

# The 2019 CEF Honored Alumnus, Mr. Mark Uyl

Mark was born the oldest of 4 children to Jim and Jane Uyl in 1974. Along with siblings, Dave (Caledonia '95), Steve (Caledonia '98) and Kristin (Caledonia '02). He was raised in Caledonia and attended Dutton Elementary School, Caledonia Junior High and High School. Mark considered it a privilege to reside in a small farm-based town where you knew just about everyone. He noted, "It was a great place to grow up and had so many people that took an interest in doing what they could to set you up for future success. It was the perfect place to grow up and the school system provided opportunities that were second to none." Many of his family members still reside in Caledonia and work for the Caledonia district.

In Mark's high school career, he participated in Honors choir, football, basketball, and baseball for 4 years. He was named Senior Class President (1991-1992) and Male Athlete of the Year (1991-1992). Mark recalls, "I was challenged academically by great teachers such as Stan Spencer (US History), Joe Zomerli (Science), and Gus Wagner (Math). I was very fortunate to have built strong relationships with my coaches who all pushed me to grow in every area which included Ralph Shefferly, Jon Meerman, John Klunder, Gus Wagner and Tom Oster, many of whom I stay in contact with today. Perhaps my favorite teacher in high school was the choir teacher Carol Guess who was a tremendous teacher and mentor."

After graduating from Caledonia High School in 1992, Mark stayed close to home and attended Calvin College. He was a 4 year starter and the team captain on Calvin's baseball team and earned All Conference MIAA honors as a first baseman in 1995 and 1996. Mark had a great academic and athletic experience there. He was able to play for a remarkable coach, Jeff Pettinga, who remains one of the greatest influences on his life. Mark continued on to pursue his master's degree in Educational Administration from GVSU while teaching his first few years in the classroom. He also was a college umpire and officiated college football.

While attending Calvin College, Mark coached JV football at Caledonia High School under Ralph Shefferly and Tom Burrill. In August of 1994, Mark walked through the gym from practice and realized CHS had hired a new JV girl's basketball coach as they were practicing back when girls basketball was a fall sport. Marcy, his wife to-be, was student teaching and coaching that fall at Caledonia. They got to know each other and have been together ever since. Mark remarks, "I often tell the story that the "MHSAA guy" met his future wife in a gym while they were both coaching high school teams." The couple has 3 children who are all very involved with athletics as you can imagine: Jackson (age 18) freshman at Hope College who is a swimmer and



water polo player, Grant (age 16) DeWitt HS junior who plays football, ice hockey and baseball, Madison (age 12) is a 7<sup>th</sup> grader who plays basketball, volleyball, baseball and is a figure skater.

Mark took a teaching job at Thornapple Kellogg High School in Middleville) from 1996-2000 and also served as the assistant varsity football coach. He then became Athletic Director at Caledonia High School for one year before going back to Thornapple Kellogg High School from 2001-2004 as the Athletic Director and Assistant Principal. In his seven years as a teacher, coach, and building administrator, he interacted with kids on an everyday basis and built relationships that lasted years after graduation.

In 2004 he took a position as the Assistant Director of Michigan High School Athletic Association. Mark comments, "I was given the opportunity of a lifetime to come work for the MHSAA in 2004. They hired me as one of the assistant directors at age 29 and was able to get the job because of my experience as a HS athletic administrator and college baseball umpire in the Big Ten Conference." In August of 2018, Mark was selected to become Executive Director of the Michigan High School Athletic Association. This was a great honor as he is only the 5<sup>th</sup> full-time director in the nearly 100 history of the association.

Mark is a passionate advocate for school sports. He is driven to build, support and defend the programs that enable 200,000 Michigan student athletes every school year to have a great experience and opportunity to play sports. "It's defining and defending these opportunities that is the fuel that drives me each and every day," replies Mark. He believes that there are life lessons learned when a person is on a school athletic team that cannot be learned anywhere

else. Skills such as dedication, commitment, work ethic, patience, sacrificing personal goals/success for the betterment of a team and bouncing back from adversity are all skills that people need into adulthood. Mark looks at the process that student athletes go through that enables them how to find success. The process begins in the offseason with physical training and conditioning, and leads up to the season where the most successful teams and individuals successfully handle the adversity that comes with any athletic season...injuries, bad bounces, and tough breaks, etc.

Mark shares some advice for current high school students. He remarks, "Dream big! Caledonia Schools will give you the skills to do anything in life...shoot for the moon and chase your dreams in terms of what college or career path you choose. Don't settle for anything less than the best!" We congratulate Mark in all of his accomplishments and success in representing his Caledonia roots on a state-wide and national level.

## Mark's Accomplishments:

**Past Board Member of National Association of Sports Officials (2011-2015 and served as their Chair Person in 2014).**

**Division 1 College Baseball Umpire for 23 seasons (Big Ten, Big East and American Athletic Conferences); Umpired College Division 1 World Series in Omaha, Nebraska in 2014 and served as the crew chief 2017.**

**Member of the Officiating Development Alliance which includes supervisor of officials from the NBA, NFL, Major League Baseball, NHL, USTA, US Lacrosse and various NCAA Division I sports.**

**Nationally recognized speaker and presenter on high school athletics, coaching, officiating and sports law.**

**Board member and longtime football and baseball coach for the DeWitt Youth Sports Association.**

**Board member for the Capital City Capitals High School Hockey Program.**