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NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Honoring a Redskins legend

Bronze statue dedicated at stadium in honor of Coach Cuskie and the Streak.

By **Jeff Werner**
BucksLocalNews.com Editor

Legendary Neshaminy High School Coach John Petercuskie stood silent for a moment as he gazed upon his bronze likeness for the first time in front of the Wall of Fame at Harry P. Franks Stadium.



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“I’m humbled and honored. Needless to say this is beyond most dreams. I can’t believe it was done,” said the 85-year-old Coach Cuskie. “It’s the third most memorable thing in my life – the first being my marriage to Dorothy and the second, the birth of my three sons.”

Cuskie’s wife, Dorothy, sat speechless as she gazed for the first time on the

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Legendary Neshaminy coach John Petercuskie delivers remarks at the unveiling of his bronze likeness at the Wall of Fame at Harry P. Franks Stadium.

Neshaminy honors a football legend

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statue of her husband, his left arm outstretched, his right hand clutching a football at his side and a whistle around his neck. Coach Petercuskie's sons, John Jr., Jerry and Gary were given the honor of unveiling the statue of their father.

The statue was handcrafted by renowned Morrisville artist James Gafgen Sr., who also sculpted the statue of Robert Morris in Morrisville and Harriett Tubman in Bristol Borough.

"I'd like to thank God for the talent that he gave me and I thank God for my healing so he could let me see this project to the end," said Gafgen, who persisted on the project while recovering from a stroke. "I want to thank the Neshaminy High School Football Hall of Fame for giving me the opportunity to sculpt this legend and fine man, Coach Cuskie."

A standing ovation erupted from the gathering of several hundred people as the statue came into public view for the first time.

"Today we celebrate the significant improvement to our stadium while acknowledging our heritage," said assistant principal and athletic director Thomas Magdelinskas. "There's an old saying, 'In order to make steel you have to put iron into the fire.' Coach Franks forged the iron and Coach Petercuskie put that iron into the fire and made the steel that is the Neshaminy Football Program. He has established a lasting legacy that is going strong 50 years later."

For five unforgettable seasons during the early 1960s, Neshaminy dominated the high school gridiron scene.

Under the leadership of Coach John Petercuskie, the Redskins embarked in 1961 on a 51-game winning streak, averaging almost 30 points a game and posting 26 shutouts that would ensure the players and coaches a place of reverence in the pages of Redskin sports history.

"It was fun. We just played, and suddenly, we won a lot of games. We had a good staff and good players," said Coach Cuskie.

From 1960 through 1965 – six full seasons and 65 games on the field – Neshaminy would lose just once to Easton, which scored a winning goal with 36 seconds left on the clock in the fall of 1961.

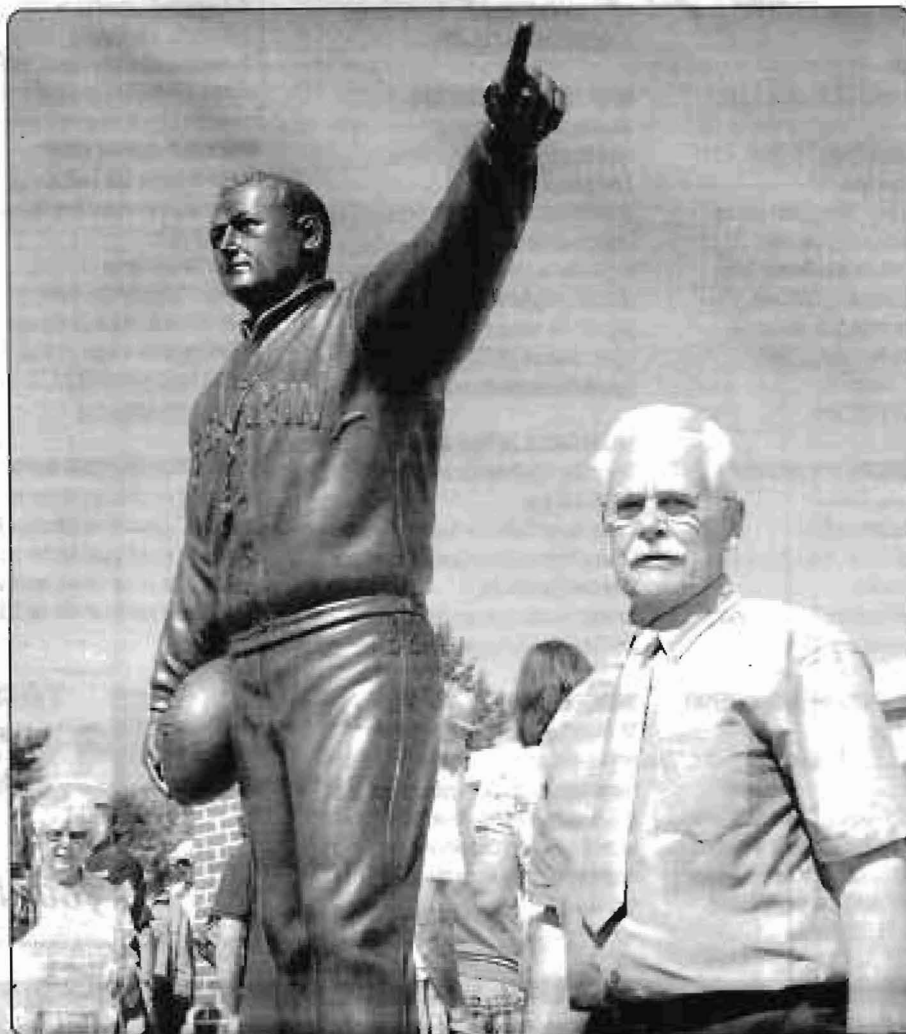
The loss would be a momentary blip on a historic ride, which would see player Jack Stricker set the area scoring record in 1960 only to have teammate Bob Baxter break it in 1962. And just for good measure the 1960, 1961 and 1962 teams would set overall scoring marks still not eclipsed.

On Sunday, current and former players and coaches, fans, administrators, lawmakers, friends and families gathered to honor Coach Cuskie and "The Streak," as it has become known in Neshaminy High School gridiron history, at its newly-refurbished and expanded Wall of Fame.

John Petercuskie Jr. read a letter from



The life-size bronze statue of Coach Petercuskie is unveiled.



Morrisville sculptor Jim Gafgen with the statue he created of Coach Petercuskie.

teacher, coach and former Neshaminy student Judy Mason Cunningham. "Today we honor our teacher, our coach, mentor and friend, a man who is the cornerstone of Neshaminy High School Football. Let this statue inspire the Redskin spirit forever."

Dr. Robert McGee, principal at Neshaminy High School, joined Superintendent of Schools Dr. Louis Muenker in officially accepting the donation of the Hall of Fame Wall and monument, a gift from the Neshaminy Hall of Fame Committee in honor of the district's rich sports history.

Superintendent Emeritus Dr. Gary Bowman congratulated Coach Petercuskie, putting his arm around the man who has been his hero and role model. "A well-deserved honor," he said.

Jack Stricker, who played under Coach Cuskie, praised his former coach as one of the district's greatest.

"Coach Cuskie is simply one of the finest individuals that I have ever known. He embodies all of the qualities that you would want in anyone – honestly, dependability, character, humility and even a sense of humor," he said. "He is a great husband and father and a friend to all. I truly cherish my friendship with coach. He has had such a positive impact on those of us who were so fortunate to have played for him. Although it has been years since we've played for coach, his players still remain teammates and close friends – Cuskie's boys forever."

Coach Cuskie began his high school coaching career with Neshaminy as a defensive line coach in 1954. He then served as assistant head coach from 1955-59 before being named coach. The players remember the former U.S. Marine's "ever present ball cap and whistle around his neck who wouldn't hesitate to get into a four point stance and knock you on your butt to make a point."

Stricker said what Coach Cuskie accomplished is well documented and "truly amazing. But even more important is the how of his accomplishments. And its through the how that we, his players and his students, benefited so greatly. He led by example and taught us values that made us all better teammates, players and individuals. Our parents couldn't have asked for better role model."

Coach Cuskie left Neshaminy following the 1965 season to take a job as a defensive line coach with Dartmouth University. After three years at Dartmouth, he served as defensive coordinator at Boston College (1969-72) and Princeton (1973-77), defensive line and special teams coach for the Cleveland Browns (1978-1984), defensive line coach at Harvard (1987-88) and defensive line and special teams coach at Liberty (1989-94). He is now retired and living in Massachusetts with his wife.

To read more and view a video of the event, visit BucksLocalNews.com