

8/12 rox athletes

By Bob Pastin
Trib Total Media

The First Athletes of Action Memorial Scholarship Luncheon, held at St. Malachy's Church social hall in Kennedy Township came to pass with the passing of people Bob Zitelli knew.

"I was thinking about how I had been to a lot of funerals in the last year — too many funerals, including those of ex-teammates, classmates and coaches," he said.

"At the wake for George Palahunik (Sto-Rox's first football coach in 1966), who died in January, someone mentioned how it would be nice to see old friends in places other than a funeral."

That gave Zitelli the idea to organize a reception that would bring together current and former athletes and coaches from McKees Rocks, Stowe, Montour and Bishop Canevin to remember deceased athletes and coaches, promote Christian values, foster networking and fund scholarships for deserving student-athletes at those schools.

A teacher at Montour and a former football coach, Zitelli believed there was a void on the Sto-Rox sports scene after the Uansa-Muha committee disbanded and stopped the annual football awards banquet, Mass and breakfast reception named for legendary local athletes Toby Uansa (McKees Rocks), an All-American at Pitt in 1929, and George Muha (Stowe), a sensation at Carnegie Tech when it was a national powerhouse.

Zitelli was a lineman on the first Sto-Rox team (WPIAL Class AA champions) and was president of the first graduating class in 1967, and played for WVU's 1969 Peach Bowl Champions.

He became accustomed to planning class reunions every five years, so this latest logistical proposition was right up his alley.

Expectedly, about 150 invited guests showed up.

"Everyone had a good time. It brought a number of people together who hadn't seen each other in years," Zitelli said. "We want it to be bigger and better next year. We've asked each attendee this year to bring a friend next year. To spread the word and pass the legacy on to the next generation."

A special guest was Pat Tarquinio, who grew up in the Norwood section of Stowe Township. He played quarterback at Stowe and then at Juniata, where he earned small-college All-America honors before embarking on a 55-year coaching career that took him to Elwood City, Beaver and Hopewell, where he presently is an assistant.

"Rox people are the greatest people in the world," Tarquinio said. "My foundation was formed here. I have been a football coach all of my adult life, and I owe a lot to (former Stowe coach) Bernie (Fuzzy) Andrews, who taught me how to respect people and players, that players will respond to you if you treat them respectfully."

The area has long been a hotbed of outstanding athletes, including quarterbacks Adam DiMichele, Chuck Fusina, Bob Medwid. Chuck Burkhart, Dave Havern, John Hufnagel, Tommy Clements and Paul Jones.

Zitelli's sons and Montour grads, Emmett and Nick, distinguished themselves in football. Emmett was an All Big Ten offensive lineman at Purdue. He played two years

with the Chicago Bears, one year for the New York Giants, a year with the Ravens and two years in NFL Europe with the Scottish Claymores.

Nick was an outstanding linebacker at Carnegie Mellon. He was voted by the American Football Coach's Association as a Division III All American, a two year University Athletic Association All Conference Linebacker, and MVP in the 1999 Aztec Bowl played in Merida, Mexico.