



**ROMEO  
COMMUNITY  
SCHOOLS**

## **GOOD NEWS ACROSS 'R' DISTRICT**

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*Former Athletic Director Greg Brynaert, pictured at the Sept. 13 Watchdog Game, continues to be Romeo's No. 1 fan.*

### **A greater purpose**

While Greg Brynaert retired in June 2018 after serving two decades as Romeo High School's athletic director, his legacy remains.

For example, Mr. Brynaert is credited with the "Be Romeo" catchphrase that often appears as a social media hashtag or in the words of a teacher encouraging students to bring out their best.

He also remains a frequent presence at school events, including at the RHS varsity football Watchdog Game on Sept. 15, in which he cheered the team on to a 20-14 MAC Red Division victory against Eisenhower High School.

While this tradition to give back to the community began under Mr. Brynaert's watch, he credits execution of the inaugural year in 2008 to the head football coaches at the time, Jason Couch, a longtime Romeo resident, graduate and teacher, and current head coach Curt Rienas, who continues the Watch Dog tradition today under the leadership of current Director of Athletics and Student Activities Cody Smith.

Filling the shoes of “Mr. Romeo” may have been a tall order, but Mr. Smith said he was accessible and approachable during the transition, always available to answer questions.

The two have maintained a close relationship in the six years Mr. Smith has served in this role, so it was only natural he should ask his predecessor to serve as the keynote speaker for the Coaches Professional Development session in July.

Erin Schwehofer, hired this school year to serve as principal of the Design, Engineering and Manufacturing Academy, had the opportunity to meet the former AD during a building team meeting. Administrators were talking about character traits of a Romeo student and Greg Brynaert’s name came up. The next morning, at RHS Principal Bernie Osebold’s invitation, he showed up with packets and delivered the same message he used to give to coaches at his annual pre-season meetings and coaches clinics – what it means to Be Romeo.

“I’ve never met somebody so proud to be able to impact the lives of young people, and I’ve been in education for 15 years,” Mrs. Schwehofer said. “We had tears in our eyes. He is so genuine, passionate, proud and incredibly humble. Even though by all definitions he is a leader, what makes him such a magnetic leader is he is constantly praising everybody else.”

Superintendent Dr. Todd Robinson, who frequently catches up with the former AD on the sidelines at games and other school events, said while he did not have the opportunity to work with Greg directly, “he has been a tremendous influence in my time here and it’s clear how much he loves this place.”

For Mr. Brynaert, using athletics as an opportunity to give back embodies everything he set out to achieve during his tenure at RHS. By beginning with the end in mind, he said, and focusing on the educational value of every endeavor, teachers, coaches and performing arts directors impart a lifelong lesson to students: that they are building something bigger than themselves.

“I truly believe there’s a greater purpose to all this, whether you’re teaching math, coaching football or directing the band,” he said. “The focus should be on building and creating good human beings.”

In his view, the way to “Be Romeo” is to “stand up, honor your character, your pride and your values, and be the person you know you can be.”



*Seventh grader Reagan Cusmano, center, participated in the Romeo volleyball team photo shoot. She even got her own banner photo to display at games!*

## **Part of the team**

The Watchdog Game tradition has grown and evolved over the years, with other teams participating in the varsity football game while also hosting their own Watchdog Games.

The volleyball team took things to a new level this year, not only raising money to contribute to the total Watchdog tally, but creating a special experience for a Romeo Middle School student.

What started as a way to make an impact on this student grew into something that has possibly had an even greater impact on the players and their coach.

Coach Williams called it her “favorite memory in 24 years of coaching at the high school.”

Senior Ava Kafoury said it created an opportunity for the team to bond off the court and taught the players what it’s like to make a difference in someone’s life.

It began with a family connection. Coach Williams previously coached two sisters whose cousin was diagnosed with cancer last year.

While Reagan missed a lot of school last year during treatment, she is back this year. However, the transition has been trying at times, and not being able to play volleyball with the middle school team was a major disappointment.

“She loves volleyball,” said her mother, Rachel Cusmano. “She has always wanted to play it. Her goal was to make the team this year.”

That's why it was especially meaningful when the high school volleyball team took Reagan under their wing. Not only did they include her in team activities, like their professional photo shoot, but when they learned how much she loved to shop, they decided to treat her to a “dreamy shopping spree,” picking her up from the front of RMS in a limousine and taking her to some of her favorite stores at Somerset Collection.

“We wanted to give her an experience she could find joy in,” Ava said.



*The girls enjoyed VIP treatment during Reagan's shopping spree.*

And according to the team's Facebook post, Reagan enjoyed every moment, from singing along to Taylor Swift in the limo, to getting bubbly water at Louis Vuitton and “filling a Sephora bag with so much her dad asked if she left anything at the store.”

“It was adorable,” Rachel Cusmano said. “The girls were treated like VIP guests. They had a great time.”

The team raised the money for the shopping spree – and additional money to cover medical expenses for the family – by managing a parking lot during the Peach Festival and hosting bake sales. Reagan in turn has supported the team by becoming their No. 1 fan.

“I think she enjoyed bonding with us and making new relationships and also finding happiness,” Ava said. “We were all so happy for her.”

“They've built great friendships,” echoed Rachel. “They're in a group chat together. They constantly message Reagan. Reagan will continue going to their games and being a part of the team.”

“We're grateful not just for the monetary donations, but for the support and love this team has given to Reagan,” she added. “It has truly lifted her spirits and instilled confidence in her. What the girls have done has gone beyond anything I could ever have imagined.”



*The team raised money by managing a parking lot during the Peach Festival.*

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