

Gridiron Chapter

Camaraderie continues after Ragin' Cajuns hang up their cleats

AS A FORMER MEMBER OF LOUISIANA'S Ragin' Cajuns® football team, Marty Cannon understands the power of teamwork.

He and other former players are harnessing that positive force into the Gridiron Chapter of the UL Lafayette Alumni Association. It's one of several alumni groups based on members' shared interests or experiences, such as the College of Nursing Alumni Chapter or Alumni Band Chapter.

Cannon is a former offensive lineman and four-year letterman who graduated in 1999.

"Some of my best memories from college are of my football teammates. We had some great times and they are some of the best friends that I've ever known. We've stayed in contact," he said in a recent interview.

Peter Batton and Paul Norton formed an independent nonprofit organization, the Gridiron Alumni Club, in 2003. Batton played football at UL Lafayette from 1982-86; Norton played from 1986-90.

"Some coaches at UL asked Peter to organize former players to help with some equipment purchases. We wanted to unify former players and encourage them to support the team," Cannon said.

Earlier this year, the Gridiron Alumni Club joined the Alumni Association as a chapter.

"I've been a member of the Alumni Association since I graduated, so I know the benefits of membership and I like being connected to the university. Our membership was growing each year and we wanted to connect with the Alumni Association so we could do even more to support the team. By becoming an official chapter, we were also able to show our support for the university in a more formal way," Cannon said.

Dan Hare, executive director of the Alumni Association, said he's grateful for the Gridiron Chapter's leadership. "Our alumni chapters and clubs are volunteer driven," he said. The association provides staff support for clubs' and chapters' activities and development.

Members of the newly formed chapter are eager to expand its size by inviting former team managers, trainers, coaches and support staff to join the Alumni Association. "We're starting to pull people in from across the country. We're letting them know that we have an alumni chapter that is doing more tailgating activities, more reunion-type activities," Cannon said.

The Athletic Network has helped find former players who live around the country and around the world. It identifies, locates and communicates with former athletes and associated groups.

Over the past seven years, Gridiron Chapter members have donated about \$25,000 for athletic equipment for the football team.

The group hosts an annual Bill "Blackjack" Landry Memorial Golf Scramble at Acadian Hills Country Club in honor of an equipment manager who served in the university's Athletics Department for 32 years before his death in 1998. "... he was a very special man. He was also one of UL's greatest fans," Cannon said.

The chapter provides meals twice a year for the football team, coaches and support staff.

Chapter members get together to tailgate during football season. "A couple of years ago, we had 60 years of UL Lafayette football represented at one of our tailgating parties. That was incredible," Cannon said.

For information about joining the Alumni Association, phone (337) 482-0900 or send e-mail to alumni@louisiana.edu



Members of the new Gridiron Chapter include, from left, Kevin Guilbeau, punter, 1993-96; Marty Cannon, offensive lineman, 1994-98; and Robby Waguespack, offensive lineman, 1990-93.

OCEANNA TRZCIAK-GATES