

Friends, Family and Footballers Come Together for Live Like Cory Tournament

BY SHANNA O'MARA

On the morning of New Year's Eve, while fog blanketed Colts Neck and 2022 signed its goodbye with raindrops, more than 150 people gathered at Bucks Mill Park to embrace the cold, the competition and the memory of one of their own. Friends, neighbors and visitors laced up their shoes for the fourth annual Cory Aufiero Memorial Football Tournament.

Cory Aufiero was a 2017 graduate of Colts Neck High School who tragically passed away on Sept. 28, 2018. A student at Rutgers University, Aufiero was walking through New Brunswick that evening when he tripped into the street and was fatally struck by a passing car.

In his memory, his family founded the 501(c)3 Live Like Cory Memorial Foundation to give back to the community Cory loved. One of the hallmark events each year is the football tournament. Organized by Liam Abujawdeh and Donnie Friedrich, the annual competition is open to all for just \$15 per person. Teams of six are formed as is a game-day bracket. Winners' names are added to a trophy which the Aufiero family keeps at home. Over the past three years, this tournament has raised more than \$7,000 for the Live Like Cory Memorial Foundation.

"We all grew up with Cory, going through school here in Colts Neck. I went to Rutgers with him too," Lea Vecchiarelli said. "The first year we did this, it was because we were all on break from college. We kept it up every year and do this as a way to get together around the holidays - to see each other, remember him and also have some fun. Cory was an incredibly happy person. He made friends with everyone, and his energy would draw people into the room. This keeps that energy alive."

Dunkin donates coffee and food, Vecchiarelli said. Water and supplies are provided by the Aufiero family, area locals and Colts Neck High School staff. Cream Team was undefeated throughout the 2022 tournament and left with their second win in two years. Participants and donors raised about \$2,000 during this year's event.



Cream Team won the 2022 Cory Aufiero Memorial Football Tournament on Dec. 31.

"All of the money raised goes back into the tournament and toward the Live Like Cory Memorial Foundation," Abujawdeh said. "Everyone working here is a volunteer. We hope this becomes more of a community event in the future and that more people come each year. It's not just meant for Cory's friends. Everyone is welcome."

In the summer, the foundation also hosts a golf outing and dinner to raise funds. That money, Cory's family said, goes to people who inspire others and spread joy just as Cory did.

"We try to help the community as much as possible. They've always been there for us, stopping by on the holidays, bringing pies over, reaching out," said Cory's brother, Brandon Aufiero. "All the money we raise from this and other events goes toward high school kids' scholarships or to buy Christmas presents for families in need. We recently worked with this one family who had a little boy. We took him to Get Air to jump around the trampoline park, then went to

Walmart for video games. Seeing him smile doing those things really changed my life. My family has his family's back now.

"Everything we do speaks to the impact [Cory] had. We could have a simple barbecue, and 200 people would show up. If I could do anything in the world, I would do this for the rest of my life. I just wish I were doing it with him."

To learn more about the tournament and to see more photos, follow @coryfootballtournament on Instagram.

