



VILLAGER BACKSTORY

You may know Chuck Lewis from the golf course, but what you may not know is that he coached a Junior Olympic track program and is in the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Sports Hall of Fame.



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

GETTING TO KNOW CHUCK LEWIS

Age: 79
Village: Orange Blossom Gardens
Spouse: Anita
Family: A blended family of five children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren
Moved Here In: 2007
Moved Here From: Nashville, Tennessee
Favorite Villages Activities: Golfing and riding his bike



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Do you know someone with an interesting backstory to tell? Email kristen.fiore@thevillagesmedia.com or call 352-753-1119, ext. 5270

Chuck Lewis grew up in Madison, Tennessee, where he lived with his grandmother after his parents divorced when he was 5.

Lewis's father was a superstar football player and boxer but had little communication with Lewis, who said the only thing his father handed down to him was the drive to accomplish more than he did.

"Everything he accomplished his senior year, I accomplished by my sophomore year," said Lewis, of the Village of Orange Blossom Gardens.

Lewis went to Tennessee Tech University on a football scholarship and got married two years later, not realizing that getting married would cause him to lose his scholarship. He ended up being picked up by the University of Tennessee at Martin and finished his last two years there

as the football team's MVP.

Much of Lewis's professional life trajectory was set in motion by a series of phone calls.

"It's just amazing how things worked out," Lewis said.

When he got out of college, he accepted a coaching position at a high school in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, but he was sitting in the office when the phone rang. It was his high school football coach asking if he would like a job at his old school.

Lewis coached football and track there for a year then shuffled around a few different schools in the area as opportunities arose before taking a position at Hillsboro High School for 14 years, where he helped the track team win two state championships.

Then, a brand new school called Hunters Lane High

School opened, and he was asked to be the assistant football coach and head track coach.

At the very first track meet, Lewis's team was beat 127 to 27.

"At the end of that meet, I told the other coach, 'You will never in your entire life beat me again,'" Lewis said. "That same year, we finished sixth in the state, and he didn't even make it."

Lewis stayed there for 17 years and led the track team to win five state championships. Part of what made Lewis a good coach was that he cared about the athletes and let them know he did.

At the end of each practice, he'd give runners a "power tab" (just a fun name for a piece of candy) and he encouraged them to work hard, telling the team that even if they didn't win, no one else was

outworking them.

"If you want to be successful in life, you'll find a way," Lewis said. "And if you don't, you'll find an excuse."

Lewis found a way. At one point, he was coaching two of the fastest athletes in the country, and Tone Grant, the president of the booster club at the time, wanted to sponsor them to travel and compete around the country. Eventually, that number grew from two to 20, and the Music City Junior Olympic track program was formed.

"We started out in my black Volkswagen and went to a van then to a bus then finally to airlines," Lewis said. "We stayed in the finest hotels."

Lewis led the group into winning 14 national events. He said many of the kids he worked with went off to college on a full-ride athletic scholarship.

His coaching success was recognized with an induction into the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Sports Hall of Fame.

"It wasn't the goal in 1965 when I started coaching," Lewis said. "You didn't even think about being in the hall of fame."

With seven state championship titles under his belt, Lewis decided it was time to retire.

"I had won seven state championships, and I thought, 'What does one more mean? I'll let this one be someone else's.' It's time to move on sometimes," he said.

Lewis moved on to The Villages, where he enjoys golfing, biking and spending time with his wife and friends.

"They all have their own stories just like mine," he said. "This place here is phenomenal."



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