

MCSHOF Banquet Notes

Members of the class of 2005 are John Allen, John L. Beard, Harold "Pistol" Bentley, Jimmy Keller, Tom Maddux, Thomas Rains, Gerald Thomas and Bill Yancy.

Beard and Bentley are deceased. Accepting in their memories were Beard's son, Johnny, and Bentley's widow, Nita Ann.

Each inductee received a video tribute before being presented with a plaque.

Family was a common thread of Saturday night's banquet, with inductees saluting parents, siblings, spouses, children, in-laws and grandchildren during their acceptance speeches.

"I want to thank my mom and dad for all the values they instilled in me," John Allen said. "It's not hard to instill values when you've got a pick sack on your back and you're down on your knees picking cotton.

"My mother is with us tonight. She's 88 (years old), and I hope you all have a mother like mine. Mother, I love you very much, and I hope you stay with us a long time."

A three-sport star at Albertville High School, Allen played baseball at Jacksonville State before making his mark in coaching and administration. He spent the majority of his career at Douglas, and currently serves on the Marshall County Board of Education.

Allen had a relationship with 21 of the first 47 members inducted into the MCSHOF.

"I feel very humbled and very appreciative just to be considered for this honor," Allen said. "I consider it as one of the greatest things that's ever happened in my life."

Johnny Beard said his father was a member of what former NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw calls "The Greatest Generation," the men who served their country during World War II.

John L. Beard starred in football and basketball at Marshall County High School and Tennessee-Chattanooga before serving first as tax collector and later as probate judge of Marshall County. He served 24 years in public office, and never lost an election.

"I wasn't able to see him excel in athletics, but I was able to see him excel as a husband, father and public servant," Johnny Beard said.

"My father is the first one inducted into my hall of fame, and the walls of my mind are covered with his memories. Thank you for adding to those memories."

Bill Yancy is the first member of the media inducted into the hall of fame. An Albertville alumnus, he gained fame as the "Voice of the Wildcats," doing radio play-by-play for Guntersville football and basketball.

Yancy, who began calling Wildcat football in 1965, has never missed a contest. His amazing streak stands at 420 consecutive games.

"Thanks to seven superintendents, 10 principals and 10 coaches for putting up with me for the last 40 years," Yancy said.

Men involved in Yancy's radio legacy include Greg Bell, Ricky Smith and Archie Anderson. He recruited them to file reports on the Wildcats' scoreboard show.

"Greg Bell is the voice of the Scottsboro Wildcats, and he now owns his own radio station," Yancy said.

"Ricky is the color commentator for Boaz football, and Archie has done PA (public address) for Arabian Knight football forever," Yancy said.

As Yancy reflected on his career, he recalled several historic moments for Guntersville and Marshall County athletics, including when Johnny "Butch" Looney became the first black star athlete in football and basketball at GHS.

Then a sophomore, Jimmy Keller started on the 1965 DAR State championship basketball team. He twice

received the James Henry Lane Award as the Patriots' top all-around athlete.

Jimmy Keller played at Northeast State in Rainsville, setting a school record for field-goal percentage.

He came to Claysville Junior High School in 1974, with his tenure as teacher and principal at the school extending 22 years until his retirement in 1996.

"I'm truly honored tonight to accept this award," Keller said. "I want to thank the (MCSHOF) board (of directors) for making this not only a dream, but a reality."

Keller said individuals receive honors, but that it wouldn't be possible without the help of coaches and teammates. He paid special thanks to his DAR coach, John Kitchens, a member of the MCSHOF's charter class in 2002.

An All-County and All-State performer for the Albertville football team, Tom Maddux played on the 9-1 squad in 1954, one of the best in Aggie history.

Maddux went on to become a gridiron star at Jacksonville State for coach Don Salls. A two-way starter, Maddux won the Gamecocks' MVP award in 1960. Following the 1961 season, he was named All-Birmingham News and Most Valuable Conference Lineman.

Maddux served as the city of Albertville's first full-time recreation director before becoming a manager in the poultry industry.

"I appreciate Coach Salls giving me the opportunity to play," Maddux said. "It was a very rewarding experience."

Maddux congratulated all of the inductees and paid thanks to the board of directors. He gave special thanks to board member Pat Courington Jr., who submitted him for nomination.

"I am very humbled by this experience," Maddux said.

Thomas "Big Tom" Rains starred on the winningest Albertville basketball team ever, the 1959-60 squad that finished 30-6 and captured third place in the State Tournament. Rains is the only Aggie to ever make the All-State Tournament team.

Rains signed with Auburn, but never attended because married players couldn't play for the Tigers in 1960. Instead, he chose to attend North Alabama, where he starred for four years and earned All-Alabama Collegiate Conference honors for two years.

After college, Rains coached two years at Douglas, guiding his first team to a 22-8 record and a berth in the State Tournament. He coached Class 2A MVP Wayne Wigley, a member of the MCSHOF's charter class.

"I want to dedicate tonight in memory of my parents, who taught me academics first and sports second," Rains said.

At Albertville, Rains played for Shannon Sloan, another member of the MCSHOF's charter class.

"Coach Sloan became my mentor in playing the post position," said Rains, who recalled how Sloan's early teams helped make basketball important to the citizens of Albertville.

"We started being successful during my sophomore year, and the city rallied around us," Rains said. "My senior year, the whole town closed up when we went to State."

Gerald Thomas lettered in football, basketball, baseball and track for Boaz. He signed a football scholarship with Tennessee Tech, playing defensive back and wide receiver.

He also boxed Golden Gloves while in Tennessee, becoming a Southern Golden Gloves semifinalist in 1970.

Thomas coached at Muscle Shoals, Douglas and Boaz. He guided two Lady Pirate basketball teams to the State Tournament. In 12 years, his BHS girls teams won 207 games.

Thomas is a level three baseball umpire and level two softball umpire for the Alabama High School Athletic Association.

"I'm very appreciative of the players, both male and female, who have played for me over the past 30 years," Thomas said. "Being surrounded by good people is important to being successful.

"I'm very humbled to have my name appear alongside the others in the hall of fame."

Some of the people who have impacted Thomas' career include Billy Hudson (a member of the MCSHOF's class of 2004), C.K. Gant, Jimmy Geiger and John Beck.

"I am astounded at the amount of work that goes into this banquet,"

Thomas said in praising the MCSHOF's board of directors. "A double thank you goes to Bill Yancy." Yancy and Clay Gresham of Pro-Video Enterprises in Anniston produced the video tributes for the banquet. Kerry Jackson of WTWX-FM in Guntersville did the narration for Yancy's video.

An emotional Nita Joe Bentley accepted on behalf of her husband, who died in August of 2003.

Harold "Pistol" Bentley's first number was 55. He wore it through high school in Arab, and he also wore it while playing college football at Jacksonville State. In 1975, his racking horse, "Bentley's Ace," won the World's Grand Championship with the number 55.

With the blessing of Bentley's family, the board inducted him last, making him the 55th person enshrined in the MCSHOF.

"My husband would be so happy," Mrs. Bentley said. "Y'all would laugh all night if I could tell some of the stories he could tell."

Bentley started playing varsity football as an eighth-grader for coach Bemon Lyon, a member of the MCSHOF's charter class.

Mrs. Bentley shared how her late husband received the final pair of football shoes, which were size 13.

"Coach Lyon asked him, 'Harold, do you think you can fill these shoes?'

He put cotton in them and he filled them," she said.

The MCSHOF plaques are housed in the Norton Museum on the Snead State Community College campus in Boaz.

Copies of the induction banquet video are available by calling Gresham at (256) 238-0201. DVDs are \$25 each and VHS tapes are \$20 each.