

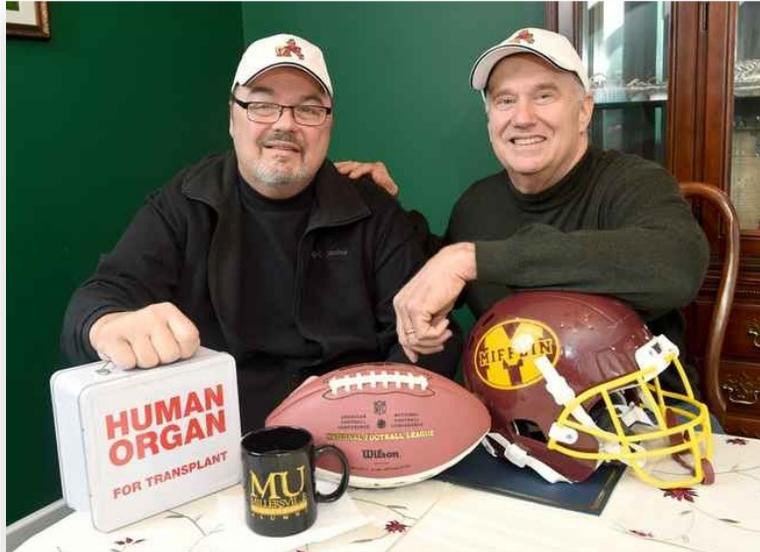


Alumni Spotlight

Jeffery Onopa '78

Jamie Kegerise '78

October 2019



Jeffery Onopa '78 and Jamie Kegerise '78 met in 1968 at Governor Mifflin Junior High School in Reading, PA where they began playing football together and they continued to do so as Mustangs for their high school football team. Even their college search process was shared; they were both intrigued by the quality education offered at Millersville and struck by the beauty of campus. And so, Jeff and Jaime started their college careers together at Millersville in 1974. Living as roommates and playing as teammates allowed them to foster a resilient friendship that would tackle any obstacle in their way, and one day save a life.

Jeff earned a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Arts Education with an emphasis on Visual Communications. His time on campus exceeded his expectations and provided him with meaningful lifelong connections. He even had the good fortune of meeting his wife, Evelyn Martin Onopa, who became a Special Education Teacher.

Jamie fondly remembers his years at Millersville where he was inspired to form positive core values and appreciation for others. "Millersville opened my eyes to the wider world and to the diversity of people and ideas." He earned a degree in Secondary Education in Social Sciences with an emphasis in Anthropology. Jamie feels liberated by his college experience, having received the guidance to become the best version of himself.

After graduating, Jeff worked as a teacher in Oley Valley School District in Berks County, PA where he spent years instilling the very discipline he learned at the 'Ville, specifically from Coach Carpenter and Coach Kane, into the lives of his students. He and his wife are now retired and enjoy spending time with their daughter Kelly, her husband Kyle—both MU alumni—and their twin girls.

Jamie taught for a few years before he paved his way in business by forming Delaware School & Office, LLC, a company that supplies office, school, and health care furniture. He plans to retire in a few years so that he can devote more time to local environmental issues. He is already helping manage several acres of meadow and woodland on his church's property.

In February 2014, Jeff faced major complications from late onset juvenile diabetes and developed a bladder infection. Due to his diabetes, the antibiotics forced his kidneys to shut down and he went into complete kidney failure. Jeff was sent into surgery to start dialysis, which would become a key part of his life; five hours a day, three days a week...and hoped that a donor would be found before dialysis stopped working.

Despite his challenges, Jeff and Jamie continued their 35-year long tradition of taking a fishing trip to Thousand Islands, New York. They spent the time catching up and taking a break from the burden of Jeff's health. Shortly after returning home, Jamie made one of the most serious, yet easiest, choices of his life. Jamie, once a classmate, teammate, roommate, and forever a friend, wanted to be an organ donor for Jeff. While there were a few obstacles along the way, on April 28, 2016, Jeff received one of Jamie's kidneys.

During the recovery process, Jamie and Jeff would walk the hospital hallways together, sharing their "numbers" updates, both grateful for the unwavering support of their wives, Evie and Claire. Now, they each have a new lease on life—Jeff says without dialysis "every day's a good day" and Jamie has an increased awareness to "take good care of myself" with just the one kidney. These Marauders hope to share their story to inspire others to give the ultimate gift.

In fact, Jamie competed in the 2018 Transplant Games of America in Salt Lake City, Utah and at 62 years of age was named "Rookie of the Year" for Team Philadelphia. The games are Olympic-style competitions for organ and tissue recipients and donors, bringing a greater sense of community to those of who have their own versions of this experience.

"Sometimes donor families are united with the organ recipient, so a mom might be hearing the heartbeat of the son she tragically lost. You can imagine the emotion in a moment like that, and how that amazing gift can be transformative for all the people touched by those events."

To learn more about Jeff and Jamie's story, please follow this [link](#) to an article in the Reading Eagle.