

James Stickel
Vito Trause Scholarship

I first met Vito Trause when I was about 10 years old during one of what would be many Saturday morning trips to the bagel store with my father. For a while, I simply knew him as a friendly older gentleman who always greeted me with a 'Hiya Pal' and asked about my school and scouting endeavors. Growing up I was quite shy, but Vito and his pals always invited me to take a seat. I soon learned more about who he was and what he stood for.

It was the spring of my seventh-grade year when Vito came and spoke to my boy scout troop about his time spent serving in World War II. His story was captivating and from this point on I knew I wanted to do something for him. He spoke about his time spent as a POW surviving on one loaf of stale bread a week and suffering from frostbite as a result of the harsh winter conditions. Even though the conditions he endured were horrible, he always stressed that he had no bad feelings toward his captors. He was simply lucky to have survived, unlike many of his fellow comrades who did not. Despite what he had been through, he carried with him an infectious smile and a happy-go-lucky personality.

Vito's military service was extraordinary but the way he lived the rest of his life was even more impactful. He lived his life with a true purpose. He lived for his community. He lived to support the children in the town and student-athletes on and off the field. Vito was truly an inspiration to me. When it came time for me to choose an Eagle Project, I decided to build a Veterans Memorial. Many believed the project was too ambitious, but Vito believed I could get the job done. He supported me and my fellow scouts every step of the way from when we broke ground until the laying of the bricks in October 2019. My project started out as a simple way to give back to local heroes and blossomed into so much more by bringing the entire community

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together. Sadly, Vito passed ten days before the dedication of the memorial, which stands for what was most important to him—our community.

As a member of the marching band, I am lucky to say that Vito was a part of my high school experience for my first three years of high school. It was not the same without him in the stands the past two seasons, but his legacy is still alive and well. It will continue to live on for generations. With fans back in the stands this season, the camaraderie was at an all-time high, the way Vito would have wanted it. I'm honored to have known Vito Trause and thankful for everything he has taught me. His mentorship has shaped me into the person I am today and will continue to impact me in all my future endeavors.

Michael Kazigian

As a resident of Township Of Washington, a scout in Troop 321, a member of the Westwood Marching Band, and a frequent customer of David's Bagels, it was hard not to see Vito Trause! For as long as I can remember, Vito was at every major town event supporting other people. He was the most devoted and selfless man that I have ever met.

The first lesson Vito has taught me is to "always root for the home team". He would attend anything from volleyball to Scouting projects to football games in freezing conditions. Unfortunately, elders lose their mobility but Vito never let that prevent him from attending community events. Vito was always there to support his "pals". I remember one freezing game during my Freshman year, Vito was getting recognized during halftime. I was shocked that he was able to attend, considering half the crowd had already left. When his name got called over the PA, he was sitting on the bench right in front of me, so I offered to help him up and walk onto the field. He kindly declined and walked himself out to receive his recognition. I just remember watching in awe, wondering how Vito was able to not miss a Cardinals game at 90 years old!

The next important lesson I learned from Vito was to never be shy to give a helping hand. The last memory I have of Vito was him visiting us working on the Veterans Memorial Eagle Scout project. I was helping to level out gravel when I saw Vito come over to check out our progress. During our break, he complimented our hard work. He then explained how important our community service was to the town. Looking back on this conversation, I realize that since he wasn't able to help us physically, he used his voice to build our sense of community. I also saw this at games, when he would offer suggestions on how teammates could play better. Almost nothing could restrict Vito from showing up to offer support.

The last lesson that Vito taught me took place during his procession. I remember finding out about his passing on Halloween and being so surprised, since I had seen him recently at one

of the football games. As soon as I heard that Vito would be having a memorial, I knew I needed to attend for all the time he spent supporting others. I will never forget all the students standing outside, paying their respects to our town icon as he made his final visit- which taught me that giving back is an everlong commitment.

I miss seeing Vito at our town events now, especially this spring as I completed my Eagle Scout project at Lincoln Park. I know Vito would have been there cheering us on, but I also know he was there in spirit. I will never forget the lasting impact that Vito had on not only me, but the whole community.

Christina Dahdah

Vito Trause has always been representative of Westwood Athletics, specifically Friday Night Lights. Growing up in a football and cheerleading family with two older siblings, I've been attending Westwood games on Friday nights since I was in fourth grade. I was so accustomed to seeing Vito in the front row of the stands. He was a fixture at every single game. There was always a lot of commotion when he would arrive at the games because he was such an admired and adored member of the community. Vito's presence at the games always provided the kids with so much motivation and inspiration.

Vito's story truly impacted me personally. His ultimate sacrifice to serve our country at such a young age and give up his youth shows his character and selflessness. One day he was a high school student, playing on the football team and the next he was a soldier defending our country. He made this decision because he felt it was the only decision he could make, as all of his siblings, friends and neighbors were serving our country, he felt it was his obligation to do the same. Although this decision to serve ultimately made his path in life much more difficult, he did not regret it. Going to serve and not finishing out his high school education made it much more difficult to get a job but he still worked hard his entire life and found a way. Vito was a success story; despite overcoming all of his obstacles he was able to work very hard, become successful and raise a family. His story motivated me to take advantage of all of the opportunities that I have in front of me. I have the opportunity to graduate high school, attend college, and have limitless potential because of the freedoms and liberties that Vito so unselfishly fought for. His persistence and resilience motivates me to take advantage of all the opportunities I have and realize my potential as a student, person, and member of society.

One of the opportunities that I was given was being a part of the Westwood Cheerleading Team throughout my four years of high school. Every game we do a cheer called "Number One Fan". Everytime we would do this cheer, the first person that came to my mind was Vito because he truly is Westwood's number one fan. Seeing Vito in the stands, surrounded by his community, always brought me joy and put a smile on my face.

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1 message

Thomas Linaris <22tlinaris@wwrsd.org>
To: Araceli Debrody <araceli.debrody@wwrsd.org>

Wed, May 4, 2022 at 2:37 PM

Thomas Linaris

The youth that I have been surrounded by and grown up with have become very complacent with their lives. Not all, but many have the impression that their life is difficult because of issues with school, friends, and more. They do not consider that less than one hundred years ago, boys about their age were being sent to fight in World War Two. One of those boys was Vito Trause. Vito dropped out of high school to serve his country during the most dangerous war in history. I try to remember these facts when I find myself feeling sorry for myself. This year I got injured before the football season even started. I was frustrated and upset, I wondered how such a thing could happen to me after working all summer for the upcoming season. Then I remembered that Vito had to miss his football season to go to war. He was in a prisoner of war labor camp when he should have been playing his senior year of football. This reminds me that I have no right to feel sorry for myself when there are men that had to go through much worse for a much greater cause. Vito's courage and reaction to adversity are an inspiration to me. The thought of that great man being a fan of the sports teams I played sparked the fire with which I played.

On top of these things, Vito always had a smile or a friendly look on his face. I found it incredible that someone that's been through as much as he has can still be as jolly as he was. It reminded me that despite the outcome of the game, it's just a game. There is more to life than what happened. If Vito can keep a smile on his face then so can I. His larger-than-life personality is something that I would be blessed to have one day.