



## **IAAS Walks of Life 2012**

### **Mike Cleary**

When Mike Cleary was a student at John Carroll University in the early 1950s, he took a job as sports information director, launching a 46-year career in leadership roles in collegiate and professional sports.

Cleary retired July 1<sup>st</sup> as executive director of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics, a job he held since the association was founded in 1965. He served in the position longer than any other current Division I conference commissioner, coaching organization executive director or national association leader.

Under Cleary's leadership, the association rose from a 300 member organization to one with more than 6,500 athletic administrators in about 1,600 organizations throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. Prior to serving in the association, Cleary was director of championship events for the National Collegiate Athletic Association with responsibility for administering all national championships.

Before entering intercollegiate athletics, Cleary held positions in the old American Basketball League as general manager of the Cleveland Pipers under owner George Steinbrenner and as general manager of the Kansas City Steers under owner Abe Saperstein. He also served as Midwest scout for the New York Knicks.

While with the Pipers, Cleary hired John McLendon, the first black coach to head an American professional sports team. He later served as fund administrator for the John McLendon Minority Scholarship Foundation, raising more than \$1.5 million to provide \$10,000 postgraduate scholarships to minority senior-level students who planned to pursue a graduate degree in athletics administration.

A behind-the-scenes person in the field of athletics, Cleary has served on committees with the U.S. Olympic Committee and the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority. In 1995, he received the award for Outstanding Contribution to Amateur Football from the National Football Federation and College Hall of Fame. In 2009, he was inducted into the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics.

A first generation American, Cleary has visited Ireland at least 25 times, especially Mulranny and Ballina in County Mayo, the birthplaces of his parents. He and about 15 other West Side Irish purchased the Mulranny Bay Hotel, which they operated for three years.

Cleary grew up in East Cleveland and is proud of his Jesuit education at St. Ignatius High School and John Carroll. He served two years in the Navy aboard the USS Lake Champlain, an aircraft carrier stationed in the Mediterranean. During his teenage years, in 1948, he competed in a CYO Boxing Tournament that is believed to be the first live sporting event broadcast on Cleveland television. He and his wife, Sue, live in Bay Village. The couple has nine children and 21 grandchildren.

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