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College BEST way to success

YANKEE TALK



EXPRESS-TIMES PHOTO | BILL ADAMS

Former New York Yankees outfielder Roy White, left, talks with members of his group while waiting to tee off Monday during the sixth annual BEST Celebrity Golf Tournament at Green Pond Country Club in Bethlehem Township, Pennsylvania. For more photos from the golf tournament, visit lehighvalleylive.com/photos.

FORMER PRO STARS raise money at banquet to help at-risk youth make academic dreams happen.

BY GREG JOYCE
The Express-Times

BETHLEHEM | Bo Orlando was part of the No. 1 high school team in America, according to USA Today, in 1983.

But it didn't happen without one of his many mentors, George Curry.

The coach of the Berwick High School football team

could be tough at times, but after a hall of fame career at West Virginia and 10 years in the NFL, Orlando came to appreciate what Curry did.

"The things he taught off the field — to be a gentleman and discipline — that's the stuff I took in my career," Orlando said.

The mentorship and sup-

port that Orlando got from Curry wasn't too different from what over 40 students are getting from the local foundation BEST — Building Education Support Teams.

The foundation held its sixth annual BEST Banquet at the Sands Bethlehem Sunday night, attended by Orlando and over 20 other former athletes.

The banquet and Monday's golf tournament are used by

BEST as its primary fundraiser to support at-risk youth and their tuition needs.

Co-founder Billy Staples said there are more than 40 students in the program, with 31 of them college graduates.

"It's the definition, in all honesty, of using (sports) to mix with education to pay it forward," Staples said.

This year's banquet was attended by former Yankees like Roy White and Rick Cerone.

in addition to other former pro athletes including Bill Gullickson, Doug Clemens, Billy Sample and Lary Sorensen.

Seven recent college graduates and members of the program were honored at the event, including Liberty High School grad Chad VanHorn. The Bethlehem native gave the student speech, and credited BEST as "a cause that literally gives life."

VanHorn graduated from Bloomsburg with a bachelor's degree in communications, focusing in TV production.

"You need to find your niche," VanHorn told the rest of the BEST students. "Chase your own dreams."

VanHorn has done just that, as his education at Bloomsburg led to his short film being in the 2013 Pittsburgh Independent Film Festival.

BANQUET: College BEST way to success

Staples helped co-found BEST in 2008 with Judy Tierney, years after he received support to get to college himself.

"I was a high school kid in Phillipsburg and I didn't think there was much opportunity I was going to be able to go to college," he said. "We sat down and we just couldn't pull it off financially. My mom went to a lady in town that's not related to us. She said 'if I help him go and give him some checks to assist, he has to bring his transcript here at the end of the semester. I can't give any money towards C+'s or C's.'"

Staples followed through on the promise, graduating from

East Stroudsburg where he has recently returned as a professor in education.

Part of the BEST program includes pairing each student with mentors. They are paired together the summer before college begins, and keep in touch.

"A lot of scholarship programs give a check, first semester, first year. We give eight checks over four years, but you gotta report in to your mentor and go over that syllabus and your professors and how things are going every two to three weeks," Staples said. "The mentoring program has been vital. We've had students who mid-semester were homeless. That's where a mentor comes in because there's no other family."

Orlando's situation wasn't as dire, but he credits his vari-

ous mentors through football — including Curry, Gregg Williams, Nick Saban, Buddy Ryan, and Dick LeBeau — for where he is today.

Starting this fall, Orlando will be helping out the Moravian College football team a few days a week.

After serving as an assistant coach for Liberty High School, Orlando will help coach the defensive backs for the Greyhounds, including his son and Liberty grad Anthony Orlando.

"I learned so much from those guys, that when I coach, I pull from each one of those guys," Orlando said. "I teach them the game and how it evolves to life. Because there is life after football. If these kids can relate how it affects them in everyday life to the football field, that's what made me a good teacher."