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## AFA Quarterback Club of Denver Supporting the Falcons for 54 years

By Ray Haygood, '69

It's a sunny Fall day – the air is crisp, and a light cool breeze rustles the leaves in front of a country club in Aurora, CO. Folks are gathering for a special mid-day event: an Air Force Academy Quarterback Club luncheon.



Arletta & Winetta Mahaffey  
(Past QBC President) with  
Falconer C2C Akil

Club members keep coming back year after year. You're as likely to encounter a World War II fighter pilot as you are a parent of a cadet, a spouse of an avid Falcon fan, or a local businessman who admires the service academies. You're likely to hear an inspiring talk from the Football Coach, the Academy Superintendent, Commandant, Dean, or Director of Athletics, the Base Commander, the Commander of the AFA Prep School, a local sportscaster, a coach from another AFA team, or even falconers with their falcons, or military police with their working dogs. You might win a nice door prize, and you will have a wonderful lunch.

What's special about Quarterback Club gatherings is the fellowship of the group. You're among fellow patriots who cherish the traditions and values of our country, our military, and, in particular, our Air Force Academy – people from all backgrounds, experiences, and professions who enjoy each other's company and are passionate fans of Air Force athletic teams, especially football.

The Air Force Academy Quarterback Club of Denver

(originally named The Falcon Quarterback Club) was founded in 1960 by a group of Denver business leaders who wanted to actively support the new Air Force Falcons. The Club was incorporated as an IRS 501(c)(9) *social organization*, and exists in that form to this day.

## **Mission**

The mission of the Air Force Academy Quarterback Club of Denver (QBC) is to foster interest in and to support the Air Force Academy Intercollegiate Athletic Program. It is unique in that it became the first non-military organization to support intercollegiate athletics at any service academy. It is now in its sixth decade, and it is recognized as the longest established private organization in the United States supporting a service academy sports program.

## **The Early Years**

After the Air Force got authorization in 1954 to establish an Academy, construction began on the permanent site north of Colorado Springs, while cadets trained at Lowry AFB in Denver. In Aug 1958, Academy facilities were sufficiently complete for the Wing to move into its permanent location. Air Force home football games were played at the University of Denver stadium until Falcon Stadium was built, entirely from donated funds, and dedicated for the 1962 football season.

The Quarterback Club was established when the Academy moved from Lowry AFB to Colorado Springs. The football team, under Head Coach Ben Martin, had already developed a strong following among Denver supporters, especially after their inaugural, undefeated season in 1958, and their subsequent appearance in the Cotton Bowl, where they tied

TCU and received a Top 10 national ranking.

Founding Club members wanted to do everything possible to encourage support, not only for football and other Academy athletic teams, but also for the institution itself. They recognized that Coach Martin had a formidable task.



Col Frank Merritt, AFA AD (67-74), QBC Pres Dave Underwood, Head Coach Ben Martin (58-77)

His job, and that of other intercollegiate coaches, was twofold. First, he was required to field a team that would compete on a national basis against tough national football programs. Second, he was asked to be one of the main "public faces" of the Academy, speaking to the general public, raising funds for the construction of Falcon Stadium, and lobbying in Washington for additional funding for the athletic program. Thus, the Quarterback Club became a welcome advocate, not just for athletics, but also for the fledgling institution itself.

Roger Dougherty was the first President of the Club and did the early play-by-play on radio for the Air Force games. He was instrumental in starting the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame. Ray Radar, the Club's third President, credits the hiring of Minetta Miller as Executive Secretary as an



1967: Coach Ben Martin, Col Bob Forman (USA), Roger Dougherty (1<sup>st</sup> QBC Pres)

important milestone in the Club's development. She provided the Club with some organization and a central location from which to work. In 1976, Al Sigman, '62, was the first Academy graduate to become Club President. In 1984 the Falcon Quarterback Club opened the membership to women, and, in 1993, Winnetta Mahaffey was elected as the first woman President of the Club. She quickly increased the number of women members.

The Club initially met in downtown Denver in the Petroleum Club Building at 16th & Broadway, and as it expanded, in the Playboy Club, then the Denver Athletic Club. Most of the members were men who worked in Downtown and took an extended lunch to attend a meeting. The Club moved to various hotel locations in the Denver Tech Center throughout the 1980s & 90s, which made it more convenient for Academy coaches and speakers to attend the luncheons. At its zenith in the late 1990s, with Head Coach Fisher DeBerry speaking at the weekly fall luncheons, it had over 500 members, ran 3 golf tournaments, and hosted a spring dinner-dance for the coaches and their spouses.

***[Continued in Part 2]***