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Coach Wilcox enters Hall of Fame

Larry Wilcox ’72 first came to Benedictine College as a pre-dental student in 1968. After his first semester, the legendary biology professor, Father Eugene Dehner, told him his calling might be elsewhere. It turned out to be true, as Larry discovered his calling was coaching and helping to form his recruits into good players and great men. Since then, he has mentored thousands of young men and along the way, become the winningest four-year collegiate football coach in the state of Kansas. On October 27, 2018, after four decades as head football coach, six seasons as head baseball coach, two as softball coach and four as golf coach, Larry Wilcox entered the Raven Athletic Hall of Fame.

“The only reason I’m standing here is because of so many other people,” he said in his acceptance speech. “So many other people who have contributed to my life.”

He talked about his parents and their influence in his life. His mother encouraging him to “be nice” and his father establishing a strong work ethic. He talked about the college staff and faculty, like Elmer Fangman and Fr. Eugene. He also talked about his coaching staff.

“If there is one thing that is most important to what we’ve done here, it’s our coaches,” said Larry. He went on to introduce his entire coaching staff and their spouses, including several coaches who have shared in the success and have coached with him for all or most of his career. These include Charlie Gartenmayer (40 years), Dennis Murphy (40 years), John Stammers (33 years), and George Papageorgiou (19 years).

“That level of loyalty is amazing!” he said. “And there were a lot of things to overcome.”

When asked about the challenges, he joked that there “weren’t many.”

“There was just no money, no staff, no facilities, not much interest in the program, our team was too little, too slow, too weak,” he said. “So it was going to take some time, but everybody hung in there.”

Larry also mentioned another important person in his success and his life, his wife, Janet. The former Janet Munro ’81 is currently the director of Benedictine College’s Student Success Center, a position she originated with the founding of the center in 2008. She has had a long career in education as a classroom teacher and an administrator, most notably as principal at Bishop LeBlond High School in St. Joseph, Missouri. Larry said the two of them were proud to have been involved in the lives of so many young people, working together as a team over all the years.

“Every good book, story, movie, needs a love story,” he said. “And this is no different. We’ve been together for 35 ½ years and Janet has put up with a lot of my stuff.”

He concluded the night rather uncharacteristically with a song, dedicated to his wife, and wrapping up with “I’m so glad you came into my life.”

Currently, Larry has an overall coaching record of 284-147. He also holds the second-most wins in NAIA history and is one of only two football coaches with more than 280 career wins. He is a three-time AFCA Region Coach of the Year and has been named the Heart Coach of the Year four times. He was an NAIA District 10 Athletic Administrator of the Year, has been a member of the AFCA for 34 years and is a former NAIA Football Coaches Association President. He entered the NAIA Hall of Fame in 2017.

Founded in 1858, Benedictine College is a Catholic, Benedictine, residential, liberal arts college located on the bluffs above the Missouri River in Atchison, Kansas. The school is proud to have been named one of America’s Best Colleges by U.S. News & World Report as well as one of the top Catholic colleges in the nation by First Things magazine and the Newman Guide. It prides itself on outstanding academics, extraordinary faith life, strong athletic programs, and an exceptional sense of community and belonging. It has a mission to educate men and women within a community of faith and scholarship.

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