

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

'Skip's the guy that made the league'

Tony Labriola was part of a mini-contingent that started the Mansion Park Summer Basketball League in, he estimated, 1972.

Labriola and Jim Rice were hired by the Altoona Recreation Commission to "turn on the lights, and people could come and play basketball," Labriola said.

Labriola remembers seeing a summer league in action when he visited the Jersey shore. He and Dick Hankinson approached then Rec Commission director Stu Nolan about developing an organized league in Altoona. They got some help from the late Herb Faris, who was around in part because he was managing the Mansion Park tennis courts.

"That first summer," Labriola said, "my wife (Charlene) answered the phone every 10 minutes."

League directors came and went the first few years. Skip Dry took over the league in 1978, and he'll begin his 28th season next month.

The league has gone from eight men's teams to 54 plus another eight women's teams.

"The thing didn't really take off until Skip took over," Labriola said. "Skip's the guy that made the league. Everybody contributed along the way, but what the league is today is a result of what Skippy Dry did."

For his efforts, Dry is the recipient of the 2006 Hall of Fame Community Service Award.

"Skip is very deserving," John Little, the current head of the Central Blair Recreation Commission, said. "He's been the heart and soul of the Mansion Park League. His commitment and dedication has been and continues to be outstanding. We believe the Mansion Park League is probably the best recreation basketball league in the state. We're the envy of many other communities, and it's a result of Skip's efforts."

Dry, a competitive point guard for the old Red Coach teams in the '70s, has a passion for organization. He developed a pool of referees, and the league now thrives four nights per week, five games per night, on four courts - two at Mansion and two at the Leopold Complex.

"We (Red Coach) used to battle the old Pint & Pound teams, but once I took it over at Mansion, I stopped playing and concentrated on refereeing," Dry said. "It's really a year-long thing, because we start planning almost as soon as it's over to get everybody in place for the following year."

Dry's stability has helped make Mansion Park the hub of summer activity. On any given weekday night, people will find Little League baseball, tennis, a City League or Federation baseball game and basketball.

"If anybody says Mansion Park isn't a social event, they haven't been around," Dry said, "and we don't charge a cent."

Dry, who also helped run the Altoona Flag Football League for a dozen years, appreciates the support of his family. Wife Diane arranges the scorekeepers, and their children (Courtney and Matt) have



Flanked by son Matt, daughter Courtney and wife Diane, Skip Dry will begin his 28th season as director of the Mansion Park Summer Basketball League.

become Mansion Park fixtures.

"It's a family affair," Dry said.

He also thanked the Rec Commission and their Altoona School District for their support, along with Jackie (Robertson) Gutshall, who coordinates the schedule.

With an NCAA sanction, the league is able to attract college players, and its drawing power often lures players from the State College and Johnstown areas in addition to Blair County.

That brings an intensity that is fueled by playoff crowds of four and five-deep around Court 1 so the league has a zero-tolerance policy.

"Skip is truly a strong leader," long-time player Galen Bickel said. "That's a tough league, and Skip handles it very well - not only the criticisms but the responsibilities. It's remarkable he's stayed with it this long."

"Skip was the guy with the courage to tell people it was his way or the highway," Labriola said. "He keeps trouble out of the league."

Dry doesn't try to make it a popularity contest.

"I've probably through the years made a few people mad," he said. "That's a fact. But I think we've served a lot of people who have come through the league. I'm refereeing kids at Mansion now whose dads have played."

Dry, 57, follows past Community Service winners John Conlon (Altoona Parochial League), John Robertson (Altoona Boxing Club), Tom Stout (Kelley Federation) and Harry Sickler (Tyrone philanthropist).

"I'm very, very honored," Dry said. "I have people coming up to me that don't even like me who are congratulating me."

Past recipients

1998: John Conlon

2000: John Robertson

2002: Tom Stout

2004: Harry Sickler

2006: Skip Dry