

GP High's Caveman statue to honor '64 team, other champs



As a kid Jeff Hyde, president of Evergreen Federal Bank, watched in awe as his older brother Mike and the Grants Pass High School football team won the 1964 state championship.

Fifty years later, Mel Ingram Field will welcome a nearly 9-foot-tall Caveman wearing No. 64 on his royal blue uniform, courtesy of Evergreen and artists Bob Eding and Del Hearn.

Appropriately it will be unveiled at halftime of the North Medford vs. Grants Pass game tonight. It was the epic 28-21 win over the Black Tornado in 1964 that propelled the Cavemen into the playoffs and on to the championship. The winner of tonight's game may well be headed that way, as both are unbeaten — but only for a few more hours.

Grants Pass already has its refurbished Caveman, all 16 feet of him, on the north end of town, where he's stood since 1971. Now his "younger brother" will gaze over the football field, to celebrate the championship and the school's mascot.

"We've done the bears and so forth, I thought, 'Why not make something permanent (for that team),' " said Hyde, who was in the Class of 1972 at GPHS.

Plaques for the three other GPHS football titles — 1948, 1951, 1967 — will go near the new Caveman, between the field and the commons building among the roses. A plaque commemorating coach Mel Ingram, whom the field is named after, is already in place.

That had been semi-hidden behind the grandstand for some time.

"One thing I've tried to do is keep the tradition going and honor the past," Athletic Director Clay Rounsaville said. "That area is going to grow. When you walk into Mel Ingram Field and see that, it'll be the centerpiece for the athletics facilities."

And the jawbone-carrying Cavemen themselves, who have been promoting Grants Pass and Josephine County since 1922, are also on board.

There was talk of moving the big Caveman statue from northwest Grants pass to the school a few years ago, but this seems the best of both worlds.

"We love having 'Little Bro,'" said James Lowe, aka Chief Bighorn of the Oregon Cavemen. "We support it wholeheartedly. We'll be there to usher him in. And we really want to club the Tornados."

The Caveman was made in the style of the bears of Bearfest, mostly fiberglass and foam.

Eding said he sketched out the original design, and Hearn did a lot of the detail work at the end, requiring putty, and wood and metal tools.

"I tried to make him rugged," Eding said. "At first he had a goatee but he looked too much like me. I like the end result."

Hyde was impressed with the detail, including the stitching on the jersey, the hair on the legs, and the helmet.

"All the hairs were done by hand, with a little stick of resin," Eding said.

Hearn and Eding are veterans of the downtown art sponsored by Evergreen and its former President Brady Adams over the years.

As for that 1964 team, it will always be known for the win over Medford, when Ingram told his players to go for

the touchdown with a few seconds left, and Blanchard passed to Terry Crenshaw.

In those days ties were decided by total yards, and Grants Pass already led that statistic. But Ingram would have nothing to do with a tie.

“I said, ‘Coach, we’ve already won,’” Blanchard recalled. “He said ‘Go back out there, we’re going to win this game on points.’”

The Cavemen later went on to beat Corvallis 7-0 in the state finals.

Crenshaw was an All-American wrestler at Stanford, and later coached and taught at Wallowa High School in northeastern Oregon, before falling ill with Lou Gehrig’s disease. He died in 2000. Joining Crenshaw on the all-conference offensive first team were Blanchard, Charles Meek and Pat Howe.

Crenshaw, Don Summers, George Stursa, Dennis Compton and Larry Forsgren were all on the all-conference first-team defensive squad in ’64, and spearheaded a Caveman defense that held opponents to 87 points in 12 games that year.

Blanchard said several athletes showed up for a reunion of the wrestling and football teams over the summer, and that he wasn’t sure how many would be there tonight.

He also suggested the 2014 Cavemen, coached by John Musser, may be making history tonight.

“I told Muss we’re going to put another rock up there for this team,” Blanchard said.

PHOTO: Tom Blanchard, left, who was a member of the GPHS 1964 state football champions, and Jeff Hyde, president of Evergreen Federal Bank, pose with the new Caveman statue that will be unveiled at Mel Ingram Field at halftime of tonight’s game.