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**Jim Brown, president of the St. Raphael Football program, recently was named Illinois Volunteer of the Year by TSS Photography for his 40 years with the league.**

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## For the love of the game ... and the kids

### *St. Raphael Football's longtime volunteer honored*

**BY MELISSA JENCO**  
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After 40 years as a coach with the St. Raphael Football program, Jim Brown is starting to wonder whether there's some truth to the joke there's only one way out.

Regardless, he has no desire to hang up his whistle and clipboard.

"I just get a real sense of satisfaction from going out on a Saturday when all the kids will be playing and watching them all have a good time," Brown said.

In recognition of his efforts over the past 40 years, Brown recently was named the Illinois Volunteer of the Year by

TSS Photography, a nationwide youth photography franchise.

"The greatest gift you can give kids is time and we think it's a fitting award because we're hooked into the youth sports industry and like to give back to people who make the youth sports industry work," said John Parkinson, owner of TSS Photography of Naperville.

Brown, who is retired from a 34-year career at Lucent Technology, started as a coach with the program in 1969 when there were about 150 players.

Today, there are 2,600 players and more than 700 coaches spread out among 115 teams.

Paul O'Toole, a



**Jake Kolbe hands off to St. Raphael teammate Nick Thomas.**

COURTESY OF RICK WILLARD

commissioner and member of the board of directors, played as a youngster and sent his own son through the program. He said Brown is caring, understanding and the "glue the holds the program together."

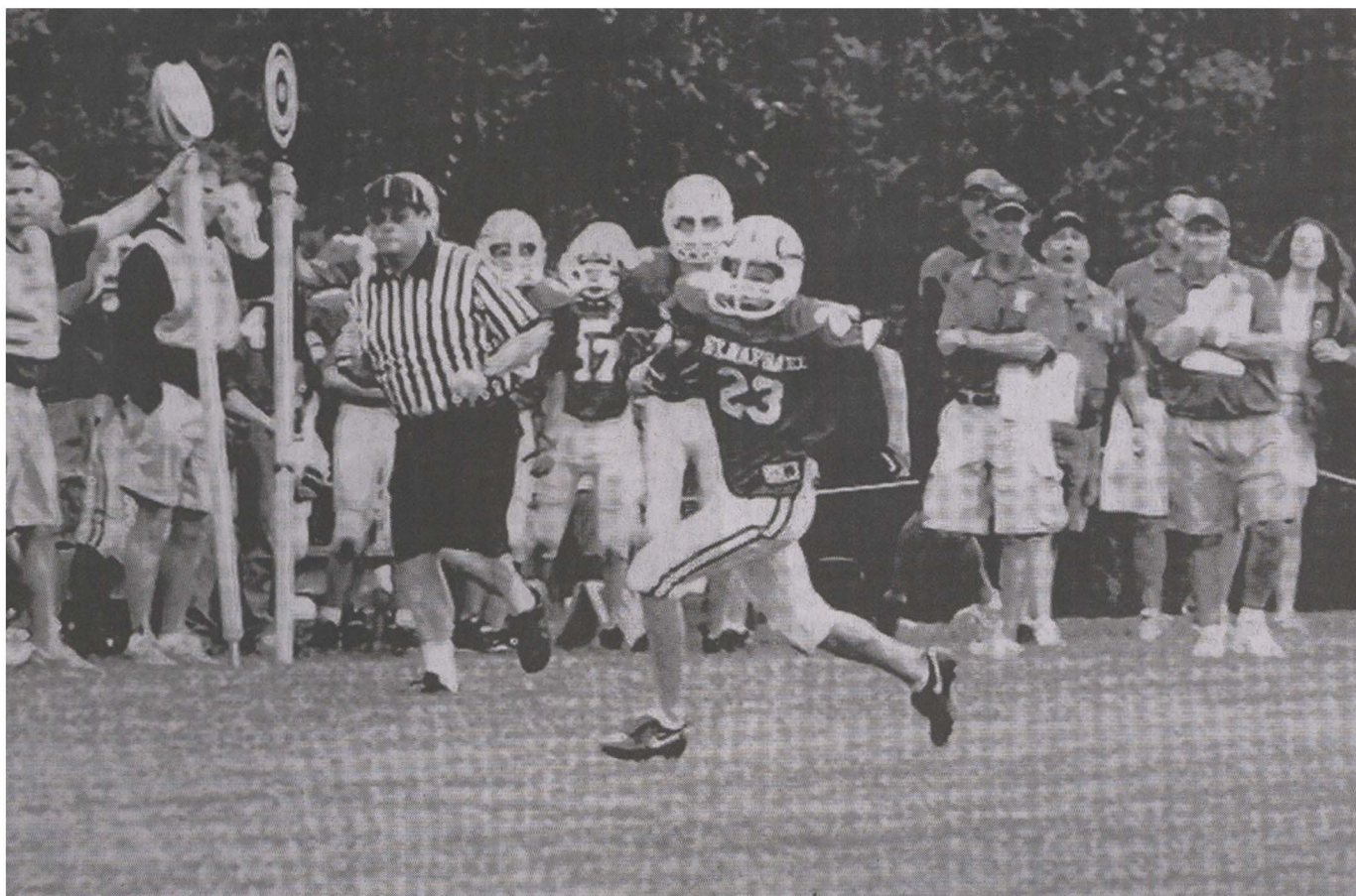
"He's passionate about it, understands right and wrong, understands how to lead an organization," O'Toole said.

Brown not only serves as president, but also coaches a seventh- and eighth-grade

travel team. Over the years, he has had the opportunity to coach his own sons and even his grandson.

"The majority of the kids in the program will never play on Friday night for their high school because they will choose other activities," he said. "But they will be able to have a great experience playing football and be able to tell their kids about it."

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COURTESY OF RICK WILLARD

**Kyle DeSanto runs for a touchdown for St. Raphael in a game against St. Alexander this season as coaches Kevin Kelly, Jim Brown, Scott Kolbe, Bruce Martynowicz and Rich Baumgartner look on. Brown, president of the program, has been coaching for 40 years.**

## Kids: Coach is now writing book

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But there will also be those who go on to play under the lights.

This year, the quarterbacks at Benet Academy, Naperville Central, Naperville North and Neuqua Valley high schools all went through the program, and 14 of the 22 starters on the 2007 Naperville North state championship team are also former St. Raphael players.

Some of his former players' stories will be immortalized in a book he is writing,

"It's More Than a Game." While it will be a work of fiction, Brown is drawing on challenges faced by boys he has coached through the years and hopes it will hold lessons for other teen boys who can relate to their experiences.

The key to the success of the St. Raphael program, Brown says, is its head coaches as well as an emphasis on respect — for referees, coaches, parents and players alike. Any decisions administrators make, he says, are done based on what is in the

best interest of children.

"We try to run the program in such a way we train coaches to view their responsibility as a football program as a vehicle for total development of children," he said. "Not just playing better football but learning all the things you can learn from participating in an activity."

Margi Schiemann witnessed that strategy in action as her son Brian played for St. Raphael. She said Brown is the kind of coach who stays positive

and emphasizes learning.

As Brian prepares for high school next year, she feels he is prepared to face any challenges that come his way both on and off the football field.

"The program is based on Christian values, honor, respect, dedication, brotherhood," she said. "He did a great job bringing the boys together and creating that sense of team unity and brotherhood."

For information about St. Raphael Football, visit [straphaelfootball.org](http://straphaelfootball.org).