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TOP STORY

Up and running again: Fayette Hall of Fame to induct class for 2021

By Rob Burchianti rburchianti@heraldstandard.com

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Rob Burchianti | Herald-Standard

Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame Executive Chair/Co-Founder George Von Benko introduces an inductee during the June 2019, banquet at Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus. After a one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame will introduce its Class of 2021 next week.

Rob Burchianti | Herald-Standard

The Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame has decided to induct a Class of 2021 after being forced to miss out on enshrining any new members a year ago due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame board will reveal the new class of inductees the week of May 17.

While there will not be a banquet for the second year in a row, there will be a social event, that being the return of the popular golf outing/luncheon/social on Friday, June 25 at Pleasant Valley Golf Club in Connellsville.

“Everyone is welcome to attend our golf outing/luncheon/social,” said Chris Cluss, Board Chairman (see details at the end of this story).

Executive Chair/Co-Founder George Von Benko stressed the importance of bringing the Hall of Fame back into the public view.

“Chris and I have been talking all along with our board and the will of the membership was we didn’t want to go a second year without having something for the Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame,” Von Benko said.

“We didn’t think that would be a good idea. So we looked at it and decided we would do things in a virtual nature, through the Herald-Standard newspaper, my talk show, our website (www.fayettecountysportshalloffame.com) and our new Facebook page which we will have up and running the week of May 17 as well.”

After the Class of 2021 is announced, Von Benko will invite the new members to be guests on the sports talk radio show he hosts on WMBS from 10 a.m. to noon each Saturday. Von Benko plans to talk to two or more of the new inductees, or their representatives, each week until all have been on the show.

Also, stories on the new inductees will run in the Herald-Standard on a weekly basis leading up to the June golf outing.

“They’ll also be getting plaques, as usual, that will be on display at the Uniontown Public Library,” Cluss said. “We want to make it as normal as possible given the circumstances. The obvious thing that’s going to be missing is the banquet but we’d like to focus on the golf outing/luncheon/social as the centerpiece of the event this year.”

This will be the 12th group of inductees for the Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame.

“We already had our class picked last March,” Cluss explained. “The members, over 400 strong, voted. Then the pandemic started taking hold. We just didn’t have a chance to introduce the class. Really, this class was formulated in 2020.”

Cluss believes the Hall of Fame and sports in general have a positive impact on local communities.

“Throughout the whole pandemic sports has been a common thread to hold people together,” he said. “We just don’t want to go another year without getting our group together and getting Fayette County sports people together.

“We’re excited to be keep moving forward with the Hall of Fame. We’re going to have our golf outing on June 25. Pleasant Valley has a new outdoor pavilion. We’re planning on honoring this year’s class, which is really the 2020-2021 class, there and having a social get-together outside.

“If we can bring the banquet back, as we are hopeful to do in 2022, the Class of 2021 will also be honored at that event as well.”

Von Benko sees the golf outing as a perfect option as the pandemic lingers.

“Golf is one of the few sports people have been able to play through the pandemic,” said Von Benko, who also stressed that those who don’t golf are also welcome to attend the social event.

“God willing, we’ll have a banquet again,” Cluss said, “but right now we can’t run the risk of holding one. We’re hoping to get 150-200 people for the golf outing luncheon.”

The Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame also had made it a point to honor local WPIAL and PIAA high school champions up until last year and would like to pick that tradition back up in 2021.

"We're planning on reaching out to the high schools," Cluss said. "Last year was an excellent year for Fayette County high school sports led by Laurel Highlands winning the WPIAL boys basketball championship.

"We would like to honor them and other students at the golf outing/luncheon/social and give them the recognition they would've gotten in 2020 if not for the pandemic. We would also like to include this year's champions as well."

The Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame continues to evolve, and Von Benko is hoping the new Facebook page will help the organization find an even bigger audience.

Those interested in attending the Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame golf outing may contact Katie Propes by email (kpropes@occluss.com) or phone (724-415-2211).