

FIRST FAMILY OF FOOTBALL TO BE HONORED APRIL 16

by Laura Gwinn

COOKEVILLE -- Those who are planning on attending the Cookeville-Putnam County Chamber of Commerce's sixth annual Membership Meeting are in for a treat. The event will honor the Upper Cumberland's First Family of Football -- the Katherine Brown family. "This will be a celebration of life and heritage for a lot of reasons," George Halford, president/CEO of the chamber, said. "After our experiences with the TSSAA football championships, the impact this family has had on this community was revealed. It will be a special time for people who love the community, area sports and the chamber."



served as superintendent of schools for Putnam County.

The Brown family's impact on sports in the Upper Cumberland goes back many years. Katherine's father, Eddie "Jelly" Watson, was instrumental in organizing sports at Cookeville High School. Watson was an athletic standout in football, basketball and baseball at Tech and then went on to coach Cookeville High's football team from 1929 to 1932. He also was the principal, basketball and football coach in Celina, then returned to Cookeville High to coach from 1944-1958. He also

(Pictured: The Cookeville-Putnam County Chamber of Commerce's annual meeting on April 16 will honor the Brown family, the First Family of Football in the Upper Cumberland. In this photo from the late 1960s, the entire family gathers around a coffee table to discuss recruiting for Watson and Mack. From left are: Watson Brown, Mack Brown, Katherine Watson Brown, Melvin Brown, Mel Brown, Mary Ellen Watson, and Eddie "Jelly" Watson).

He also began the little league program in Cookeville, and in honor these accomplishments, the Cookeville High School football stadium was named after him. Mary Ellen Watson, Katherine's mother, was an artistic influence in the Upper Cumberland. One of her paintings will be on display at the meeting. Katherine herself also made an impact on the region as well. While attending Cookeville High School, she was a member of the basketball and cheerleading teams, while enjoying softball, badminton, volleyball and tennis. She attended college at Tennessee Technological University and went on to open the Brown and Watson Sporting Good Store in Cookeville. She supported her father and husband, Melvin Brown, in coaching, along with helping her three sons, Watson, Mack and Mel Brown, in their athletic pursuits.

"Katherine was a devoted mother and wife in the 1950s, but very much a 'today's woman,'" Dianne Callahan, membership director for the chamber, said. "She was a leader, a standout and a voice for women when she ran her own women's boutique, as well as later being the only female bank manager in town."

Watson and Mack Brown were named All-Americans while playing football at Cookeville High School. They also played basketball and baseball and both went on to play football in college. Watson went to Vanderbilt and Mack attended both Vanderbilt and Florida State University. During his coaching career, Watson was the head coach for Austin Peay State University, the Cincinnati Bearcats, Rice University, Vanderbilt University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He is currently the head coach at Tennessee Tech University with his son, Stephen, serving as an assistant coach. Both of his children, Jenny and Stephen, received athletic scholarships to play collegiate sports.

Mack coached at Appalachian State University, Tulane University, the University of North Carolina and

currently coaches at the University of Texas where he led the Texas Longhorns to win the national championship in 2005, becoming one of the most respected coaches in football today. Mel also played football and baseball at Cookeville High and attended Florida State University, serving as the manager of the football team. A devoted supporter of Cookeville High School and Tennessee Tech athletics, he and his family attend and tailgate at every Tennessee Tech and Cookeville High School game. He currently works as an account sales executive with BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee.

Katherine passed away peacefully in late February, losing her battle with pancreatic cancer. Two weeks before her passing, Callahan and Brenda Smith, also with the chamber, visited Katherine at her home. "Katherine Brown's wishes will be carried throughout the evening," Callahan said. "All the details were reviewed with her and she alone chose the music."

Callahan said that this year's annual meeting is unique in two ways: it will focus on the field of sports and will recognize an entire family instead of one individual. "I think this year's annual meeting will be like a good movie," Callahan continued. "We will laugh, we will cry, and we will leave being a little better than when we came, through this brief two hour experience of one family's legacy -- the Browns, one of our own!"

"The chamber is so pleased to be able to honor the Brown family and recognize their contributions, both to this community and to so many people across the country," Bob Luna, chairman of the chamber's board of directors, said. Speakers at past meetings include Bob Dole, David Oreck, John Seigenthaler, Harry Stonecipher and Millard Vaughn Oakley. "It is an honor for the chamber to be able to showcase the history of this family and the contributions they have made to our community," Callahan said. Tickets are \$75 per person or \$600 per table. Chamber members may purchase tickets or tables by contacting Callahan at 526-2211 or e-mailing her at dcallahan@cookevillechamber.com. Purchase tickets early due to limited seating.

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