

‘Do it for the kids’

RR scoreboard, possibly track to be named in
Kerzie’s honor

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GILBERT — Steve Kerzie is considered a local legend for his years of coaching, refereeing, teaching and playing sports on the Iron Range.

To make sure everything he achieved is not forgotten, his children Bill Kerzie, Karen Hoffner, Deanna Kerzie and the late Suzie Traaseth recently donated \$120,000 to the #RockRidgeRising campaign to name the new Rock Ridge Schools sports stadium scoreboard in his honor.

The family has also started a fundraising campaign for their late father called the Steve Kerzie Legacy Fund in hopes of naming the track in his honor, as well. To do that, another \$120,000 will have to be raised.

The Kerzies sought to have their father recognized for his longtime dedication in the Gilbert community and throughout the Iron Range for all of his teaching and athletic endeavors.

“Because it’s a brand new track, we thought wouldn’t it be nice to do something for my dad,” Deanna Kerzie said. “We would like to raise more

money to get not only the scoreboard being named in his honor, but the track.’’

The track naming would be especially important considering Kerzie worked at the State Track and Field Meet for 65 consecutive years “either as a coach or helping,” Deanna Kerzie said. “He reffed everything, he coached everything, but his true love was track. His really true love was track.’”

Steve Kerzie’s life and career included many accomplishments.

The Chisholm High School graduate participated in football, basketball and track and went on to Hibbing Junior College, where he did the same. He played all three sports at Morningside College and is in their Hall of Fame. His track career included a long jump of 23 feet, 11 inches.

He later became a Gilbert High School teacher, coach, and athletic director for more than 40 years. His time included starting the girls’ basketball program in Gilbert and officiating three State Basketball Tournaments. He also was an assistant coach for the 1951 Gilbert state basketball team and was athletic director at the time.

Kerzie, who passed away in 2018, served on the Minnesota State High School League Board of Directors, won many state awards and was named to several halls of fame.

The MSHSL even honored the local icon by creating the Steve Kerzie Award, which honors a delegate that best exemplifies his dedication.

In the Gilbert community, Kerzie started the 4th of July kids' races and organized them for 35-plus years, was a 4th of July parade grand marshal, a member of the Gilbert VFW, a member of the VFW Color Guard, ushered at St. Joseph's Catholic Church and trained young people for lifeguarding at Sparta Beach.

While Kerzie was an orange and black Gilbert Buccaneer through and through, his daughter said, "he was very, very supportive of this Eveleth-Gilbert/Virginia consolidation before it passed. He thought it was the best thing ever."

Kerzie said she and her siblings sat down and said "there's never been anything named in my dad's honor. ... I thought we would get the ball rolling and see what happens."

According to Willie Spelts, Rock Ridge Human Resources Director/Fundraising Coordinator, many donations from all over the nation have already started to come into the Steve Kerzie Legacy Fund.

"Kerzie reached a lot of people in his years and there's a lot of people that want to give back because of that." Businesses are considering giving a considerable donation, Spelts added, and alumni and many others are looking for ways to get the track named for Mr. Kerzie.

"What a great way to remember and honor the life and contributions of Steve Kerzie."

Information on how to donate to the Kerzie Legacy Fund or any of the new Rock Ridge facilities/programs can be found at rrps.org and then going to #RockRidgeRising in the menu. Those interested can also go to alumni.rrps.org and go to Donate Now in the menu options.

Further information can also be found on the Gilbert alumni Facebook page.

Anyone can donate the Kerzie Legacy Fund. All donations will be recognized on several "Wall of Donors" throughout the new campus and one can also choose to give anonymously.

“Maybe there’s someone that wants to donate \$10 in my dad’s name because they had him as a coach or they had him as a referee or they just knew him or coached with him,” Deanna Kerzie said.

If the additional funds are not raised, the money that is donated “will go back into the track fund to help purchase the safest and best equipment for our student athletes and stadium projects for the track team. It will honor Mr. Kerzie, which is a great, great honor.”

Deanna Kerzie and others have wondered why things like a stadium scoreboard wouldn’t be included in the massive project to build the new Rock Ridge High School and two elementary schools.

“A scoreboard was included,” Spelts said. But when the large scope of the project is looked at, “we don’t want to put a postage stamp scoreboard on this beautiful remarkable stadium.

This stadium is going to be so nice that we sought a big time college level major metro high school level scoreboard because that's what's going up everywhere now. We wanted it for these communities because it will help us attract tournament opportunities so that we can host tournament games. It will separate us.'"

The goal is to have the highest level of a facility possible.

"And that (digital video) scoreboard will be an amazing scoreboard" that will match the stadium, Spelts stated. "That's what we're shooting for in all facilities.'"

Regarding how the Kerzie donation/fundraising started, Spelts said, "We decided to look at a way to enrich and enhance the new campus." He stated some things are in and some are out due to how bids come in or for other reasons. Rock Ridge officials patterned some of their actions after Alexandria's fundraising efforts to improve their school and also saw other schools that were building new do the same thing.

"We're first and foremost thankful to the support from the community, from the voters,'" Spelts said. "None of this happens without that support.'"

As the district moved along with construction, "we saw that we could offer naming rights to different facilities to different places to different fields all throughout the campus because that's what we saw other brand new high schools doing,'" Spelts told the Mesabi Tribune.

As donations were being made, the Kerzies decided to “make a donation to this project. We’d like to do it to honor our dad,” the family told Spelts.

“What a great deal that was. Their dad, Steve Kerzie, is an absolute legend up here. I was so thankful and so appreciative that they were interested to give to this project,” he added. “We wanted to get his presence on campus. The Kerzie kids really wanted to do that.”

Having the Kerzies donate for a major video stadium with lane-by-lane track results, Spelts said, “What could be better. Deanna loves track and Steve did track forever. They were kind enough to donate \$120,000 for the purchase of a stadium scoreboard. That was so kind, so special and so appreciated. ... This will be a world class facility now with a world class scoreboard. You don’t see them in a high school setting. Without that donation we couldn’t make this purchase.”

He said that is what the Rock Ridge Rising campaign was set up for — “to do things that we normally would be able to do.”

As far as when the scoreboard and track will be used, the Rock Ridge High School is slated to open in the fall of 2023.

The first track season would be in the spring of 2024, he said, or a year earlier depending on progress in the construction.

If the added funds are raised, Deanna Kerzie said the track will be dedicated to a “very honorable and deserving man who cared about all young students and athletes throughout the Range and state.”

She added the donation is the family's way of continuing their father's legacy of caring for the kids.

“He always said, ‘Do it for the kids.’ ”

Spelts pointed out there are numerous other opportunities to honor a person or a family on the RR campus. Anyone interested can contact Spelts at: willie.spelts@rrps.org.