



## TOP OF THE 2ND



DREW A. KELLEY, FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

'I'm really grateful for everything Orangewood has done,' Kenny Reid said about the transitional home. 'The people there have given me a second chance at a better life.'

# Athletes First help hits home

**DANA POINT** • Kenny Reid moved nervously through the VIP lounge at the St. Regis hotel last Saturday night, passing the hulking shoulders of millionaire NFL players.

Reid, 24, needed help picking out his best suit and tie. He has needed

hands.

"We were told not to ask why the children were there," said Colt McCoy, the Heisman Trophy candidate quarterback from Texas who is awaiting April's NFL draft. "We just knew how lucky we were and that some of these kids don't really have good chances of





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these players — all clients of Newport Beach-based Athletes First sports representation firm — to help him rebuild his life, one lacking the fortunes of pro football and challenged by lost parents, foster homes and, for two years, the feeling of believing he had no

future.

Reid was only 14 when his father died of cancer. Devastated, his mother turned to alcohol to numb the pain, escape from responsibilities and forget her three sons. Social workers took them out of their Huntington Beach home, placing them at a transitional home run by the Orangewood Children's Foundation.

"Orangewood took us in when we had nowhere to go," Reid said. "There, we were loved, cared for and learned we could have futures."

For the past five years, Athletes First and CEO David Dunn have worked with Orangewood by donating proceeds from galas and golf events that raise more than \$350,000 each year.

"The kids caught our heart, and when you watch the players with them, you see the connection," said Dunn, whose firm paid for the hotel rooms of more than 50 players. "This is more than players giving time and money. It's a reminder about their roles off the field. This is just as important as the game and it keeps life in perspective."

Each year more than a dozen Athletes First rookies spend an evening at Orangewood, talking about their football lives and spending hours playing with youngsters who need compassionate hearts and open

making it. "I was just happy to put some smiles of some faces for an evening."

And all it takes is a few hours a year of sharing time and attention.

"I spent about a half an hour throwing a football with a 12-year-old girl and I don't even know how to throw a football," said former Stanford running back Toby Gerhart, a Heisman Trophy finalist this past season. "I've been blessed to have a good family, a good home and good, loving parents. It's sad to see kids who don't have that. What's important is that we, in this easy way, can help them. We get a lot out of it, too."

Several players on Saturday have stories of childhood friends who fell into drugs, gangs, crime and prison. They say having a place like Orangewood might have saved them.

Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis shot his hand in the air to pledge \$1,000 during a pre-dinner donation drive that raised \$125,000 from the event's 500 guests. Buffalo Bills center Eric Wood made a bid on a saddle autographed by jockey Roberto Alvarado at the silent auction. San Francisco 49ers linebacker Scott McKillop made a \$300 bid for a signed Lewis jersey.

"Every little bit helps," Orangewood chief development officer Cal Winslow said. "Everybody wins, especially when you see how the children relate to these players at the home and know that these are athletes they can follow and say, 'I know him.'"

Winslow recalled how one NFL rookie sat with a child in the corner of a room for a half hour to talk about life. They had similar childhoods.

"It will be OK," the player told the boy. "Just work hard. You'll see."

That's the message Kenny Reid learned as a teen at Orangewood, the one place he could go to see his younger brothers after their family had been split into separate foster homes.

After Reid graduated from high school, got emancipation from his mother and left Orangewood, he struggled on his own. He dropped out of Orange Coast College and began drinking. He was angry and depressed for two years before he called Orangewood to discover, "the door was still open there for me."

The foundation saw how determined Reid was to turn his life around. He just wanted to return to college, and, through an Orangewood scholarship, is enrolled at Golden West College and has a job as a Huntington Beach lifeguard.

He told the dinner crowd he was thankful for their help. The room gave him a standing ovation that left him on the verge of

tears. He told them he wanted to transfer to USC one day.

By the end of the evening, a donor promised that his USC tuition would be paid.

It was another helping hand for Kenny Reid as he tries to find his way.