

# Tom Dempsey ('64) featured speaker in Alumni Lecture Series in Rancho Santa Fe

During his high school years in the early sixties, Tom Dempsey's parents sometimes received unexpected telephone calls late at night.

The callers were usually new parents of children who had been born "less than

perfect." They were calling Tom's parents because he had been born "less than perfect" himself, missing his right hand and part of a foot.

As Tom Dempsey told attendees of the second event in San Dieguito's Alumni Lecture Series held at the Inn at Rancho Santa Fe, the unexpected callers typically asked the same question: "How can we best raise our child?"

Mr. and Mrs. Dempsey's answer was simple: "Don't be afraid to let your child fail."

"And if you think about it," Tom told the audience, "who are the only people we know who have never failed? They're the people who've never tried anything."

Tom Dempsey, former NFL placekicker and alumnus of San Dieguito's class of 1964, knows plenty about trying to do stuff he'd never done before, and he entertained the crowd by telling several stories about those attempts in high school, college, and in his professional career in football. (You can view more photos from the February 9 event on the San Dieguito High School Alumni website.)

"Who are the only people we know who have never failed? They're the people who've never tried anything."

—Tom Dempsey

Before his talk, Dempsey mingled with old classmates and fans at a cocktail reception, posed for pictures and made himself available to everyone. Alumni from several years were represented at the event, as well as school parents, staff, and other members of the community.

**Jeff Zevely**, alumnus of the class of 1988 and current Channel 8 news reporter, then introduced Dempsey to the audience and played two video presentations, one a humorous video essay on the art of kicking and the other a salute to Dempsey's career.

When the former football kicker finally took his place in front of the crowd, he reminisced about San

Dieguito, where he tried out for all the sports

teams despite his "less than perfect" body. During the basketball tryouts Coach Ernie Zeno looked him over and told him to follow him to the wrestling room. "This," Coach Zeno told Dempsey, "is where you belong."

As it turned out, Dempsey not only made the varsity wrestling team, but the varsity track and football teams, too, where he was described as one of "the league's best defensive tackles." Not that this high status mattered one bit to his parents or coaches. "All the adults knew us—it would get back to your parents if you got into trouble. And Coach Ernie Zeno—he might smack you!"



Charles Higgins ('64), Tom and Carlene Dempsey, Bill Sullivan ('64)

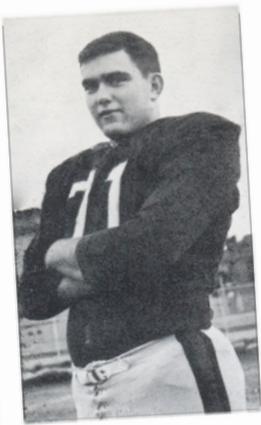
Later, Dempsey described what it was like immediately after kicking his record-making field goal on the 8th of November in 1970: the New Orleans police kept him in the locker room for several hours in order to protect him from the celebrating crowds outside the stadium. He couldn't phone his date to let her know where he was, so she promptly went out with a more punctual beau.

No matter. He and the future Mrs. Dempsey worked it out, married, raised a family and now Dempsey coaches his 8-year-old grandson's football team.

"I show the kids how to win," he said. "Not to cheat, but to do what is necessary to win. I prepare them to play football. I tell them, 'If you have a test, you can skip practice, but you have to bring me the test — and it's got to be a B or better.'"

After a lifetime playing for football teams as diverse as the Eagles, the Rams, the Oilers and the Bills, Tom and Carlene settled in New Orleans, where, in August 2005 they had to flee from Hurricane Katrina with the rest of that city's population. Hoping to make the best of what they expected to be several days, they decided on Lake Michoud, where Tom could go fishing—only to discover the lake had been drained.

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Tom in 1963-64. "It would get back to your parents if you got in trouble—and Coach Ernie Zeno—he might smack you!"

## WE GET LETTERS!

### So *that's* where she went!

Hello,  
MUSTANG MEMORIES is great! I'm a 1950 graduate and had several family member grads. My uncle, Earl Weller, graduated in the FIRST graduating class—and he named the MUSTANG in that first year.

But what really surprised me is the article by Dolly Rice Stefanson Brabant—Dolly is my cousin!!! And I lost contact with her many years ago. I did read your notice on the front page that you will not give out addresses, but thought since we're both grads and are related that you might assist me. All of her family, including her grandparents, and I grew up in Cardiff.

Boy, it brings back memories.

Thanks,

— *Marian Weller Boandl*, '50

*Our goal is to help alumni reconnect with San Dieguito and with other alumni, so we were happy to forward Mrs. Boandl's letter on to Mrs. Brabant; however, we do not give out alumni contact information to anyone but registered class representatives.*

### Multi-generation fans

I am sending \$20 to help with publishing Mustang Memories. My husband (1957) and I (1961) really do enjoy it. I also share it with my mother (1942).

Thanks,

— *Verna Hansen* ('61)

Thank you, Mrs. Hansen! We certainly appreciate contributions.

We also want to thank you and other alumni who have contributed to the Foundation this school year (a list of donors is on Page 4).

### Stirring up memories

It has been some time since I have thought of San Dieguito.... Some [days] were great, and some I wish were a lot better, you remember those. I was not the best student but I hope I set the legacy for the class of 1972. Thank you for the memories,

— *Richard Moczygemba* ('72)

## Dempsey in Lecture Series

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Their luck soon went from bad to worse. When Tom was let back in to the city to survey the damage to their home, he found it sitting in "3 feet of water, muck and mold." Everything in the home was lost, including all his memorabilia. He immediately called Carlene.

"I told her, 'I've got good news and bad news.' 'What's the good news?' she asks. And I tell her, 'You know all that brand new furniture you wanted?'"

Tom Dempsey isn't complaining, though. He says they were lucky, that it was all "stuff" and could be replaced. And the way the people of New Orleans came together to help each other "really renewed my faith in humanity."

At the end of the talk, Encinitas City Councilman Dan Dalager ('68) mentioned that some people might wonder what a football legend was doing raising money for a Performing Arts Center. Dempsey responded that thanks to his wife's influence he understood perfectly how important the arts are to a well-rounded

education. "Besides," he said, "theater classes are the best places in the world for boys to meet girls."

To thank Mr. Dempsey for his appearance on behalf of the Performing Arts Center, the Foundation presented him with Mustang memorabilia, including a



*Tom Dempsey (64) mingles with guests before his lecture on February 9.*

Mustang sculpture by former Encinitas artist Alan Pfeiffer, as well as CD-ROM versions of the 1964, 1963 and 1962 yearbooks he lost to Hurricane Katrina.

## San Dieguito Robotics "Team Paradox" places third

On January 5, a team of San Dieguito High School Academy students received a kit of parts, a set of rules for a robotic competition and a six-week deadline. Their assignment: design, build and program a robot to compete in a game that requires the robot to make laps around a rectangular track while moving large balls over and under a 6-foot-high intersection.

The group of robot-building students who accepted this challenge call themselves "Team Paradox," and on Saturday, March 8, they competed against teams from several states and Canada at the San Diego FIRST Robotics Regional competition held at San Diego Sports Arena. They placed third in individual scores and went on to the Los Angeles Regionals. We are quite proud of their achievements. Go, Mustangs!



"You don't learn nearly as well until you actually use it for something."

— *George Stimson*, physics teacher and "Team Paradox" mentor