

2007

Joseph G. Rogers Award For dedication, accomplishment and excellence in YMCA Competitive Swimming and Diving



Long Time YMCA Volunteer To Receive Joseph G. Rogers Award

Donald Leas will receive the YMCA's highest award for his volunteer work with the sport of swimming and diving. The Joseph G. Rogers award is to be presented by the National YMCA Competitive Swimming and Diving Advisory Committee during the National YMCA Swimming and Diving Championships on March 31 at the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Leas has been involved for over 30 years with the management of the National YMCA Diving Championships. Don's involvement with swimming and diving at the YMCA dates all the back to 1944 at the North Branch Y in Philadelphia where he was a swimming and diving competitor, which ultimately offered him the opportunity to participate in the 1953 National YMCA Championships and the 1952 and 1953 State YMCA Championships. While a member of his local Y he also belong to the Hi-Y and was a lifeguard for a number of years. He has also competed in the National YMCA Masters Diving Championships.

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Leas's participation in aquatics over the years has been extensive and varied. It began in 1943 when he competed in swimming for the Big Bothers Boys Club in Philadelphia before moving on to the Y. He was Public League and City high school diving champion his junior and senior years at Northeast High School where he earned 12 letters in Track and Field, Swimming and Diving, Gymnastics (team Captain), and Cross Country (team Co-Captain).

At Michigan State University Don continued his career in gymnasts, team Captain and Big 10 Champion on the Flying Rings, and diving. At Southern Illinois University he served as Diving Coach and Assistant Gymnastics Coach for two years while earning his Masters Degree. At East Aurora, Illinois, High School he was Head Swimming and Diving Coach and Cross Country Coach and also coached swimming at the Aurora YMCA. From 1961 to 1965 Don was the Diving Coach and Assistant Gymnastics Coach at the University of Illinois while also coaching divers from the Champaign, Danville, and Decatur YMCA's. The next assignment had Don at St. Cloud University, Minnesota, where he was the Head Swimming and Diving Coach before accepting the position of Chairman of the Department of Health and Physical Education in 1966 at Clarion University in Pennsylvania. His first assignment was the completion and furnishing of the new physical education complex, including a swimming and diving natatorium where Don and the swimming coaches sponsored numerous conference championships and four national championships.

Leas's career blossomed at Clarion where he produce 36 National Champions and 135 All- Americas in the sport of diving with two of his women divers going on to become members of three Olympic Teams. In 1984 he was named NCAA Swimming Coach of the year and in 1990 was named the NCAA Diving Coach of the Decade. During Don's time at Clarion he ran a very successful winter diving program and summer camp which attracted many YMCA divers, some of whom became State and National YMCA champions, including his son Michael who won two State Championships. Toward the end of his tenure at Clarion, Leas was asked to manage the diving competition for the 1995 FINA World Cup and the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. He lived there for a year and eight months working with the IOC, FINA, USOC, NBC, and the Organizing Committee to produce an outstanding Olympic diving competition.

Since 1981 Leas has been the International Chairman of Diving for the World University Games. These multi-sport competitions, similar to the Olympics, are held every two years in a different country throughout the world. The duties involve inspection and approval of a facility, suggestions for design of new or retrofitting of old facilities, determination of the competition schedule, selection of judges and referees, and finally overseeing the competition as it unfolds. For over 20 years Don has directed the FINA USA Diving Grand Prix competition at the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Ft. Lauderdale and other cities in the United States.

Other responsibilities which Leas has had over the years have included member of the Board of Directors of the United States Olympic Committee, National Chairman of the AAU Women's Diving Committee, member of United States Diving Board of Directors, Chairman of USA Diving Rules Committee, Member of NCAA Diving Rules Subcommittee, National Chairman of the Women's Swimming and Diving Rules Committee for AIAW, Diving Judge at the Good Will Games, Referee and Judge at the US Olympic Trials, Co-Editor of USA Diving Safety Manual, Editor of over 20 Rule Books for Swimming and/or Diving, and Consultant for four films on diving fundamentals. He was the originator of a computer diving program which was used for the management of diving meets and the analysis of diving judges' performance and which has been used by most programs in existence at this time. Don has also served as National Chairman of ANSI/NSPI-1 Standard Writing Committee For Public Swimming Pools and edited the 2003 National Public Swimming Pool Standard and has served on the Technical Council and APSP-5 Residential Swimming Pool Standards Committee. Additionally he has been Vice President of the Allegheny Mountain Association of the AAU for all sports, Vice President for Health of the Pennsylvania Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, and President of the Pennsylvania Association for United States Diving. No one has served in more capacities in the sport of diving in the United States than Don Leas.