

'MR. HUSTLE'

# Remembering big-hearted Dave Ricciardi of Branford

Dave's Dream  
Oktoberfest fundraiser  
at Silver Sands Beach  
Club Oct. 15

10/17/16

By Lisa Reisman

[lisareisman27@gmail.com](mailto:lisareisman27@gmail.com)

**EASTHAVEN** » Some years ago, Branford's David Ricciardi, who died in August 2015 at 60, was coaching a softball team. "Good eye, good eye, great job," he called out to a little girl each time the ball went over the plate.

Finally there came Ric-

ciardi's gentle suggestion — "next time, honey, let's start swinging the bat," said his wife Margaret who's inviting the public to the first annual Dave's Dream Oktoberfest at Silver Sands Beach Club, East Haven, Saturday, Oct. 15.

The purpose of the event is to raise \$10,000 to benefit Dave's Dream, an organization that seeks "to support those in need to further themselves through athletic and artistic endeavors," its website reads.

Dave's Dream was formed in Ricciardi's memory. In February 2013, the tall, outgoing

father of three collapsed a few days after successful heart surgery. For the next two and a half years, he was in a persistent vegetative state.

To understand the man who once threw himself into coaxing a tiny girl to swing a bat, and why his family and friends founded Dave's Dream not long after he died in August 2015, consider that his Hamden Hall classmates created the David K. Ricciardi "Mr. Hustle" Award to honor their friend.

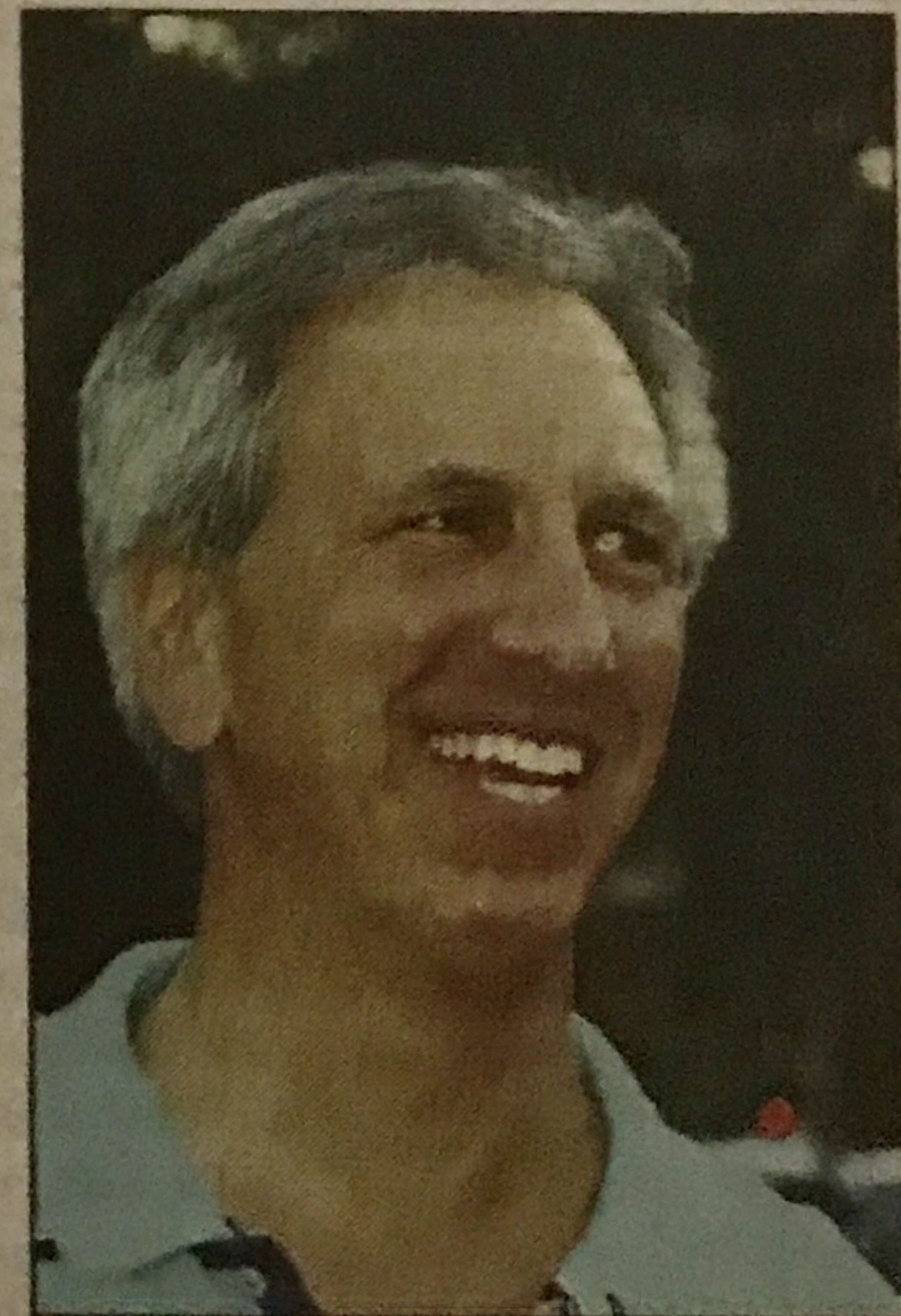
The award is given annually to a three-sport varsity athlete like Ricciardi, the

captain of the varsity football, basketball and baseball teams.

The hustle he continued to display at Villanova, where he made the vaunted basketball team as a walk-on, wasn't hustle in the fiercely ambitious sense of the word. "He led his teammates by example," according to his Hamden Hall classmate Marc Riccio, citing his unflagging work ethic and positive energy.

He showed that same initiative in coaching. "He was involved in every sport our

**RICCIARDI** » PAGE 4



The late Dave Ricciardi, who will be remembered with the first annual benefit, Dave's Dream Oktoberfest, Oct. 15 in East Haven.

CONTRIBUTED  
PHOTO



# Ricciardi

FROM PAGE 1

three kids did, youth soccer, basketball, baseball, softball," said Margaret, a retired OR nurse at YNHH. At the swimming pool, "he'd start with our kids on his shoulders and they'd be jumping off, and then all these other kids, they'd get on his shoulders too."

What set him apart was the way "he tried to give every kid the fun of learning a sport and the confidence to keep at it," she said.

That impulse, to shine his sunny attitude on whomever needed it, went beyond coaching. As tax director for the United Illuminating Company, he could be found at lunchtime helping employees enrolled in college classes with their homework. When he went to Dunkin' Donuts in New Haven, he'd invariably be asked for a quarter for a cup of coffee.

"No, you can't have a quarter," he'd tell them, "but get whatever you want for food," and a cup of coffee would end up costing him 15 or 20 bucks," Margaret said.

With Ricciardi, it seemed, old-fashioned chivalry was alive and well. At In Shape Fitness in Branford, where he was a member, he arrived at the Group Power class early to reserve a spot and set up the equipment, along with a bottle of water and towel, for his "gym wives," as Branford's Kathy Kessler recalled.

"If someone walked in late, he would stop and help them assemble everything." As for the spinning class, "he'd have the seat adjusted to my height, and a towel draped on the bike, and a bottle of water," Kessler said. "Just the consummate gentleman."

Margaret agreed. "After 30-something years together, he'd still open the car door for me, still drop me off at the front door if it was raining. You don't see people doing that anymore."

The extent of those touched by her husband's uncommon kindness became evident once he suffered what would turn out to be a permanent setback. "He had friends visiting him, singing to him, bringing him up to date on everything, all throughout," Margaret said.

Many of those same friends banded together to form Dave's Dream. Already the foundation has offered its first matching grant to Branford Youth Football, raising \$7,700 to replace decade-old jerseys for close to 200 kids in town. It's also launched an initiative to collect any old sports equipment that "a kid could put to good use."

With the first annual Dave's Dream Oktoberfest this Saturday, featuring a variety of beer from Branford breweries and wine with catering by Texas Roadhouse and live music, the aim is to continue honoring and building on Ricciardi's legacy.

So that, eventually, another little girl stepping into the batter's box will follow through on her swing with a few encouraging words from a coach.

---

*Dave's Dream Foundation Oktoberfest Fundraiser will take place on Saturday, Oct. 15 from 6 p.m.-10 p.m. at Silver Sands Beach Club, 640 Silver Sands Road, East Haven. Tickets \$50 per person or \$35 for guests aged 21 to 29, include 2 drink tickets at [www.davesdreamfoundation.org](http://www.davesdreamfoundation.org). Tickets are also available at the door.*