

John Mitchell: Tribute to a teaching legend



John Mitchell

John Mitchell has impacted my family since before I was born. He's been the director of music at DeMatha Catholic High School in Prince George's County for the last 41 years. He taught my cousin and godfather, Daniel Miller, when he attended DeMatha in the 1970s, my cousin John Martin in the 1980s and my brother, Jeff, in the 1980s and 90s. He didn't even teach me, but attended my graduation party. He is revered in my family for his quiet dignity. Mr. Mitchell, as he is known to parents and students alike, has the incredible ability to make each student feel as though they have greatness inside and then pulls it out of them. It would be easy to assume that a music teacher at DeMatha would be overshadowed by people like basketball coaching legend Morgan Wootten at DeMatha. Wootten's in the National Basketball Hall of Fame. It's hard to top that, but if there's a DeMatha Mount Rushmore, Mr. Mitchell is right next to Morgan Wootten. He announced this week that this is his last full-time year at DeMatha. That feels impossible. Along with Jim Roper, Mr. Mitchell has built arguably the finest high school music program in the country. I'm 32 years old, 15 years out of high school, and I can't help but use the "Mr." in front of their names. That's how much respect I have for them. About 400 of the 1,000 boys who attend the school are involved in the music program. Think about that for a second. Forty percent of the school. If there's one program that is the pulse of DeMatha, it's the music program. The program has an entire building dedicated to it now and it's because of the tireless work of Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Roper. Mr. Mitchell's was named one of seven National Educators of Distinction by the National Catholic Educators Association in 1993. He was given The Washington Post's Outstanding Private School Teacher Award in 1996. During a 20-year span, the school's Wind Ensemble, under his direction, was named the top Catholic high school band in the country 18 times. Since 1970, 1,000 students have been chose to Maryland All-State Bands, orchestras and chorsues and the same amount in

Archdiocese of Washington teachers council bands. Performing music groups have received 40 gold medals at national competitions. Mr. Mitchell is a transformative figure. When I see representations of music programs on television, like in Glee, I see kids worrying about being the outcasts. At DeMatha, football and basketball players play alongside once painfully shy students. He has created an environment for young men who thought they were outcasts to be stars. Students have spent years walking into his office just to talk with him and. He's always there for them. When DeMatha talks about being a brotherhood or a family, it's because of men like John Mitchell. He is the foundation of that family and there will never be another like him.

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