

Hooper Maria vs. Hurricane Maria

Maria Blazejewski survives Puerto Rico's devastation

By Aubrey Ann Parker
Current Editor

Earlier this summer, we profiled Maria Blazejewski in Volume VI Issue 5 of *The Betsie Current*. Blazejewski, 26, originally from Beulah and a 2009 graduate of Benzie Central High School, has been playing professional basketball abroad for three and a half seasons—but it is still unclear if she will get her fourth season, after Hurricane Maria's tempestuous troubles in Puerto Rico, where Blazejewski was slated to play this fall.

Blazejewski, an all-state high school basketball player and soccer goalie who went on to be a four-year starter and three-year all-conference basketballer at Lake State Superior University, began playing professional basketball just eight months after graduating college in 2013 with a degree in exercise science. The 6-foot-1-inch forward has played one and a half seasons in the Czech Republic, followed by a season in Germany and a playoff run in Luxembourg. Then last year, she played a condensed season for a Puerto Rican team, the Lajas Lady Cardinals, followed by the second half of the Portuguese season last spring.

After our article ran at the end of July,

Blazejewski accepted a spot on a different Puerto Rican team for the condensed fall season, consisting of three games per week for 12 weeks, compared to the nine-month European seasons. This time, Blazejewski was set to play in Morovis—if that name sounds familiar, it is most likely because you have heard it on the evening news, associated with Puerto Rico's epicenter of destruction from Hurricane Maria, which hit the island as a high-end Category 4 hurricane on September 20.

Maria Blazejewski, meanwhile, had arrived on the island in late August, just over a week before



Maria Blazejewski has played three and a half seasons of professional basketball overseas. Unfortunately, her latest season in Puerto Rico was cut short, due to Hurricane Maria. Photo by Aubrey Ann Parker.

Hurricane Irma hit Puerto Rico and the rest of the Caribbean between the night of September 5 and the early morning hours of September 6. Blazejewski had been practicing for less than a week with her new team when Hurricane Irma hit, but in that case, the damage to Morovis—a municipality of about 35,000 people in the north-central part of the main island of Puerto Rico—was minimal: they lost power for a few days, but the majority of Irma's destruction had hit the northern and eastern sides of Puerto Rico, including Culebra and Vieques, smaller islands off of the main island that have been declared "disaster areas," due to Irma.

Blazejewski says that a few of the team's games were pushed back due to the power outage, but then they had about another week of practice and actually got to play two games before warnings for Hurricane Maria began. This time around, Morovis was in the hurricane's projected path, so Blazejewski drove herself to stay with friends that she had made last year in Lajas, a municipality of about 30,000 people along the southwestern coast

Please see Maria on page 3

Dennis Pace Remembered

Saying goodbye to an old friend

By Staff Reports

Editor's Note: Typically, this publication is not in the habit of printing obituaries, just as we do not have a classifieds section or op-ed contributors, nor do we highlight the outcomes of local elections or athletic events. These are simply not the kind of things that we run, given that there is already a newspaper in town doing just that. Rather, our pages are filled with what we consider to be (mostly) uplifting feature stories about the interesting people, places, and events of Benzie County.

However, we have recently had to ask ourselves what our publication would do in practice when the certainties of life occur: every year, we profile and/or interview dozens of people, adding up to hundreds just in the last four years of publishing. And eventually, it was going to happen—we were going to lose one of the people whom we had interviewed.

Dr. Dennis Eugene Pace is the first that we are aware of.

We profiled Pace back in September 2015, 10 months before his cancer diagnosis. On Friday, October 21, 2017, Pace—father, son, brother, grandfather, friend, guitar-playing member of the band, athlete, soccer coach, and Doctor of Optometry—died in his hometown of Phoenix, Arizona, where he had been spending the past few months with family after his prolonged illness.

Although running obituaries is not common place for *The Betsie Current*, we, the editors, believe that there is value in updating Pace's story for our readers. What follows is the obituary for our beloved friend and community-activist mentor, Dennis Pace, who



Dr. Dennis Pace at the 4-H Benzie Area Youth Soccer fields at Benzonia Memorial Park back in September 2015. Pace Photo by Aubrey Ann Parker.

helped thousands of Benzie kids to play soccer over the course of two decades, who quietly and behind-the-scenes saved the Benzonia ice-skating rink, who found the funds and cut through the red tape of creating Benzie County's first dog park. Sincerity and grace are the first things that come to mind when reflecting on this 6-foot-four gentle giant, who lived a life of selflessness and service, with a deep legacy that this community can be proud of. We love you, and we miss you terribly.

Pace, born in Phoenix, Arizona, on February 17, 1959, is survived by: his parents, Ralph and Naomi Pace; his children,

Dakota Easlick and Isabel Lorton (Adam); his grandchildren Madeline and Andrew Dennis Lorton; and his siblings, Lynn Blake (Peter), and Dean Pace (Barbara). He was a true friend to many in Benzie County, where he lived for the past 30 years. A devoted father, he shepherded his children with love and integrity.

In 1981, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from the University of California Berkeley, and later, a teaching degree from California State University Chico. He, much later, graduated from the Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University and practiced in Beulah

and Traverse City for twenty years. Pace was a member of several missions to Haiti that were devoted to helping those less fortunate with their vision problems.

Prior to optometry, he taught as Principal for Head Start, teaching the children of migrant farmworkers to speak English by having them sing along with him while he played guitar.

Committed to his community, Pace helped to run the youth soccer league in Benzonia and Lake Ann, long after his own kids had departed for college.

He was a Trustee and past President of the Darcy Library of Beulah, and his fundraising contributed to a much needed new building.

Pace stood 6'4", and one of his few regrets was that he did not grow until his late teens. A letterman on his tennis team in high school, he played tennis the rest of his life; however, he loved to play basketball and pursued it with passion well into his forties. At the U.C. Berkeley gym or on the courts of Beulah or Venice Beach, California, he held his own with pro athletes, former high school all-stars, and college players.

An avid hang-glider in his twenties, Pace once flew off the White Mountains of California, overlooking the Eastern Sierra, and caught an updraft to 18,000 feet in a primitive craft, seemingly made of aluminum-lawn-chair tubing and colored Mylar.

Pace had a far-reaching intelligence and continued to learn and do throughout his life. He read science and history avidly and loved a good novel. He knew his way around tools and sailed on Crystal Lake.

Please see Dennis on page 3



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Mondays

Circle Time for infants and toddlers at the Benzie Shores District Library at 630 Main Street in Frankfort. Infants and toddlers (+ their parents/caregivers) will have fun rhyming and moving with Miss Char, as well as a focus on repetition. Each week, children build their repertoire of rhymes, both old and new. There is an informal playgroup following Circle Time. 10-11am.

Yoga class for seniors led at no charge by Michelle Leines at The Gathering Place Senior Center. 10579 Main Street in the Honor Plaza. 231-525-0600. 10-11am.

Pilates with Anna at the Oliver Art Center. annamallien@gmail.com if interested. 10:15am.

A volunteer will be at the Benzie Shores District Library to repair clothing while you wait. No formal wear or upholstery; no drop-offs. 10:30am-12pm.

Cards at The Gathering Place. We have a dedicated group of card sharks who play Pinochle weekly during lunch, but we aren't limited to Pinochle: grab your friends and join us for euchre, cribbage, and rummy, too! 12-1pm.

Tuesdays

Sunrise Rotary Club's weekly meetings are over breakfast at the Cold Creek Inn of Beulah. Come join us! 7:30-9am.

Stretch and tone with Jean at the Oliver Art Center. Email annamallien@gmail.com. 9-10am.

Gentle yoga in the barn at the First Congregational Church of Benzonia. All levels welcome. Donation. 10am.

Technology Tuesday: Benzie Shores District Library in Frankfort offers assistance with technology. Learn how to download ebooks, audiobooks, and magazines to your personal devices. 10am-12pm.

Music by the Melody Makers at The Gathering Place. 10:30am-1:30pm.

Knitting Group at Benzonia Public Library. A "knit-along" project for those who want to work on the same project, or bring your own project if you prefer; we'd love your company! Need help? If you are having troubles with a current project, bring it along and we'll help you get it straightened out. Call Michele at 231-383-5716 with any questions. 1-3pm.

Chair Yoga class for \$5 at The Gathering Place. 3:30-4:30pm.

Yoga with Kari at Pleasant Valley Community Center in Arcadia. Open to all levels; \$13 per session. 231-383-1883. 5:30-7pm.

Yoga flow with Lauren at the Oliver Art Center. Email annamallien@gmail.com. 6pm.

Wednesdays

Stay Fit with Doris at The Gathering Place. 10-11am.

Open art studio at the Oliver Art Center. Participants are strongly encouraged to become members and to contribute a donation of \$2 per visit. 10am-4pm.

Gentle yoga with Lauren at the Oliver Art Center. Email annamallien@gmail.com. 10:15am.

Bingo at The Gathering Place. Cost is \$1 per card or bring a prize. 12:30-1:30pm.

Yoga with Kari at the Oliver Art Center. Open to all levels; \$13 per session. 231-383-1883. 5:30-7pm.

Stormcloud Brewing Company's Trivia Night is here again: the Fall Trivia Tournament began Wednesday, October 25, and continues through Wednesday, December 20, excluding Wednesday, November 22, the night before Thanksgiving. Teams of up to four people compete in an eight-week series for weekly prizes and overall grand prizes. Teams may join at any time and can attend as many games as they choose—you did not need to start on the first date. Begins at 7:30 pm.

Thursdays

Stretch and tone with Jean at Oliver Art Center. annamallien@gmail.com 9-10am.

Adult coloring at Benzie Shores District Library. All materials provided. 10-11am.

Bible Study at The Gathering Place. 10-11am.

Bunco at The Gathering Place. 1-2pm.

Computers with Carol at the Darcy Library at 7238 Commercial Street in Beulah. Ask Carol computer-related questions. Read to Denny, the new puppy! 1-5pm.

Everyone is welcome to attend Open Clay Studio at the Oliver Art Center, including families! Per 4-visit block (12 hours total, used how you like), \$60 fees cover one adult or one adult and child pair. It can be as fun or focused as a student prefers, and all skill levels should consider taking part. Children must be accompanied by an adult at all times in the studio. Price includes: 25 pounds of clay, glaze, and firings. 3:30-6:30pm.

Yoga with Kari at the Ware Farm of Bear Lake. Open to all levels; \$13 per session. 231-383-1883. 4-5:30pm.

Open Mic Night at St. Ambrose Cellars, hosted by Jim & Wanda Curtis, beginning at 6pm. (Also enjoy 35% off howler and growler discounts all day!)

Open Mic Night at The Cabbage Shed in Elberta. 8pm.

Fridays

Yoga flow with Lauren at the Oliver Art Center. Email annamallien@gmail.com. 10:15am.

Bunco at The Gathering Place. 9:30-10:30am.

Wii Bowling at The Gathering Place. 1-2pm.

Saturdays

Body Sculpting on the ball with Deanne at Oliver Art Center. annamallien@gmail.com 10:15.

*Yoga classes at Discover YOU Yoga and Fitness in Frankfort every day of the week, except Saturday. For a complete schedule and more information on classes and rates, visit discoveryogami.com.

ON DECK

Friday, November 10

North Channel Brewing Company's Grand Opening: A new brewpub is opening up in downtown Manistee! Check out their launch party on Friday from 5-11pm, or head there any day thereafter! 86 Washington Street, Manistee.

Friday, November 10

Andy Lynn and John G. perform at St. Amrbose Cellars. Andy Lynn was singing

and playing piano early on, and later began seriously playing guitar, adding percussion, as well. She is known for her lively stage presence and for encouraging audiences to join her dancing during performances. John G. started playing guitar at age 22 and has spent 35 years developing influences from country, jazz, rock, and blues genres. His guitar work is featured on several albums, recorded by prominent Michigan artists. He is known by his cherry red 1963 Fender Stratocaster. 6-9pm.

Friday, November 10

Adrian+Meredith play music at Stormcloud Brewing Company in downtown Frankfort. 8pm.

Saturday, November 11

The public is invited to a memorial reception for Dennis Pace from 2-4pm at Grow Benzie at 5885 Frankfort Highway/M-115, between Benzonia and Frankfort. Those wishing to memorialize Pace are requested to send donations to the Darcy Library of Beulah, PO Box 469, Beulah, MI, 49617.

Saturday, November 11

Alez Mendenall performs at St. Ambrose Cellars. 6-9pm.

Saturday, November 11

Alfredo Improvisational Trio plays at The Cabbage Shed in Elberta. In appreciation of Veteran's Day Weekend, The Shed will be offering a free entree to any acting or retired military personnel. Add to that some quality tunes, and it makes for a fun Saturday night. 8:30-11:30pm.

Sunday, November 12

TC Tango will host a Tango Milonga (Tango open dance party) at Stormcloud Brewing Company. Come heat up the pub with this sultry Argentine dance, which originated in Buenos Aires around the 1880s and was adopted in France and Finland, before becoming popular around the globe. Traverse City-based TC Tango will provide instruction for the first half hour of the event. Traditional Tango music, as well as other partner dance music, will be on tap for any and all who wish to listen, watch, or join on the dance floor. The event is free, fun, and offers a chance to share in this awesome dance style! 4-6pm.

Sunday, November 12

Storm the Mic: Join Stormcloud on select Sundays this fall for an open mic night, hosted by local singer and songwriter Blake Elliott. 6-9pm.

Monday, November 13

"Michigan Love for Puerto Rico" event at Betsie Bay Furniture in downtown Frankfort: send love and donations that will provide essential basic needs to those devastated by Hurricane Maria. All monetary donations from the evening will reach those in need, smack dab in the middle of the island! RSVP by voicemail or text to Anna Mallien (231-383-1885) or Janet Hessler (231-920-1694). 7-9pm.

Tuesday, November 14

Leathercraft workshop with Amalia Fernand, the daughter of a local shoemaker who has been creating leather art since as soon as she was old enough to hold a hammer. For adults and children ages 8 and up. Get creative this holiday season and make your own one-of-a-kind gifts: personalized bracelets, notebooks, earrings, key chains, ankle bracelets, and more. Learn how to use leather tools, and gain skills in tooling, punching, skiving, cutting, stitching, and setting rivets. All leather is from repurposed shoe scraps. Cost is \$15, plus \$5 material fee. St. Ambrose Cellars. 5-6:30pm. Whitmer will host a meet and greet at the Benzonia Township Hall. 11am-2pm.

Maria

Continued from page 1

of Puerto Rico's main island.

"We still had 120-mile-per-hour winds in Lajas, but we only were without electricity. We still had water," Blazejewski says. "The strongest winds were closer to Morovis, which

because most of the leagues have only played a few games so far, Blazejewski explains, they are not yet looking for new players or trades, so it may be awhile longer before she hears anything.

In the meantime, Blazejewski is trying to do what she can back here in Northern Michigan to raise awareness and funds for the two Puerto Rican communities where she has played basketball and made friends over the



you've probably seen on the news—they had flooding and landslides, they still have no running water or electricity."

Blazejewski says that growing up in Northern Michigan gave her bit of a leg up.

"I've been without power before. It's just kind of like you're roughing it," she says. "But being without water would have been something else entirely. As it was, having to hand-wash my clothes [because there was no electricity] was really eye-opening as to how much worse it could have been, how much worse it was elsewhere on the island."

Needless to say, the Puerto Rican basketball season has been canceled. Blazejewski was able to fly back to Michigan on October 8, three weeks after Hurricane Maria. She has been living at home with her parents in Beulah, and her agent is currently looking into other teams, mostly in Europe. However,

past year: Lajas and Morovis.

Just last week, Blazejewski spoke to students at Traverse City East Middle School, where her mother works. The students raised \$504 through a hat day: students paid \$1 to wear hats to school. Additionally, Traverse City West Middle School's Spanish teacher held a fundraiser where an additional \$500 was raised. Blazejewski is currently looking into the possibility to do something similar at her alma mater, Benzie Central, and perhaps at Frankfort High School, as well. Additionally, she has been invited to speak at Betsie Bay Furniture's "Michigan Love for Puerto Rico" event on Monday, November 13, from 7-9 p.m. in downtown Frankfort.

"It's sad to think that 70 percent of the island is still without electricity, and we can't get them more help," Blazejewski says.

Dennis

Continued from page 1

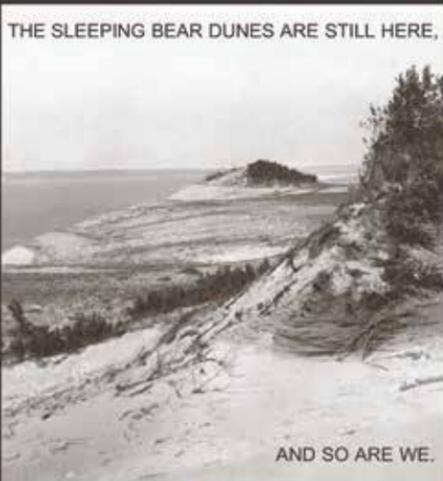
His mother could often be quoted as saying that she had two sons who did not care much about material things. Pace definitely lived simply but fully, following his own muse. He did not own a television, for instance. His idea of a good time was riding his bike, singing, eating a red chile burro, or quaffing the occasional dram of rye. He was self-reliant in the best sense, subsisting on friends, family, curiosity, and endeavor.

We mourn his passing and feel blessed to

celebrate his life.

The public is invited to a memorial reception will be held on Saturday, November 11, from 2-4 p.m. at Grow Benzie at 5885 Frankfort Highway/M-115, between Benzonia and Frankfort. Those wishing to memorialize Pace are requested to send donations to the Darcy Library of Beulah, PO Box 469, Beulah, MI, 49617. To read The Betsie Current's 2015 profile of Pace, go to <http://betsiecurrent.com/index.php/dennis-pace-more-than-meets-the-eye/>

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