

Dan Rooney and family applauded for strong Catholic roots

By WILLIAM HILL
Correspondent

Even in ordinary times, it's hard to think of Pittsburgh as just one word — "Steelers" automatically follows. And in this week of Super Bowl mania, "Go Steelers" chants are flying heavenward as fast as Hail Marys.

Just as inseparable from Pittsburgh and Steelers is "Rooney." The Rooney family is part of the package, and Dan Rooney has succeeded his father, the late Art Rooney Sr., as the family patriarch.

"The Rooney family has been a vital part of the life of the Catholic Church here in Pittsburgh for so many years," said Bishop Donald Wuerl.

"Art Rooney, 'the Chief,' was a legendary figure, a dedicated Catholic whose acts of charity defined the man. Dan Rooney, though a private man who does nothing to promote himself, is a fixture in the diocese. The Holy Family Institute, the Cardinal Wright Regional



Photo by Bob George at Pittsburgh Custom Darkroom

Pittsburgh Steelers President Dan Rooney waves to the audience at the annual Art Rooney Courage House Luncheon for the Holy Family Institute.

School, Catholic Charities — the list goes on and on. His faith and his values permeate the Pittsburgh Steelers organization which is the real reason why, win or lose, the Steelers are so important to our city and region."

The Rooney family's — and through them the Steelers organization — support of good causes in Pittsburgh is a litany of foundations: Boys & Girls Club; Cancer Caring Center; Catholic Charities; Catholic Youth Association; Central Blood Bank; Children's Hospital; Duquesne University Mind, Heart and Spirit Award; Extra Mile Education Foundation; For Kids Sake;

See Rooney, Page 6

Rooney: Owner called faithful, humble, generous

Continued from Page 1

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank; Holy Family Institute; Make-A-Wish; Salvation Army-Project Bundle-Up; United Way; and many others have benefited.

Father Kris Stubna, diocesan secretary for education, singled out Rooney's support of Catholic schools over the years.

"For so many years now, Dan Rooney has been a great friend to Catholic education. Certainly he has provided enormous support for countless initiatives like the Bishop's Education Fund, the North Side Friends and Neighbors, the Extra Mile Education Association, North Catholic and Cardinal Wright Regional School and others. But more important, Dan has invested himself personally in our efforts," Father Stubna said.

"He loves children and youth and has been for them a model of everything that is good about being a person of faith. He models for all he meets his love for the church, especially the Eucharist, and his desire to serve the needs of others in whatever way he can. Dan Rooney is a man of tremendous faith and great compassion, and it is always a joy to interact with him," he said.

"Our Art Rooney Sr. Courage House Luncheon is our largest fund-raiser each year," said Diana Fryer, executive director of the Holy Family Foundation. "The luncheon honors a Steeler player who has demonstrated courage by overcoming some particular personal adversity, as well as a Holy Family alumnus who has had a similar accomplishment. The Rooney family has been involved for many years and has been a huge factor in the success of the Holy Family Institute.

"We have many photos in

our halls of Art Rooney with the children living here in the days when he was supporting us through the United Way. Pittsburgh is a large city with many foundations, and we feel very fortunate to have Dan Rooney's continuing support," she said.

Father Thomas Sparacino, pastor of St. Mary of Mercy in Downtown Pittsburgh, said, "I know Mr. Rooney to be a faith-filled man and friend to all he meets. When I came to St. Mary's a year and a half ago, Mr. Rooney was one of the first to welcome me to my new home. He has been a constant support and encouraging to me in this my first pastorate."

"Dan Rooney is more than just a Pittsburgher. He's from the North Side," said Mercy Sister Ignatius Rooney, also a native of Pittsburgh's North Side who attended the same Catholic elementary school, St. Peter, as Dan Rooney. St. Peter became part of Cardinal Wright Regional School, and Dan Rooney continues to give his personal support as well as the support of the Steelers organization to the school through the North Side Friends and Neighbors annual fund-raising event.

"They host the event at Heinz Field and he is always there. He's an essential part of our effort; it is all about his desire to help the children and young people on the North Side," said Sister Ignatius, who is a committee member. "He has always been a strong supporter of Catholic education — and a good example, too, since he went on to North Catholic and to Duquesne University."

Father Benjamin Walker, former pastor and now parochial vicar at St. Peter Parish, has known Dan Rooney for more than 13 years. "Humility explains him. He is a humble and generous man. He contributes to numerous community

affairs, and is probably hit up for everything that goes on in Pittsburgh."

Father Ben observed that Rooney is "very faithful — a daily communicant, if possible, and he goes to church when and wherever it fits his schedule. He and his wife are almost always at Friday night adoration, or at Benediction, and he always comes back to the sacristy to say hello."

When Father Ben was hospitalized with leukemia, Rooney called to check on him, once from Indianapolis, and on another occasion from an NFL owners' meeting. Father Ben later had a mild stroke, and Rooney again called to keep informed on his progress. "He is a good friend — the genuine article, and a good family man."

In addition to extensive involvement in Pittsburgh philanthropy, Rooney also supports an international program as well, through the Ireland Funds, which he co-founded in 1976 with Anthony O'Reilly, former chairman of Heinz. The program is dedicated to raising money to support programs of peace and reconciliation, arts and culture, education and community development throughout Ireland.

O'Reilly's tribute to Rooney is perhaps the best summary of his character: "of all the figures that identify to me what it is to be an American — to be fair, to be honest, to be good-humored, to be wise, to be a fine parent to both your family and the wider family of your team and your fans and the American public — the best man would be Dan Rooney. And in saying that, I am conscious that behind him is the extraordinary figure of this wife, Pat, the mother of his nine children, a dedicated and tireless worker for education and the poor and the underprivileged."