

AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY CHRISTNOVICH



From 1980-2002, Tony taught P.E. and coached at both UW-La Crosse and Central High School. During his tenure, they won national and conference championships, but what Tony enjoyed the most was being part of a team and seeing members of his teams have success. "I was never one to worry about individual accomplishments or honors, I was more concerned with our team having success," said Christnovich. About young people, Tony feels their impact to this day. "A lot of people say coaches help mold and form the lives of young people, I felt it was the other way around, they were helping to form our lives."

Interestingly, he has been one to shape lives. Tony's father, Jack, had been injured in an industrial accident and still wanted to hunt and fish. Tony and his brothers would throw him over their shoulders and drop him

Tony Christnovich is well known in our community as a physical education instructor and coach. He spent several years as a defensive coach at UW-La Crosse, was an assistant and head coach at Central High School, and taught P.E. at both the elementary and high school levels for the La Crosse School District.

Tony grew up in Franklin, Wisconsin, and attended Oak Creek High School. As a farmer's son, Tony had to carry out his chores and could only play sports that didn't interfere with his farm responsibilities. He played only one year of football, but ran track and field for four years. In the off-season, Tony and his family spent their time hunting and fishing.

Football brought Tony to UW-La Crosse, where he was an outstanding offensive lineman for the Eagles. Graduating in 1970 with a degree in Biology, he was drafted in the 12th round by the Washington Redskins. Joining Tony in Washington were former UW-La Crosse standouts Dewey Stendahl (punter) and Greg Mattison (offensive line). The NFL dream was short-lived when an ACL injury prematurely ended his career. Armed with the motto "let your passion lead your way", he took his own advice and earned a Master's degree in Physical Education. Focused and ready to return to La Crosse, Tony took his first teaching and coaching job in La Crosse in 1980.

in a deer stand, or help him into a boat so he could still enjoy his passion for the outdoors. With the help of Dr. Carl Peterson and physically challenged sportsmen Mike Derpinhaus, Tony formed a goodwill organization called the North American Squirrel Association (NASA). Mike loved to hunt and fish and was looking for a way to get back into the outdoors, and Dr. Peterson and Tony wanted to help. It started with a squirrel hunt and has blossomed into helping hundreds of physically challenged sportsmen and athletes do what they love best. Activities include fishing, boating, skiing, golfing, and hunting, to name a few. More information about NASA can be found at: <http://www.nasasquirrel.org/>

Tony has been retired from coaching since 2004, but is still involved in our community as the co-owner of Schafer's Boat and Bait on Lake Onalaska. He and his wife Nancy bought the shop from Red Edmunds and have fallen in love with it. They planned on owning the shop for about 3 years, and that was 6 years ago. Originally purchased to save the shop from condo development (and assuring a docking facility for the NASA pontoon), their business venture has become a lifestyle.

Tony and Nancy enjoy traveling and spending time with their 3 children, Cari, Kati, and AJ. Trout fishing trips to Montana and coaching/fishing trips to Alaska are yearly highlights for the Christnovich's. Tony still coaches the defense at the All-Alaska Football Camp in Anchorage and sneaks off with guys for a few days of halibut and salmon fishing. When asked about retirement, they say "This is retirement with a bonus." They still get to fish and travel, and since buying Schafer's, they have met a lot of great and interesting people.