



Rita Benson LeBlanc to receive Pop Warner's Female Achievement Award
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Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc. (PWLS) the largest national youth football and cheerleading organization in the United States with more than 400,000 participants will award **Rita Benson LeBlanc, Owner and Executive Vice President of the New Orleans Saints and Arena Football's New Orleans VooDoo** with the **Pop Warner Female Achievement Award** on Saturday night at the 48th Annual Pop Warner All-American Scholar Banquet at the Coronado Springs Resort at Walt Disney World in Orlando, FL. Rita Benson LeBlanc also becomes the first female NFL executive to be recognized by Pop Warner.

The **Pop Warner Female Achievement Award** is being presented to Benson LeBlanc not just for her success as an executive in football at both the team and league levels, but for her commitment to developing programs that have benefited the community, youth and charities in the Gulf South and the leadership role that she and the Saints have taken to rebuild the New Orleans region post-Katrina.

The banquet honors the most academically advanced student-athletes from Pop Warner programs across the country, as well as several individuals and public figures for their commitment to academics, athletics, community, and the betterment of young people across America. More than 2,500 people are expected to attend the Banquet.

"Rita Benson LeBlanc is one of the most talented and respected executives in sports. Her key role within both the Saints and the AFL's VooDoo in New Orleans is a tribute to her hard work and commitment to the game," said Mary FitzGerald, Chief Operating Officer, Pop Warner Little Scholars. "Pop Warner participants are fortunate to have such exemplary role models like Rita," added FitzGerald.

Rita Benson LeBlanc joins many other prominent and successful females who have accepted this award at the Pop Warner Scholar All-American Banquet including Olympic Gold Medal Gymnasts, Natalie Coughlin (2007), Kerri Strug (1999) and Amanda Borden (2003), American Idol Judge Paula Abdul (2000), Sports Journalists Kelly Naqi (ESPN in 2006), Lesley Visser (CBS in 2005) and ABC's Good Morning America anchor Robin Roberts (2001).

"It is a tremendous honor to be recognized with the Pop Warner Female Achievement Award. I am extremely proud to join the past recipients of this prestigious award," said Benson LeBlanc. "Across America, Pop Warner is touching and enhancing many young lives and I am thrilled to be acknowledged by such an impactful organization."

As Owner/Executive Vice President Rita Benson LeBlanc oversees the business and administrative operations of the New Orleans Saints including sales, marketing, community and youth programs, game entertainment and stadium operations. LeBlanc was formerly named to her position with the club in 2006, after having assumed many of the same responsibilities during the 2005 season when the team was forced to evacuate to San Antonio in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Rita. During that period LeBlanc, under the leadership of Saints owner Tom Benson played a critical role in securing the return of the Saints to New Orleans. As Owner/Executive Vice President, LeBlanc represents the Saints at NFL Ownership Meetings, chairing the NFL Employee Benefits Committee and serving on the NFL International Committee that has brought NFL International Series Games to London including the New Orleans Saints vs. San Diego Chargers on October 26, 2008.

LeBlanc also serves as Owner/Executive Vice President of the New Orleans VooDoo of the Arena Football League and has played a key role in the development of the team since the franchise was awarded in 2002. LeBlanc currently serves on the Executive Committee and is Vice-Chair of the Properties Committee. Under her leadership, the VooDoo set a league record for season ticket sales in 2007 and led the AFL in attendance. With AFL Board support, she and Tom Benson helped secure ArenaBowl XXI for New Orleans, the first professional sports league championship game to be held in the city since Hurricane Katrina. Arena Bowl XXII will also return to the city of New Orleans Sunday July 27, 2008.

Other Awards presented at the 48th Annual All-American Scholar Banquet on Saturday night will include:

The Warner Award: Troy Vincent, former NFLPA President and Cornerback for the Miami Dolphins, Philadelphia Eagles, Buffalo Bills and Washington Redskins

Pop Warner Inspiration To Youth Award: Wes Welker, New England Patriots Wide Receiver

Pop Warner Humanitarian Award: Josh Cribbs, Cleveland Browns Wide Receiver

Pop Warner Gold Football Award: Rick Horrow, Horrow Sports Ventures

Pop Warner NFL Team of the Year: Philadelphia Eagles

Pop Warner AFL Team of the Year: Los Angeles Avengers

Pop Warner is the only youth sports organization that requires academic guidelines for its members to participate in Pop Warner programs. Each year Pop Warner recognizes those participants that have achieved the highest academic merit with the All-American Scholar Banquet. Students who have a 96% or better grade point average are eligible to apply for this prestigious recognition, however, the standard for excellence increases each year with the continued growth of the program. While the student's grades are an integral part, applicants are also graded on their various school-oriented and community activities and achievements from the past year.

This year's All-American Scholars comprise the top one percent of all Pop Warner participants nationwide, and the average grade point average was a 96 percent. Over 7,500 scholar-athletes were named to the First Team, Second Team or Honorable Mention All-American Scholars, based on a score calculated from the student's grade point average and addendum activities.

First Team All-American Scholar is the highest achievement a Pop Warner student-athlete can achieve, with only 35 football participants and 25 cheerleaders and dancers selected per grade level. First Team All-American Scholar's in eighth grade and higher are also eligible for one of many scholarships that are awarded at the National Scholar Banquet.

About Pop Warner:

Founded in 1929 and headquartered in Langhorne, P.A., Pop Warner Little Scholars is the largest national youth football and cheerleading organization in the United States and the only youth sports organization that emphasizes academics as an prerequisite for participation. Currently there are over 400,000 children in Pop Warner organizations in 43 states, Guam, Scotland, Germany, Russia, Japan and Mexico. The NFLPA estimates that 70% of all current NFL Players got their starts in Pop Warner programs. For more information on Pop Warner and its programs visit www.popwarner.com.