



Great national honor goes to Somerville native

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Thomas Shannon still considers himself at home in Somerville, even though he does not live within the city limits. One of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans 2009 award winners, Thomas spent most of his life in Florida where his family moved when he was ten, but in many ways he is true to his roots, which grow deep in the Charlestown and Somerville soil. The award honors individuals who have overcome humble beginnings or adversity to achieve success, and serve as outstanding role models to the national community. "We welcome these extraordinary leaders into the Horatio Alger Association. Each has demonstrated steadfast determination and amazing achievements that support our unwavering mission of honoring true American success stories," said David L. Sokol, president and CEO of the Horatio Alger Association. "Tom will serve as a role model for today's youth by encouraging motivation, purpose and superior accomplishments." While Thomas has won many other awards in his successful career as a collegiate athlete and businessman, he states, "every award is an honor, but this is extremely humbling because it honors extraordinary Americans. These are amazing people and I am humbled to be put in their company."



A success on field and off

Thomas Shannon's successes have come both in sports and in business. His football skills won him a scholarship to University of Florida, where he played quarterback and was voted Most Valuable Player at the Gator Bowl in 1962. After graduation, he and his wife Kathy decided to try life north of the border and moved to Montreal, where Thomas joined the Montreal Alouettes in the Canadian Football League. While playing there, he sustained his fourth knee injury and quit the sport. He states, "It was hard to turn the page from scholarships and sports contracts to something else, but I had to do it. When you make that kind of transition, you bring your competitive spirit, and hopefully your fairness and your honesty."

His football career over, Thomas was hired as an administrative assistant at Watson and Company, an engineering and architecture firm. While there, he learned market analysis and economic feasibility. A client, Sun State Builders, hired him as project manager and soon promoted him to vice president in charge of West Coast operations. In 1976, he formed his own company, Village Development Company and worked as a real estate developer until 1993. At that time, he formed T-Bird Restaurant Group, Inc., which developed Outback Steakhouse restaurants in California. With 63 restaurants and 5,000 employees, Shannon was recognized as

Restaurateur of the Year in 2002. He is a seven-time recipient of the National Franchisee of the Year award.

Somerville and Charlestown family keeps it local

Thomas credits his success to his formative years in Somerville and Charlestown. He was born in Somerville, to a large Irish-Italian family, and spent the first ten years of his life growing up in one of the housing projects in Charlestown. They moved when his father's job transferred them to Miami. He describes his family as "great providers - even if there wasn't money there were so many people to help, and so much love, that we never felt poor. As a kid I didn't know what income bracket we were in - I just knew I had lots of loving family." His mother, who he describes as "four foot eleven inches of Italian fireball" had a large family in Somerville and Medford. Thomas still talks about the proud Nunziato part of his family he has in Somerville, whether a barber still practicing his trade, or his cousin John Nunziato of Somerville High's athletic Hall of Fame. Thomas states, "The basis of my integrity comes [from my years in Boston.] My religion, my influences, my family - they stay with me forever. At some point, growing up in a housing project, you make the decision to stay on the light side, and stay away from the dark side. I knew there was another path, but with my family, it was never a hard choice." When talking about his parents, Thomas credits them with his "automatic drive to succeed, whether in sports or business." He states, "My father was a tall handsome Irishman and a US Customs agent. He was the most honest guy I ever knew, and he is the reason that, for me, the choice to stay away from the darker side of project life was never hard."

Giving back

For Thomas, the best part of the success he has garnered is that it has given him the opportunity to give back, both personally and professionally. He states, "Our restaurants gave 925 special events for different charities all around California last year. It has spread all over the state - it might be a Little League ribbon-cutting one day, and a seated dinner for 800 the next. We want to be a part of our community, wherever we are." And his generosity is also evident in his personal life. He and his wife have donated over \$1 million to the Hough Graduate School of Business at the University of Florida, and through the Tom and Kathy Shannon Family Foundation they support many diverse charities, most of which involve children in need.

The Horatio Alger Association Award is another opportunity for Thomas to give back. One of the key goals of the Association is to provide mentoring and financial assistance through scholarships to a group of extraordinary scholars. When talking about the award, Thomas states, "The scholarship is the incredible part. The only word for these kids is 'amazing' - they are truly amazing kids. I am really looking forward to helping them pull themselves forward. To me, life truly is a team event, and the most important things are family and community, and faith of course. I don't think it matters who your god is, but it is important to remember you're not the big shot in this world!"

Boston now and forever

When talking to Thomas it becomes clear that, although he hasn't lived in Charlestown since he was ten years old, he still considers it his home. He speaks frequently of relatives, some who are celebrating ninety-fourth birthdays, and others whose funerals he recently returned to attend. His longtime friendship with sportscaster Will McDonough was an important one in his life, and whether they were talking Buccaneers or Patriots, Thomas remembers: "He always called me a Townie, which is what I was back in those days. I have never lost my roots in Somerville, Medford, and Charlestown, and I am proud to be from Boston."

And when asked the one question that truly defines a Bostonian, Thomas passes with flying colors. He states, "Of course I really enjoy watching the Patriots play ball. But I will always love the Red Sox. Ted Williams in my favorite player in the world." Spoken like a true local son.

About the Horatio Alger Association and Award

Founded in 1947, the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans continues to fulfill its mission of honoring the achievements of outstanding individuals in our society who have succeeded in spite of adversity and of encouraging young people to pursue their dreams through higher education. The Horatio Alger Association offers three annual scholarship programs: the National Scholarship Program and state scholarship programs, and graduate grants. The association awards nearly \$7 million annually in college scholarships and has given more than \$63 million to deserving students since 1984.

In addition to Thomas Shannon's award, ten other outstanding individuals who have accomplished remarkable achievements through hard work, self-reliance and perseverance, will receive the 2009 Horatio Alger Award. They are:

- James S.C. Chao, chairman, Foremost Group
- David Foster, producer, composer and arranger, Reprise Records & 143 Records
- Clayton Paul Hilliard, president and owner, Badger Oil Corporation
- Rebecca MacDonald, founder and executive chair, Energy Savings Income Fund (international recipient)
- Michael G. Morris, chairman, president & CEO, American Electric Power
- Indra K. Nooyi, chairman and CEO, PepsiCo Inc.
- Carl H. Ricker, Jr., founder, chairman and CEO, Azalea Holdings; partner, Campus Crest Communities; chairman, executive committee, Capital Bank Corp; co-founder and chairman, MXT Card Services, LLC
- Denzel Washington, Academy Award winning actor and director
- Robert L. Wright, Jr., chairman, FE Holdings, Inc.
- Stephen A. Wynn, chairman and CEO, Wynn Resorts

The new members will be presented with their awards April 3rd at the Horatio Alger Awards Induction Ceremonies. Activities include three days of meetings and celebrations in some of the nation's most historic buildings. The Horatio Alger National Scholars, remarkable high school seniors, will also be formally honored during the three-day gathering.