

## NEWS RELEASE

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## NFF ANNOUNCES 2008 CHAPTER LEADER AWARD WINNERS

*Four distinguished individuals selected for outstanding leadership and dedication to amateur football at the local level.*

**DALLAS, November 4, 2008** – The National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame (NFF) announced today the selection of four exceptional individuals as the recipients of the 2008 NFF Chapter Leadership Awards.

### **2008 NFF Chapter Leadership Award Recipients**

*(Full Bios Included)*

**Art Demmas** – South Region (Middle Tennessee Chapter)

**Robert Keropian** – West Region (Northern California Chapter)

**Joe Owens** – Midwest Region (Cincinnati Chapter)

**Howie Vandersea** – Northeast Region (State of Maine Chapter)

With more than 12,000 members, the 120 NFF chapters reach more than 4,800 high schools and 400,000 football players each year with more than 1,000 annual events, including coaching clinics, leadership conferences, college nights, media days, health clinics and distributing nearly \$1 million to 3,300 student-athletes at local awards banquets. Critical to these efforts have been the four regional coordinators, and this year, the NFF has chosen to honor these four individuals for their extraordinary dedication to fulfilling the NFF's mission and inspiring the numerous chapters in their regions to continuously expand the NFF's grassroots efforts.

“These four honorees have delivered time-and-time again for our organization, not only for their local chapters but for all the chapters throughout their regions,” said NFF President & CEO **Steven J. Hatchell**. “They have played a critical role in our efforts to maintain a strong presence at the grassroots level from border-to-border and coast-to-coast. It’s our honor and responsibility to properly pay a tribute to their contributions, and I thank Sprinturf for joining us in our efforts.”

The regional coordinators have spearhead and coordinated the efforts of the NFF's local chapters. With wide ranging responsibilities, their work includes helping chapters stage, market and promote local events, securing local funding, and ensuring the NFF takes a comprehensive approach to honoring the best and the brightest scholar-athletes in the land while recognizing those who have made major contributions to the future of our sport at the local level.

The Chapter Leadership Awards, first presented in 1993, annually recognize the individuals from each region for their commitment, generosity and leadership at the local level. Each of the leadership award winners will be honored during the NFF's Chapter Awards Luncheon, presented by Sprinturf, on Tuesday, December 9, 2008, at the Waldorf=Astoria in New York City. Also at the NFF Annual Awards Luncheon, presented by Sprintruf, five student-athletes selected from the 3,300 chapter scholar-athletes will be honored as the 2008 NFF National High School Scholar-Athletes.

Later that evening, the NFF will hold its 2008 Annual Awards Dinner, celebrating the organization's 61<sup>st</sup> Anniversary. The evening will be highlighted by the induction of 15 of college football's greatest legends in to the College Football Hall of Fame. Additionally, several awards will be bestowed that evening, including the Gold Medal, the Distinguished American Award, 15 National Scholar-Athlete Awards totaling \$275,000, and the Draddy Trophy, presented by HealthSouth. For more information about the lunch or dinner, please call 800.486.1865 or visit [www.footballfoundation.org](http://www.footballfoundation.org).

# **Art Demmas**

## *South Region*

### *Middle Tennessee Chapter*

No one knows about a life dedicated to promoting football better than NFF South Region Coordinator **Art Demmas**. For the better part of fifty years, Art has lived and breathed the game on both sides of the ball. From playing big-time college football in the SEC to umpiring four NFL Super Bowls to dedicating 42 years to the NFF and its mission, few can tell the stories that Art can.

A native of St. Louis, Mo., Art began his football successes as a high school All-American, leading the St. Louis University High School team to the state championship. Art then attended Vanderbilt University and was a four year starting tackle, including playing on the 1955 squad that beat Auburn in the Gator Bowl. In 1956 Art was co-captain of the Commodores and Second Team All-SEC and an Academic All-America. Art has received the Vanderbilt Legend's Award, and he earned induction into the Tennessee Sport Hall of Fame in 1997.

After graduation, Art served his country in the U.S. Army Counter-Intelligence Corps before starting his career on the other side of the ball as a game official. He started in 1957 as a high school referee, and it became obvious to everyone that he had found his true calling. The next year he was tabbed by the SEC to be an umpire, and by 1967 he was working games for the NFL. A legend in the NFL officials ranks, Art earned the honor of working four Super Bowls (XIII, XVII, XXV & XXVIII). He retired from the NFL in 2006.

During his work as an official, Art began a relationship with the NFF Honors Court Chairman **Fred Russell**, who had become one of the most decorated and influential sports journalists in the country during his tenure with the *Nashville Banner*. And in 1966, behind the leadership of Russell and Demmas and others in the Nashville, Tenn., area, the Middle Tennessee Chapter held its first banquet, honoring one student-athlete.

“It was a privilege to work with Fred Russell to start the chapter 42 years ago which led to my appointment as Southern Region Coordinator in 1991,” said Demmas. “To witness the numerous honorees and experience the growth in the chapters in the South Region has been a blessing.”

Today building on the 42-year legacy started in 1966 by Russell, Demmas and many others, the Middle Tennessee Chapter honors 53 high school and seven collegiate scholars each year while distributing \$28,000 in scholarships. The group honorees have included three Tennessee Governors, two U.S. Senators, and a U.S. Ambassador.

“Art Demmas represents what has made college football so appealing and successful,” said University of Georgia Chapter Executive Director **Loran Smith**. “He loves the game and has taken a giving back stance since graduating from Vanderbilt. He, himself, was a scholar-athlete and represents the high ideals of the foundation, which were established in the beginning.”

Art continues to live in Nashville with his wife **Nancy**. They have two daughters and three grandchildren.

# **Robert Keropian**

## *West Region*

### *Northern California Chapter*

Teacher, high school principal, athlete, coach, inventor represent just a few of titles earned by **Bob Keropian**, the West Region Coordinator and president of the Northern California Chapter. For nearly 50 years, Bob has given his time and talent to the NFF, always with a keen focus on his educational roots.

A multi-sport athlete at Washington High School in San Francisco, Bob's track team included **Ollie Matson**, a future Olympic medalist and College Football Hall of Famer from the University of San Francisco. Later in life, Matson would describe Keropian as “pound for pound, the greatest all-around athlete I ever saw.” After teaming with Matson in high school, Bob went on to attend the San Francisco State University, lettering in four sports in a single academic year and graduating in 1951 with a bachelor of arts degree.

In 1952, Bob earned a masters degree in San Francisco State, launching his career as an educator. He first taught science and coached football and basketball at South San Francisco High, later becoming the principal of El Camino High School for 29 years. A creative and pioneering solution seeker, Bob invented the first adjustable

basketball standard in 1952, allowing a backboard to be raised or lowered. In 1969, the South San Francisco Chamber of Commerce named him their Citizen of the Year and the Northern California Principal of the Year.

As president of the Northern California Chapter, Bob oversees one of the most robust chapter scholarship programs in the country, having recognized 1,152 scholar-athletes and distributed \$648,000 since its inception.

“We are investing for the future. Honoring our scholar-athletes and providing scholarship dollars is the best investment return for the future leaders of our communities and nation,” said Keropian.

Founded in 1959 behind the leadership of College Football Hall of Fame inductee **Ernie Nevers**, the Northern California Chapter is one of the oldest in the country, and in addition to its annual scholar-athlete banquet, the chapter’s many initiatives include golf tournaments, coaching clinics, football workshops for women, and activities with the NFF’s Play It Smart program.

“We have known Bob since the early 90's, and to us he is the "Professor" with all the right answers concerning the Foundation's operations and history,” said **Janie Riddle**, president of the Valley of the Sun Chapter in Phoenix. “And the "Professor" is the consummate networker. If you're ever with him at an event, you will eventually know everybody in the room by the end of the evening.”

Bob and his wife of 53 years, **Joan**, live in Hillsborough California.

## **Joe Owens** *Midwest Region* *Cincinnati Chapter*

Notching an impressive 22 years of service to the NFF, **Joe Owens** earned the respect and admiration of all the chapter presidents in his region before stepping down in August 2008. A fixture in the region and within the organization, his breadth of knowledge, consistent delivery, and attention to detail played a key role in creating a strong and expanding membership base in the Midwest Region.

A graduate of Mid-America Nazarene University with a degree in public relations, Joe began his career with the NFF in 1986 after a three year stint as the sports information director at DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind. Joe knew early on that establishing rapport and gaining the trust of his chapter contacts was the key to success.

“College Football Hall of Fame Coach **Woody Hayes** was famous for saying, ‘you win with people.’ The same can be said for the NFF,” said Owens. “It is the people who make up our chapters that have enabled the foundation to fulfill its mission and reach its goals for more than half a century. It was my privilege for 22 years to not only work along side our chapter members but to consider them my friends.”

Those relationships can be found in virtually every one of the chapters that Joe helped guide over the years. The NFF’s largest chapter can be found in Fayetteville Arkansas and chapter President **Eddie Bradford** has a special appreciation for Joe’s contribution.

“Joe Owens is clearly one of the most outstanding young men with whom I have ever been associated,” said Bradford. “Joe has been a gentleman from the word go. I have had the privilege of working with him from the time he began his employment with the NFF. He has always been a person of integrity and reliability, one who has not only demonstrated the best interest of the organization but also understanding and providing unending support to the various chapters coming under his region.”

Over the years, Joe has worked closely with the Cincinnati Chapter in his hometown, but he always made sure to not play favorites, equally giving of his time to all of the presidents and members in his region.

Joe has been involved in his local church and its special needs ministry, further demonstrating his desire to give back to the community and positively impact those around him. Joe lives in Mason, Ohio, with his wife **Marcia** and his daughter.

# **Howie Vandersea**

## *Northeast Region*

### *State of Maine Chapter*

A man of many talents and interests, **Howie Vandersea's** contribution to the game of football has been significant and his influence on generations of young men will be felt for many years to come throughout the Northeast Region of the country.

An active member of the NFF for more than 30 years, Howie founded the State of Maine Chapter in 1988, and he continues as its president today. In 2001, he assumed new responsibilities as the NFF Northeast regional coordinator, helping other chapters expand their membership base and promote their events.

"It's been a joy and an honor to have been associated with the NFF for over 30 years," said Vandersea. "The growth of our chapter has served amateur football in Maine very well. The associations and friendships I have developed with the Northeast chapter leaders have been very rewarding."

Howie's commitment to education and learning began at Northbridge (Mass) High School where he captained the football team. He attended Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, becoming a four-year starter and captain for the Bobcats. He earned All-Maine accolades three times at linebacker and center and was named to the Williamson All-America team. A testament to his all around athletic prowess, he also started all four years for the baseball team.

Following college, he signed as a free agent with the Chicago Bears in 1963 and 1967 and played and coached on numerous semi-pro football teams. After serving in the Army and rising to the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, Howie began a coaching career that would span four decades, including stints as an assistant coach at Tufts and Brown and then as head coach at Springfield College for eight years and at Bowdoin College 16 years, winning seven Colby-Bates-Bowdoin Championships.

"Howie Vandersea is the perfect choice for the role of Northeast Region Coordinator," said **Bill O'Brien**, the president of the Gene Casey Chapter in New Haven, Conn., who has worked with Vandersea for many years. "Being a longtime chapter president with the State of Maine Chapter, Howie's experience with chapter issues regarding membership, finance and events make him an amazing resource."

Howie chaired the Brunswick High School athletic department fundraising effort, and his numerous awards include the Carens Award for Contribution to New England Football, the Citation of Honor from the Football Writers Association of America and the John Vaught Lifetime Achievement Award.

An avid film buff, Howie is a charter member of the John Ford Film Society. Retired from coaching, Howie lives in Brunswick, Maine, with his wife of 40 years **Sara Jean**. He has two children and two grandchildren.

#### **ABOUT SPRINTURF**

*Sprinturf ([www.sprinturf.com](http://www.sprinturf.com)) is a leading U.S. based provider of synthetic and artificial playing surfaces. Founded in 1999, Sprinturf's patented all-rubber infill and Ultrablade™ turf system plays as close to a natural grass field in pristine condition as is possible but requires virtually none of the maintenance – providing superior safety and performance for all users from professional and collegiate athletes to young children. The company has delivered over 350 athletic playing surfaces to marquee customers including The Philadelphia Eagles, The University of Pennsylvania, UCLA, Auburn University, The U.S. Naval Academy and many others worldwide.*

#### **ABOUT THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL FOUNDATION & COLLEGE HALL OF FAME**

*Founded in 1947 with leadership from General Douglas MacArthur, legendary Army coach Earl "Red" Blaik and immortal journalist Grantland Rice, The National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame, a non-profit educational organization, runs programs designed to use the power of amateur football in developing scholarship, citizenship and athletic achievement in young people. With 121 chapters and 12,000 members nationwide, NFF programs include the College Football Hall of Fame in South Bend, Ind., the NFF Hampshire Honor Society, Play It Smart, the NFF-FWAA Football Forum, the NFF Gridiron Clubs of New York City, Dallas and Los Angeles, and scholarships of over \$1 million for college and high school scholar-athletes. The NFF awards the MacArthur Trophy, the Draddy Trophy, presented by HealthSouth, and releases the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) Standings. Learn more at [www.footballfoundation.org](http://www.footballfoundation.org)*