

Turning Fortnite into

Commack man earned \$404G as a pro gamer

BY LAURA AMATO
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Like many of his friends, Commack's Tim Miller, 20, still lives at home, plays video games and listens to Billy Joel. One big difference, though, is the \$404,275 he earned since June playing those video games in professional esports events.

He has gone from a college student to one of the most popular figures in esports, with almost 38,000 followers on Twitter and 43,000 on Twitch, a streaming platform.

Since turning pro just more than six months ago, Miller — playing under the name of "Bizze" — has convinced his family that he's the real deal. He has an agent, a team, even his own personalized merchandise and, most importantly, a professional-sized paycheck of more than \$400,000 last year according to ESportsEarnings.com.

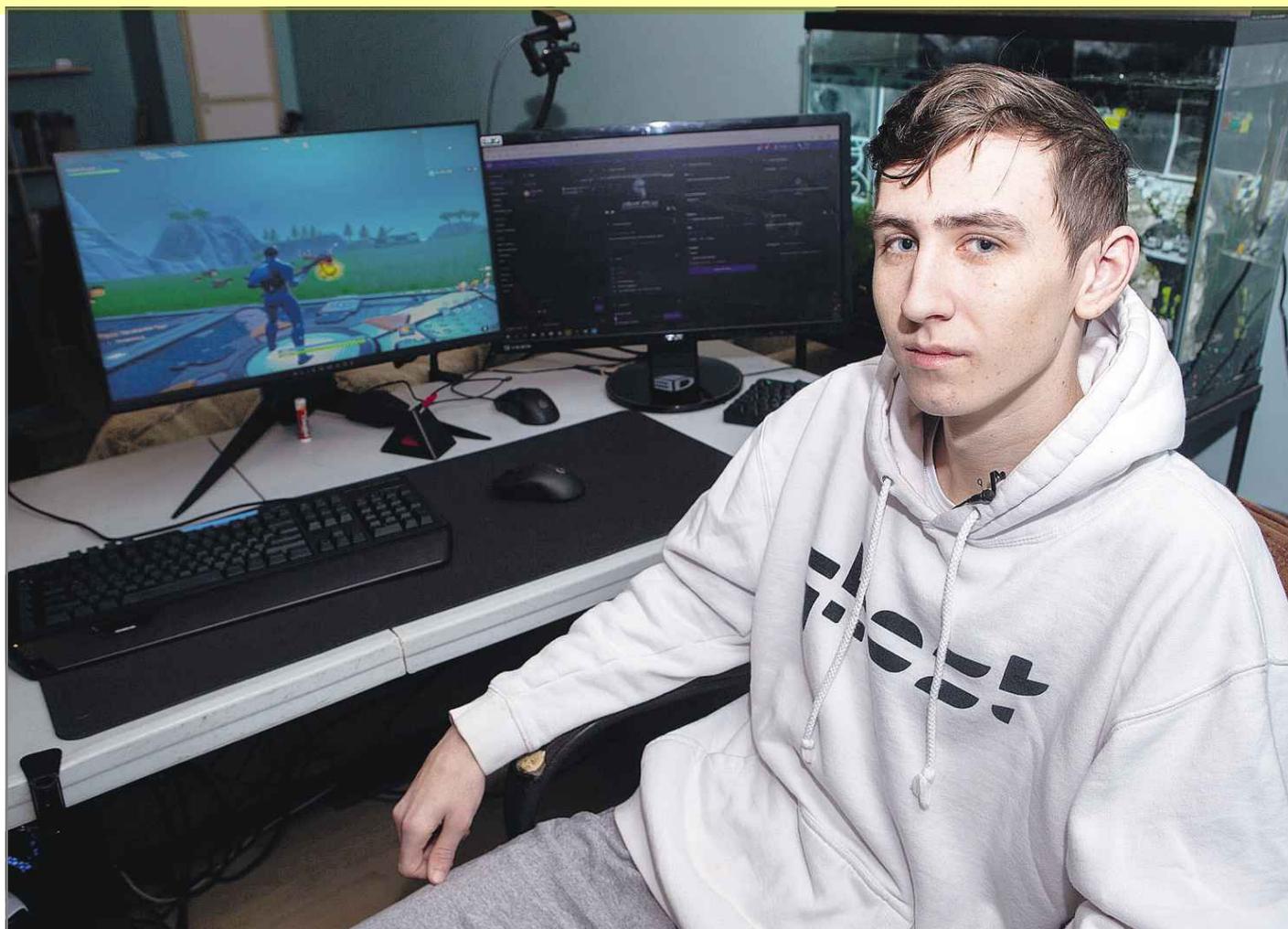
One more thing, he's already paid off his student loan from Penn State.

Miller's game is Fortnite, a battle royale involving up to 100 players with the last player standing declared the winner. Fortnite had more than 200 million registered users as of December 2018, according to Business Insider.

It's been a whirlwind experience he didn't expect, he said, but one he hopes continues. After all, what 20-year-old wouldn't want to spend his day playing video games?

"It's been crazy," Miller said. "In high school, I started playing games more and more. It's sort of like an addiction, but when you get good at it, it's something you enjoy doing all the time."

Miller had some earlier success playing Counter-Strike a first-person shooter game, while he was in college before turning to Fortnite and capturing the attention of Ghost Gaming, a California-based company that fields professional video game teams.



Tim Miller, a professional video game player, plays Fortnite on 3 screens for about 40 hours a week to hone his skills.

Ghost offered Miller a spot on its Fortnite squad last year, with the chance to compete at the Summer Skirmishes, an eight-week series with a total prize pool of \$8 million. He accepted and, in late August, placed second in the event's final competition, winning \$205,000, according to Fortnite's official website.

And, suddenly, everything changed. "After that, it started blowing up and I was like,

"Wow, you can make seriously good money from video games," said Miller, who won an additional \$199,275 in 12 other Fortnite events throughout 2018, according to ESportsEarnings.com.

At the time of the Summer Skirmishes, Miller was



A character from the game Fortnite.

doing his best to figure out what his next step would be, both in video games and his life in general. He graduated from Commack High School in 2016, and went to Penn State, thinking he might want to be an accountant.

Instead, he transferred to SCCC and took classes focusing on cyber security while working part-time at a golf course. But after winning six figures, Miller started to wonder if playing video games full-time wasn't the best option.

But he knew it wouldn't be easy to convince his mother that dropping out of school to play video games was a good idea.

"We made him register for school this past fall," said Debra Miller, who works at Commack Middle School. "As a mom, I was like, 'You have to

get that degree.'"

It quickly became apparent that the demands of a professional video-game career were bigger than any of them realized and Miller started playing full-time, stepping away from school.

Debra Miller said that though she originally thought Tim would be able to keep going to school while he was still playing Fortnite, it turned out the pro schedule was too much and he'd have to dedicate his time there.

Her daughter, Stephanie, 18, a freshman at Ohio State, who cuts the highlight videos her brother posts on social media, helped convince her that leaving school was the right choice.

"My daughter was a big part of getting me on board. She would tell me, 'You don't real-

a paycheck



Fortnite is a battle royale involving up to 100 players, with the last player standing declared winner.

ize how good he is.’”

Eventually, Debra said, she agreed with Tim’s decision to put school on hold.

“I said, well, a lot of kids take a gap year to figure things out and travel. Why not support him? If he can build a nest egg and set himself up for the rest of his life, how can I hold him back?” she said. “After that we were all on board and I think he was really surprised how quickly we changed.”

Miller said he plays Fortnite about 40 hours a week on a three-screen setup in the basement of his parents’ house and has fine-tuned his hand-eye coordination.

He also travels to events in places such as Seattle and San Jose, and broadcasts his play to his fans on Twitch. Although he’s quick to point out that he loves playing, Miller also acknowledged that going pro was far from simple.

“There’s always assumptions because some people don’t know or fully understand the whole scene,” said Miller, who added that success in pro gaming can be as hard, if not harder, than traditional sports.

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— Tim Miller, professional video game player

“You’re not playing a region or local teams, it’s the whole country,” Miller said. “Everyone is playing Fortnite, so everyone wants to be a good player, but it’s only the top .01 percent that make it worth their while.”

Despite their early misgivings, Miller’s family members have become big fans.

His sister Stephanie’s videos have helped grow his social media presence and draw more viewers to Twitch when he streams.

When Miller competes, his family packs the living room and turns on the video screen.

“[My dad is] 77 years old and he’s on Twitch,” Debra

said. “He says, ‘I subscribed to Timmy!’ ‘It’s unbelievable.’”

Miller isn’t sure how long his playing career will last. He has seen popular video games such as Fortnite come and go, but he said he’s already considered his post-Fortnite options, including coaching opportunities. He and other Ghost gamers spent time working with the University of Nevada-Las Vegas esports team in 2018.

Right now, he’s enjoying the moment.

“I like playing the game,” Miller said. “And I want to keep playing and try to make as much as I can. I’m trying to take advantage of everything.”

Blood drive in officer’s memory

BY DAVID OLSON

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Suffolk County Police Officer Glen Ciano was killed by a drunken driver 10 years ago this month. Now, hundreds each February give blood in his honor at the Commack Fire Department headquarters.

“February is a little overwhelming for me. It’s difficult because I lost him on the 22nd,” his widow, Sue Ciano, said Saturday at the ninth annual Glen Ciano Blood Drive. “But to come here for this is a great thing.”

Ciano was headed to assist another officer at a traffic stop in Commack on Feb. 22, 2009, when a car driven by a drunken driver struck his cruiser. He was 45.

His brother, Jim Ciano, 58, of Ronkonkoma, said that with the blood drive, “his name lives on, saving lives.”

“Blood is a gift of life,” he said.

Sue Ciano, 56, of Farmingville, noted how the blood drive “helps so many people.”

“That is what his job as a police officer was — to help others,” she said.

The six-hour event yielded 234 pints of blood for the New York Blood Center — 12 more than last year. It comes amid what the center is calling a “blood emergency.” Cold weather, the flu, snow upstate, and forecasts of snow downstate that led to school closures have contributed to the shortage, said Andrea Cefarelli, senior executive director for donor recruitment and marketing at the blood center. Schools are often the sites of blood drives.

“When you start to have lower turnout, you get into a problem really quickly, because blood is perishable,” Cefarelli said.



Officer Glen Ciano

The blood center, which serves Long Island and other parts of both New York and New Jersey, has about 7,000 pints of blood, 2,000 to 3,000 pints short of the needed supply, she said.

When the blood drive began at 8 a.m., about a dozen officers Ciano worked with in the Second Precinct were waiting to donate, said Suffolk Officer Fred Leyboldt. They had just come off the night shift, on which they worked with Ciano, he said.

Leyboldt, 52, of Sayville, said Ciano was a skilled officer who knew how to defuse tense situations. “He knew how to make people comfortable and calm them down,” he said.

He was friends with many Commack firefighters, said fire department Assistant Chief John Barry, 49, of Commack. Ciano sometimes came to the firehouse during his time off to play cards, watch sports and eat, he said.

Ciano changed into his police uniform at the firehouse. A photo of him leaning against his police car, and a sticker memorializing him, adorn the metal locker he used. It hasn’t been used since his death.

“He’s watching,” Weisberg said.



Suffolk County Police Chief Stuart Cameron gives blood at the ninth annual Glen Ciano Blood Drive at the Commack firehouse.