

RICH in community spirit

Teacher, coach
 Richard Wilkins
 memorialized in
 new gym name

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“Positive thoughts.”

“No regrets.”

“Live life to the fullest.”

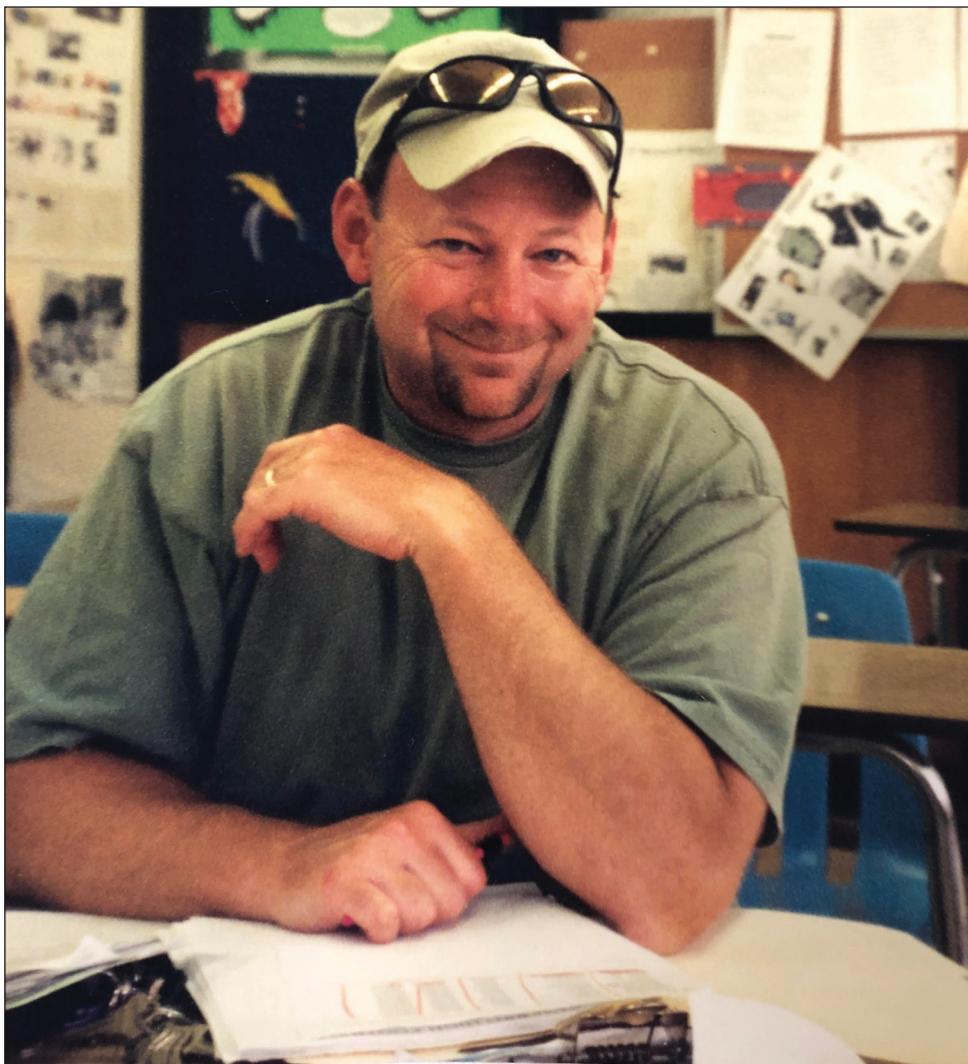
Rich Wilkins personified his favorite quotes, “and he lived life well in all ways,” said Christine Wilkins, his wife of 29 years.

Mr. Wilkins, as he was known to thousands of children in his 31 years teaching physical education at the Margaret Chase Smith Elementary School, died Oct. 8, 2021, at age 58, literally weeks after he was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer.

“It was so shocking, so unexpected, and it was so fast,” said Mike Fallon, one of Rich’s best friends, also a teaching colleague and Sanford High School co-coach for three decades. “It caught the entire community by absolute surprise.”

Now friends and family are hoping his fun-loving, loyal and perceptive spirit will live on in the Richard Wilkins Memorial Gym at the elementary school, his second home, the place he spent countless hours as teacher, a “human jungle gym,” a motivator and an inspiration.

The Sanford Schools Legacy Foundation has launched a fundraising campaign to name the facility in memory of the beloved teacher, coach and a well-known community man. With a \$10,000 goal, the nonprofit is seeking contributions to fund the naming rights, which in turn funds educational projects above and beyond taxpayer funding.



Rich Wilkins taught physical education, the majority of his 31 years at Margaret Chase Smith School. He also served as a high school football coach at Sanford High School for three decades.

HELP US MAKE IT HAPPEN! Sanford Schools Legacy Foundation is raising funds to name the gym at Margaret Chase Smith Elementary School in Rich Wilkins’ memory. To make a tax-deductible donation, visit sanfordschoolslegacyfoundation.com/give or mail a check to the foundation at 917 Main St., Suite 200, Sanford, ME 04073.



Along with his wife Christine, daughter Autumn was Rich’s pride and joy.

LEAVE A LEGACY: SanfordSchoolsLegacyFoundation.org

LEGACY MINUTE



Rich Wilkins played football, basketball and baseball at Sanford High School.



Before the start of a game last fall, the Sanford High School Spartans football team honored Coach Wilkins for his years working with the team.

RICH in community spirit

“He was an inspiration and a motivation to so many people,” said his daughter Autumn, now 26, who grew up at his side on the football field. “I’m still hearing from his friends, his students, the teachers and his co-workers who still work there, and they all miss him. I think it’s great to honor him and his memory.”

His gym students loved him. “Kids LOVED him,” said Fallon. “Teaching K-3 was his world. He’d always have kids hanging on his legs. They could be standing on his head, he didn’t care!”

“And I’m talking little kids, all the way up to big kids. I got to see this at the high school level, but every one of those kids hung off of his leg in first grade. For those kids, he was literally part of their lives from kindergarten through high school if they were athletes — and he impacted their lives all over again. Kids loved playing for him, kids loved having him for their physical education teacher.”

They loved him because of the kind of guy he was.

“He found a way to live life without getting real stressed about it,” said Fallon. “He brought some perspective, some calm, but he was hilarious, he was the funnest guy in the room, all the time. I miss him for that — a lot.”

Yet Rich was also a patient, perceptive soul that read and responded to each individual.

“He was able to connect with people,

know what they need, whether they needed him to be a jokester, or quiet and comforting,” said Christine. “He just knew how to get the most out of people.”

Autumn saw this too on the football field, where always alongside her dad, she had “better attendance than 95 percent of the players,” joked Fallon.

“He noticed the slightest body language, the smallest difference in someone,” said Autumn. “Like he knew if a kid needed tough love on the football field, or if they needed to be soothed. He would deliver the coaching message for each person individually according to what their needs were.”

For 32+ years, he was Fallon’s confidante. “For me personally, I just had the ultimate faith and trust in him, as a friend, as a colleague and in our coaching careers together. He was always ‘the guy’ if I needed to run something by somebody, if I needed to get some thoughts, or I needed support. It was hands-down, never for a moment did I ever hesitate, Rich. I think a lot of his other friends would say the same thing.”

Rich also exuded pride for his team and his town. After their Spartans won the “Gold Ball” in 1998, Rich had a gold ball tattooed on his arm in honor of their Class A State Championship win, his one and only tattoo.

Rich himself was a stand-out multi-sport athlete at Sanford High School, playing catcher for his twin-brother Robert, who

was a pitcher, and Rich played baseball at the Division 1 University of New Hampshire.

But perhaps nothing made him more proud than his daughter and his wife.

“Autumn was his baby, she was his everything,” said Christine, who said their marriage of 29 years was a balance between his “puppy dog and rainbows” and her “realistic” views of the world.

Their strong relationship was apparent to anyone who knew them. “It was powerful. I just was in awe the bond that Autumn and Dad had. And I got to witness that first-hand because I was working, teaching and coaching at the high school when Autumn was going through.”

Autumn kept the stats for the football team alongside dad every Friday night or Saturday afternoon at Cobb Stadium, and they also shared a love for fly-fishing. They made countless trips together and for 10 years also as volunteer guides for Casting for Recovery, an adventure retreat for breast-cancer patients and survivors.

Right now the competitive Dad and daughter remain tied for “largest fish.” “Rich would (jokingly) say he’s better, but he was so proud of her,” said Christine.

Fun, loving, loyal and Sanford-proud, that’s how his community will remember Rich Wilkins, who will soon have a gym named in his memory to continue his legacy.