

Shamokin grad, football coach to be memorialized via fieldhouse<!--s:24-->

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Content

A Shamokin High School and Bloomsburg State College (now Bloomsburg University) alumnus is being honored posthumously by Mechanicsburg Area School District with a new facility to be named after him.

Longtime football coach Rich Lichtel, a 1964 graduate of Shamokin High School and 1968 graduate of Bloomsburg State College, played quarterback for both of those schools before coaching the game he loved.

In his memory, the Mechanicsburg Area Senior High School now plans to name its new fieldhouse after him, the Rich Lichtel Fieldhouse, which will house the new team rooms and a Hall of Fame, along with new showers and lockers for the players and coaches.

Lichtel, who also was a teacher at Mechanicsburg Area from 1968 to 2004, served as head coach of the Wildcats football team from 1981 until 2006.

A year later, he passed away at age 60 of pancreatic cancer.

Overall, Lichtel compiled an impressive 160-121 record during his 26-year tenure at the school, winning five Mid-Penn division titles and a District 3 AAAA championship in 1986. In 2004, his team was District 3 AAA runner-up.

Family, friends and players reflect

Current Mechanicsburg Area School District Athletic Director Seth Pehanich, who also played for Lichtel from 2003-04, losing in the state quarterfinals in 2004 to Manheim Central, shared his recollections of his former coach and friend.

"In the 1980s, the Mechanicsburg program became legendary because of how far he brought the program. He had seven quarterbacks from 1981 to 2006 that received Division 1 football scholarships," Pehanich said.

“Coach Lichtel called all of the offensive plays from the sideline. He was versatile and knew the game of football extensively, being able to adapt to every situation. There’s no doubt he loved to throw the ball but never put his team in a bad position. He would call games without a play sheet and was a joy to play for. I was a wide receiver so I loved playing for him even more,” he added.

Pehanich recalled one incident in particular that demonstrated Lichtel’s character to him.

“In my sophomore year, I had him for study hall after I’d decided to play basketball and not football that year. He never once had a bad word to say to me about it, but instead asked how me and my family were doing,” he said.

Lifelong family friend Gregg Sheibley, who was best friends with Lichtel for nearly 40 years, also spoke of the goodness of his childhood friend’s heart.

“We first met when I was 12 years old at the Hampton Pool in Mechanicsburg. Being best friends with him, I saw the impact he had on so many lives as a person who cared more about others than himself,” Sheibley said. “He was always looking out for the best interests of others. I recall back in the early ’80s, he helped other local area coaches practice football drills, running pass patterns at a field near the pool.”

In 2007, Sheibley started a non-profit for his fallen friend — the Rich Lichtel Foundation (richlichtel.org) — in order to raise money to build a new fieldhouse and name it after him. The Rich Lichtel Foundation would eventually partner with another non-profit called the Wildcat Foundation in order to see the project through.

Holly (Rider) Laufer is the executive director of the Wildcat Foundation, which helps raise funds for what it deems “capital campaigns” — projects in the Mechanicsburg Area School District.

“This project has been in the works now in excess of 10 years and it’s time we brought it to completion,” Laufer said. “The field is named John H. Frederick Field, in memory of another former legendary coach at Mechanicsburg from 1937 to 1957. In addition to being a successful coach, Rich was also a friend, mentor and teacher, who impacted so many lives of the students and faculty here at Mechanicsburg Area School District. I was a student at Mechanicsburg when Rich taught and he was much more than a coach. He was a teacher and stand-up guy to so many people — a genuinely good person.”

Laufer indicated that the Wildcat Foundation is honored to be able to be a part of what she deemed a “worthwhile” project.

“Our goal for this fieldhouse project is \$2.5 million and to date, we’ve raised a total of \$1,653,150,” she added.

Ed Lichtel spoke of his brother’s life and how he lived it each day.

“Dedication. No matter what he did he was totally dedicated to it,” he said. “Whether it was family or football, or school teaching. Whether it was playing football or coaching his teams, he put everything into it.”

While Ed didn't get to attend many of his brother Rich's football games as a player or coach, he said that always respected the way his brother interacted with his teams.

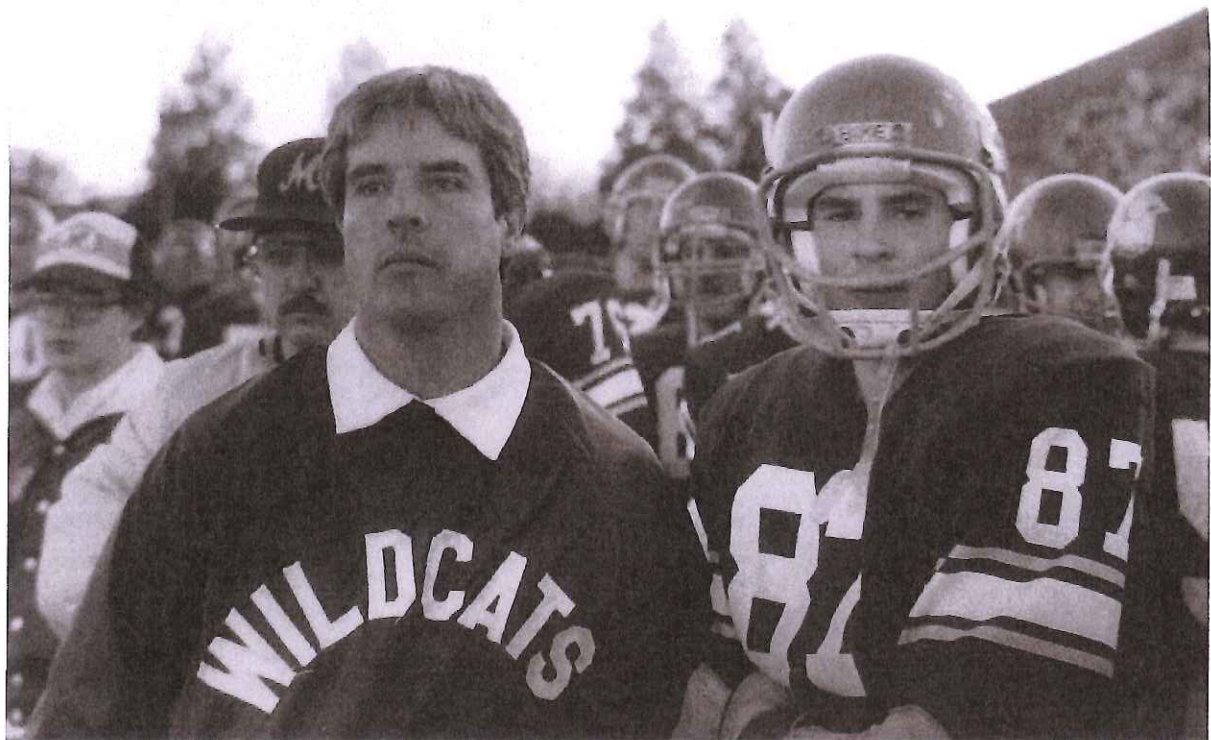
"When he was in high school, I was in the Navy. When he was at Bloom, I got to see a couple of his games and also a few later on at Mechanicsburg but, overall, not a lot, either because of military service or the location," Ed said. "He taught his players in a light-hearted way. One time I recall hearing about a game he was coaching when he was down by at least two touchdowns at halftime and told his team, 'We've got 'em right where we want 'em.' He was always a positive person."

Ed Lichtel said that the family is pleased with how his brother is being honored by the school.

"I'd have to say that our family is elated that he's being recognized in this way. I'm please and thrilled for him because he was always a 'people person' and as a result we have this project underway today. Our father, Ward Lichtel, had the same spirit as a longtime teacher, coach and athlete at Shamokin High School," he said.

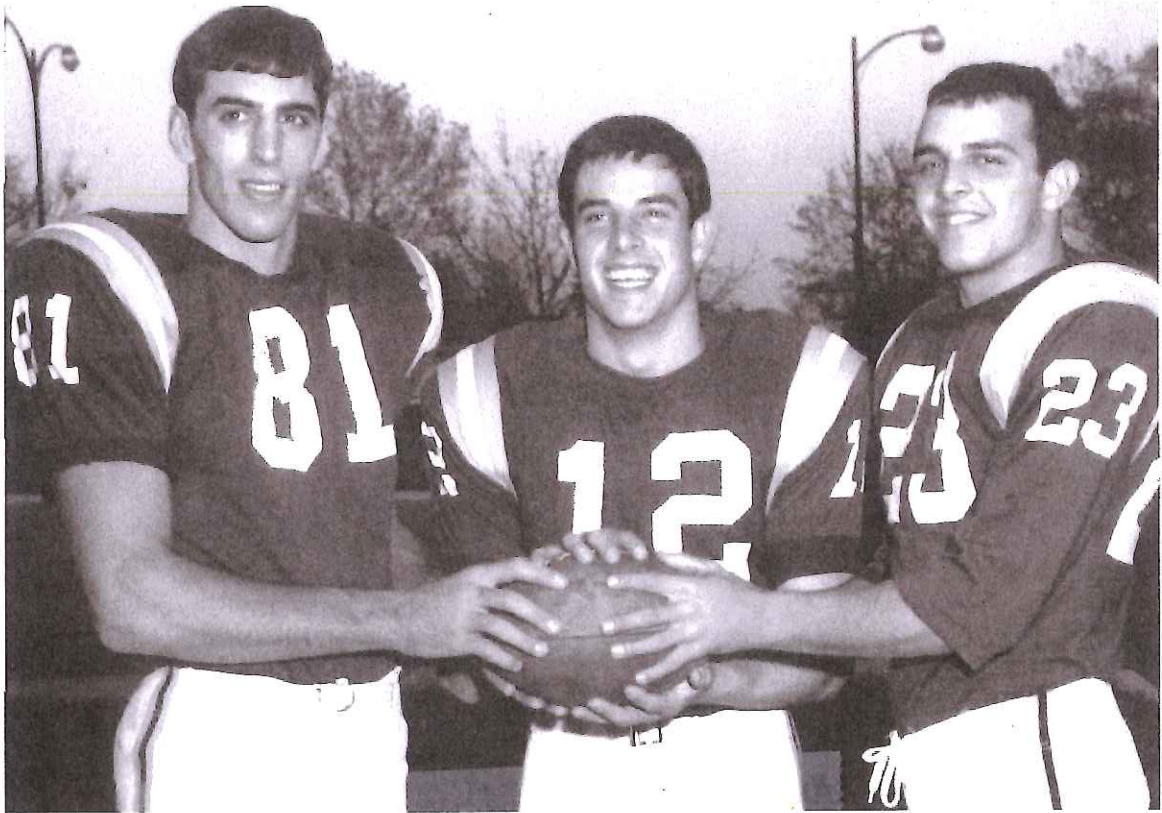
Child images

Coach Lichtel in 1984

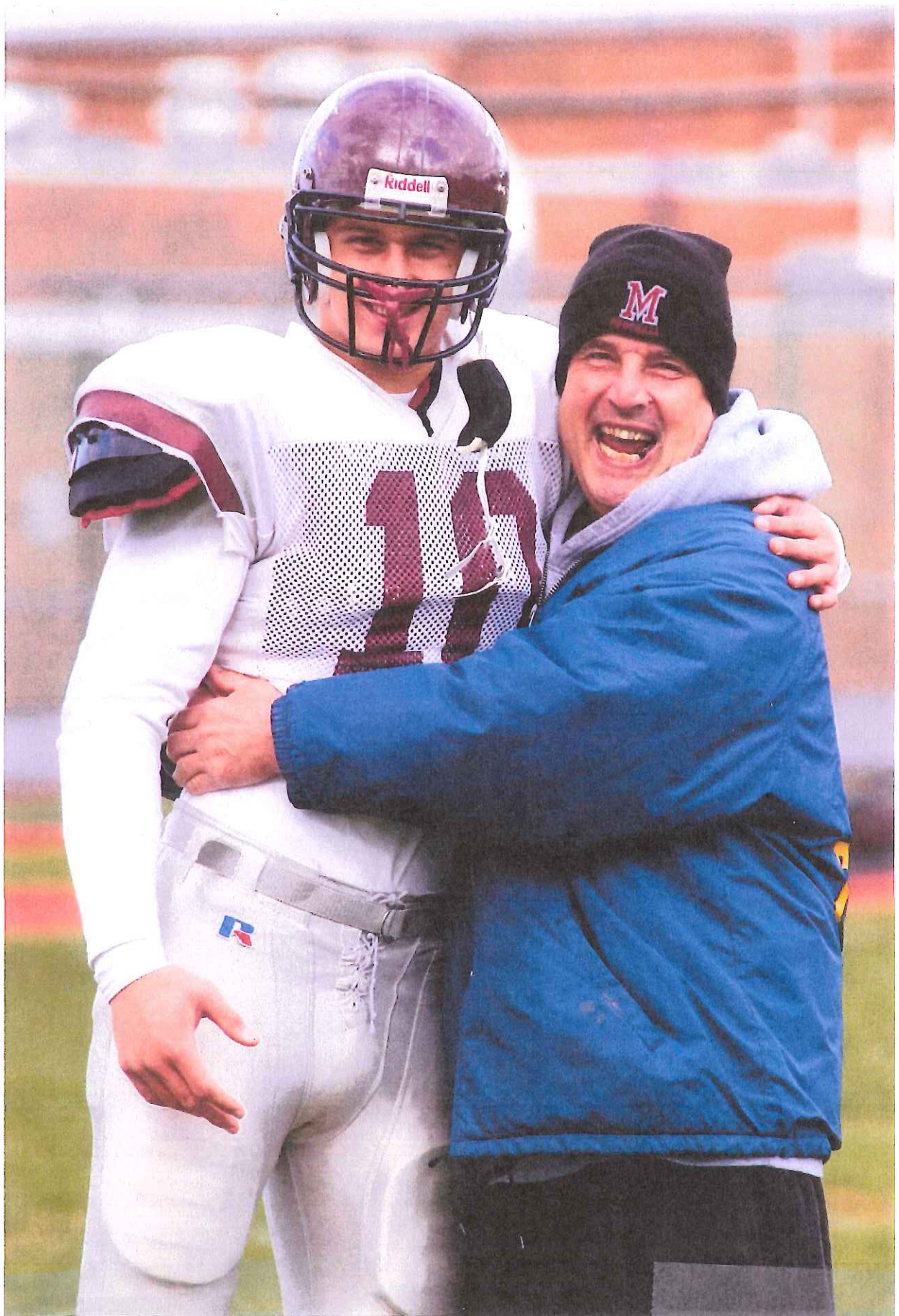




1962 at SHS



Tucker, Lichtel and Koharski at Bloom



Coach Lichtel with QB Zach Frazer



New Rich Lichtel Fieldhouse

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