

A Work of Art— Art Rooney Jr.

Wayne Herrod

Art Rooney Jr. is a fascinating gentleman. The son of the legendary Art Rooney Sr., “The Chief,” Art Rooney Jr. has forged his own identity with his numerous passions. Art Jr. is a family man. He and his wife of 48 years, Kay, have two sons, Mike and Art III, and two daughters, Susan and Karen, as well as six grandchildren.

Art also tells of his love for his other family—the Pittsburgh Steelers of the 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. He grew up during the Steelers Empire, eventually becoming the Steelers’ director of scouting. His scouting and player knowledge were a big part of the success of the team in the 70s. The first four players chosen by the Steelers in the 1974 draft (Lynn Swann, Mike Webster, Jack Lambert, and John Stallworth) were later elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, a draft considered by many to be the best in NFL history. Franco Harris, Joe Greene, Terry Bradshaw, Jack Ham, Jack Lambert, and Mel Blount are just a few of the Steeler greats that were also drafted during his tenure.

Art left the day-to-day Steeler operations in 1985. He remains vice president and one of the owners, but he has moved onto some of his other life’s passions.

Eighteen years ago, Art established an office in Upper St. Clair from which he still works today. Two of his biggest projects were completed during this time, including his many journals and book on the history of the Rooney clan. “Many people may not know this, but a major portion of the book’s work was completed right here in Upper St. Clair,” said Rooney.

“A number of years ago, Mort Sharnik, a writer from *Sports Illustrated*, told me that I should write down the stories about friends and family so they would not be forgotten. I started writing things down in journals, and after 12 years I had accumulated 42 journals, all hand written. Originally I used a fountain pen, but Kay convinced me that I was ruining too many of my shirts, so I switched to ball-point. The journals were filled with recollections and stories about my family, our friends, and the Steelers.”

While continuing to write in his journals, Rooney started another interesting collection—pencil sketched postcards of popular Steelers from the 40s through the 80s. Most of them were created by USC artist Dino Guarino. “I always sent out notes to everybody, and I thought these Steeler postcards would be a nice way of thanking people and keeping in touch.”

Rooney also started a collection of colored postcards produced by West Coast artist Merv Corning. Corning was one of the preeminent football artists in the county. “While I worked with Merv for many years, we never met. The collection includes football Hall of Famer Rocky Bleier. I decided to do a card of Rocky because my dad always said he was a Hall of Famer in many ways.”



Art Rooney Jr., at work on his journals

Eventually, Rooney’s main passion became his book. “I originally never wanted to put my journal stories in print, thinking that I might offend someone. In addition, my writing style was not very readable. But, after the prodding from many, I approached Gene Collier from the *Post Gazette* to help me. He recommended Roy McHugh, a great sports writer who had retired from the *Pittsburgh Press*. Roy was able to take my words and thoughts from the journals and create my book, *Ruanaidh* (Gaelic for Rooney). Many people told me that my journal writing was similar to James Joyce in his book, *Ulysses*. This was not intended as flattery as he wrote with countless digressions. In the book, McHugh removes my digressions.”

Ruanaidh is a one hundred-year history of the Rooney family and filled with much of the artwork that Art Rooney Jr. has commissioned, including his private collection of colored and pencil sketched postcards. He decided to publish the book mainly as a keepsake. Extra copies were printed and placed for sale. “The purpose of this was not to make money, believe you me,” said Rooney. I really figured that after I gave away copies to family and friends that the rest of the books would be placed with me in my coffin. I am amazed at the public’s overwhelmingly positive response to the book!” The book is currently into its second printing.

“Chuck Noll was probably the first person who accused me of being a writer when he told me that my scouting reports were a great read since they were filled with so much fiction!” laughed Art. “However, the book’s stories are not fiction; they are true stories and represent a history that is important to me. I cannot adequately express what this book means to me.”

Dr. Terry Kushner, assistant superintendent of the USC School District, has been a friend of Art’s for 20 years. “Art has been a great longtime friend. He has a world of knowledge and great stories about the Steelers and the NFL, capturing these moments in his book. In essence, Art has captured Pittsburgh. Most impressive about



Color postcard of John Stallworth



Pencil sketch drawing of Rocky Bleier

Art, though, is that he is still just a regular North Side guy and a true Pittsburgher.”

One thing that Art has, without a doubt, is a deep love and devotion for his dad, Art Rooney Sr. “Did you know that no one in the family called him ‘The Chief’?” said Art. “He was simply, ‘Dad’.” Art’s office affectionately displays numerous paintings honoring his dad. “One day, I told Bishop Wuerl that there are a number of Art Rooneys out there. But, to me, there is only one Art Rooney, and that one is in heaven.” He summed it up by saying, “I have the great fortune of being the son of Art Rooney Sr. Being his son is the only reason I could have thought of getting this project under way, then finishing it!”

Art Rooney Jr. is selling himself short on this one. I believe that this book was completed because of Art’s drive and energy. *Ruanaidh* is truly a work of art—a work of Art Rooney Jr., that is. ■

To catch an online glimpse of *Ruanaidh*, visit www.artrooneyjr.com.



Art Jr. and Kay Rooney display enlarged book jackets of *Ruanaidh*.

Special Tree Planting

On Saturday, May 3, 2008, USC Citizens for Land Stewardship (CLS) celebrated Douglas Watkins’ 25 years of service as Upper St. Clair’s Township Manager and his work with CLS.

Doug and CLS worked together on the McLaughlin Run Streamside Stabilization Project to improve water quality and reduce flooding in the McLaughlin Run and the Chartiers Creek watersheds. He supported the CLS stewardship approach at Boyce Mayview Park, which focuses on the worth and role of the natural

lands resource conservation in the community and praised CLS’s work with the River Sweep project to keep USC streams clean and free of debris.

In honoring Doug, a Liriodendron tree, commonly known as a tulip poplar tree native to this area, was planted near the picnic pavilion at Boyce Mayview Park. The Watkins’ family and friends, Congressman Tim Murphy, USC Township staff, and CLS board of directors and members attended the event. ■

For more information about CLS, visit www.uscls.org or call 412-831-3289.



Left to right are CLS president Mary Lee Maloy, CLS director and Township Commissioner Preston Shimer, and honoree Doug Watkins.



Ready to plant the tree are Doug Watkins’ grandchildren, left to right, Tyler Anibaldi, A.J. Tomaino, and Keira Watkins.