

Sports Hall of Fame honorees revealed to Rotarians

Rotary Club of Dayton took a trip through decades of Bronco history as guest speaker Larry Wadzeck and President of the Sports Hall of Fame presented the history of the museum, introduced its 2026 class of inductees, and shared details about efforts to preserve Dayton's athletic heritage for future generations. Rotarian Michelle Hampton arranged the program. Wadzeck was accompanied by Suzanne Hicks, who is the secretary and Board Member of the Hall of Fame.

The Dayton Sports Hall of Fame Museum is housed at Nottingham, the former Dayton High School and later junior high campus, through the support of Dayton Independent School District. The museum occupies rooms near the south wing leading toward the football field and is open during the Varsity Dayton home football games. Visits can also be arranged at other times. Wadzeck described the museum as a continuing "work in progress," but one the organization is proud to share with the community.

This year's Hall of Fame class includes a championship-caliber team, longtime Bronco supporters and nine individual athletes whose accomplishments span

generations of Dayton athletics. "Today, I will only give a teaser of the induction program. So, I hope everyone will come out and learn more about these outstanding Broncos," stated Larry Wadzeck.

The 1998 Dayton Lady Broncos basketball team will be inducted after a memorable season in which the team won district, bi-district and area championships and advanced deep into the playoffs. Several members continued their athletic careers at the collegiate level, including Stacey Robinson, who went on to play basketball at UCLA. This team was coached by Suzanne Bagwell Davis.

Longtime Bronco supporters and DHS graduates Jim and Peggy Smesny will also be honored as the outstanding fans. Wadzeck described the couple as supporters whose commitment extends far beyond Friday night football. Through the years, they have supported football, basketball, baseball, softball, track and other Dayton programs at home and on the road. Their service to Dayton ISD also includes Jim's years on the school board and Peggy's career as an educator.

The nine individual athlete inductees represent sev-

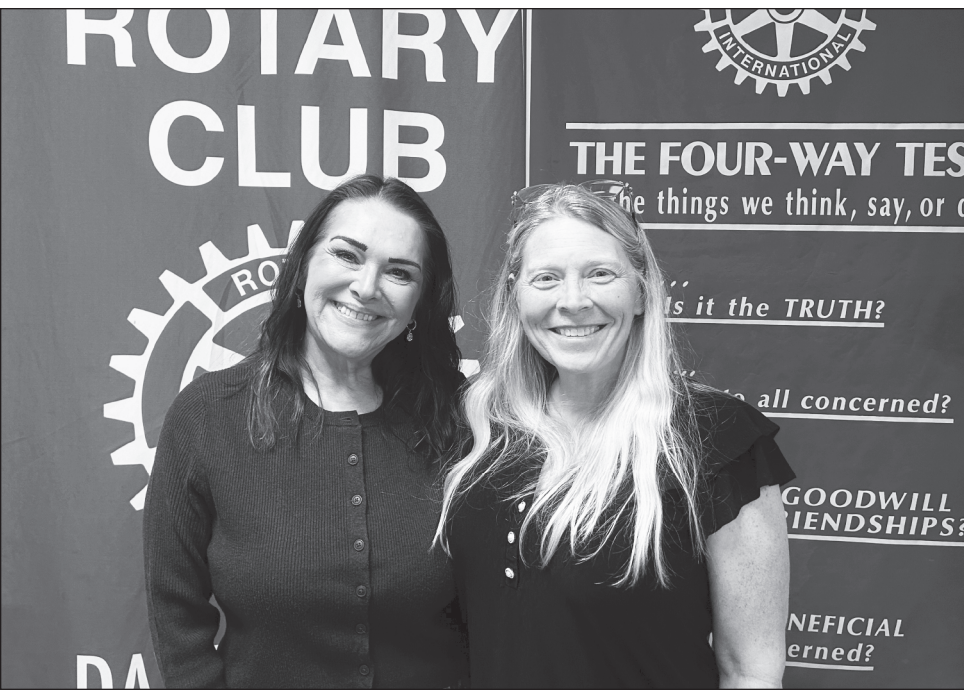
eral generations of Bronco excellence. First, are sisters **Hannah Bell and Presley Bell** who both were multi-sport standouts at Dayton High School. Hannah earned numerous All-District and All-State honors before signing to play softball at Texas Tech. Presley became an accomplished pitcher at the University of Houston and later entered coaching. She now serves as a pitching coach at Lamar University.

Jerry Boone, a 1954 Dayton High School graduate, was a standout quarterback and basketball player before playing quarterback at Lamar University. His induction adds another member of the Boone family to the Hall of Fame.

Juan Jose Carranco distinguished himself as one of Dayton's top kicking specialists. A multi-year All-District and All-State performer, Carranco continued his football career at Lamar University, where he became known for his precision as a punter.

Ardist Conner excelled in football, basketball and baseball at Dayton High School. In addition to his athletic achievements, he was an honor graduate who went on to attend and graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Chad Collins was an out-



Rotary Spotlight Tammy Alexander and President Elizabeth Robertson

standing Dayton basketball player who later built an extensive coaching career. Over more than two decades, Collins accumulated more than 500 basketball victories while leading very successful programs at several Texas schools. Collins retired in 2010, yet he later returned to coaching for a particularly meaningful reason – the opportunity to coach his granddaughters.

Dorothy Jo (DJ) Mazza competed at the cross-country state meet 2 years in high school with her CC team and was named All-State Honorable Mention. She was a member of the first lady Broncos powerlifting team where she placed 2nd in regional and qualified for state. Her true passion was competitive cheerleading. She achieved state-level championships and went on to be a 4-year cheerleader at Florida State University after making the team through a tough try-out process with over 500 applicants and only 12 spots available.

Aaron Ripkowski went from Dayton Bronco football to the University of Oklahoma and then the National Football League. He was selected by the Green Bay Packers in the 2015 NFL Draft and played fullback and special teams during his professional career. Wadzeck noted one memorable distinction from Ripkowski's NFL career: he caught a touchdown pass from quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

Curtis Stevenson, a standout Dayton football and track athlete, will also be inducted. Stevenson was an All-District quarterback for several years, was a regional and state-level track competitor in the 440 yd dash (now known as the 400m) and anchored multiple relays. Stevenson later became a three-year football letterman at the University of

Texas at El Paso.

Wadzeck emphasized that athletic statistics tell only part of the story when candidates are considered for induction. Character is a significant part of the Hall of Fame selection process. The committee considers not only what nominees accomplished on a field, court or track, but also how they represented themselves, their families, their schools and the Dayton community throughout their lives. That philosophy gives the Hall of Fame a purpose beyond recognizing athletic records. It provides current students with examples of former Broncos who combined achievement with character and service. Candidates must first be nominated to be considered. Nomination forms are available through Dayton ISD, including a digital option.

Wadzeck also gave Rotarians a look at the John Paul Ott Athletic Courtyard, another big project aimed at preserving Dayton's sports history. The courtyard was built on Dayton ISD property near Nottingham. It started with commemorative bricks honoring athletes, coaches, teams, and supporters, but grew into a much bigger project. With private donations and community support, the Hall of Fame was able to create a permanent courtyard that Wadzeck said Dayton ISD and the community can be proud of. Special thanks goes out to Clayton Bracey, who helped with the design and planting of the courtyard. Wadzeck made sure to note that no taxpayer money was used to build it.

The 2026 Dayton Sports Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony will be held Saturday, October 17, at 10 a.m. at the Dayton High School Performing Arts Center. Admission is free. Wadzeck encouraged former students, athletes, families and community members

to attend, describing the annual event as something of a "mini class reunion," where generations of Broncos reconnect while celebrating Dayton's athletic history.

Before concluding, Wadzeck recognized longtime Rotarian Bill Buchanan and reflected on the important role local radio once played in connecting former Dayton residents and military personnel around the world with Bronco athletics. He recalled receiving messages from people far from home and other countries around the world, who listened to Dayton games online, including service members overseas who stayed up during the early morning hours just to hear their Broncos play. For them, Wadzeck said, the broadcasts provided a small piece of home.

At the conclusion of the program, the Rotary Club of Dayton presented Wadzeck with a letter of appreciation for sharing the history and work of the Dayton Sports Hall of Fame.

The club also recognized Tammy Alexander as its Rotarian Spotlight. Alexander serves as secretary of the Rotary Club of Dayton and was recognized for the considerable work she performs behind the scenes, her attention to detail, participation in service projects and continued commitment to the club and community.

The meeting concluded with members reciting Rotary's Four-Way Test along with the Dayton club's fifth question: "Is it FUN?" The Rotary Club of Dayton meets Thursdays from noon to 1 p.m. at the Dayton Community Center. The club brings together local leaders and community members committed to fellowship, scholarships, youth programs, community projects and Rotary's guiding principle of Service Above Self.



L-R: Rotarians Michelle Hampton and Jessica Johnson, Sports HoF Board Members Carolyn Land, Mary Ellen Conner, Larry Wadzeck, and Suzanne Hicks

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