

Port Washington Youth Activities

PYA HALL OF FAME

John “Pepe” Salerno

Pepe Salerno was a 2-sport athlete during his PYA days, playing football from 1977-1980 and lacrosse from 1978-1984. He focused on the latter as he entered Schreiber High School where he played 3 years of Varsity lacrosse for coach Ken Case. Pepe earned All-League honors in 1988 as the team marched to the Nassau County Class A finals that year.

Collegiately, Pepe played 2 years of lacrosse for Nassau Community College in 1989 and 1990, and achieved 2nd Team Junior College All-American status in 1990. From Nassau he moved on to St. John’s University, graduating in 1992 after two solid lacrosse seasons. As a team captain his senior year, by the time he graduated, he was in 3rd place as St. John’s all-time scoring leader, and 2nd in career goals. Those high rankings have pretty much held up over the years as he is currently the 9th ranked all-time points leader, and tied for 8th as the all-time goal scorer in the school’s history, reaching that level with only 2 years under his belt with the Redmen.



Pepe parlayed his post-collegiate career into club and professional lacrosse, playing on the North Hempstead Lacrosse Club (USCLA), and for the New York Saints (National Lacrosse League) pro indoor team in the 1990's. All the while, he was developing a sales career which ultimately led him to Cantor Fitzgerald on Wall Street in 1994. As he and his wife Danielle settled into Westfield, NJ, Pepe volunteered to be head coach of the town's 5th/6th grade youth lacrosse team from 1999 – 2001. He was tragically killed in the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. Pepe was just 31 years old.

Pepe felt that his most treasured accomplishment was “giving back” and coaching that group of 5th and 6th grade boys in that town’s youth program, much like he experienced from his PYA days. Pepe loved children and they loved him. Those that knew him remember his infectious smile and his favorite saying, “There is no ‘I’ in team”. He would be so proud to know that the young Westfield boys wore his initials on their helmets throughout their high school and collegiate lacrosse careers

Needless to say, his passing in the attacks of September 11 left a severe level of emptiness amongst his family and friends, teammates and players. His Westfield team loves to reminisce this way about “...his contagious laugh as he told us we were the next unforgettable generation of lacrosse players. But memories with someone who has touched lives as much as John did, never fade.”

Another one of his former players said, “The 5th grade 1999 Westfield lacrosse team knew John in a completely different way than most people, and I think that is part of the reason he had such a profound impact on our lives. He spoke to us not as a superior, but as a friend. He helped us not just on the lacrosse field, but in life as well. He was a best friend, and to us, he was family”

“John lived his life one moment at a time, and he lived each one to the fullest. He showed his family he loved them as much as possible every single day. He even showed the young boys of that lacrosse team who had no relation to him, how much he loved [them] and would do anything for [them] every day.... He never let a moment pass where he was not appreciating everything life had to offer. He opened [our] eyes, as well as those of 25 other young boys, to the precious time we have in life, and we will be forever grateful for that....His legacy is nothing short of the standards held when being in a ‘Hall of Fame’ class....”

In addition to Danielle, Pepe is survived by his son Jack, currently an 8th grader, who is a PYA alumnus of our football and lacrosse programs.