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Immediate Release : Reception to Honor Don "Swede" Larson for 30th as Football Coach

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 8, 1983

Two men who have known him from two perspectives are organizing a reception to honor Don "Swede" Larson, who is in his 30th year as Illinois Wesleyan University's football coach.

Hal Chiodo and Wally Kistenfeger are co-chairman for the event, which will be open free to the public and will be held at the Tiara Ballroom, 107 E. Lafayette, from 6:30 p.m. to midnight Sept. 24. Earlier that day, Larson's Titans will open their home schedule against College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin favorite North Central.

Chiodo and Kistenfeger, both of whom played for Larson in the 1970s, now serve as part-time assistant coaches under the 1950 IWU graduate.

Chiodo, who was a three-year letterman as an offensive end and punter from 1974 through 1976, said the idea for the party honoring Larson and his wife, Betsy, was born last year in a discussion with Kistenfeger.

"We realized that this was going to be Swede's 30th year. We decided it would be nice to honor a coach while he's still coaching," said Chiodo, whose father, Frank Chiodo, has been the coach at University High School in Normal for many years.

The program for the reception will be short on structured activities and long on opportunities for the guests to visit with the Larsons. Plans are to have hors d'oeuvres, a band for those who wish to dance and a cash bar. Additional information may be obtained from Chiodo at 828-9237.

"Not too many people stay in one place 30 years and we think Coach Larson deserves recognition for that and the success he has had," said Kistenfeger, who set nearly every IWU passing record from 1970-73 and is now helping coach John Rooney, the junior quarterback who already has displaced Kistenfeger on several lines of the Wesleyan list of records.

"We hope that many of the players Swede has coached--not just in football but in track, tennis and golf--persons he played with and the many other friends he has made over the years will come to the Tiara and make it a great night.

Kistenfeger said Larson "treated us not just as players but as people he enjoyed working with. I think Mike Sprague offers a good example of the way Swede operated," Kistenfeger said, referring to a former teammate from Clinton who is now a physician.

"Mike was in school to become a doctor and to try to play football and baseball. His attendance at practice was limited at times. There were many days when he'd have a lab course and get to practice about 15 minutes before it ended. Swede and Coach (Bob) Keck always had the idea that scholastics came first and worked their practice routine around those situations," said Kistenfeger, who formerly coached at Tremont High School and is now an assistant principal at Bloomington High School.

Chiodo said his father's respect for Larson was a major reason Hal and two younger brothers, Mark and Tom, played for Larson.

"I was what you'd call an average player and punter, but I appreciated the fact that I got to play on two good teams and I know the guys I played with thought the world of Coach and Mrs. Larson," Chiodo said.

Chiodo was a member of the 1974 team that won eight of nine games and tied for the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin championship. He also played on the 1976 team that had a 6-3 record, losing its final two games by a total of five points.

Larson, a native of Princeton, enrolled at Wesleyan in 1946 after serving in the U.S. Navy. He was a four-year football letterman as a fullback and linebacker. He was a teacher in the Rockford public school system for four years after graduating in 1950, returning to the campus as head football coach in 1954.

In his past 29 years, his football teams have won 148 games, lost 104 and tied five, winning or sharing CCIW championships in 1964, 1965, 1974, 1977 and 1980. He also has coached conference champions in tennis and golf.