



Gridiron Gold provided guests with an exceptional display of 150 silent auction items, including special and unique autographed sports memorabilia. The live auction included a trip to London for an NFL game this fall, an opportunity to fly with the Steelers team and attend their game in Kansas City this year, and a one-of-a-kind original painting of the six quarterbacks created by noted Pittsburgh Sports artist, Dino Guarino. The unique painting, along with a very limited number of Hall of Fame helmets and footballs, were signed at Gridiron Gold by the four living quarterbacks.

Pittsburgh sports historian, Jim O'Brien, wrote a new book, "Golden Arms," specifically for the Gridiron Gold event, capturing the lives and careers of the six Hall of Fame quarterbacks from this region. Each guest received a complimentary copy of the book.

Managing the flow of the evening for NLSA was long-time supporter Ellis Cannon who served as Master of Ceremonies. As an attorney himself, Ellis was eloquent in his description of the agency's mission. The dinner began with an invocation by Bishop David Zubik who was a guest of Huntington Bank, and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Steelers legend Rocky Bleier.

"We are a quiet organization because of the nature of the services we provide, so the opportunity to share the work we do with such a big audience is very significant and meaningful to the staff, volunteers and attorneys of NLSA," said Racunas.

To view an array of photos from Gridiron Gold and a complete listing of the event's generous sponsors, please visit to [www.nlsa.us](http://www.nlsa.us). To learn more about NLSA and opportunities to donate or volunteer, call Christine Kirby at 412-586-6137. 📞



NLSA Executive Director Bob Racunas and his wife Karen pose with Gridiron Gold honorees at the DeBartolo Reception. Pictured (from L-R) Joe Namath, John Unitas, Jr., Betty Blanda, Karen Racunas, Bob Racunas, Jim Kelly, Joe Montana and Dan Marino.



Joe Namath, Joe Montana, Jim Kelly and Dan Marino participate in a lively round table discussion moderated by NFL Network Correspondent Andrea Kremer.



Gridiron Gold Event Chairman shakes hands with former Steelers running back Franco Harris. Harris went home with the event's premier live auction item, Pittsburgh Artist Dino Guarino's depiction of the 6 "Gridiron Greats".



Joe Montana completes one more pass to Jerry Rice who traveled to Pittsburgh for the event.

Contact Us

NLSA provides service to residents in Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties. Call toll-free: 1-866-761-6572 Visit us online: [www.nlsa.us](http://www.nlsa.us)

Funded, in part, by the Commonwealth and through a contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). The official registration and financial information of the Neighborhood Legal Services Association may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. Federal regulations applying to NLSA require that we notify all donors that no funds can be expended by NLSA for any activity prohibited under P.L. 104-134 or otherwise prohibited by 45 C.F.R. § 1600 et seq.



# JUSTICE MATTERS

A Publication of Neighborhood Legal Services Association

FALL 2015

## Gridiron Heroes Talk Football, Pride & Family to Raise Funds for NLSA

On June 6, 2015, Neighborhood Legal Services Association (NLSA) hosted Gridiron Gold – the largest and most successful fundraising event in the agency's 50-year history raising more than \$800,000. NLSA worked for nearly two years with Honorary Chairman, Arthur J. Rooney II, and Event Chairman, Richard W. Boyd, to create Gridiron Gold which recognized the extraordinary careers of the six Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterbacks born in southwestern Pennsylvania – George Blanda, Jim Kelly, Dan Marino, Joe Montana, Joe Namath and Johnny Unitas.

The four living quarterbacks from this exceptional group – Kelly, Marino, Montana and Namath – came to Pittsburgh for this unique event along with Mrs. Betty Blanda and John Unitas, Jr. This was the first time that the six quarterbacks have been celebrated together in Pittsburgh. Marking the occasion, the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton Ohio, brought the Hall's six bronze busts of the quarterbacks which were on display throughout the evening.

Gridiron Gold's presenting sponsor, Huntington Bank, led a group of 70 table sponsors including First National Bank, UPMC Health Plan, and Peoples Natural Gas. The Pittsburgh Steelers and DeBartolo Holdings also sponsored receptions for over 1,000 guests who filled the main ballroom at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Hotel.

Mr. Rooney was joined by his father, Dan Rooney, and several Steelers alumni including Rocky Bleier, Franco Harris, Andy Russell, Louis Lipps and Craig Bingham. Mr. Eddie DeBartolo brought his own contingent of 49ers alumni with Jerry Rice, Ronnie Lott, Dwight Clark and Roger Craig who were in attendance.

The highlight of the evening was an energetic arm chair discussion with the four quarterbacks, led by NFL Network journalist Andrea Kremer.

Each quarterback received a standing ovation from a highly enthusiastic audience as they were introduced, as did Dan Rooney who was recognized earlier in the evening.



Joe Namath reminisces about growing up in Western PA with Joe Montana, Andrea Kremer, Jim Kelly, Dan Marino and Gridiron Gold attendees.

NFL Films also provided highlight footage of the six quarterbacks, has created a half-hour feature of Gridiron Gold that aired this fall.

As the primary beneficiary of Gridiron Gold, NLSA is also sharing a portion of the net proceeds with each quarterback's designated charity. For NLSA, this income represents significant support for the agency's efforts to provide civil legal representation to residents of



Neighborhood Legal Services Association

Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence Counties who, for a variety of reasons, would otherwise not have access to legal services. "The generosity of those who attended the event, bid on auction items, or donated their time and resources to make Gridiron Gold a success is truly humbling," said Bob Racunas, Esq., Executive Director of NLSA. He continued, "We are very grateful to everyone who supported Gridiron Gold as these proceeds will enable NLSA to continue to be the essential civil legal resource for low-income and underserved individuals in our region."

For nearly 50 years, NLSA has quietly delivered its mission to ensure equal access to justice for all residents of this area, with 8,868 cases in fiscal year 2015 serving 17,252 individuals. NLSA clients may be victims of domestic abuse, predatory lending or they may be threatened with eviction. They may be veterans seeking resources as they return from duty. In any event, all of the people represented by NLSA are typically in crisis, often with their basic needs for safety and security being threatened. 📞



Honorary Chairman Art Rooney II speaks of the important work of NLSA.

## Words from Penn



Dear Friend,

NLSA is hosting a football fundraiser? That was the reaction we got from most people when we decided to host the first-ever gathering of six Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterbacks from western PA. Events like Gridiron Gold most often are black-tie and high profile society events, not what most think of when they think of Neighborhood Legal Services Association.

But we wanted and needed to shake up our fundraising model to better serve us. So when key staff and longtime supporters gathered to identify ways of diversifying revenue, the feedback indicated "something" focused on sports was where we needed to be headed. From that idea, we were able to leverage our region's love of sports to boost our profile and raise funds by creating our first sports-related event, NLSA Spring Sports Roundup.

The NLSA Spring Sports Roundup, held in 2013 and 2014, tested our capacity to plan and host a successful sports-related event with an eye toward hosting a signature event to kick off our 50th anniversary year. That signature event became Gridiron Gold, a gathering so momentous NFL Films came to Pittsburgh to capture it.

Held at the Wyndham Grand in Downtown Pittsburgh, Gridiron Gold brought more recognition, attention and financial support to NLSA than any other event in its 50-year history. The generosity of those who bought tickets, auction items or simply donated to NLSA will help us provide additional free civil legal services to thousands of low income residents of Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties.

I'd like to wrap up my letter with a special memory from the Gridiron Gold event, one that seems very appropriate as we pay special attention in this newsletter to family law, an area of NLSA's services that accounted for 39 percent of our efforts last year.

In a region where football and family go together, Dan Marino shared a very special story about his dad, a man who filled newspaper vending machines for a living, letting him get home early enough in the afternoon so that he could toss a football to his son. As Marino told it, it was a special time because it was just the two of them, one-on-one.

The need for a loving, supportive family that feels safe, close and well-cared for is one that our team of dedicated family law attorneys work hard for, each and everyday. For more information on NLSA, the people we serve and how you can help, visit [www.nlsa.us](http://www.nlsa.us).

*Bob Racunas*

Bob Racunas, Esq.  
Executive Director

## Seeking Justice For Families

Family law is one of the most challenging practice areas of NLSA, according to Pamela Lynn Dalton-Arlotti, the Director of Program Performance and Compliance for Neighborhood Legal Services Association. "The families that we represent are in crisis. It is our job to act quickly to ensure the safety of children and those who care for them," she said.

NLSA provides free legal services in family law to those in Lawrence, Butler, Beaver and Allegheny counties, focusing primarily in three areas.

First, NLSA offers Protection From Abuse representation to clients at their final hearing where they are seeking a long term protection order. Second, NLSA offers representation in situations where the primary custodian has been sued to have custody removed or reduced to shared custody, and in situations where a child has been snatched from the care of the primary custodian.

The third area of assistance involves advice and/or reduced fee referrals to those involved in efforts to change existing custody arrangements, efforts to file complaints to confirm existing custody arrangements, efforts to hold another party in contempt for failing to follow an existing order, and efforts to get the court's permission to relocate the children. Reduced fee referrals are provided to private attorneys willing to take these cases at a reduced rate, but not for free.

To maximize resources in this area, NLSA utilizes students from [Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh Law Schools] to provide advice and assistance in drafting legal paperwork for those who will be representing themselves. The students also offer some limited representation on occasion. NLSA also utilizes volunteer attorneys from the Family Law Section of the Allegheny County Bar Association to provide telephone advice.

"Increasing pro bono help to those who need assistance in Beaver, Butler, and Lawrence counties is at the top of our wish list," said Dalton-Arlotti. With this in mind, we are working with the law schools towards providing legal advice to clients residing outside of Allegheny County as well as working to increase volunteer opportunities for retired attorneys.

"Family law practice currently encompasses 39 percent of our work, so it's extremely important to our mission that these services continue to be as accessible as possible," said Dalton-Arlotti.

Successes in the area of family law can be especially gratifying (see Brenda's story, One Family at a Time). "When we can positively impact a family and make a difference in the lives of children, it's extremely rewarding work," she added.

Attorneys interested in pro bono opportunities, should email NLSA at [support@nlsa.us](mailto:support@nlsa.us).

## One Family at a Time

One of the most poignant moments at the Gridiron Gold event -- in an evening of big moments -- was when Brenda, a former NLSA client, took the stage to tell her story.

Brenda described her harrowing, seemingly never-ending life of abuse she and her two children were subjected to by her then husband. Even after a legal separation, she was still required to permit him unsupervised visits from which the children would often come home terrified, with signs of physical abuse from being struck or thrown. At that point, Brenda explained, she had depleted her life savings in legal fees but was still unable to end the court-ordered visits. She was finally referred to NLSA, where she met family law attorney Mark Krochka.

Mark began his career as a child abuse investigator and spent so many hours testifying in court he was able to anticipate lawyers' questions. It was that experience that drove him to law school, and after graduating from the University of Akron, to work on custody cases transitioning children out of foster care. He also made numerous appearances before the grand jury on serious child abuse cases while representing the child protective services agency before the Juvenile Court. In 2001, Mark decided to point his career in a different direction and accepted a position with the Neighborhood Legal Services Association.

When Brenda met with Mark and told him her story, she, like many women who have suffered years of abuse, tried to minimize or normalize her story. But Mark saw Brenda's situation for what it was. At the abuse hearing, Mark presented a trail of evidence from the Children and Youth Services, the state police and county crisis shelter that resulted in a final Protection Order that stopped all unsupervised visits -- and all phone contact -- between the children and their father for three years. Brenda's children only saw their father at a neutral location in the presence of a supervisor. Brenda said simply, "Mark Krochka and NLSA saved my life," and she asked her attorney, who was present at the Gridiron Gold event, to stand. Today Brenda works as a program director for a statewide organization providing education options for individuals with brain injuries.

Brenda's very public and heart-felt gesture of thanks is a perfect illustration of NLSA's mission, and for those lucky enough to attend Gridiron Gold, one of the most memorable moments of the evening.

Speaking to a hushed crowd, former NLSA client Brenda tells her compelling story to the Gridiron Gold audience.



Save  
the  
Date

### Celebrating 50 Years of Service

On April 5, 2016, NLSA will celebrate 50 years of providing free legal civil services to families in need throughout Lawrence, Butler, Beaver and Allegheny Counties with another sports-themed event at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh, the venue for its highly successful Gridiron Gold fundraiser. Details will be available soon, but in the meantime, mark your calendars for another evening celebrating the people, traditions and sports of the City of Champions. You won't want to miss it.