

Caring H-F community helped Benetti find way to success

BY MARILYN THOMAS
mthomas@hfchronicle.com

Jason Benetti, Chicago White Sox play-by-play broadcaster, said the first baseball game he ever called was for Vikings baseball at Homewood-Flossmoor High School.

When Benetti shared that insight, he got rousing applause from the crowd at the Vikings Baseball Boosters Club banquet Saturday, Jan. 29.

"I am not here if H-F didn't have the resources in my field — to have the highest power high school radio station in the country — I'm literally not here," the 2001 H-F graduate told the gathering of more than 125 people at Balagio's Ristorante in Homewood.

The professional announcer admitted that when he got to H-F in 1997, he didn't have a clue that H-F had a broadcasting program. He first went out for band. He played the tuba. Between the instrument's size and awkward walk Benetti had from his cerebral palsy, it was tough for him to march. Band director Bill Jastrow suggested Benetti be the band announcer. From that experience, he learned about the broadcasting program.

Benetti paid special tribute to his par-



Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle
White Sox play-by-play announcer Jason Benetti, left, with Homewood-Flossmoor High varsity baseball coach John McCarthy.

ents, Sue and Rob Benetti, for all the encouragement they gave him, and to special guests Bob Comstock and Megan Tipton, former H-F broadcasting teachers, who helped him discover his love for working behind a microphone.

They were "the two people who made me understand there was a standard of

excellence in the thing we all did. I also realized that I could be good at something," he said. "I think that's the best gift you can give to any kid. Show that kid that not only are you valued, not only are you welcomed at school, but you're good at something. I wasn't that until I got there."

Benetti said Comstock and Tipton and other teachers prepared him for his college career at Syracuse University.

"I'm here because of H-F. I truly am, and I don't say that lightly. I went to Syracuse to go be an announcer. Because I had a place at H-F where for a kid who has a disability, the hardest thing sometimes is to hold them to the same standard as everyone else. Because it seemed like we need to lower the bar. That's BS.

"It's very difficult for some people to hold people with a disability to high standards, and I can't help but know that I wouldn't have gone to Syracuse without these two people and a broadcasting program they helped create, and H-F as a whole and the community as a whole that cared about me and wanted me to go succeed as the best."

Benetti made his way as a sports broadcaster calling everything from DePaul women's basketball, Syracuse University lacrosse and 10 years doing minor league

baseball games for ESPN. Benetti learned White Sox announcer Ken "Hawk" Harrelson was going to reduce his schedule and he was encouraged to try for the White Sox position.

Again, Benetti believes H-F played a role in his future. His schedule was tight, but he was coming to the community to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the H-F broadcasting program and the Sox set an interview for him.

"I end up interviewing, I get the job and I can't help but think it was a really cool thing that I was coming here ... The convenience of me being here led to the White Sox job," he said. He's been in the Sox booth since 2016.

Although Benetti doesn't get back to the H-F area often, he said the community had a wonderful impact on his life.

"It's the fact that I grew up here and (the community) made me into what I am. That's the generosity, that's the care and spirit, that's the brilliance of Homewood-Flossmoor High School and James Hart (School) and Parker (Junior High). The generosity and spirit of all of you," he told the Vikings baseball supporters. "You meet other people who didn't have this, and you immediately say, 'I didn't know how lucky I was.'"



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