



George Toma named NFL Pioneer Award winner

George Toma, one of the founders of STMA, was honored at the Pro Football Hall of Fame Celebration in Canton, OH. He won an award that's only been given four times in nearly 30 years.

The "Magnificent Seven" player inductees presented to the world during the 2001 Pro Football Hall of Fame's Enshrinement Weekend celebration in Canton, OH, weren't the only honorees used to being in the spotlight. George Toma, one of STMA's founders, and Playing Field Consultant for the National Football League, was honored with the Daniel F. Reeves Pioneer Award, named for the late Daniel F. Reeves, former owner of the Los Angeles Rams.

pro football's championship fields, including all 35 Super Bowls, has earned him widespread recognition and acclaim. It is a reputation he has earned over a career that spans nearly 60 years."

Emil Bossard was mentor

Toma landed his first groundskeeping job at the Class A Eastern League home of the Wilkes-Barre (PA) Barons. Legendary Cleveland Indians groundskeeper Emil Bossard was his first mentor. After serving in the Army during the Korean War, Toma returned to sports turf management, moving through the ranks of several minor league teams. In 1963 he was hired to provide his expert services for the Kansas City Chiefs. His first direct connection with the NFL came with field preparation for the first Super Bowl. Toma has demonstrated his field expertise on baseball, football, and soccer venues around the world.

In 1981, he lent his expertise to the formation of STMA. He remains active and his name is seen regularly on the "referred by" line on STMA membership applications.

Congratulations, George, on a job well done "and then some!"

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The Hall of Fame's announcement notes, "Toma, considered a master at his trade, is sport's preeminent groundskeeper. His innovations, expert care, and preservation of

\$5 ticket to the Hall of Fame

The winning ticket in the first SAFE Foundation Drawing to support sports turf-related research and scholarships opened the door to a once in a lifetime experience for winner Dave Ditzler, turf & irrigation Specialist for Grinnell College in Grinnell, IA. Dave and his wife, Tami, shared an expenses-paid trip to Canton, OH, to join in the Pro Football Hall of Fame's 2001 Enshrinement Weekend celebration last July.

Highlight of the trip for Dave was borrowing a press pass to get on the field during Saturday night practice sessions for the Miami Dolphins and St. Louis Rams. Armed with his 35-mm camera, Dave took the field. He says, "We have a son named Zach Thomas, so I headed for the Dolphins middle linebacker, number 54, Zach Thomas. Telling him about our son led to an autograph and a photo with him." Dave mingled with the press and players, alternating taking shots with Tami's shooting some from the stands.

Ditzler also arranged to meet George Toma at the Hall of Fame (HOF) pre-game Tailgate Party. Dave says, "The turnout was huge and I thought I'd never connect with him, but we did within 10 minutes of arriving. Meeting him was a highlight of the trip for me. We're undertaking a \$2 million, 23-acre, multiple-

field construction project at the college. George let me pick his brain for 90 minutes. I was scribbling notes on napkins."

Local hospitality

Bob Patt, current SAFE (and past STMA) treasurer and Civic Center Manager/Stadium Manager for the City of Canton, the key force in putting together the Raffle package, met the Ditzlers at the airport and showed them around Canton. Dave says, "Bob Patt was great. We felt welcome right away. He even gave us a behind the scenes tour of the Civic Center."

The Ditzlers stayed at the Hilton Hotel, rubbing elbows with the HOF dignitaries staying there, including a chat with NFL great and television star Merlin Olson. The Hall of Fame visit on Sunday was made even better by running into

Jackie Slater who was also touring the facility with family members. Slater, an offensive lineman who played for 20 years with the Rams, was one of the inductees.

The Ditzlers ended their official HOF event schedule enjoying the HOF Game between the St. Louis Rams and Miami Dolphins.

Not a bad return for a \$5 raffle ticket!



At the HOF Tailgate Party, Ditzler meets George Toma, STMA founder and recipient of the NFL's Daniel F. Reeves Pioneer Award.