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Contact: Sean Hargadon
Hargadon@udayton.edu
or Pam Huber
Huber@udayton.edu

NEWS RELEASE

FLYERS FOOTBALL COACH MIKE KELLY HONORED WITH LACKNER AWARD

DAYTON, Ohio — In the 1850s, there were four members of the Society of Mary and a hilltop plot of property in southwest Ohio. From the rolling hills of Dewberry Farm, the Marianists fashioned a prominent academic institution and a football powerhouse.

“You’ve heard the story,” said Mike Kelly, UD’s quarter-of-a-century coaching veteran. “There was a gardener, a cook, maybe a professor and a businessman. Where’s that coach? They should have had a coach.

“But that’s the Marianist style. Everyone has something to offer.”

The Marianists and the UD community will recognize Kelly for all that he has offered in his time with the Flyer football program when he receives the 2002 Lackner Award Feb. 8. at an invitation-only dinner on campus. The award is named for Brother Elmer Lackner, S.M., who served the University for 45 years. The recipients are chosen based on behavior congruent with the Catholic and Marianist identity of the University.

The annual awards carry a \$5,000 stipend that recipients disperse to campus organizations. Recipients also receive a piece of Marian art by G.E. Mullins of San Antonio.

On the field, Kelly, a Kettering resident, led UD to two Division III national championships, one as an assistant coach in 1980, and at least a piece of seven Pioneer Football League crowns. Sixteen of the University’s 18 academic All-Americans have graduated under his watch.

Off the field, he has been an ambassador and promoter of the University’s ideals.

“To the Dayton community Brother Elmer Lackner was known as Mr. UD,” said Steven Mueller, director of counseling and health services at UD. “In the greater Dayton community, Mike Kelly is second only to Brother Ray (president) as the most known and most respected representative of UD. He epitomizes Brother Elmer’s spirit.”

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OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
300 College Park Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679
(937) 229-3241 (937) 229-3063 Fax
www.udayton.edu

Kelly, who grew up in Ludlow Falls, came to UD in 1977 with former head coach Rick Carter. The two had coached together at Hanover College, where Kelly started as assistant football coach, assistant baseball coach, wrestling coach, physical education instructor and intramural director.

"I never took my gym shorts off," he joked.

He was Carter's assistant when they came to UD, and when Carter moved on to Holy Cross in 1981, Kelly earned then-athletic director Tom Frericks' nod as the next Dayton coach.

Twenty-five years later, Kelly stands as one of the most successful coaches in football. He attributes much of his success to the continuity of the program. The core football staff — Kelly, his assistants Rick Chamberlin and Dave Whilding and administrative assistant Sandy Bales — has more than 100 years of combined service.

Other coaching opportunities have come along but none appealing enough to sway him to leave. "In our business the goals are very well-marked," Kelly said. "You win and you move or you lose and you move. There are so many different ways in life to keep score."

Kelly said the University and its leadership, the athletic department, his staff and quality student athletes keep him close to home. His mother and father, who still come to all the games, will attend the Lackner Award banquet.

"Are we happy?" Kelly asked. "Why go anyplace else? It's a great place to be."

And when a recruit comes to his door, Kelly pitches the benefits of the UD experience. It's an easy sell.

"We're not out looking for the best football player. We don't get the best football player. We get the best people," Kelly said, leaning forward in his chair with his elbows on his knees in a coach's crouch. "I want our men to get a great education, a well-rounded education. At the same time I want them to have a ball playing football. If it was just about winning it would be a very shallow experience."

Myron Achbach, former director of admission, knows the caliber of academic and leadership potential Kelly's recruits bring to the UD community. Achbach worked with Kelly every spring on his list of recruits. Achbach said Kelly knew the significance of assuring the academic health of the 40 to 50 incoming students.

"I can't overstate the integrity Mike brought to this process," Achbach said. "I always knew that Mike and his staff would be active in making sure their athletes were good students and good citizens.

"Mike had a thing he did every year. When the press release would come out announcing his recruits ... Mike would underline in red items like valedictorian, class president, National

Honor Society (member), above average high school GPAs, etc., and send it to me in campus mail. The sheet was full of red lines.”

Achbach commended Kelly for an incredible sense of integrity and sincerity and the humility to shun the limelight and credit those around him for the football program’s success. Achbach said Kelly has a private sense of spirituality and “he totally subscribes to the Marianist charism, embraces it and lives it in his daily life.”

That charism carried Kelly through one of the toughest times in his career in early December 2000, when then-senior football player A.J. Cohen died in a student neighborhood house fire.

“There could not have been a more caring or concerned man about his 100 players and the family of the victim,” Mueller said of Kelly. “It was his presence that helped the healing process carry on as best it could.

“His record of winning over the years rises above wins and losses. Winning on the football field is important, but he is a true winner in how he represents the University.”

The Marianists finally have their coach.

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For media interviews, contact **Mike Kelly** at (937) 229-4423 or via e-mail at michael.kelly@notes.udayton.edu.