



Daniel Bell / Rome News-Tribune

David Mathis relaxes with campers at the annual Foundation Camp he helped to found.

Teaching values

David Mathis is the health, physical education, recreation lab coordinator at Georgia Highlands

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Everyone who knows David Mathis has nothing but glowing praise to share about the man — and considering the number of organizations, activities and volunteer opportunities he's got his hands in, there are a lot of people to ask.

Mathis' primary gig is as health, physical education and recreation lab coordinator and intramural director at Georgia Highlands College. He's been there for about two decades.

He's also a basketball tournament director for the Georgia High School Association, a position that allows him to host state and regional tournaments — including the annual Rome News-Tribune Holiday Festival — in the gym at GHC. Mark that one down for 15 years worth of work.

More recently Mathis became a member of Pepperell High School's Local School Governance Team, a group of parents and community members who act almost like a miniature school board for the individual schools in the county school system. Keeping with the longevity theme, however, Mathis has volunteered for the PHS athletic department for about 25 years now.

He's a member of the NAIA host committee that runs the college football national championship played at Barron Stadium. That's a new role, but Mathis has volunteered on various United Way committees and other similar organizations for decades.

Still, ask him about his breadth of activities, and the one Mathis will spend more time on than the rest is the Foundation Camp, a two-week camp for at-risk males ages 10-14 that just wrapped up its sixth year this summer. Mathis and fellow GHC educator Jon

Hershey created Foundation Camp after the federally funded National Youth Sports Program ended. (Mathis headed up NYSP too.)

"When that program dried up, we knew that the need we met for the community was important," said Mathis.

So they started looking for private funding. The very first camp was only a week long and included 25 campers. Six years later the camp has grown to a two-week program with about 120 participants. Through the generosity of private donors and grants from businesses, the offerings have expanded too.

The goal, explained Mathis, is to give the boys a look at what college is about. He wants the campers to learn that college is not only an option but an expected outcome.

The campers spend time playing tennis, kickball, basketball, soccer and more, but they are also learning sign language, improving their writing skills, participating in math and physics labs, and taking art lessons. Even the camp counselors are college students, so the campers get to know college students and develop role models.

"We use athletics to get them in the door," said Mathis. "But then they spend just as much time in the classroom."

Mathis is a lifelong Floyd County resident, having grown up in Lindale and graduated from Pepperell High and Floyd College. His wife, Kathy Mathis, to whom he has been married 32 years, has also lived here her whole life, having grown up in Coosa and graduated from Berry College. She's the deputy director of the Greater Rome Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The couple has two grown children. Brooks Mathis is the vice president of economic development for Cobb County, and his younger brother Ryan Mathis is a second-grade teacher at Pepperell Primary.

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