

Home Now Playing Coming Attractions News & Notes The New WPS Links Contributions Help

Looking at America



Written by Tony Mussari

Saturday, 28 November 2009 18:37

Looking at America from the 20-Yard Line

By Tony Mussari

To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right. Confucius

I spent a good part of my Thanksgiving Day on the 20-yard line in North Plainfield, New Jersey. It was a beautiful day, and I was surrounded by beautiful people who were celebrating the end of a high school football season.

For most of the jam-packed stadium, it was a football game between traditional high school rivals. It was a morning like so many others they had experienced on Thanksgiving days past in this place with friends, relatives and family. It was a time to yell and shout for "the Boys," as they are affectionately known here.



For the proud mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, teachers, administrators, and school board members, it was a last look at the football players, the band members, and the cheerleaders in their finest moment.

Watching the glorious scenes of this quintessential American right of passage, I began to better understand something that is central to our culture and our history. America is a nation of positive people who relish positive moments that are all too often missed in a fast-paced world that only takes momentary pause when something is controversial, contentious, or cacophonous.

We are inundated with stories about things that do not work, people who do not do the right thing, events that bring us bad news caused by angry, alienated people with agendas that most people find destructive and offensive.

There are days when everywhere we look, the picture is anything but positive. That's what made this scene, in this place, so glorious. Everything was working. Everyone was enjoying the symmetry of the moment. Everything was as it should be on a day of national gratitude.



No matter where one looked, or whom one talked to, the message was essentially the same. People like their town. They like the people who live there. They like the students, their teachers and their coaches.

To paraphrase the words of a famous song: "they were family," and a beautiful family indeed.

There were no stretch limos in the parking lots. There were no mink covered women in the bleachers. This is a place of denim, cloth coats, and New York Yankee baseball caps. The people behind the cheers and the students for whom they were cheering are blue collar solid.



For the most part, these are first and second generation immigrants who came to this country and this town in search of a better world for themselves and their children. It was obvious that they had found it, and they had every intention to do what they had to do to pass it on to their children.

This is a place where community service is more than words on a page. It is central to the education of these students.

This is a place where one sees the America of tomorrow today.

It is personified in the cheerleaders I came to record, the band members who amplified the sound of their cheers with appropriate music, and the football team whose players behaved in an exemplary way.

If ever there was a portrait of the strength of our multicultural society, this is it.

If ever there was an example of how beautifully diversity can work, this is it.

If ever there was a statement about America on its best days, these young women have codified it.

Danielle Aponte, a recent graduate of North Plainfield, described the school as just one big family. This is a young lady who works two jobs and volunteers to do public service whenever she can at her college. It's a tradition she learned as a cheerleader at North Plainfield.

And what will Danielle Aponte be doing tomorrow?





She answered that question with words that will touch your heart. "I want to become a teacher and a coach," She Said. "I want to change the lives of my students the way my teachers and coaches have done for me."

Another recent graduate and former cheerleader, Edith Costello, was unequivocal in her belief that the work of her cheerleading squad and the students in her sister's squad "makes me proud to be from North Plainfield."



Other returning graduates who were cheerleaders coached by Skip Pulcrano in 2007 talked about the things they learned when they stood on the 20 yard line: teamwork, commitment, hard work, leadership



and community involvement.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Marilyn Birnbaum's face was brimming with pride when she talked about the cheerleaders: "These kids have fabulous values. They just give of themselves. They know what's right and what is not."



Dr. Hope Blecher-Sass echoed these thoughts with words of praise: "These kids reach out to the community because it means something to them. They do it because in their hearts they want to help people in the community and across the state."

The captain of the cheerleaders, Toni Costello, gave truth to Hope's words when she told me she wants to help people. Her co-captain, Christianna Blue, put it this way, "It's fun to go into the community. It's a good experience to see how other people live."

School board member Sandy Dodd put everything into perspective when she told me: "It's nice to see that everybody can live together peacefully."



The view from the 20-yard line in North Plainfield is optimistic, positive and very promising. It's a place where everything is in the right order because the family is in the right order, and that guarantees that this is a place where the caring hearts of good and decent people prevail.



Please provide feedback to: tmussari@gmail.com

< Prev Next >



© Copyright 2008 • MUSSARI-LOFTUS ASSOCIATES • All Rights Reserved.
E-MAIL: TMussari@aol.com WEBSITE: www.windsorparkstories.com