

PEOPLE NEXT DOOR ROCHESTER HILLS

Rochester Hills resident coaches for love of the game

By ADAM L. NEAL Special to The Daily Oakland Press

Lou Bitonti is known by his co-workers as the senior manager for brand events at DaimlerChrysler AG headquarters. But the successful executive has another pastime that doesn't carry a fancy corporate title. To young football players at Brother Rice High School, he is simply "coach." "Football is very important to me, to set a goal for the players and be part of a team," said Bitonti, the assistant coach for the junior varsity team.

The Rochester Hills resident started coaching about eight years ago when his children were going through the high school.

He continued to coach even when he had none of his offspring in the program — donating countless personal hours to the football program.

He said he learned the necessary skills when he played the game at both the high school and college levels, and realized how important sports are to youths.

"It was always a very important part of me growing up, and playing (football) was one thing I was able to do to just get away from everything," said Bitonti, 55.

"It is just a lot of enjoyment for me by creating the team-like atmosphere. That is how I run my job at DaimlerChrysler."

Being with DaimlerChrysler AG as one of the top executives for the Jeep brand for more than 20 years has helped Bitonti shape his coaching mentality.

Bitonti said one of the main reasons he decided to coach was to help students develop — as a former coach did for him when he was young.

"I had a coach in high school that had a lot of confidence in me when I didn't have a lot in myself," he said.

"I like freshman football the best because these kids are coming from all different schools and their bodies haven't developed.

"They are just great to coach."

Because of the constant demand and hours that his day job requires, Bitonti said, he is able to volunteer his time to the football program only about twice a week.

He is always there for the games on Saturdays, but he said he told the vice president of marketing that he will not miss meetings for football practices.

Bitonti said his goal is to teach the players about good sportsmanship — a lesson stressed by the entire program.

"I try to teach the boys the days of thumping chests are over," he said.

“It’s not what it is all about anymore. It is about good sportsmanship.

“We are bringing it back for the love of the game.”

Bitonti said he regularly gives a speech about how many high school players enter high school playing football, and how many actually make it to the professional level.

He said he just wants the players to keep their heads on straight and work together toward the season’s goals.

If he had to do over again, Bitonti said, he would have been a teacher and a coach because of his love of working with students.

“I would say it would be nice, but I love my job now,” he said.

Meet LOU BITONTI

AGE: 55 **RESIDENCE:** Rochester Hills **FAMILY:** Wife Christine, three children **OCCUPATION:** Senior manager, brand events for DaimlerChrysler AG **HOBBIES:** Volunteer assistant coach of junior varsity football at Brother Rice High School **PERSON HE'D MOST LIKE TO MEET :** Musician George Gershwin. “I thought the music he wrote was just amazing — just everything about it.”



The Daily Oakland Press/GARY MALERBA Brother Rice assistant junior varsity football coach Lou Bitonti, 55, of Rochester Hills addresses his freshman team during practice.