

MANKATO EAST COUGARS

HALL OF FAME

Class of 2023



JEFF DAHLINE COMMUNITY MEMBER
LEE MASTERS COMMUNITY MEMBER
JEFF MATHEWS ATHLETE
COLEY (RIES) WELTER ATHLETE
EJ (SCHARMER) LEE ATHLETE
CHRIS WARD ATHLETE

JEFF DAHLINE - Community Member



Jeff Dahline thrived at Mankato East as a student athlete, before returning to his alma mater as an Assistant Principal and ultimately taking over as the Principal, leaving an indelible mark on both East High School and the community of Mankato as a whole.

As a student, when Jeff wasn't working at Pizza Kato for his dad, he excelled as a three-sport athlete and was the winner of the M.L. Wolverton Award in 1982, which is given to the Outstanding Male Athlete of the Year. In football, Jeff was a two-year starter and letter winner, earning Big 9 All-Conference Honorable Mention honors and the title of team captain his senior year. He was also voted the team MVP and an All-City team selection. In the winter on the wrestling mat, which was highlighted in 1982 when he earned a key fall in the first ever East victory over West, Jeff was a four-time letter winner and freshman wrestler of the year. With the arrival of spring came the time to shine on the baseball diamond, where Jeff again earned two varsity letters, was team captain and received Big 9 All-Conference Honorable Mention honors.

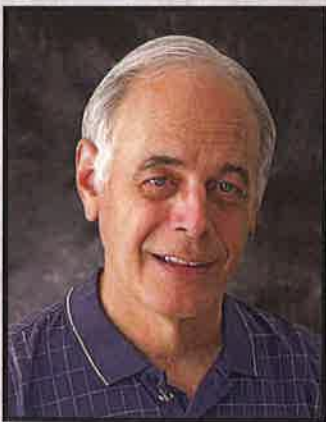
After high school, Mr. Dahline enrolled at MSU and, as a freshman, immediately began his work with students. The legendary career humbly started when he accepted a 9th grade coaching position for the East baseball program. He also coached junior high football, junior high wrestling and the East VFW baseball team, which made history as the first ever to earn a State VFW Tournament berth. The following summer Jeff took over the Eagle Lake Legion baseball team and again led the team to their first ever State berth, which was the first of two in a row.

In 1989, Jeff became the head football coach at Loyola High School for four years before moving to Benson, where he served as the head coach for eight years. In those 12 combined seasons, his teams earned four section titles and two state championship appearances. Jeff was also honored by his peers on five different occasions as the section or conference coach of the year. Jeff's administrative career was intertwined with his coaching to begin with, serving as an Activities Director at Mankato Loyola and Benson, while coaching football before giving up the dual role to focus on his administration career when he accepted the Activities Director Position at Owatonna High School. During his tenures as an AD, Jeff was selected as a Region AD of the Year, served as the Chairman for Region 3A and later Region 1AA and was also elected and served as the President of the MNIAAA.

In 2007, Jeff moved back home when he accepted the role of Assistant Principal at Mankato East High School. He served in that role for five years before taking the helm as the Principal of the school from 2012 until his retirement in 2023. During that time, Jeff oversaw an increase in student enrollment of over 400 students, along with a complete remodeling of the school building. All of this gave Jeff and his team a unique opportunity to reshape the culture and climate of East High School.

Jeff and his bride Dawn, who was also an East grad, have been married for 37 years and together are proud to have raised three daughters, Nicole, Ashley and Cassie. They also adore their eight grandchildren immensely and the time spent with each of them.

JEFF MATHEWS - Athlete



Jeff Mathews was a standout student-athlete during the 1973-77 time period, which was the first class to have attended all four years of their high school careers at Mankato East. Athletes in this era not only did not play nearly as many games, but they rarely were moved up to play varsity before their junior & senior years. Many of the awards, accolades, and certainly any social media awareness were not available for the athletes of the 70's and 80's.

Jeff was a two-year letter winner in football in '75 and '76. He was a senior tri-captain and Co-Most Valuable Offensive player his senior year along with earning Big 9 Conference Honorable Mention honors. He notes that his overtime winning TD catch vs West as a highlight of his senior year.

As a tri-captain during the winter season, Jeff played on the hardwoods and was one of the stalwarts for the Cougars. He again earned Big 9 Conference Honorable Mention honors and averaged 13.0 a game his senior year. Upon graduation he had the 3rd most points in a single season and was 4th all-time in scoring. The Cougars were undefeated in three games vs the Scarlets during his senior season.

Jeff shined on the diamond during the spring season, lettering three years. He was voted a member of the All-City team as both a junior and senior. In his final campaign, Jeff was co-captain, hit .362, was voted the team MVP, earned Big 9 All-Conference status, and played in the Lions' All-Star game. Once again, the Cougars didn't lose to the cross-town rivals in the spring of his senior year-going 3-0 vs them.

Jeff was one of the three athletes of the year, selected to attend the American Legion Boys' State Tournament, was selected as a member of the National Honor Society, serving as Vice-President, and graduated in the top 10% of his class with a 4.0 GPA.

Mr. Mathews attended Clemson University in South Carolina and graduated summa cum laude with a B.S. in zoology in 1981. He returned to Minnesota and earned his DDS from the University of Minnesota dentistry with honors in 1985. He was a general dentist in the Mpls/St. Paul area for four years and for the following three years in Madison, WI. His final move was to Arizona, where he practiced dentistry for the next 30 years. He owned his own private practice, Acacia Dental in Tempe AZ, from 2000-2023, retiring this past July.

Jeff's wife is Candy and they have a son Drew and three step step-children Cody, Casey, and Ciara. Jeff grew up in a family of five siblings. All 6 of them graduated from Mankato East in consecutive years in its first 6 years of existence from 1973-1979.

LEE MASTERS - Community Member



Lee's story in Mankato started in 1977 when he moved here from Waterloo, IA after graduating from Central High School there in 1974 and spending some time planning on what the next chapter in life would be. Upon his arrival, Lee enrolled in Mankato State University, double majoring in Accounting and Finance and served as Treasurer, Vice President and President of Lambda Chi Alpha. Not busy enough, Lee soon began working for Northwestern National Bank. At that time, the bank had the school district accounts and they had employees who would sell tickets at events and run through all of the deposits afterward. Shortly after his arrival, Lee was asked if he would help out selling tickets for the local high schools and the rest was history.

Not long after beginning his work at Northwestern National Bank, Lee was introduced to Wendi Kaus by her matchmaker mother and after a short courtship, they were married in 1983. The partnership also spilled over into the ticket selling world as Wendi also enjoyed spending time at East High School either taking or selling tickets and most importantly, often bringing in her delicious home-made cookies and bars. The two of them have now been married 40 years and are proud parents of son Adam, daughter Tacy, son-in-law Ryan Anderson and are adoring grandparents of grandson Daven.

Over the years, Lee has had many career achievements away from his time at East. He served 31 years in the Army Reserve and Army National Guard, retiring with the rank of Sergeant First Class after three deployments...1st to Bosnia, followed by a second to Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan and a third back to Kuwait. Lee also became a certified CPA, held various positions for the Mankato Jaycees and is still employed as an Accounting Manager for Environmental Tillage Systems, Inc. in Faribault, MN.

Fast forward to 2022. The bank and school no longer conducted business the same way, but Lee was still doing it his way. Now, with retirement looming at the end of the school year, Lee was beginning his 43rd and final year of selling tickets for football, boys and girls soccer, boys and girls basketball (his personal favorite), boys and girls hockey for both high schools as well as section tournaments, track and field and over the years, virtually every activity tickets are sold at for one time or another. For certain, one constant in the 50 years of East High School's existence has been Lee Masters in or behind the ticket booth for the Cougars making a personal connection with all of the parents and grandparents coming through the line over the years.

Mankato East High School has very fortunate and appreciative to have had such a personable, committed and dependable person as the first impression of their school...he is a one of a kind "front man" for the Mankato East!!

COLEY (RIES) WELTER - Athlete



Coley (Ries) Welter, a 2012 graduate, had an illustrious career both in high school and college, giving definition to what a student-athlete is all about. She was a multi-sport athlete and 13-time letter winner during her time at Mankato East.

In the fall, Coley was dashing across the tennis court where she was a five-year starter and letter winner in tennis, holding down the #1 single's slot from her freshman year through her senior year. She finished 3rd in the section tournament twice during her career and placed as high as 3rd at the #1 singles spot at the Big 9 conference meet. Coley was both Big 9 All-Conference and Academic All-State her senior year.

On the hardwoods, Coley was a two-year letter winner and displayed her sharp shooting basketball stroke and competitive nature. She was Big 9 Conference Honorable Mention as a junior and earned All-Conference and Academic All-State honors her senior year.

The spring season is where Coley really truly shined. She was a 5-year starter and letter winner for the Cougars, a major part of three Big 9 Conference titles, three section titles, and finished her 5-year span on teams that had a combined record of 108-26. She has the Cougars modern (last 30 years) single season pitching record in wins (25), strikeouts (283), and winning % .96% (25-1). She also holds records for career wins (85), which is 19 more than 2nd place and K's (791). Coley is also ranks 12th all-time in hits (121) and 9th in RBI's (80). Coley finished as a 4x All-Section recipient, 5x Big 9 All-Conference performer, and 5x All-City award winner. Coley was Team MVP or Co-MVP

her last three seasons. She was 2nd team All-State her sophomore year, and 1st team All-State (Class AA) and 1st team All-State (Class AAA) during her final 2 campaigns. Her favorite memory was her walk-off HR in the 8th inning vs West in the Big 9 tournament championship game.

Most players reach the pinnacle of their athletic career in high school but not Coley. Her storied softball career continued at Minnesota State University - Mankato where her 2017 squad won the Division II National Championship. Coley was named Most Outstanding Player of the National Tournament, was awarded D2 National Player of the Year, Pitcher of the Year, Central Region Scholar Athlete of the Year, CoSISA Academic All-American, was recipient of the NCAA Post Graduate Scholarship, and was a nominee for Honda D2 Athlete of the Year, and NCAA Woman of the Year.

Coley was a 2x All-American, 4x All-Region, 4x All-NSIC, and 2x Central Region Pitcher of the Year. She is MSU-Mankato's All-time leader in Appearances (146), Innings Pitched (999), Wins (119 - 14th most in D2 history), and K's (1,481 - 5th most in D2 history). In the 2017 season, she led the NCAA in Wins (41) Strikeouts (476) including a 10 inning 24 strikeout game, and Shutouts (17). She finished school with a Bachelor of Science in Mass Media, Minor in Communication Studies, and a Master of Educational Leadership.

Coley continued her softball career after college where she played Professional Softball in the National Pro Fastpitch League for three years. She earned NPF Pitcher of the Week and had the NPF Play of the year. She also played in the inaugural season of Athletes Unlimited professional softball.

Currently Coley is the Head Softball Coach at Gustavus Adolphus, where her teams have improved from 8th place to 4th place in her first 3 seasons in charge including winning GAC's first conference tournament game since 2016.

She is married to fellow Mankato East grad Alex Welter and they currently reside in the Mankato area with their 2 dogs (Honey & Winnie) and their cat (Behr).

EJ (SCHARMER) LEE - Athlete



EJ (Scharmer) Lee, a 2011 graduate, had a spectacular high school career, embodying what the term student-athlete is all about throughout her career as a Cougar. As a three-sport athlete, EJ excelled in tennis, basketball, and in fastpitch softball while at East.

During the fall EJ performed on the tennis courts where she lettered four years and captained the Lady Cougars as a sophomore, junior, and senior. She was Big 9 All-Conference in her last two seasons and finished in 2nd place in the conference tournament three different times. She also earned Academic All-State status as a senior.

In the winter season, Emily played basketball and lettered her junior and senior years for the Cougars. She was a tough physical defender who played a variety of positions and roles, helping give her team a chance to win every night.

The spring season is where EJ's athletic passion was fully present. As a 7th grader she was thrust into varsity action behind the plate as a starter and never looked back in the first of her six years of lettering. Her overall record of 102 wins and 26 losses in her last five years attests to how successful she was when playing for the Cougars. Her teams won three Big 9 titles, three Section titles, and twice finished 3rd in the State Tournament during her stint as a Cougar.

In her time with Cougar Softball, EJ was a 6-time letter winner, 5-time Big 9 All-Conference performer, and first team Coaches' All-State member in 2010 and 2011. She was also a Pioneer Press Honorable Mention performer in 2010 and 2nd team All-State performer in 2011. Her 2011 season, where she was a Minnesota Ms. Softball candidate, she set Mankato East single season records in RBI's (52) and HR (14). She also was 4th in doubles (14) and 3rd in hits (47) and batting average (.540) for the most prolific offensive season a Mankato East player has ever had. She finished her career as the all-time HR hitter (20), RBI producer (122), doubles producer (48). She finished 3rd all-time in hits (174) and 6th all-time in runs (107). She was Co-MVP with Coley Ries on the storied 2011 team that finished 26-2 and for good measure, was the Mankato East AAA Award winner as well.

EJ went on to play softball at Augustana University in Sioux Falls where she was on the 2012 College World Series qualifying team. She graduated in 2015 from Auggie Magna Cum Laude (3.79 GPA) with a B.A. in Philosophy, Political Science, and Economics. She also served on the leadership team of the Navigators Campus Ministry.

Emily has worked 9 years in youth ministry, 6 years as a nanny, and is a certified Pro-Life Speaker and a Real Estate Investor. She is launching a sports ministry "Paladin Sports Outreach" in the spring of 2024. She has been married for eight years to Matthew Lee and they have 4 sons: Teddy (6), Beau (4.5), Freddie (3), George (1.5) and a fifth on the way in February.

CHRIS WARD - Athlete



Chris Ward, a 2006 graduate of Mankato East High School, made a tremendous impact as a student athlete at Mankato East as a three-sport captain and as a productive member of the city of Mankato afterward.

While at Mankato East, Chris lettered in three sports and made an significant impact in each of them. He was a four-year letter winner in baseball and a three-year varsity letter winner in both football and basketball.

On the gridiron, Chris was a strong two-way player that made an impact as a physical sure-tackling cornerback. On offense, he played slot and moved to quarterback his senior year due to a teammate's injury, showcasing his versatility and all-around talent. In his junior year he was a key member of the 2004 section championship and state qualifying team. He was Academic All-State, Big 9 All-Conference, and an All-City performer his senior year.

On the basketball court, Chris was a physical, defense-first, point guard who was part of a section championship team in 2005 that won 25 games and finished 3rd in state, the highest finish ever in school history. In the 2006 campaign, Chris was the starting point guard on a Big 9 Championship team that won 20 games. During his junior and senior years, the Cougars compiled a 45-14 record.

Chris would do whatever was asked of him and was the ultimate team player who could handle the ball and score with contact in the paint.

In the spring while playing baseball, Chris found his most success, earning All-Conference honors his junior and senior years. He led the Cougars in stolen bases both years, finishing with a school record 60. Chris also finished top three in hits both years and graduated with a school record 74 runs scored. He was Academic All-State in baseball in 2006; furthermore, he was the Wolverton Award winner in 2006 as the male athlete of the year.

Chris continued his academic and baseball career at Augustana College in Sioux Fall, SD. He garnered his Bachelor of Arts degree with majors in Mathematics & Economics. He graduated Cum Laude and was awarded the Bale Business/Economic Scholarship. Chris was also a member of the All-NSIC Academic Team in baseball for the Vikings.

Chris is now the Owner/President of Salient Financial which was voted 2nd place in Best of Mankato in 2022 and 2023. He is married to Jessica and they have three children, Elijah (10), Emery (7), and Gabe (5).