

Larry Bruno Foundation keeps famed Beaver Falls coach's 'magical' memory alive

By Kayleen Cubbal For The Times | Posted: Sunday, July 19, 2015 7:00 pm

BEAVER FALLS -- Tucked in a corner of the second floor of the Carnegie Free Library in Beaver Falls is a small room.

The only thing that hints at what is inside is some of the sports memorabilia that adorns the walls at its entrance.

Open the door and what awaits is a sports fan's dream.

Item after item of priceless Beaver Falls sports memorabilia is there to welcome visitors to the Larry Bruno Foundation's Hall of Achievement museum.

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Each year, the Hall of Achievement welcomes a new class of honorees into its Circle of Achievement. The honor pays tribute to achievers from the community that best emulate the attributes of Bruno, the Beaver Falls coaching legend who was known as "The Magical Coach." Members of the Circle of Achievement then are added to the Hall of Achievement and their photos featured in the museum.

Many of the items in the museum were contributed by Beaver Falls native and Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Namath, a patron of the Larry Bruno Foundation.

Bruno coached at Beaver Falls from 1959-78, winning a WPIAL championship in 1960 with Namath as his field general. Namath maintained a lifelong connection to his mentor when he went on to the University of Alabama and then into the NFL. When Namath was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1985 after a successful career with the New York Jets, Bruno was his presenter in Canton. Bruno died Dec. 24,



Hall of Achievement Sports Museum

The Carnegie Free Library in Beaver Falls is planning a major renovation of the building. Board member Ron Main wants to include the Hall of Achievement Sports Museum in that renovation. He is standing over a Super Bowl book donated by Joe Namath.

2010, at the age of 88.

And the magical coach moniker?

That was two-fold, according to Ron Main, board chairman of the Larry Bruno Foundation who was a teammate of Namath's as a sophomore.

Bruno was an amateur magician known for innovative plays that relied on timing and misdirection to enable his often-smaller players to get the best of larger opponents.

"Larry loved to do magic tricks, especially for kids," Main said. "And he taught all of us to be a magician with the opponent. We had talent, but Larry made us a cut above."

One of the prize items in the Hall of Achievement is Namath's Alabama letter jacket, which was stolen from him years ago, after he played for the legendary Paul "Bear" Bryant. The foundation bought it from a collector and it now sits in an enclosed case in the museum.

Perhaps the centerpiece of the museum is a large, silver-edged book that is locked in a custom-made glass case. Namath donated one of his two MVP edition copies of that book, Super Bowl XL Opus, with original signatures of all of the first 40 Super Bowl MVPs. Only 400 copies were made of the MVP edition and 20,000 of the Limited Edition. At 20 by 20 inches, 850 pages and weighing more than 80 pounds, it is the heaviest sports-related book ever published.

"We're not sure exactly what it's worth, but it's definitely worth a lot," said Phil Little, a foundation board member who works as a specialist for the Office of Pennsylvania Attorney General. "We are honored that Joe Namath thought enough of Beaver Falls and Larry Bruno to donate this wonderful piece to the museum."

Main, a former math teacher and football coach, helped form the Larry Bruno Foundation in 2008 as a 501c3 non-profit, largely with a donation from Namath, who wanted a way to honor his beloved coach.

The foundation helped Bruno through the final two years of his battle with dementia.

"Joe wanted to make sure he was well-taken care of in his final days," Main said. "That was how much he thought of him, how much we all did."

The foundation began its annual induction dinner in 2010, which Namath faithfully attends, and also awards annual scholarships to players at Beaver Falls and Blackhawk high schools. It sponsors activities at local schools and provides programs and classes for the community and plans to add coaching clinics and courses based on lessons from Bruno.

"Sports are a catalyst for achievement in our lives," Main said. "The Larry Bruno Foundation not only keeps Larry's memory alive, but recognizes achievers from the community that emulate the attributes of our great coach.

"This is a way for us to make sure that the magic lives on."