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PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

Kicked into gear

FORMER NFL PLAYER NICK LOWERY CHAMPIONS SOCIAL WORK FOR CHILDREN

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His house is comfortable, not lavish, with hints to athleticism tucked among the Southwestern art: a game ball on a bookshelf, a helmet on top of a cabinet. But the bright red No. 8 jersey framed in the kitchen is not trying to be discreet.

Nick Lowery matches his home's somewhat mixed decor. The former Kansas City Chiefs kicker is a former senatorial aide and presidential adviser, a constant philanthropist, and sometimes a poet.

"I feel like my life has been a lot like Forrest Gump in some ways, because I've had such a privilege," Lowery said. "It's been so serendipitous how things have happened."

The NFL Hall of Famer is not resting on his laurels as a retired athlete. Now working full time from his Scottsdale home, he leads the Nick Lowery Youth Foundation and its programs – Champions Against Bullying, Champions for the Homeless and Nation Building for Native Youth – and makes the occasional speaking appearance.

"My (charity work) became so healthy for me to get over the culture of narcissism in our society and, more particularly, with athletes," Lowery said. "It was really grounding to be able to leave the locker room, where we were complaining that our socks weren't properly dried."

Born in Germany, Lowery was raised mostly in Washington. With both parents working in the public sector, he turned his attention to politics when he wasn't playing sports. After graduating from Dartmouth College, Lowery was cut 11 times by eight NFL teams before joining the Chiefs in 1980. He played there for 14 seasons and established a

number of NFL records.

"All of these rejections were incredibly good lessons in how to learn how to focus on what you truly love in life and devote yourself to a worthy cause, to a purpose that matters, and that in the end you'll be better for it," he said.

Lowery began working with charity during his third year in the NFL. He started Kick with Nick for Cerebral Palsy, from which he donated money to the United Cerebral Palsy Fund for every field goal he scored.

Lowery moved to Arizona at the end of his football career, splitting time between Kansas City and the Valley before shifting to Scottsdale for the majority of the time. His work takes him all over, though he said he doesn't travel internationally as much as he would like. He is hoping to shine a positive light on Arizona as the media gears up for the next Super Bowl at University of Phoenix Stadium in February.

"It's not just a resort community with a bunch of rich people hiding behind their walls with their sunglasses and their pools, even though I have a pool," he said. "It's also a town of a lot of individuals with big hearts."

It doesn't hurt that Phoenix has a major tie to one of his causes, Nation Building for Native Youth, a unit of the Lowery Youth Foundation.

"It's about creating cultures in schools that embrace difference, that look at difference as being a sign of great health and vibrancy in a culture," he said.

While he's not sure what the future holds, he said he is confident he's found his calling.

"You're supposed to do what you love doing, not what somebody else told you to do," he said. "When you know that, and you apply that inspired focus, then you have a sense of purpose."

NICK LOWERY

Title: Founder and president, Nick Lowery Youth Foundation

Age: 58

Education: Bachelor of Arts, Dartmouth College; Master of Public Administration, Harvard University; Harvard Fellow, Nation Building for Native Youth

Residence: Scottsdale

Associations: Chairman, National Fund for Excellence in American Indian Education

What's playing in your car right now: Sirius Radio, probably the Coffee House station



Nick Lowery talks about life after the National Football League, including his philanthropic work, at PhoenixBusinessJournal.com



Nick Lowery poses with Jamison Sobchuk, a participant in one of his Champions Against Bullying programs.