



## The Official Vision for Giving Back

*Gene Casey/New Haven Chapter holds its 48th annual banquet.*

Many define football as a game of perseverance. It teaches us that when you get knocked down in life, you get back up. You don't give up. 2008 Distinguished American Award Winner David Holdwright delivered that message loud and clear at the Gene Casey/New Haven Chapter's 48th annual banquet March 30.

Holdwright, a long-time and highly-respected college football official, led an active life in community service with the Special Olympics, the U.S. Army Reserve, and much more. Three years ago, he permanently lost his eyesight when blood failed to reach his optic nerve during fusion surgery on his back. Despite the loss of his sight, he fought back and continues to live an active life, volunteering in the community and serving as a true inspiration for all.

With more than 400 people in attendance, the chapter honored 29 scholar-athletes, including five class presidents, and distributed a total of \$6,500 in scholarships. Honoree Alex Thomas from Ansonia HS finished his remarkable career with Connecticut records for career rushing yards (8,261) and career touchdowns (114), season rushing yards (3,578) and season TD's (47). He capped his senior year by leading his team to the state championship and plans to play at Yale next fall.

Additional honorees included Dona Limone who received the Chapter Merit Service Award; Ralph Zinarella, who claimed the Official Recognition Award; and Seymour High School head football coach Paul Sponheimer who accepted the Coach of the Year Award.

Chapter President Bill O'Brien continues to ensure the chapter remains in the vanguard of the promotion of amateur football in the region by supporting three local Play It Smart Programs; staging fall dinner meetings and a pre-Thanksgiving coaches' dinner; and hosting the Hall of Fame Classic Game between the All-Stars from New Haven and Fairfield counties. ■



Left: Yale Bound scholar-athletes Alex Thomas holds numerous state records. Right: David Holdwright, a former college football official who lost his eyesight gives a moving keynote address.



Hillhouse coach Tom Dyer stands to the left as New Haven Chapter member Don Martin presents Paul Corona, a Play It Smart participant at Hillhouse, with the Valley Scholarship. Third in his class, Corona will attend UConn in the fall.



Scholar-Athletes during the grand march: Christopher Mastrianni (Dorby HS), Robert Moir (Seymour HS), and Thomas Norton (Woodland HS).



Chapter President Bill O'Brien (center) stands with the 2008 Honorees: Paul Sponheimer, Dona Limone, David Holdwright and Ralph Zinarella.



Chapter President Bill O'Brien addresses the 2008 Gene Casey/New Haven Chapter Scholar-Athletes at the chapter's spring banquet.