


Hall of Fame quarterback to visit Brockport

Tim Fenster

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Former Buffalo Bills quarterback Jim Kelly's life changed drastically just after his professional career ended. Jim's then-girlfriend and current wife, Jill Kelly, gave birth to Hunter Kelly on Feb. 14, 1997. Days later, Hunter was diagnosed with Krabbe disease, a degenerative disorder that affects the myelin sheath, an electrically insulating material that covers neurons in the brain.

Hunter was given three years to live.

Jim and Jill responded to the heartbreaking diagnosis by establishing Hunter's Hope, a non-profit organization to increase national awareness of Krabbe disease, in 1997.

When Hunter died in 2005, at 8-years-old, Jim and Jill's marriage took a turn for the worse. The loss of Hunter coupled with Jim's extramarital affairs threatened to destroy their marriage.

However, Jim and Jill managed to save their marriage through their Christian faith.

Their story caught the attention of associate minister Mark DuPre as he was planning the Brockport Christ Community Church's annual holiday event, the Christmas Extravaganza.

He booked the two speakers shortly thereafter.

DuPre said the Faith Hill song "A Baby Changes Everything" inspired the theme for this year's event.

The Christmas Extravaganza will be held in Tuttle North at 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 11.

"When I thought about that (theme), I thought about presenting the Christmas story and the story of Hunter," DuPre said. We're telling two stories in one, trying to blend Jim and Jill's very personal story with the Christmas program. That's a beautiful and delicate balance that I want to respect."

DuPre had no prior connection to the Kellys. He managed to book the local icons by e-mailing the couple at the perfect time.

Jim and Jill were preparing a national speaking and promotional tour for Jill's new autobiography Without a Word: How A Boy's Unspoken Love Changed Everything, Mark DuPre said. The book chronicles Jim and Jill's struggles in coping with Hunter's disease, and how their marriage nearly fell apart after his passing.

"I found out that what I had tapped into was this huge (speaking tour)," DuPre said. "I didn't know I was sticking my finger into that flurry of activity."




Jim Kelly, a former Buffalo Bills quarterback, will speak alongside his wife, Jill, at a holiday event held in Tuttle North Saturday, Dec. 11.

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Jim and Jill agreed to speak for free at the Christ Community Church's annual Christmas Extravaganza.

The two have recently held speaking events and book signings across Western New York. The couple also appeared on NBC's the Today Show in early September.

Jim and Jill will be available for book signings during the reception.

The Christmas Extravaganza will also include guitarist George Collichio and singers Chris Wilson and Mark DuPre's wife, Diane DuPre.

DuPre said the event is mainly for church members, their friends and family, and other local residents. Therefore, the church didn't advertise much for the event. "We didn't want 1,000 people from Rochester coming in," he said. "We wanted it to be a Brockport event."

The church provided tabling in the Union on Wednesday, Dec. 1 and Thursday, Dec. 2 to give students the opportunity to see the famous former Buffalo Bill. Students who purchased tickets at last week's tabling will be able to pick up their tickets at tables in the Union on Wednesday, Dec. 8 and Thursday, Dec. 9, DuPre said.

"I hope as many people who want to come on campus get to come," DuPre said.

Brockport's Oliver Middle School was the original venue for the Christmas Extravaganza. However, when DuPre asked Physical Education professor Tim Brusseau about a floor covering for the middle school gym, he received an offer from the college's physical education to hold the event in Tuttle North.

DuPre gratefully accepted the offer because Tuttle North can hold about 2,000 people, which is far more than the capacity of the middle school's gym. He added that the college has been helpful in organizing the event.

"The school has been nothing but cooperative," he said. "They have been amazing."

Though DuPre acknowledged the relevance of Jim and Jill's tragic and personal story, he also said he was excited to have a western New York icon speak at the largest event the church has held.

"It's the coolest thing in the world to have a hall of fame quarterback in Brockport," he said.

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