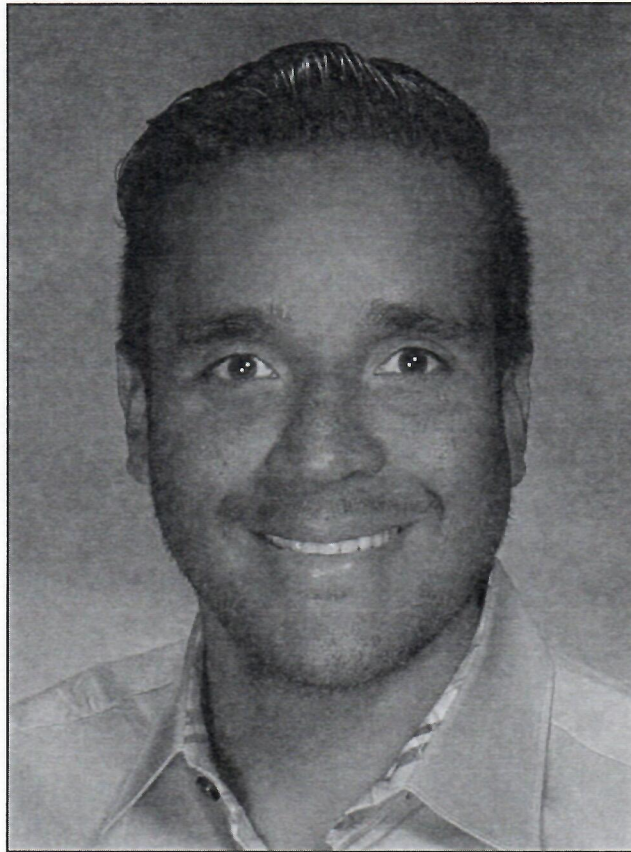


Watchung Hills Regional High School Hall of Fame



Juan Carlos Cruz Beloved Spanish Teacher, Soccer and Track Coach, and Warrior

The beloved late former Spanish Teacher, JV Soccer coach and Track coach who died in October 2016, Juan Carlos Cruz held a degree in Criminal Justice from Rutgers University. He had been on the faculty of Watchung Hills Regional High School for 12 years.

Juan was born and grew up in the City of Cali, Colombia, and moved to the United States when he was 15-years old. His passion for soccer began when he was very young. He flourished as a mid-fielder on his high school team in Cali, until he injured his knee. While he was recovering, he and his family moved to the United States. Juan overcame many obstacles to succeed in school at Middlesex Community College. There he studied Liberal Arts, and joined and became a very active member of the Hispanic-American Club. It was with the Hispanic-American Club that Juan developed his personal calling to help fellow members of the club gain confidence and feel motivated to pursue their dreams to become a better person for themselves and their family.

He transferred to Rutgers University, where he became the first person in his family to graduate from college. He knew he had a calling to be an educator when he appeared as a guest speaker at Marlboro Middle School. He was called on to speak in Spanish to sixth graders about his experience as an immigrant in the United States. Soon after that, he began taking classes in education, and followed the path to become an "alternate route" professional Spanish teacher while being mentored at WHRHS. His dedication, determination and gift for teaching resulted in his being considered by his peers and students as not only a well-respected educator but also a beloved colleague and mentor.

In addition to teaching Spanish and coaching, Juan played an integral role in the development and success of the WHRHS cultural exchange programs with Austria, France, Italy and Spain. He was invested in the lives and well-being of the students in his classes, on his teams, and the cultural exchange programs.

Students he had in class, athletes he had on the athletic field, as well as colleagues, friends and family have all called Juan an inspiration, a friend, a mentor, and brother. He will be remembered for his youthful approach to life, his smile, and the passion he put into everything he did. His greatest achievement was the imprint he left in the hearts of his students and the community in general.