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NFL star donates \$30,000 to project

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STARKVILLE — Across the world, NFL phenomenon Jerry Rice is known as a first-class athlete and football player destined for the Hall of Fame.

But when he returns to his hometown of Crawford and his alma mater, the former B.L. Moor High School, he's plain old

Please see RICE on Page 9A



Valerie Matchette/Dispatch Staff
Jacqueline Ellis, left, president of the Educational Association of East Oktibbeha County Schools, talks with NFL star Jerry Rice. Rice, an alumnus of the former B.L. Moor High School in Oktibbeha County, who was in town Friday night for a fundraiser for the EAEOCS.

Rice

Continued from page 1A

“Jerry” to the friends and family who know him best.

“I think you guys pretty much know: I’m just Jerry. I’m just Jerry Rice, and I got my foundation here at B.L. Moor High School,” Rice said Friday night at a fundraiser for the Educational Association of East Oktibbeha County Schools.

Smartly dressed in a khaki-colored suit with a cleanly shaven head and the coveted Super Bowl ring gleaming on his right hand, Rice looked the part of a California football star.

But with his genuine smile and friendly, easy-going manner, he could’ve been any average Mississippi guy.

The Oakland Raiders wide receiver was in town just for the EAEOCS’s annual banquet Friday night.

The group wants to build an outdoor amphitheater on the grounds of the school, which has been renamed East Oktibbeha High.

The EAEOCS was founded to help rebuild the school after a devastating fire ravaged the building in September 2002.

Now, the group has earned tax-exempt status and is seeking the help of B.L. Moor alumni to improve the community.

Their first goal is to build the amphitheater, and Rice announced Friday night that he will donate \$30,000 to that cause.

He said the gift is just his way of repaying a debt of gratitude.

“This high school really gave so much to me when I was growing up, and the teachers, and all the coaches, the time that was spent to make me into the person that I am today,” Rice said. “So for me to be able to come back and give something to those kids, it feels the same way. Just to come back here and be a part of this, I think it’s wonderful. I’m really glad to be a part of this project.”

The EAEOCS is working with the Carl Small Town Center at Mississippi State University’s School of Architecture to design an outdoor classroom.

The project has been in the works for about a year, and a lot has been chosen and cleared for construction.

“We’re very excited to be here and to be a part of this project,” said Leah Faulk, an intern with the SCT.



Valerie Matchette/Dispatch Staff

LEFT: Brandon Pearce, 7, plays on the jumper at the annual picnic Saturday for the Educational Association of East Oktibbeha County Schools at East Oktibbeha High.

ABOVE: Linda Harris, left, and Shirley Beckum fan themselves to try and keep cool at the annual picnic.

The SCT staff members worked with students at East Oktibbeha High to complete the design, which hasn’t been finalized.

EAEOCS President Jacqueline Ellis hopes the

project will be finished by this time next year.

She encouraged everyone at the banquet to get involved in some way, whether by a monetary donation or by volunteering time

to help build the amphitheater.

“I urge you to continue your support,” Ellis said.

Rice echoed her words, emphasizing that throughout his 20-year career, his success on the gridiron has come from

teamwork.

“If we’re going to make this work, it’s going to have to be a team effort,” Rice said.

For more information, check the EAEOCS Web site at: www.eaeocs.org