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As always, Elgin Sports Hall of Fame banquet another successful gala

By: John Radtke

The Elgin Sports Hall of Fame Foundation held its 39th annual banquet and induction ceremony Sunday night at The Centre of Elgin, and as is the case every year the organization's signature event was another smashing success.

The ESHOF has three missions -- to induct Elgin's outstanding athletes, coaches/administrators, and friends of sports into the Elgin Sports Hall of Fame; to award scholarships to student-athletes who live in or attend high school in Elgin, and Elgin Community College; and to present outstanding achievement awards and recognition to individuals and teams that have contributed to the success of Elgin's sports history during the current year or through a lifetime of contribution.

On Sunday, five new inductees were introduced to the sold out crowd of over 300 -- George Clark (Elgin High, basketball), Rodney Clifton (Elgin High, baseball/all-around athlete), Richard Hersey (Elgin High, football), Joel Moore (Larkin, baseball), and Kiley Holtz Ross (Larkin, basketball and softball).

Those inductions brought the total number of inductees in the ESHOF to over 185 since the organization was founded in 1980.

Where the ESHOF has made its greatest strides over the years is in the awarding of scholarships. At the inception of the scholarship program in 1981, one \$500 scholarship was awarded. On Sunday, 30 scholarships of \$1,500 each were awarded to student-athletes from Elgin, Larkin, St. Edward, Elgin Academy, Harvest Christian, Westminster Christian, Burlington Central, South Elgin and ECC.

That \$45,000 brings the total scholarship money awarded by the foundation to over \$500,000 since 1981 -- an amazing accomplishment.

It's also an accomplishment that couldn't have happened in the magnitude it has without the brainstorm of Dick Fitchie, who in 2005 proposed the ESHOF hold a golf outing to help build up the scholarship fund. Over the years, the wildly successful outing that is held in early September, has helped add over \$150,000 to the scholarship fund.

Fitchie passed away last year but on Sunday he was honored with the organization's Vic Masi Service Award, a presentation that was well deserved for someone who worked tirelessly for the ESHOF.

Over 50 student-athletes, coaches and teams were recognized for their outstanding achievements of the past year, as well as two teams from the past receiving a Team Recognition Award, a fairly new award the ESHOF added a few years ago.

Those teams recognized Sunday were the 1956-57 Elgin High boys basketball team and the 1987-88 St. Edward girls basketball team.

The 1956-57 Elgin High basketball team was the first team in school history to go undefeated (21-0) for the regular season. The Maroons advanced to the Elite Eight that season under legendary coach Bill Chesbrough, losing 66-60 in the quarterfinals to eventual champion Herrin, finishing the season 27-1. In attendance Sunday from that team were Chuck Brandt, Dick Becker, Gary Kane, Jack Pflederer and Ted Tammearu.

The 1987-88 St. Edward girls basketball team finished second in the Class A state tournament, concluding its season with a 29-5 record. Attending Sunday's event from that squad were Maureen Mueller Kremer, Ingrid Crane Freeland, Julie Janek Hardesty, Kerry Waller Hicks, Jackie Robinson Kielytk, Stacey Karom and assistant coach Pete Sauter.

I try each year to find the most touching moment of the event and on Sunday it was early on when ESHOF president Ron Lange introduced Bob Thoren, who at 94 is the oldest living ESHOF inductee.

Thoren may be the best golfer to ever live in Elgin. His golf accomplishments are memorable and they include beating Arnold Palmer in a match in the 1950s.

When Thoren was inducted in 1988, the ESHOF did not yet award inductees medals so on Sunday, Lange presented Thoren with a medal and it was a touching scene to see Bob walk up and accept his.

Kudos go to the organization's banquet committee for another outstanding event. As Lange pointed out early on in the program, board members had to do some major stepping up this year after the passing of longtime banquet chairman Dave Covey. And above all, kudos go to Jim Harrington and Gus Vaughan for taking the lead.

More information on the ESHOF can be found on the organization's website at eshof.org.