

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Tyrone's Sickler leads league in giving back

There has been very little involving Tyrone area sports in the last 30 years in which Harry Sickler has not been involved.

The list of Tyrone organizations in which Sickler has either started or been a significant contributor is staggering.

He is the founder and first president of the Sinking Valley Country Club.

He is the founder and first president of the Tyrone Monogram Club, which annually honors ex-Tyrone Area High School athletes and preserves the community's sports history.

He is a past member of the Tyrone Area High School Board, and as its athletic chairman for six years, he was instrumental in recruiting John Franco as the Eagles' football coach.

"I wanted to coach for a person who cared so much for the kids," Franco, who led Tyrone to the 1999 PIAA championship, said.

Sickler has sponsored teams and leagues and fields for decades, and last year the community dedicated the Harry K. Sickler Athletic Park in his honor.

All that he has given and the steady leadership he's provided for Tyrone, and for Blair County, made Sickler a natural candidate for the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame's Community Service Award.

"I'm not sure there's anyone in sports who's made more of an impact and meant more to their community than Harry Sickler has to Tyrone," Hall of Fame president David Andrews said. "It's our honor to be able to honor him."

A 1948 graduate of Tyrone who went on to graduate in 1953 at Notre Dame, Sickler has always believed in the role sports has played in society.

"It's so much more than an extra-curricular activity," he said. "You don't get a complete education unless sports are intertwined."

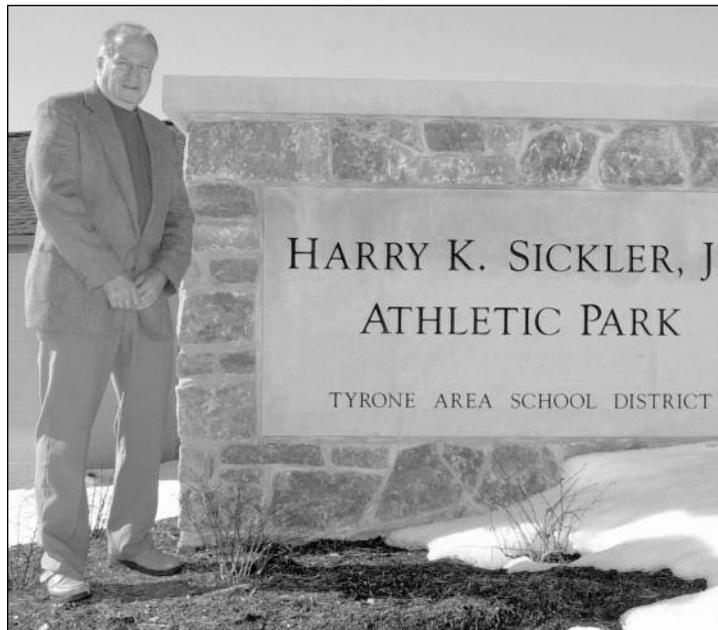
Sickler follows past Community Service recipients John Conlon (Altoona Parochial League), John Robertson (Altoona Boxing Club) and Tom Stout (Kelley Federation).

"I feel very humble about it because there are so many people who are so worthy," Sickler said. "I attribute it to my family. My aunt, Jane McNelis, raised me since I was two years old, and that motivated me to want to give back to the community."

Through his support of sports, Sickler has made lifelong friends, in and out of Tyrone.

One is former Penn State defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky, founder of The Second Mile, which provides programs for challenged youth.

Sandusky has been to a couple of Hall of Fame dinners with Sickler and has spoken to the Monogram Club in Tyrone.



The pillar of Tyrone's athletic history, Harry Sickler stands proudly by the sports complex named in his honor in 2003.

"Harry Sickler is one of those special individuals that come along and make a huge difference in community," Sandusky said. "Harry lives every day with enthusiasm, laughs, learns, loves people and above all remains loyal to those who are dear to him."

Former Pitt head football coach Foge Fazio, recently retired after a long tenure as an NFL assistant coach, is a fixture at Sickler's annual Bull Pen Open, a golf tournament that raises money for The Second Mile and for the Ara Parseghian Medical Foundation.

"Having had the opportunity to be in Harry's company, it is easy to see that he is truly a great sportsman, always helping others and promoting Tyrone sports teams," Fazio said. "Harry is a tireless, generous contributor and loyal supporter of his community."

Harry and his wife Dolores have five children — Linda Suda of Turnersville, N.C., Colleen Mertiff of Tyrone, Mary Suzanne Tomer of Miami Beach, Fla., Deborah Heaton of Altoona and Timothy, who manages the Bull Pen Restaurant in Tyrone. A sixth child, Harry K. Sickler III, passed away in 1992.

"I've always been a family-oriented person," Sickler said. "My family has been strongly supportive of me. I feel I'm accepting this on behalf of all the different individuals who have helped me accomplish what I'm being credited for."

Past recipients

1998: John Conlon
2000: John Robertson
2002: Tom Stout
2004: Harry Sickler