

Rene Portland named 2005 Renaissance Person of the Year

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University Park, Pa.; July 21, 2005 -- Rene Portland, head coach of the Penn State Lady Lions basketball team, will be honored as the 2005 Renaissance Person of the Year at the 29th annual Renaissance Scholarship Fund dinner, according to Charles W. Rohrbeck, president of the Renaissance Fund board of directors.

The annual dinner raises funds for Renaissance Scholarships, which are awarded to academically talented Penn State students who have great financial need. Each dinner honors a local leader or leaders in the community, and contributions are used to endow scholarships in the honoree's name.

This year's event will be held Thursday, Nov. 3 at The Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel on the University Park campus, with a reception at 6 p.m. followed by dinner at 7 p.m.

Since the Renaissance Fund's inception in 1969, more than \$6 million has been raised. During the 2004-05 academic year, \$515,625 in scholarships was awarded to 427 Renaissance scholars.

"Rene, in addition to being a great coach, is a community leader and has given her name and efforts to many campaigns and public projects," said Rohrbeck. "She is a wonderful role model for young women. Her support of other scholarships makes her a natural choice for the 2005 Renaissance Honoree."

Rene Portland is in her 26th year as head coach of Penn State's women's basketball team. Last year she reached 665 victories over the course of her 29-year coaching career, including 578 wins at Penn State. She led the Lady Lions to 21 NCAA tournaments, including the last seven seasons. She also has received Big Ten Coach of the Year honors four times. The Women's Basketball Coaches Association twice has named her National Coach of the Year, the first time in 1991 and the second in 2004, after leading the Lady Lions to their third-straight Sweet Sixteen appearance and an Elite Eight finish in the 2004 NCAA Tournament.

A Broomall native, Portland and her six brothers and sisters were encouraged by their parents to play in competitive sports from an early age. After high school she attended Immaculata College, a small Catholic institution near Philadelphia, with hopes of becoming a school teacher. Immaculata had a strong women's basketball program, and she joined the team under the college's legendary coach, Cathy Rush.

In the next four years, Rush's Mighty Macs won three consecutive national championships and a second-place finish, and Portland earned three Outstanding College Athlete of America awards. She gained her first coaching experience when she and her teammates worked summers as assistants in Rush's basketball camps.

After graduating in 1975 with her bachelor's degree in social sciences and teacher certification, Portland stayed at Immaculata for a year as Rush's assistant. She then coached for two years at St. Joseph's University and for two years at the University of Colorado. In 1980 her determination to make a difference in women's athletics won the attention of Penn State's then-athletic director and football coach, Joe Paterno, who hired Portland to coach the Lady Lions.

Along with Lady Lion team success, individual players have thrived under Portland's leadership. For example, four players have garnered six first-team All-America honors, and seven players have been named to the first-team All-Big Ten squad a total of 18 times. Portland is well-known for encouraging her players to get involved in the community, participating in local charitable events such as the Easter Seals Therapeutic Horseback Riding Program, United Way Day of Caring, the Second Mile, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the American Cancer Society and Special Olympics.

In 2001, she and her husband, John Portland, endowed two Lady Lion scholarships -- named in honor of their daughter and Rene's late mother -- with one of the largest scholarship gifts ever made by an athletic coach at any university. They have been married for 29 years, and all three of their children -- Christine, John and Stephen -- are Penn State graduates. The Portlands also have been foster parents and recently adopted 10-year-old DeLisa into their family.

For Renaissance Dinner information, or to make a contribution to the Renaissance Fund, contact Kathy Kurtz in the Office of Annual Giving at (814) 863-2052.