

NATCHITOCHES -- Former Bossier City mayor George Dement, a champion of amateur sports in northwest Louisiana, and the man known as "Mr. Softball" in Louisiana for three decades, Benny Turcan, are the 2009 recipients of the Dave Dixon Louisiana Sports Leadership Award.

Dement and Turcan will be honored Saturday night, June 27, during the 2009 Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame Induction Dinner and Ceremonies in Natchitoches. Turcan will be recognized posthumously.

The award is presented annually by the Hall of Fame's 30-member selection committee to an individual who has played a decisive role as a sports leader/administrator benefiting Louisiana and/or bringing credit to Louisiana on the national and international level. It is named in honor of Hall of Famer Dave Dixon, the driving force behind bringing the NFL to Louisiana with the creation of the New Orleans Saints franchise. Dixon is also considered "the father" of the Louisiana Superdome.

The award was created in 2005 and has been presented to Randy Gregson, a New Orleans resident and former president of the United States Tennis Association; Emmanuel "Boozy" Bourgeois, the 33-year president of Louisiana Special Olympics; Don Landry, a longtime collegiate administrator; Doug Thornton, the executive director of the Superdome; and last year's winner, Dr. James Andrews, a Homer native, LSU graduate and SEC champion pole vaulter, recognized as one of the world's premiere sports medicine/orthopaedic practitioners.

Along with presentation of the Dixon Award, tight new Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame members will be enshrined: football greats Michael Brooks, Marshall Faulk and Willie Roaf, golf champion Hal Sutton, women's basketball coaching pioneer Sonja Hogg, world motorcycling champion Freddie Spencer, high school girls basketball coaching legend Carrice Russell Baker, and iconic LSU athletic trainer Marty Broussard. Broussard will be honored posthumously.

Also honored June 27 will be the 2009 winners of the Distinguished Service Award in Sports Journalism, Ruston Daily Leader sports editor O.K. "Buddy" Davis and 48-year Shreveport sportscaster Bob Griffin.

For ticket information, to make secure on-line ticket and event reservations, and for a schedule of events during the Hall of Fame Induction Celebration June 25-27, visit www.lasportshall.com on the internet. Banquet tickets are just \$30 per person.

Dement's contributions are centered in boxing and his role as a youth sports activist. The former mayor of Bossier City was a hotel innkeeper when he began having a major impact on the Shreveport/Bossier and regional sports scene. He was the man behind the Golden Gloves being fought in Shreveport, featuring the Spinks brothers and other later prominent Olympic and pro boxers. He also brought in international competitions such as a USA-Russia card when the Cold War was red hot.

The father of 1972 Summer Olympics' boxer Tim Dement has long been an avid supporter of youth athletic endeavors, particularly the "Sweet Science," for many years in Shreveport/Bossier City. He helped spearhead Irish McNeel's Sports for Boys club in Shreveport.

He served as the long-time mayor of Bossier, where he gave time and his status as a city political figure to better youth sports' programs. Dement helped spearhead and oversaw construction of the CenturyTel Center, a 12,000-seat arena for sports and special events.

Turcan was the state ASA softball commissioner from 1952 until his passing in 1980.

He was inducted into the American Softball Association Hall of Honor in 1976, one year after it was established. He served on the ASA Executive Committee, as treasurer, budget officer and on every other ASA committee. Turcan traveled throughout the United States promoting softball.

Although his playing career ended at age 12 when stricken with osteomyelitis, a disease of the bone which left him physically challenged, the New Orleans native found ways to be involved in the sport. After moving to Baton Rouge in 1935, he began organizing softball leagues. He started the first softball league in Louisiana in 1938 and was involved with the growth and development of softball for more than 40 years.

He began managing teams in the late 1930's and had a state champion in 1942. In 1943, Turcan received all but one of 700 votes cast in choosing softball's "Manager of the Year."

When he was named State Commissioner in 1952, there were 20-30 teams in the entire state. By 1977, that number had grown to over 1,000. These teams included men, women, boys and girls fast and slow pitch, industrial leagues, church leagues, modified fast pitch and others. Under his leadership, for the very first time, Baton Rouge was selected as the host for ASA's Southwest Regional Tournament.

Favorites among his humanitarian and charitable contributions included the March of Dimes and Baton Rouge Kids Baseball Clinic. For many years, he chaired and directed the March of Dimes Basketball Tournaments which he started. Turcan raised thousands of dollars for children with birth defects.

He was a founding director of the Baton Rouge Kids Baseball Clinic which provided young players an opportunity to interact with and learn from national baseball figures. He was known as "Mr. Softball" in his area and as the "Father of Softball" throughout the state. Sam King of the Baton Rouge State Times/Advocate wrote, "If the earth was a softball, Benny Turcan would be its axis. The game in Louisiana revolves around him."

Turcan served as Chief Budget Officer, Assistant Commissioner of Administration and Commissioner of Administration for the state of Louisiana during his 40-year governmental career. He chaired state employees fund raising for the March of Dimes for 25 years and for the United Way for 10 years.

The Dixon Award winners will be recognized with a display in the under-construction Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame and Louisiana State Museum, a 27,500-square foot facility in Natchitoches whose centerpiece will be the Hall of Fame.