

RHS alumni group honors teachers, grads

By Nancy Bergeron
Special to the Leader

The Ruston High School Alumni Association will bestow distinguished status on three alumni and three faculty members Oct. 17 during the association's annual homecoming awards luncheon. The luncheon begins at 11:30 a.m. at Squire Creek Country Club.

Faculty honorees are retired basketball coach Denman Garner, current English teacher Jane Tatum and choral music teacher the late Kendall Hearn. Alumni honorees are John Shealy, 1954; the late Gen. Billy Mitchell, 1933; and Fred Dean, 1971.

Tickets to the luncheon are \$25 each and are available at CTB Financial Center, located at 1511 N. Trenton St. in Ruston, or by calling Pat Tippet at 255-7750.

A Louisiana-theme quilt, made by RHS graduate Sharon Swearingen Tusa of Houston, will also be auctioned during the event.

Each year the Alumni Association honors three faculty members — one on the school's current faculty, one retiree, and one deceased teacher, and three

alumni.

"Ruston High has been blessed with so many outstanding teachers that to select only three in any one year becomes a daunting task," awards committee chairman John Sacks said.

"Like-wise, the number of Ruston High School graduates nominated for recognition that have achieved distinction in their chosen fields grows," he said. "With so many alumni having achieved so much not only in their profession, but also in their service to their local, state, and national community, the selection decision becomes more difficult. But decisions are made and this year's recipients exemplify the best-of-the-best of RHS graduates."

Tatum, a Ruston native and RHS graduate, has taught English at the school for 26 years. She has also been sponsor of

several school organizations, including the Bearcat Belles dance line, Keywanettes service organization, the school yearbook and the student council.

"Ruston High School has always been an integral part of my life," Tatum said. "When I was born, my mother was teaching girls' P. E. and sponsoring the Pepettes (pep squad) at Ruston High School. I became the mascot for the Pepettes, I think, as soon as I could walk."

Tatum is a past recipient of the Ruston Jaycee's Outstanding Young Educator Award, and the RHS Teacher of the Year Award.

Garner began his teaching career in Simsboro in 1948. Five years later, he moved to Ruston High where he taught math and coached basketball for 18 years. During his tenure as head coach, the school produced

three state championship teams and one state runner-up squad. Garner's Bearcats also won a number of district honors.

"I had incredible young men who showed dedication to the team and to the school," he said.

Garner's players will be recognized during the Alumni Association's homecoming tailgate reunion Oct. 18 at the school. Garner, of Ruston, left RHS to join the parish school system central office staff until his retirement in 1986.

Hearn, also a Ruston High graduate, began teaching at RHS in 1932. He wrote the school's Alma Mater the following year. After several stints elsewhere, Hearn returned to RHS in 1955.

Under Hearn's leadership and direction, the RHS choir grew from 36 members to 70. The choir won numerous Louisiana choral competition awards. Among his students at RHS was Metropolitan Opera singer Patricia Wells.

Hearn served as president of the Lincoln Parish Teachers

Association and was state vocal chairman of the Louisiana Music Educators Association.

The Alumni Association recognized Shealy for his work in commerce and industry. Shealy, of Ruston, is retired vice president of the former Willmette Industries. He was instrumental in the company's successful expansion into the southern states.

Shealy was one of the founders of Ruston's former American Bank, and has been active in forestry organizations. In 2005, he received the Robert E. Russ Award, one of the highest honors awarded by the Ruston-Lincoln Chamber of Commerce for community involvement.

He said his fondest memories of Ruston High are of "great friends and the relationships made." Shealy said former RHS head football coach the late L.J. "Hoss" Garrett was "a special mentor and friend to me."

Mitchell was cited in the government and military service category. While at RHS, he participated in athletics and excelled academically. After

graduating from Louisiana Tech University, he entered West Point.

Upon graduating from West Point, he became an Army Air Corps pilot. During the Vietnam conflict, he served as deputy chief of staff in the Republic of Vietnam. Mitchell was then promoted to brigadier general and assumed command of the 314th Air Division in Korea. He retired in 1970 after 33 years in the army.

Fred Dean was honored for individual athletic achievement. Dean was a standout in football at RHS, and at Tech. After graduating from Tech in 1975, Dean, of Ruston, was drafted by the San Diego Chargers.

He left the Chargers in 1981 and played for the San Francisco 49ers until 1985. Dean was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame this year, becoming the first RHS alum to enter the hall.

Throughout his career, including high school and college, Dean won a number of All State, All Conference, All American, All Pro, Pro Bowl, and Super Bowl honors. Coaches have said Dean changed the way professional teams played defense by specializing as a pass rusher and sacking quarterbacks.

Dean is now a minister at New Hebron Baptist Church in Arcadia.



Tatum



Shealy



Garner



Hearn

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