

**‘His spirit will live on here forever’**

**By KATHLEEN DUFFY**

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On Saturday, March 9, while student actors at Cherry Hill High School East flew across the stage and performed sword fights during “Peter Pan,” Charlie “Moose” Musumeci quietly lost his cancer battle.

Musumeci, 58, had been fighting adrenal cancer for two years, with the East community supporting him each step of the way.

Play director Tom Weaver received the call from Charlie’s wife, Cindy Musumeci, shortly after 11 p.m. with the news. And a wish.

Not a soul was to know of Musumeci’s passing until after the Sunday matinee, which would be the last showing of the spring play.

“Charlie would’ve been very upset if the kids had gone into the last show with this weighing over their heads,” Weaver said.

After the final show, the students were told, with staff on hand to give hugs and comfort through the immense grief.

“The first group of people in Cherry Hill to know of Charlie’s passing was the ‘Peter Pan’ cast and crew,” Weaver said.

At the cast party later that night, the students stayed close.

“We bond tremendously well in this theater department,” he said.

The department was just one important part of Musumeci's life. A graduate of East, he began working as a substitute teacher in 1977 and rooted himself in all areas of the school.

"He was our ambassador," Principal Dr. John O'Breza said. "He loved East."

"He liked being here. He liked being involved with the kids and the activities."

Other than gracing the auditorium, Musumeci could be found administering SATs, coaching several sports or supervising games.

"There was no part of the community that he wasn't involved in," O'Breza said.

An announcement on the East Cougars softball team page echoed that sentiment.

"Anyone who has ever met Charlie knows him as an energetic, vibrant, positive, caring person, who always put others before himself. The East softball program, as well as the entire Cherry Hill East High School community has lost a great coach, teacher, mentor, role model and friend," the statement said.

Musumeci coached softball for 28 years, Assistant Principal and Athletic Director Dr. John Burns said.

He was also the cross-country coach during the 1990s and early 2000s and cheerleading coach.

Since his passing, Burns has been inundated with support from area athletic directors, calling Musumeci a "class act."

"If you played for him, you shared a special bond. For me, Charlie invited me to be involved with his softball program once he knew I had previous coaching experience at

another school,” Burns said. “I learned a great deal from him in how to treat student athletes.”

In his opinion, the best part of Musumeci’s personality was his inclusion of everyone.

“With Charlie, no one was ever excluded. He made it a point to speak to all students. It didn’t matter if he was working with the top academic student, or with one who was not fully engaged, Charlie just had a way with the kids,” he said. “People have said, and I agree that he is truly Mister East. He made it a point to be involved in every student’s life. I was always amazed at how many people knew and respected him. His sense of humor was amazing, and he could laugh at himself, too. When a child succeeded in anything he made it a point to congratulate them.”

Last year, a screening was held in Voorhees for Musumeci’s completed mockumentary, “Ain’t Nobody Left Behind,” and he spoke with The Sun about his cancer fight.

Seated on his couch, despite having to shift positions often to relieve pain, he exuded a positive energy.

“They’re coming up with new remedies every day,” Musumeci said in November. “You gotta be positive. You just have to make adjustments.”

He had been receiving treatments from Sloan-Kettering and Fox Chase cancer centers and had spent Thanksgiving Day in the hospital.

According to Musumeci, adrenal cancer is rare, affecting one in 3 million people at his age, and one in 1.5 million in the general population.

“It’s so rare that nobody specializes in it,” he said.

Two months later, in January, the East community rallied to support the Millie Schembechler Fund for Adrenal Cancer Research at the annual coffee house. He was in attendance and talked to the crowd.

That night broke school records, Choral Director Laurie Lausi said in the days following the event. In fact, \$8,600 was raised.

“It was such an inspiration,” she said. “He truly made his mark on hundreds of lives that night.”

Love just flowed for him at the coffee house, Burns said.

“I watched the students, graduates, from recent history to a long time ago, come up to Charlie and talk with him, and it was readily evident the love that they all had for him,” Burns said. “This was from students who were performing songs on the stage to boys’ basketball players who had played a game that afternoon and he wanted to know how everyone had done. It is the rare person who can cross the various student groups so easily.

“It is a huge loss for the school and community.”

For Weaver, the loss of his close friend just plain stinks.

The two had been especially good friends in the last five years, working together often in the theater department.

Even in his last days, struggling with severe pain, Musumeci found his way into the auditorium, helping the pirates in ‘Peter Pan’ and causing plenty of laughter.

“That’s what he was good at,” Weaver said. “His laughter was extremely contagious. It wasn’t a polite giggle. It was a hearty laugh. He held nothing back.”

At the same time, he was honest with the kids, which was respected.

“He would never sugarcoat something,” Weaver said.

That philosophy transferred into his cancer fight.

At first, he fought to perhaps beat the cancer, but over time, as he knew the battle was almost over, he would just say, “Weav, it is what it is.”

“He was unbelievably strong,” Weaver said. “I already miss him. It’s going to feel funny directing a play without him next to me.”

As for “Peter Pan,” the play went off without a hitch, with glitter still coating the high school’s floors.

Almost 5,000 people attended the showings, with Musumeci delighted of the success.

“His spirit will live on here forever,” Weaver said.

According to his obituary, Musumeci leaves behind his wife Cindy, son Adam of Newbury Park, Calif., daughter Jaclyn (Michael) Gambone of Glen Burnie, Md., as well as three siblings, five nieces and nephews and three great nieces.

In addition to his work at East, he was a member of the Screen Actors Guild and knights of Columbus Council No. 6173 in Cherry Hill.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to the “Charles Musumeci Cherry Hill East Scholarship Fund,” 1750 Kresson Road, Cherry Hill, NJ 08003.

View Charlie Musumeci’s full obituary and guest book at [www.murrayparadeefh.com](http://www.murrayparadeefh.com).