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Allderdice Hall of Famers impress with their humility

by Angela Leibowicz
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Chronicle photo by Angela Leibowicz

Pittsburgh Allderdice's inaugural inductees to the Hall of Fame each took a different approach in addressing the audience at the Sept. 24 ceremony. But by the end, each had paid homage to their alma mater.

Dr. Bernard Fisher, in the early part of his career, conducted research on liver regeneration and transplantation. His research interest turned to treatment of breast cancer that included the drug tamoxifen, which changed the treatment for breast cancer.

Fisher was surprised at his selection, saying it was "beyond the realm of probability that he would win." His message to students: anything is possible. The most important influence in his career "did indeed come from Allderdice," Fisher said.

Novelist and playwright Iris Rainer Dart kept the crowd laughing as she described her Allderdice career: poor athlete, bad in math, bad in chemistry. Yet, Dart said that Allderdice definitely gave her a start — just not academically. It was her teachers who pushed her forward in her writing, she said. "Any and every student who graduates from this school can succeed."

Introducing comedian Marty Allen, broadcaster Bill Cardille described him as a "rambunctious man," a description that Allen lived up to during his shortened stand-up comedy bit. Taking a serious turn, though, Allen shared anecdotes of growing up in Squirrel Hill and attending Allderdice. He gave special recognition to high school friends who were at the ceremony.

Accepting the award on behalf of her father, the late Myron Cope, Elizabeth Cope, who spoke briefly, touched on the importance of family in Cope's life.

Honorees Herbert Douglas and Robert Geminder had the most challenging barriers to success.

Born in Poland in 1935, Geminder survived the Holocaust, along with his mother and brother, largely because of his mother's willness. When he arrived in the United States at age 12, having never attended school, Geminder went directly into the seventh grade. "You don't need the first six grades if you go to Allderdice," he said.

A quick learner, Geminder graduated and continued his studies at Carnegie Mellon University, becoming an electrical engineer. At age 69 he returned to school and earned his master's degree in education, and now teaches math and science at Saint Mary's Academy in Inglewood, Calif.

Douglas faced a tough road to success as a talented black athlete who could not enjoy the same rewards of success as white athletes did back in his day. "This school meant a lot to me when I was here," Douglas said. Allderdice sports, he added, gave him a lifelong confidence that helped him win a Bronze medal in the 1948 Summer Olympics in London, in the long jump event.

He became the first Pittsburgher to win an Olympic medal.

Douglas graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a master's degree in education and became a successful businessman. He founded the International Amateur Athletic Association and was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame in 1992.

The Hall of Fame plaques are displayed on the first floor, near the cafeteria.