



## **AL LEISTER**

**As a young Al Leister stood on the sidelines of Trenton's Hetzel Field in 1968 as the soccer coach of Atlantic Community College against national champs Mercer County Community College, little could he know of the impact that, over the years, he would have on Mercer County soccer in general. As the architect of the legendary MCCC soccer programs, we are honored to induct Al Leister into the Mercer County Soccer Hall of Fame**

**A graduate of Lock Haven University, Al was brought to Mercer in 1970 by legendary basketball coach Howie Landa to help build the Health and Physical Education program and grow the athletics program. Over the years as the Athletic Director, he introduced additional varsity programs for men and women, created Mercer's first sports camp in 1973, bringing in many of the area's premier soccer players as mentors, and grew the prestige of the athletics program in general as a national power in multiple sports.**

**It was in men's soccer that Al truly made a strong statement. Already winning a national title in 1968, the program won an additional two titles during his tenure, producing 39 All-Americans, and 19 appearances in the NJCAA National Tournament. Pushed by the urgings of HOF sportswriter George O'Gorman after a loss in the national finals in 1980 who said "Al, the only way that you will win the national**

**championship is if you host the tournament” did he make a Mercer the epicenter for junior college soccer for years to come.**

**Starting in 1982, through Al’s leadership, Mercer County Community College hosted the NJCAA National Tournament for the next 18 years, bringing some of the finest players to Mercer County, garnering national titles in 1982 and 1988 during his tenure and additional titles in 1991, 1995, and 1996 under HOF coach Charlie Inverso. Following his example, the Viking’s women’s program were the hosts of NJCAA Women’s National Tournament from 1984 to 1993, making appearances in every iteration. His vision saw him bring in and mentor many influential coaches to the college during his time in West Windsor, such as HOF members Inverso, Stan Dlugosz, Bill Drake, and Shelly Dearden.**

**A 1995 inductee of the NJCAA Men’s Soccer Hall of Fame, a 2021 inductee of the Mercer County Community College Athletic Hall of Fame, tonight Al Leister can add another honor as we induct him into the Mercer County Soccer Hall of Fame, Class of 2023.**