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'Coach Jack' remembered during game this evening

By Ben Baird
, The News-Herald

TRENTON — Mayor Gerald Brown plans to proclaim today Jack Castignola Day during halftime at a football game at Trenton High School.

That will coincide with a lineup of events dedicated to the former coach before and after the football game at 7 p.m. and tomorrow at Monroe Golf and Country Club.

Castignola coached football at the school from 1964 until his death in 1986. He had 231 career wins, ranking him 19th overall in Michigan high school football history.

At Monday's City Council meeting, Councilwoman Timber Baun-Crooks suggested that today become a city holiday in memory of the beloved coach.

There was unanimous consent.

"The whole weekend is about remembering Jack," said Baun-Crooks, one of the event coordinators.

First is a meet and greet at 6 p.m., before the football game, in a tent at the main entrance.

"That's kind of the kickoff to this whole weekend," Baun-Crooks said.

She said former Trenton alumni who played for Castignola are gathering and will be at the social events this weekend to swap stories about their old coach.

The public is welcome to participate and refreshments will be available.

Immediately following will be the home football game against Wyandotte.

At 10 p.m. there will be a celebration remembering Castignola at Sibley's Hotel Grill, 2651 W. Jefferson Ave., hosted by the Trenton Touchdown Club.

There will be appetizers and a cash bar. While it will be free to attend, a \$5 donation is suggested.

Anyone interested in joining in should come even if they didn't know Castignola personally, Councilwoman MaryEllen McLeod said.

"It's going to be for everyone in the city," Baun-Crooks said.

The first Jack Castignola golf outing, at the Monroe Golf and Country Club, 611 Cole Road, is set for 1 p.m. tomorrow. Mark Lybrook, chairman of the Jack Castignola Memorial Committee, said it's an 18-hole game with a \$100 entry fee.

Lybrook said \$25 of the fee will go to the Castignola Scholarship fund. Gift certificates to local businesses such as Sportsland and Uncle Harry's Restaurant will be given for those winning longest punt or drive and highest score for certain holes.

Call 1-734-241-5190 to register for the outing.

The intention is to have a similar golf outing every year around this time to raise money for the fund, Lybrook said.

There will be a final social event after the golf game at 7 p.m. at Mr. Nick's, 1926 West Road. It will feature free appetizers and a cash bar.

"I hope we'll have a great turnout this weekend," Baun-Crooks said.

Coach Bob Czarnecki, the current high school football coach, played for Castignola in the early 1970s and praised his predecessor.

"He made all of us better as players, people and community members," Czarnecki said. "Anything that can be done to remember him or introduce him as a coaching icon is long overdue.

"He, along with Don Lessner, inspired me to become a coach. I am just trying to take care of his job at Trenton High."

Both Baun-Crooks and Lybrook knew Castignola. Baun-Crooks went to school with Castignola's son and considers herself a family friend. Lybrook played for Castignola in the '70s.

"He was a great leader and a father figure for a lot of guys who needed it at that point in their lives," Lybrook said.

"He was a great, great guy," Baun-Crooks said.

A memorial for Castignola has been planned for three years. While the dedication of the memorial had been slated for today, it has been delayed until the Board of Education finalizes what it wants.

Part of the wording on the memorial will read: "A leader of young people who dedicated his life to them on and off the field. He encouraged his athletes and students to obtain a college degree, to set their goals high and helped prepare them for life."

Castignola was born in New Philadelphia, Ohio, in 1921. He was stationed in the South Pacific while serving in the Marine Corps. Before coaching at Trenton he coached at two Ohio schools and, after moving to Michigan, St. Mary Catholic Central High School in Monroe.

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