

Local resident to try his hand at World Series of Poker

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Did you ever know someone who was really talented? Not just among the other talents around in the neighborhood or the county. The person who had the talent to become a famous athlete or a lead singer in a world famous rock band or a star of the silver screen? The one person who was so good they could have easily made their passion into a career if they only had the nerve to be willing to take a gamble and bet on themselves?

Thomas Cannuli, a 23-year-old local resident, may very well be such a person. For the past few years, Cannuli has been a professional poker player and is about to be the youngest player to be featured at the World Series of Poker next month in Las Vegas.

"I got started when I was 15 years old," Cannuli said. "My dad had a good friend whose nickname was Mojo. He was the first person to show me poker. I had never seen the game before. I thought, 'Wow, this is cool. You can bluff somebody off and win the pot with the worst hand.' And when I got really into it, I realized this is what I love. I actually found a passion in it."

Cannuli's passion for the game came well after he played his first hand. After graduating

from Lower Cape May Regional High School, he didn't go to college. Instead, Cannuli said he knew he just wanted to be a poker player.

"I didn't learn poker through books. I learned poker through experience. I put a lot of work into the game," Cannuli said. "I took \$400 and turned it into \$200,000. I made more money that year than both of my parents. This was when I realized there was a ton of money in poker. In June 2013, I turned 21 and went straight to Las Vegas for the series event happening there. I didn't get to play in Atlantic City first. It wasn't until August of 2013 I started playing in A.C., and that is primarily my place to play."

Yet Cannuli was still a new player in life as well as the sport. To win a large amount of money at a young age was good and bad for him.

"You don't know how to value it," Cannuli said. "I didn't really know how to value money at all, but at the same time I knew how to make it. So I would constantly go up big numbers or go down big numbers."

However, through all the ups and downs, which come when risks are taken, Cannuli's parents supported him from Day One.



CANNULI

knew they were just looking out for me. They didn't want me to struggle at all," he said.

So Cannuli kept playing and learning his sport.

"It's different than, let's say, Michael Jordan on the basketball court," Cannuli explained. "Jordan could go out and consistently dominate every game. In poker, you can dominate but you are going to need the right bankroll. You have to have enough money to support the losses. I might not necessarily win every day, but I'm still winning over all. It's a longterm game and it has a lot to do with bankroll management. If you don't have enough money to come back the next day, then your longterm strategy doesn't work. I play with my heart, 100 percent."

"There are a lot of math guys that are doing stats and stuff like that. I'm just looking into someone's eyes and I'm deter-

mining if they are lying to me or not with their cards. I'm able to understand that from repetition, from playing the game. Poker has helped me in life, too. I can tell when someone is not being genuine and honest to me, but it has also helped me to understand people's emotions a little bit better."

And his "understanding" of the game started getting Cannuli recognition from some other players. He also got noticed by the people from 888 Poker, an online poker site that is Cannuli's sponsor.

"They approached me," he said. "They saw me at events when I was playing and they liked what they saw. I recommend their site to everyone who is starting out or who plays regularly."

The teaming of Cannuli and 888 Poker has been a lucrative one, peaking now with Cannuli's playing in the World Series of Poker's main event next month.

"It's the biggest tournament anyone who likes poker would want to be in," he said. "I plan on winning the main event. If I don't, things won't change that much for me. I like what I do. I enjoy the time I spend while I'm doing it. More importantly, I'm a young person who never quit on my dream. I'm just an example of fighting for what I wanted. For me, I constantly want the higher mountain to

climb. I constantly want something new to accomplish."

"Poker is just an example. I think this is motivation for anybody, any young kid, to see I'm just like everyone else. I lived in a household with my mom and my sister. I had a dream and I went for it. I feel everyone can do it. In life, in general, as long as you don't

quit at what you want and keep fighting for your dream, you are going to succeed eventually. The only thing that stops you is quitting. It's just what's inside of me. That's why I'm here."

So, for those of you who know a talented person afraid to take a gamble, remember Cannuli and tell them to go all in.

Laptops

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New Jersey science ASK Test results for eighth-graders at the Richard M. Teitelman School that scored either proficient or advanced proficient increased from 65 percent last year to 71.4 percent this year, he said.

Special education scores on the test increased from a 35 percent passing rate last year to 39 percent this year, Castellucci said. For economically disadvantaged students, the passing rate increased from 55 percent last year to 62.5 percent this year, he said.

Castellucci said high school biology scores took a dip to 53.1 percent from 60 percent the previous year. Special education students' scores on the biology test fell from a passing rate of 32 percent last year to 24.3 percent for the 2014-15 school year.

Scores for economically disadvantaged students dropped from 55 percent last year to 50 percent this year, he said.

"However, if you look how we compare to the state, you'll see that we compare very favorably," Castellucci said.

He said similar schools in the same district factor group scored only 38.5 percent. He said passing scores on the biology test for special education students were much better than the 10.5 percent passing rate for similar schools.

In end-of-program industry-standard tests, nine students took the administrative assisting test with none passing. In Culinary Arts Level I/Prep Cook, seven students took the test with all scoring passing grades. In engineering, 62 students took the end of program test with 33 receiving passing scores.

Test results for Advanced Placement (AP) showed eight taking the biology test with six passing with a score of three or better. Eight students took the AP Calculus test with seven passing. For English Literature, all 22 students passed the test. For AP History, 25 students took the test with 11 passing. In the AP Government test, 16 took the test with one student passing. In AP English Language, 38 students took the test with 26 passing the test.

Superintendent Christopher Kobik said School Choice funding was capped at the state level. He said the district inherits School Choice students from elementary school districts in Cape May, Lower Township and West Cape May.

"Those students have rights to choice seats in our school district," he said.

While there is a 2 percent cap on increasing seats for choice students, the inheritance factor has allowed the school district to increase the number of choice students attending. When the program started in the 2013-14 school year, the district had 14 choice students. This year, the district has 49 students with 64 projected for next year, Kobik said. He said the school receives about \$750,000 in School Choice Aid.

The state expectation for high school graduation rates is 80 percent, Kobik said. Lower Cape May Regional High School had an 80.2 percent graduation rate for 2015. He said the district had a 78.8 percent graduation rate in 2014, down from an 88.5 percent graduation rate in 2013.

"One of the things we're seeing is that classes, to some extent, like people, have their

personalities and dynamics," Kobik said. "In fact, you can see by looking at the data that different class years do in fact perform differently on this measure."

Castellucci said the district has expanded its use of Facebook and is now using Twitter, which can be viewed from the school district's website at lcmr.schooldistrict.com.

"We had an initiative this summer to use teacher webpages," he said. "We had 27 teachers take a three-day workshop on a substantial webpage program called 'Dreamweaver,'" he said.

New webpages from teachers are available as links from the school district's webpage, according to Castellucci. Bandwidth for Internet use has been greatly expanded, he said.

Kobik has been busy with the district's energy savings improvement project. Castellucci said students may notice lights come on when someone enters a classroom and turn off if no one is present.

"That's a project that will continue to save the taxpayer money and allow us to replace a lot of lighting, pumps, some AC units, get some insulation work done that we needed to get taken care of and send a message that we can use technology to be a little greener, too," Kobik said.

The school is working on a program with universities such as Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Howard and Brown to launch a program called Matriculate, he said.

Kobik said those colleges are working through a program funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies for high-achieving,

low-income students.

"Those Ivy League schools define low income a lot differently than we do down here," he said. "As of matter of fact, you might even parallel it to our moderate-income families down here."

He said those schools have targeted the district because they want to make sure Lower Cape May Regional students apply for the most rigorous, highest standard colleges.

"I expect great things to come from that program," Kobik said.

The regional school will ask the public to support a bond referendum project that will go to a public vote Jan. 26. A meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 16 in the high school auditorium to provide details of the project. He said the bond contained "no frills," it was about fixing roofs, parking lots and other items that needed attention.

"We'll be renewing some debt service, less than what has retired, so I'm optimistic the public will support us as they always have," Kobik said.

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