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Lifestyle

## Striking out cancer: Foundation helps officials/umpires fighting the disease



Bob Ciulla wears the Vegas Gold shirt in honor of the UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation. Here, he is umpiring in the initial game to benefit the family of fellow umpire Dave Pluda. *Courtesy of Bob Ciulla*

By Kim Becker

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If you see a high school umpiring crew working a game in a Vegas Gold shirt instead than their usual blues or black, it is because they are doing more than just calling balls and strikes. Members of the UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation are raising money and bringing awareness to their cause.

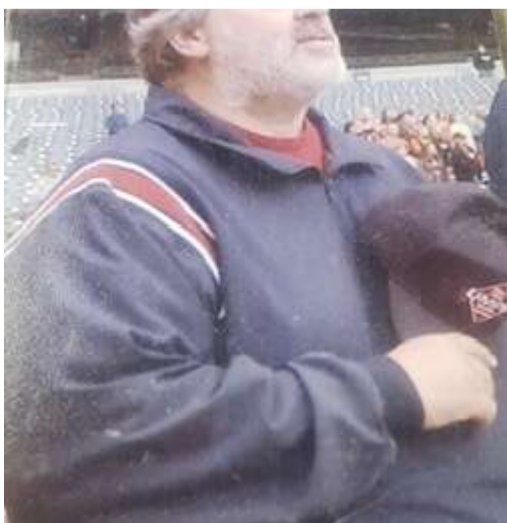
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Umpires Bob Ciulla of Des Plaines and Jeff Siegel of Huntley started the organization in 2011 when fellow ump Dave Pluda was diagnosed with colon cancer.

“Dave was diagnosed with terminal cancer and couldn’t work. We decided to do a fundraiser to support his family,” Ciulla said.

They held a fundraising dinner in Des Plaines with an auction and 50/50 raffle.



Dave Pluda was diagnosed with Stage IV colon cancer in 2011. His fellow umpires held a fundraiser to help his family, which was the start of the UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation.  
*Courtesy of Bob Ciulla*

“It was extremely successful,” Ciulla said. “And we wondered how many Daves could use our assistance.”

During UMPS Baseball Training meetings, the members hold 50/50 raffles to help raise funds, with many winners donating the money right back into the charity.

Ciulla said one weekend during each spring baseball season, the Central Suburban League sponsors an UMPS Strikes Out Cancer game, where funds raised by the participating school are donated to the foundation.

Ciulla said the nonprofit has helped 12 or 13 families over the years. There is an application online at [www.umpsstrikesoutcancer.org](http://www.umpsstrikesoutcancer.org). The organization’s board members evaluate each application on a case-by-case basis. Applicants must be an official or umpire for amateur sports. Sometimes exceptions are made.

“On one occasion we helped a coach whose daughter had brain cancer and didn’t have long to live,” Ciulla said. “He and his wife had to take off work and had no income coming in. We just had to help them.”

To get the word out about their organization, and to help out more families in need, the UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation is holding its first golf outing Monday, Aug. 5, at Chevy Chase Country Club, 1000 Milwaukee Ave., Wheeling. The registration deadline to take part in this event is July 21.



A group of umpires who were very close to Dave Pluda. The group photo was taken at the Central Suburban All Star Game, where all proceeds were donated back to the UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation. *Photo courtesy of Bob Ciulla*

“This is the first time we are putting it out there to the community,” Ciulla said. “Usually it is more internal because it is very personal. We lost a friend.”

Ciulla said he also thinks it is important for the public to see that umpires and officials are human, too, which parents can sometimes forget in the heat of a competitive game.

“The public doesn’t always see the human side to us. We work just as hard as the players and coaches,” he said. “We are not invincible. We go through the same things they do. It is important that we break down the barriers between parents and officials.”

Ciulla talks more about the UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation and the upcoming golf outing.

**Q:** What is the UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation? Give a brief overview of what the organization does and who you serve.

**A:** Started in 2011 by members Bob Ciulla and Jeff Siegel of the UMPS Baseball Training (UMPS), UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation is a 501(c)3 Illinois nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting amateur sports officials diagnosed with cancer or other serious illnesses. Initially, we were formed to help fellow umpire Dave Pluda, who was diagnosed with Stage IV colon cancer in June 2011.



Jeff Siegel, left, and Bob Ciulla present Dave Pluda's family with his umpire shirt. The group retired his assigned umpire number, 52. *Photo courtesy of Bob Ciulla*

**Q:** How many people do you serve each year?

**A:** There is an application process to apply for assistance. Since 2011, we have helped take the burden off 12 or 13 families during their troubling time.

**Q:** Where do the majority of your funds come from to support this program?

**A:** Throughout the spring and summer baseball/softball season, we have 50/50 raffles, umpires donate game check(s), and one of our baseball conferences holds an “UMPS Strikes Out Cancer” day, where they barbecue and fundraise for our foundation.

**Q:** Tell us about the upcoming golf outing.

**A:** The golf outing takes place Monday, Aug. 5, at Chevy Chase Country Club in Wheeling. Registration begins at 10 a.m., with the shotgun start at 12:30 p.m. Dinner will start around 6 p.m., depending on when golfing is finished. There will also be 50/50 raffles and an auction. Sponsorships are available. The cost is \$160 for golf and dinner; \$50 for dinner only. Registration deadline is July 21. Visit [www.umpsstrikesoutcancer.org](http://www.umpsstrikesoutcancer.org) to find out more information on how to be a sponsor, donate to the auction, or sign up to golf.

**Q:** How can readers help your organization?

**A:** They can assist by participating in the golf outing. If they do not golf, they can either donate, sponsor a hole, or attend the dinner at the end of the golf outing

**Q:** What else would you like readers to know?

**A:** This is truly a grass-roots effort, and we believe in what we are doing. Many times, people/fans/spectators see us umpires/officials as “villains.” In all actuality, we are humans who want what is best for the athletes. We are dedicated to doing a great job and helping each other to become the best official we can be. At times, life takes over and there is not much we can do except be there for each other.

### **The UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation**

**What:** The UMPS Strikes Out Cancer Foundation golf outing

**When:** Monday, Aug. 5; registration begins at 10 a.m., with the shotgun start at 12:30 p.m. Dinner will start around 6 p.m.

**Where:** Chevy Chase Country Club, 1000 Milwaukee Ave., Wheeling

**Cost:** \$160 for golf and dinner; \$50 for dinner only. Registration deadline is July 21.

**Details:** Visit [www.umpsstrikesoutcancer.org](http://www.umpsstrikesoutcancer.org) to find out how to be a sponsor, donate to the auction, or sign up to golf.



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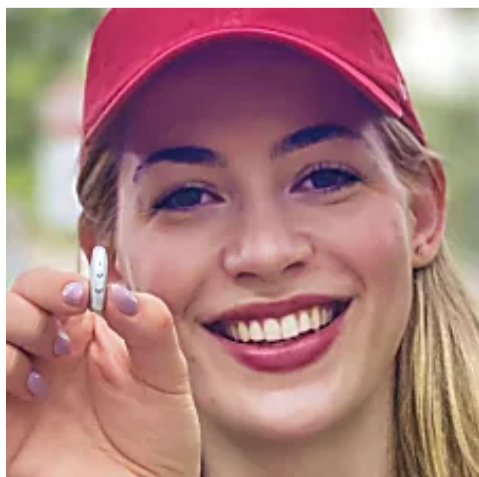
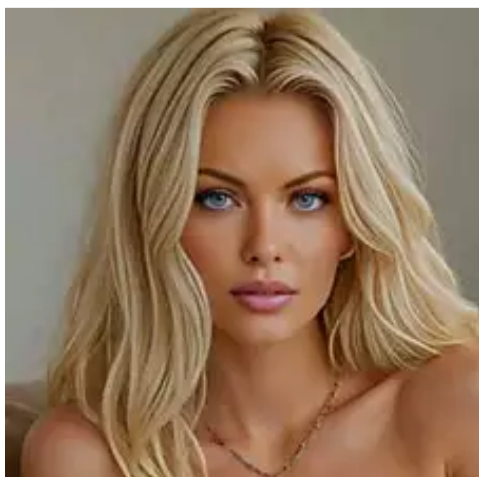
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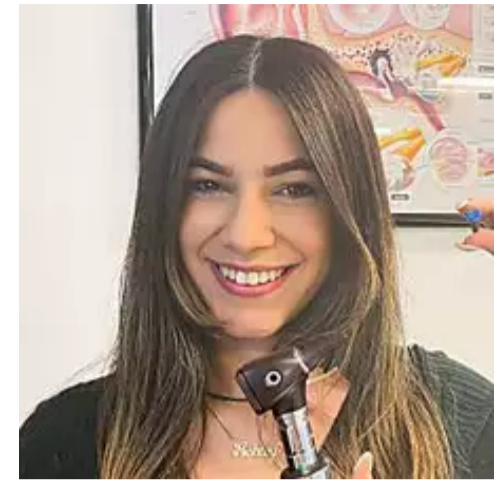
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