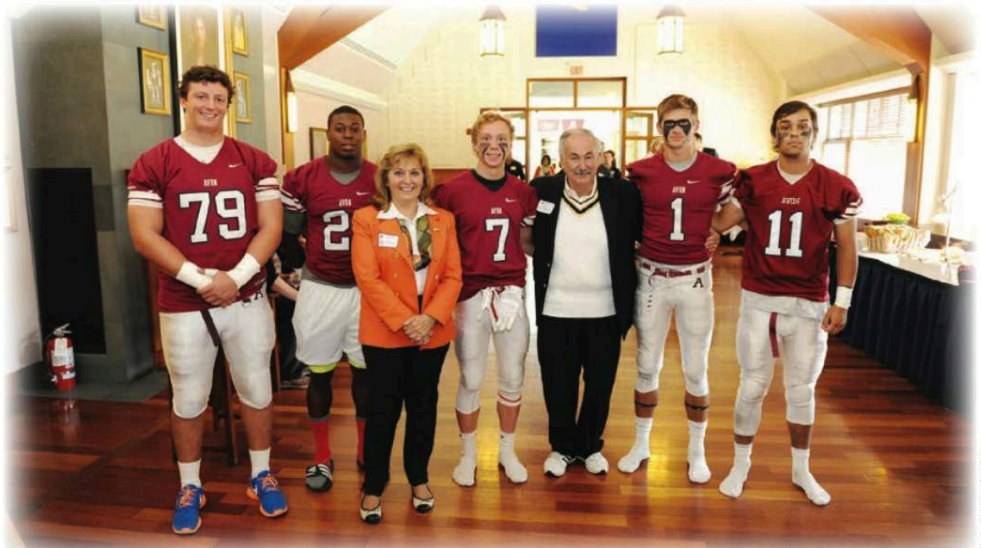
Dean Kevin Driscoll shows the helmet worn by Frank DiCocco during his time at Avon Old Farms.

part of his focus. He dedicated his life to teaching those he coached how to develop into thoughtful, bright men away from the gridiron.

"His moral fiber was so strong that I couldn't let him be forgotten," said Driscoll, who now serves as football coach emeritus. "His family [is] an Avon family, he was an Avon boy. He's part of what makes us a great school. It's right that we should honor a former player and coach. He was a true, great Avonian."

On his website, www.coachdicocco.com, DiCocco stated, "My mission is to build men of character, men of values, men of purpose and men of honor. My aim is to help shape the lives of others in a positive and meaningful way: a way that inspires individuals to help create a better and more hopeful world for us all."

DiCocco wrote several books, including "The Playbook for Manhood: A Game Plan for Being A REAL Man," which he used as a stepping stone to develop REAL Man Inc., which stood for Respect All People, Especially Women,



Courtesy photo

Current members of the Winged Beavers varsity football team with Frank DiCocco's parents, Kathy and Lou DiCocco, at a pre-game reception honoring their son.

Always Do the Right Thing and Live a Life that Matters.

"It is designed to help boys and men of all ages to develop an under-

standing of what it truly means to be a real man," the program's website states.

The program was created for

middle school, high school and college students, and men.

Avon Old Farms has implemented it. This year, the program is being

presented to seniors each Sunday evening at the school by coaches and staff. It will eventually be taught to the entire student body.

The start of the program is timely, with its message of respecting women in juxtaposition with current headlines in the NFL about alleged domestic abuse of women by players.

"We are getting ready to do the REAL Man program and teach the importance of treating people, especially women, with respect. It's amazing it just happened to come together when all this madness happens in the NFL, and here we are

teaching a course on how to act," said Driscoll.

Additionally, each current player's helmet now has the REAL Man logo – a large paw – on it. The organization's website explains that the paw logo was adopted in part because it was a common logo for several of the teams DiCocco coached, and because it symbolizes an imprint reflecting the impact an

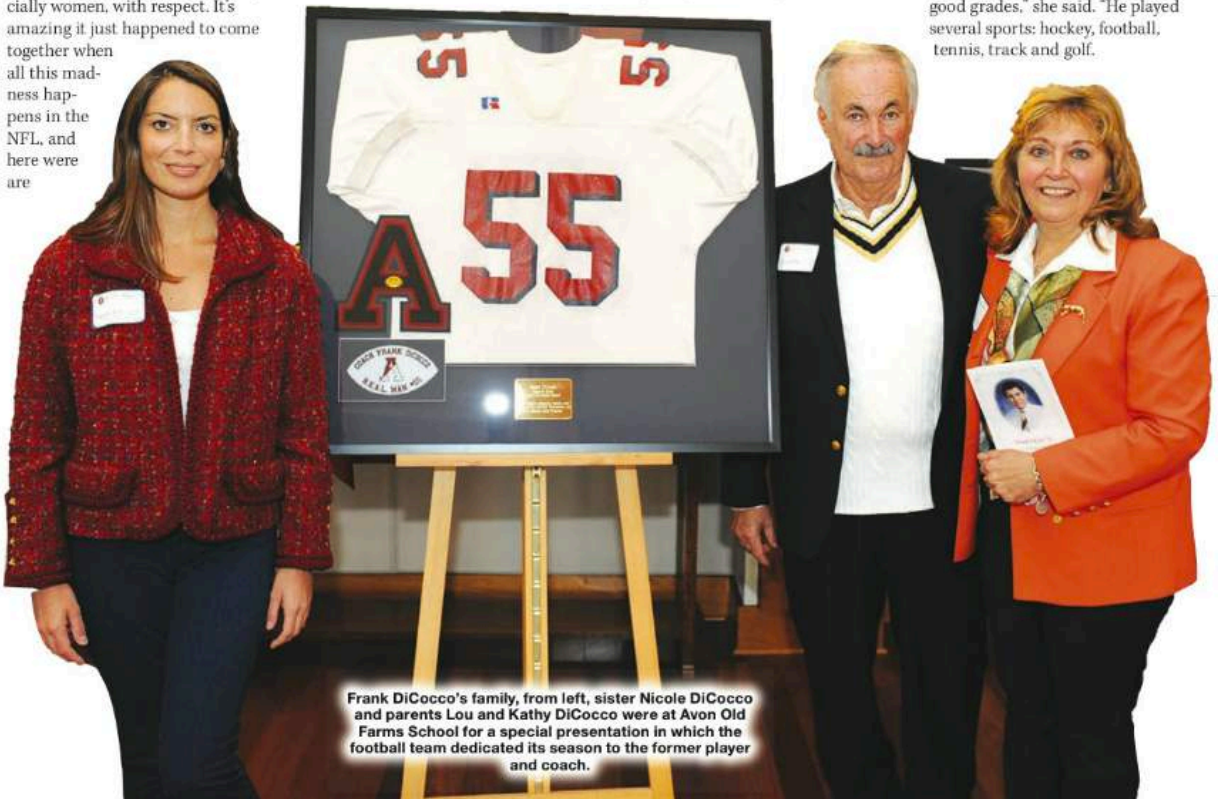
individual can have on the world around them.

In 2011, DiCocco went on to found the H.O.P.E. Foundation for a Better Tomorrow, a nonprofit organization to help students and student athletes "demonstrate exemplary ambition, a commitment to both academic and intellectual excellence, dedication to community service and a desire to become personally and professionally successful."

as explained in a press release.

When asked where DiCocco got his drive and commitment to others, his mother, Kathy DiCocco, said her best guess was that it was a combination of his upbringing in a very close family, his schools and teachers.

"He was very bright. He was a very good kid, so easy to get along with. He had high honors his whole life and worked very hard to get good grades," she said. "He played several sports: hockey, football, tennis, track and golf."



Frank DiCocco's family, from left, sister Nicole DiCocco and parents Lou and Kathy DiCocco were at Avon Old Farms School for a special presentation in which the football team dedicated its season to the former player and coach.

He just loved sports."

With her son's REAL program, Kathy said he "was very much trying to teach young players you have to be respectful, do what is right, live a life that is important and matters; he wrote several books about this. It was important to him to teach these kids what to do so they would have a more successful life."

Upon DiCocco's passing, his family was ready to step in and continue the work he had started. His mother, father Lou DiCocco and sister Nicole DiCocco all work for the H.O.P.E. Foundation for a Better Tomorrow.

"The day after his funeral, we kicked it into action. We had some relatives helping us. We just started the website and started to hold a couple of fundraisers. We visit schools to get his books out there," his mother said.

The organization has two goals, she explained. One is to offer scholarships and the other is to get his REAL program out

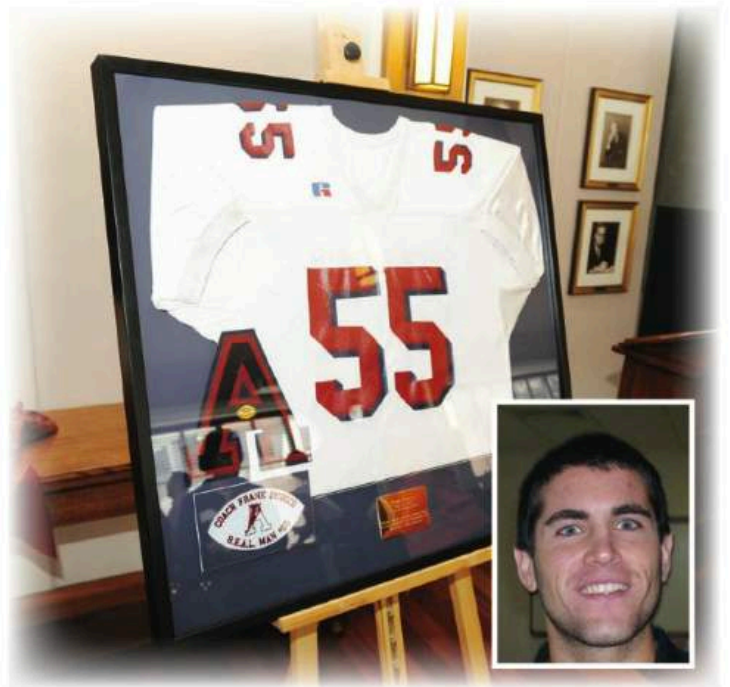
to students who can benefit.

So far, she said, the organization has given away nine scholarships and sent six youngsters to Camp Courant.

"I think he would be very glad because he wanted us to keep the program going. That was his intention, that we keep it going. He asked us to get his book into the hands of coaches, so we've attended some big coaching conventions."

Less than two weeks after the celebration on the football field, the DiCocco family returned to Avon Old Farms School for the H.O.P.E. Foundation for a Better Tomorrow's Second Annual Wine Tasting event, with proceeds going towards the Shaping Champions Scholarship Fund.

"Our work is to get the REAL Man program into the hands of coaches and teachers everywhere," Kathy said. "We are constantly writing and have some very high powered coaches in Division I programs." **VL**



The football jersey worn by Frank DiCocco (inset) was presented to his parents, Kathy and Lou DiCocco.