

*"At some of our schools, if it wasn't for Larry, those students wouldn't have running shoes."*

- Mark Rosenbalm  
CCPS Supervisor of Interscholastic Athletics and Student Activities



L: Larry Eaton in his younger years  
R: Larry attended Alfred University in NY



## RUNNING AND GIVING TO 'SAVE ONE KID'

At 85 years young, Naples resident Larry Eaton still runs five times a week, usually three or four miles a day. His decision to go out for track in the spring of his senior year of high school to win an award for "Best Student-Athlete" proved to be a defining moment in his life's trajectory. "I discovered not only was it my best sport, but it was also the only sport I

was really good at," explained Larry. "My college education comes from [track], my wife comes from [track], my career comes from [track]. All of which has worked out amazingly well." After retiring from 3M (originally the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company), Larry connected with staff and students at Naples High School (NHS) who shared a similar passion for running.

What started as an annual donation to one school, NHS, has expanded to support all high school cross-country teams—boys and girls—in the A-rated Collier County Public Schools (CCPS). Looking ahead to School Year 2023-24, Larry will donate a total of \$36,000 to nine schools: Barron Collier High, Everglades City School, Golden Gate High, Gulf Coast High, Immokalee High, Lely High, Naples High,

Palmetto Ridge High, and the new Aubrey Rogers High School opening in August in North Naples. "At some of our schools, if it wasn't for Larry, those students wouldn't have running shoes," explained Mark Rosenbalm, CCPS Supervisor of Interscholastic Athletics and Student Activities. "They would not be running." The money pays for sneakers, entry fees for meets, basic nutrition, special experiences, and training for our cross-country teams. Mark sees the support of springboarding our teams to the top of Florida. This school year, seven out of eight Collier high schools placed at the State Cross Country Meet, widespread success shared by students in every corner of Collier County. "Larry has been able to let the coaches do more coaching, less fundraising and getting down to techniques and what they need to be focusing on," Mark added. "You can see it has turned our programs around and put Collier County on the map as a running county."

Nora Potter was the first person from Everglades City School to attend the State Competition, held this school year in Tallahassee. "And she was able to do it because of Larry's support," explained Lisa Morse, CCPS Senior Director for Strategic Engagement and District Initiatives. Despite blazing fast times and remarkable accomplishments, Larry prefers to judge success by the sport's ability to help kids "make it through the teenage years" and build friendships with peers who carry profound influence on their life choices. He is nimble on his feet and quick to deflect credit toward people and organizations that created the system for this support to continue. "Larry is really the only person in Collier who has created an endowment to make sure this sport is supported for a really long time," Lisa explained. He gave an initial endowment through a fund at Collier Community Foundation and has worked with CCPS to funnel the money to schools and students. "Larry came to us with this idea and how he wanted to replicate it," said Meredith Nassif, Director of Philanthropic Services for Collier Community Foundation. "It was about partnering with Lisa, and she brought Mark into the fold and we were able to get this off the ground." Each year, this team of philanthropic connectors meets with CCPS cross-country coaches to share stories of the fund's impact and look

ahead to future needs. Just as Larry has a passion for cross-country, this model of support for students could be replicated in other areas. "It would be wonderful if there were other people who were passionate, whether about a sport, debate team or whatever they want to support, that's what we are here for, to create those philanthropic plans," Meredith added. Larry's mark on Collier County will endure far beyond the day when he runs his final mile. In a sport defined by seconds, Larry's looking at the long haul.



by CHAD OLIVER  
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Coach Kyle Rankin with Barron Runners



Barron Collier High School Cross Country Team



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