

Shining Light on Community Unity

Frank Pitillo, a beloved figure in the Ellicottville community renowned for his prowess on the slopes, entrepreneurial spirit and gridiron grit, was taken far too soon in a fateful motorcycle accident. Yet, from the darkness of grief emerged a glimmer of hope, as Frank's brother, Nick Pitillo, embarked on a mission to honor his brother's memory in a profound way.

Nick – like his brother – is an entrepreneur. Nick and his wife Kendra are the owners and proprietors of the restaurants Osteria 166 in Buffalo and Villaggio in Ellicottville.

At the time of Frank's passing, very few schools in the area had lights for their football fields. The lights erected at Ellicottville Central School were named in Frank's honor in 1977. While attending one of his daughter's softball games, Nick realized that these lights needed to be updated.

It was then that he decided to refocus the lights not just on the field, but on his brother's legacy. Inspired by Frank's passion for sports and his unwavering commitment to the community, Nick established the Frank Pitillo Memorial Fund at the Cattaraugus Region Community Foundation in 2022.

The vision for the fund was as clear as a pristine ski slope at dawn: raise funds to replace the aging lights illuminating the local football field, a place where Frank had once dazzled crowds with his athletic feats.

For Nick, it was about more than just upgrading infrastructure; it was about preserving Frank's legacy and ensuring that future generations could bask in the same vibrant lights that once guided his brother's footsteps on the field.

After sifting through a myriad of bids, Pitillo came to the conclusion that the lights could be installed for \$200,000, plus another \$50,000 for plaques and maintenance.

Word of the fund quickly spread in the Ellicottville community, igniting the hearts of residents who had been touched by Frank's kindness and infectious zest for life. From fellow former athletes to business leaders, the community rallied behind Nick's noble cause, raising almost \$180k since the fund was established.

The culmination of many events has raised money for the fund, including the Frank Pitillo Memorial Lighting Fund Golf Tournament held at the Holiday Valley Double Black Diamond Golf Course.

“These lights will be in place for years to come, so they can help create new memories for the next generation” said Pitillo. “Whether it was playing a sport, or attending games, ‘Friday Night Lights’ is a cherished tradition that has created countless memories for generations, not only here, but across the country.”

The new lighting system promises to enhance access to athletic fields by upgrading the ECS Stadium lights to a more environmentally efficient system. The new lights will last up to 25 times longer than the current bulbs and will increase the number of hours that the field can be accessed, all while using 70% less energy. The new lights will increase clarity and reduce blind spots on the field which will help young athletes play safely.

And maybe most importantly, at the heart of the project is community. Sports possess an extraordinary power to bring people together, and the funds for this project were raised primarily through community efforts. Through sports, bonds are formed, friendships are forged and mutual respect is cultivated.

While the immediate focus of the fund is to get the lights paid for and installed, any remaining funds will go towards scholarships for graduating Ellicottville Central School seniors. The scholarship will go towards a student who has strong academics, displays leadership through athletics, and has a strong entrepreneurial work ethic.

“This is one way that I can keep honoring the memory of my brother, plus help out the kids that are at Ellicottville Central now,” Pitillo said. “With this community, I know we can get it done.”

