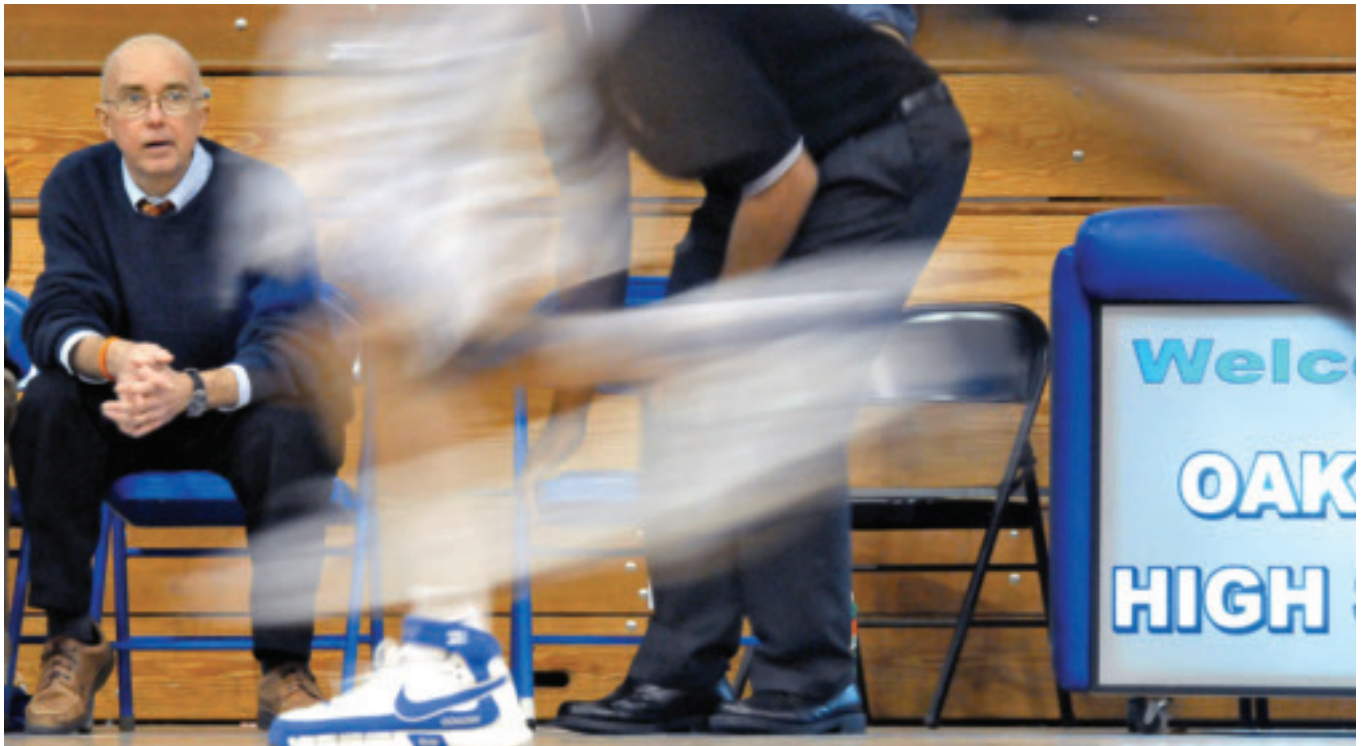


DAVE LEWIS '81M HONORED AS TEACHER OF THE YEAR



MAX C. LEVINE / THE ATLANTIC COUNTY WEEKLIES

Philadelphia *Daily News*' Sam Donnellon has called him "a spiritual compass." Others have commended his indomitable spirit, incredible courage, kindness and dignity. Former students still come to visit him years after graduating.

Dave Lewis '81M has been teaching mathematics and business for the past seven years at Oakcrest High School in southern New Jersey to some of the most difficult students, a task he has whole-heartedly seized and has never taken for granted.

His strong work ethic and quiet dedication have earned him the label "Teacher of the Year" for 2008—an honor that most say is well deserved and a little overdue for the 58-year old educator.

"You meet very few great men in your life, and he's one of them," said Al DeCicco, vice president of the Alterna-

tive Program at Oakcrest and friend for the past eight years. "If people are paying attention, they can get a great life lesson from him."

The children assigned to the Alternative Program are generally considered "at-risk" children, with a wide range of backgrounds. Some have been classified due to behavioral problems, while others have recently been released from the criminal justice system.

But Lewis seems to be unrattled by the challenges he faces every day. Instead, he is thankful and anxious to do more.

"It's educational rehab," Lewis said, adding that his main goal is to get the kids back to the regular high school. "But they haven't had really good relationships with adults," he said, adding that gaining their trust is the most challenging part of his job.

DeCicco said, "This is fast-track

training for teachers because the kids will eat you alive." He added that the Alternative Program is not just about following a curriculum. DeCicco has been with the program since its inception in 1994.

When Dave is not teaching math, business, or general life skills, he's coaching basketball for the Oakcrest Falcons, a job which earns him even more fans. He has been coaching basketball since the early-80s and seems to love every minute of it. And the feeling is mutual as evidenced by a student who had been dismissed from the team and is now helping to coach the team.

His cousin and close friend, Dr. Ivor Lewis, said, "Dave was born with a basketball in his hands." He fondly reminisced about their days growing up together in Mahanoy City, PA. "He willed himself into being a basketball player despite his small stature. I see

that same spirit in what he's doing now with his cancer. He wills himself into rising above it."

"Many times Dave and I were in the middle of some kind of benign mischief and it seemed the teachers were on the look out for the Lewis boys. Even when I was the culprit, Dave was always there, ready to take the hit for me, no questions asked, no excuses," his cousin added.

But it hasn't always been easy despite his consistently calm and encouraging demeanor. For the past three years Dave has been battling with three bouts of cancer. He was first diagnosed with colon cancer, followed by multiple myeloma in November 2006 and now leukemia. He has undergone chemotherapy and blood transfusions, and in June 2007 he underwent a stem-cell transplant.

He was feeling better, but in December he suffered a relapse that landed him in the hospital for three weeks. As a result, he has been receiving transfusions once or twice a week since February.

Lewis said he remains very open with his students about his cancer so that it is not "scary" for them. "I have made it my mission to teach my students and players about cancer," he said, adding that he also teaches them "mental toughness."

On March 17 Lewis was rewarded for his efforts when he received the prestigious Charley Dinsmore survivor award in front of about 700 people at the tenth annual Philadelphia Coaches vs. Cancer Tourney Tip-Off Breakfast, an organization that has raised \$23 million since 1993.

"I was very honored. It was a tremendous day," Lewis said.

A couple weeks later Lewis was given "the Most Courageous Award" by the Al Carino Basketball Club of



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South Jersey. The long-time dream of founder Al Carino, the club was organized in the fall of 1962 with the help of *Courier-Post* sportswriters Charlie Schuck and Walt Burrows.

Philadelphia Inquirer Columnist Sam Carchidi wrote about Lewis in January, calling him "a profile in courage" and "a role model for the ages, a man whose resiliency is off the charts, and a man who is teaching a lesson every time he attends a practice or game."

Despite the adversity he has faced, his positive attitude and strong character are still intact. Dave, who dropped out of Penn State when he saw the need to enlist in the Army during the Vietnam War, graduated with an M.B.A. from Monmouth 27 years ago. He has continued to prove that he is a survivor and an inspiration to his students and fellow teachers.

He spent much of his career in the healthcare management field, where he served as vice president for the Children's Seashore House, a medical care and rehabilitation facility now part of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia for children with chronic illnesses and severe developmental disabilities.

Dave lives in Northfield with his wife, Beth, and their daughter, Emily, 13, and son, David, 10. David is regu-

larly seen sitting right next to his dad at the games. Lewis also has two grown daughters from his previous marriage—Rebecca, 33, and Rachel, 28—who also attend many of the games.

"Things are good. Things are moving in the right direction," Lewis said from a University of Pennsylvania Hospital room as he finished up the last day of his fourth round of chemotherapy.

He said he has had "a tremendous support system" from his family, church, and school, and he wants to continue to be healthy for his family. He also plans to diligently work with his basketball team this summer, hoping to improve their record next season.

His other wish is to walk his daughter down the aisle when she marries next year.

With these goals in mind, Dave returned to school the next day, lamenting about nothing and keeping the focus on his students.

Lewis sees cancer as just part of life, something he is not going to let interfere with living.

Donnellon seemed to echo what many others have said or thought: "He was a special guy way before the illness."

"Now he is a reflection of courage," his cousin said.