If you’re familiar with Springfield sports history or politics, there’s a good chance you’ve heard of Don W. Casper – known to his friends as “Cas.”

Soon, the newest generation will start to learn his name as well.

After Casper, 83, passed away in the summer of 2017, his family set up the Don W. Casper Memorial Scholarship in his name to benefit high school students of his alma mater – Springfield High. Casper was a standout in baseball, basketball, and especially football as he gave the Senators 1,776 yards of offense in his senior year (1951). That translated into a year at University of Illinois and then eventually quarterbacking a Fort Hood (Texas) team ranked second nationally among all army teams. He was inducted with the second Springfield Sports Hall of Fame class in 1992.

Add in 40 years of public service as supervisor of Woodside Township, and Casper’s roots run deep in Springfield. But his nature wasn’t to brag. So much so, that even his son-in-law, George Merriman, found out new facts about his life this summer.

“Cas was a great person. He never, despite some of his accomplishments, spoke about himself,” Merriman said. “One of my best friends read his obituary that talked about how he was such a great athlete and had done so much in local politics in
Springfield – The friend said “I knew Cas for over 20 years and he never said anything about it.”

His youngest son, Mike, echoed that sentiment.

“What a great father and husband,” Mike Casper said. “Really just an All-American man. Everybody loved him. He didn’t have a mean bone in his body.”

Setting up a scholarship for Springfield High students who excelled in academia and sports isn’t a foreign concept – Casper set up scholarships in life as well. In fact, in lieu of flowers at the funeral, the Casper family asked donations be put into a scholarship Casper had maintained for a long time.

“There was one that he started with George – the Sand Hills Golf Scholarship in Nebraska,” Mike Casper said. “That’s become a pretty large scholarship and people donated $10,000 when he died. It’s given out every year to students who work at the golf course.”

Mike said his dad showed his generosity in many different ways. “He was always just trying to help kids get summer jobs within the state or county,” he said.

Knowing a scholarship was in memory to him? That would have been a little different for “Cas” to think about.

“My gosh, he would be a little embarrassed,” Mike Casper said. “But he would have been truly honored and I think teared up a little bit.”