C.A.G.E. slo-pitch league honors memory of two who left us much too soon; brings community together
Weekly softball league honors memory of Chris Attieh and George Elias, raises scholarship money and unites community.

(Kieth Groller, THE MORNING CALL / August 12, 2014)

Chris Attieh and George Elias were best of friends. They were both Whitehall High graduates close in age, trying to make their way in the world, and both left us way too soon. Attieh died at the age of 28 from complications from Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) in November of 2010. Elias was just 20 when he died in March of 2004 in a horrific car accident that involved a drunk driver and also took the life of Danny Khalouf, Joseph Nimeh and Joseph Azar. Elias was home on a 21-day furlough from the Army while serving as a military police officer in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The two are gone, but remembered every week by the teams and players in the C.A.G.E. memorial slo-pitch league at Scherersville. There are nine teams and more than 150 players in the league, which lasts 14 Sundays from May through August. Each Sunday full of games takes on the feel of a family reunion.

"This league, in the beginning, was a way to keep my brother's name alive," said Danny Attieh, one of Chris' brothers. "His death was tough for me to accept. But now the purpose has become much larger. We're helping a lot of people through the money we've raised, but we're also helping each other because we get to see each other every week. Without this, we'd see each other only at weddings and funerals."

The league sprouted out of the Chris Attieh Foundation Memorial Tournament that began in 2011. It was held for the fourth time this past June and it has raised a significant amount of money that has gone toward two or three scholarships per school year to Whitehall High students who have excelled in humanitarian endeavors. Also, some of the money raised goes to orphanages in Syria to help kids whose lives have been put in jeopardy by that country's civil war. Other contributions go to the Lehigh Valley Hospital Network's Children's Clinic and the ARDS Foundation.

"It began with the tournament and it attracted 12 teams that was mostly friends and families. ... guys who usually never played softball," said Joe Attieh, another of Chris' brothers and the league president. "Everyone loved playing it and there was a lot of positives. "After the tournament, we met on my back patio and decided we should keep playing. So, we came up with the idea of the C.A.G.E. league to salute both Chris and George. We decided to branch out and ran a dodge ball tournament to honor Shaunice Jarjous, who was just 17 and a senior at Northwestern Lehigh High School when she died in a car accident in September of 2009."

Attieh said the majority of the league features families from the area's Syrian community. It's a tight-knit community that pulls together in good times and bad. "I came up with a statistic for our league that I don't think any other slo-pitch
softball league can match and that's that our league features 23 pairs of brothers, three sets of three or more brothers and three father-son combos," Joe Attieh said. "This is not a typical beer league. This is about family and friends. As big as the Syrian community is, we all know each other and this brings us together."
Joe Attieh is sure that Chris Attieh would have loved this league.
"We grew up playing baseball with Fullerton A.A. and George Elias was on the team with us," Joe said. "He would have liked this."
The league and the Chris Attieh foundations both have their own websites — [http://www.cageleague.com](http://www.cageleague.com) and [http://www.chrisattieh.com](http://www.chrisattieh.com)
Joe Attieh said the foundation and the league are always coming up with new ideas and goals.
One idea is to develop their own park and/or community center.
"A lot of people talk about it and it has been done before," Joe Attieh said. "Who's to say we can do it? Our goal this year is to get to Step 1 and get everything written down and organized. We need to find land and then ways to fund it."
Gus Elias, George's brother, said that while the competition can get intense, it's all about having a good time.
"Everyone knows each other somehow," Elias said. "I grew up with all these guys and I looked up to many of them. It's just great that we can get together once a week in this setting and do something good for the community, too."