

LOCAL / NEIGHBORHOODS / EAST Six honored at Alderdice High

Hall of Fame's first class: Marty Allen, late Myron Cope, doctor, author, athlete, survivor

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Even though the induction of Alderdice High School's inaugural Hall of Fame class was two weeks ago, part of that event was completed only yesterday.

On a wall outside the school cafeteria, displaying 12-by-15-inch wooden plaques with pictures of the six inductees, a 31/2- by 5-inch plaque went up with the words: "Hall of Fame sign and plaques for 2009 were generously donated by Alderdice classes of January 1957 and June 1957 and January 1958."

"It would have been put up the night of the ceremony, but at the last minute I noticed Alderdice was misspelled," said Jeff Rosenthal, 56, Alderdice Alumni Association president.

"I didn't put it up then because knowing the expectations of faculty, students and graduates, there would have been far too many inquiries as to why Alderdice was spelled wrong. So we chose to get it corrected."

Alderdice's Hall of Fame ceremony, held in the school auditorium Sept. 24 in front of a crowd of about 300, brought some high-profile names to the 82-year-old Squirrel Hill school.

The inductees were: comedian Marty Allen (class of 1940); former Olympic track medalist Herbert Douglas (1940); breast cancer research pioneer Dr. Bernard Fisher (1936); best-selling novelist Iris Ranier Dart (1962); Holocaust survivor Robert Geminder (1953); and the late Myron Cope (1947), sports broadcaster and writer.

Among the presenters, sitting on the auditorium stage with the inductees, were Pittsburgh radio and TV personalities Bill Cardille (for Mr. Allen) and Bill Hillgrove (for Mr. Cope) and Olympic track gold medalist Roger Kingdom (for Mr. Douglas). In the audience were former Steelers star Franco Harris, University of Pittsburgh Athletic Director Steve Pederson and Pittsburgh Superintendent of Schools Mark Roosevelt.

For the inductees, the journey to the hall of fame was filled with twists and turns, which they addressed in their speeches.

Mr. Geminder, born in Poland in 1935, was 6 when the Nazis took his family and thousands of other Jews to a cemetery in Stanislawow, Poland, on Oct. 12, 1941, where at least 10,000 were shot dead. Mr. Geminder's family was spared as darkness set in. He also hid under his mother's skirt and escaped the ghetto and lived among non-Jews. Later, he was on a train headed to Auschwitz but escaped with his family out of the top hatch of a car during a stop, 100 miles from the death camp.

Mr. Geminder was 12 when he enrolled for seventh grade in his first school, Alderdice Junior High. He knew little English but brothers Elliot and Irving Rothman "put their arms around me" and served as guides.

Mr. Geminder, who lives in California, eventually received a degree from Carnegie Mellon University and rose to captain in the Army. After a 40-year career as an electrical engineer, Mr. Geminder received a master's degree in secondary education from Loyola Marymount University in 2007, and teaches math at a school in Los Angeles.

He has spoken to thousands of high school and middle school students on the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, Mr. Geminder said, "I was hungry for six years." Of Alderdice, he said, "It was ... and still is a good school."

Dr. Fisher, 91, talked about how a chemistry teacher, Mr. Colborn, helped lead him to his life's work -- improving lives through medical research. "I hated that discipline [that he tried to give us]," Dr. Fisher said. "But it was that discipline that got me here tonight."

Mr. Douglas, 87, noted how his involvement in athletics at Alderdice led him to Pitt and to the 1948 Olympics in London, where he earned a bronze medal in the long jump. Later, he became a successful business executive at a time when African-Americans were being shut out. "Going to Alderdice gave me the confidence to go through life," he said.

His presenter, Mr. Kingdom, an Olympic gold medalist in the 110-meter high hurdles in Los Angeles in 1984 and Seoul, South Korea, in 1988, spoke of what a great mentor the Alderdice Hall of Famer has been to him. Mr. Kingdom said when he was a track star at Pitt and met Mr. Douglas, "The first thing [he] said to me was, 'Son, how's your academics?' " Mr. Kingdom said his mentor stressed to him the importance of life "after you run and win."

During her induction speech, Mrs. Ranier Dart (formerly Ratner) talked about how she wasn't a good math student or much of an athlete at Alderdice, but that she loved theater and writing and followed that passion. Among her many accomplishments, she was a writer on the "Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour" in the 1970s and wrote the best-selling novel "Beaches."

Mr. Allen (formerly Alpern), still working as a comedian at age 87, has enjoyed a show business career that includes numerous appearances on the "Ed Sullivan Show" and other TV shows, an acting career as well as many nightclub appearances. He has entertained all over the world.

Mr. Allen said it felt good to be back in Pittsburgh and at Alderdice. "When I came through the [Fort Pitt] tunnel from the airport and saw Pittsburgh, I could have cried like a baby. It brought back all the memories of my childhood -- all the things I love."

Mr. Cope [formerly Kopelman] also entertained and brought the gift of laughter -- as well as the Terrible Towel -- to a lot of people as a Steelers broadcaster and local radio and TV personality. He was an accomplished newspaper and magazine writer before that. As Mr. Hillgrove said, "No broadcaster was as much a part of the fabric of his community as Myron."

Mr. Allen, Mr. Geminder and Mrs. Ranier Dart all made 15-minute tapes about their lives that will be shown to Alderdice students at an assembly later in the year. A tape of Mr. Cope also will be shown. Mr. Douglas has already spoken at Alderdice, and Dr. Fisher will speak live to the students at a later date.

A class is to be inducted every year.

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