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History Center to Rename Sports Museum in Honor of Franco Harris *-The renaming celebrates his enduring legacy both on and off the football field-*

PITTSBURGH, Dec. 23, 2025 – On the 53rd anniversary of the Immaculate Reception, the Smithsonian-affiliated Senator John Heinz History Center announced today that the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum will be renamed as the **Franco Harris Sports Museum** in honor of the late Pittsburgh Steelers Hall of Fame running back.

A longtime supporter of the History Center, Franco's leadership played a pivotal role in the development of the Sports Museum, which opened in 2004 and has grown into one of the nation's premier attractions for sports fans. His family remains in leadership roles at the History Center, with wife Dana on its Board of Trustees and as a member of the Sports Museum's Champions Committee, and son Dok as the co-chair of the History Uncorked event committee.

The Sports Museum renaming celebrates Franco's enduring legacy and impact, both on and off the field.

"Franco touched and inspired so many of us, not only with his achievements on the gridiron, but with his kindness, generosity, and leadership," said Andy Masich, president and CEO of the History Center. "His influence has gone well beyond Western Pennsylvania and will continue to inspire future generations. It is altogether fitting that the Sports Museum should bear Franco's name."

"Franco exemplified many of the characteristics associated with this region: hard work, integrity, perseverance, and a commitment to his team and the community – all attributes that the Sports Museum amplifies in its exhibitions and programs," said Sports Museum Director Anne Madarasz. "Franco's actions always spoke louder than his words. A true man of the people, his generous spirit, his approachability, and his unfailing humility made him one of the city's most beloved and admired citizens."

One of the NFL's most iconic players, Franco is best known for the Immaculate Reception, often considered the greatest play in American football history.

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On Dec. 23, 1972, he helped change the fortunes of a franchise and a city by making the legendary catch and touchdown run to defeat the Oakland Raiders, which secured the Steelers' first-ever playoff victory and led to four Super Bowl championships during the 1970s.

Off the field, he started a business based in healthy foods and championed children's health, education, and athletics, using his platform to advocate for social justice and equality. He dedicated himself to this community, earning a nickname that captured his spirit perhaps more than any accolade. As teammate Joe Greene put it, Franco was simply "Mr. Pittsburgh."

Franco's work with organizations as varied as the United Way, Easter Seals, Special Olympics of Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh Promise, Habitat for Humanity, Penn State University (his alma mater), and numerous youth initiatives exemplified his commitment to service.

"Franco represented decency, charity, kindness, love, and humility. His goal was to make the world a better place for us all," said Dana. "Our family is honored that the Heinz History Center will continue to share his legacy with future generations."

The Sports Museum renaming will be implemented in 2026.

About the Sports Museum

A dynamic two-floor "museum-within-a-museum," the Sports Museum features 20,000 square feet of interpretive galleries and more than 50 interactive experiences that showcase the unforgettable and almost forgotten stories of athletes who transformed Pittsburgh into the "City of Champions." Visitors can see rare artifacts from sport legends including Arnold Palmer, Bill Mazeroski, Chip Ganassi, and Suzie McConnell-Serio.

From football to baseball and hockey to golf, the Sports Museum highlights the region's passion for amateur and professional sports.

The Sports Museum is the "home of the Immaculate Reception," featuring a lifelike figure of Harris making the catch, his cleats from the play, the Three Rivers Stadium field turf where it happened, and other 1970s Steelers artifacts.

The Sports Museum's **Super Steelers** exhibition features a special section dedicated to Franco's life and career including his championship rings from Super Bowls IX, X, XIII, and XIV, his 1976 Man of the Year Award (now named for Walter Payton), and his "Franco's Italian Army" helmet.

The **Senator John Heinz History Center**, an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and the largest history museum in Pennsylvania, presents American history with a Western Pennsylvania connection. The History Center was voted as the #1 history museum in America by readers of USA TODAY (2024, 2025) and "Pittsburgh's Best Museum" by Pittsburgh Magazine (2022, 2023, 2024). The History Center and Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum are located at 1212 Smallman Street in Pittsburgh's Strip District. The History Center's family of museums includes the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum; Fort Pitt Museum in historic Point State Park; and Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village, a National Historic Landmark located in Avella, Pa., in Washington County. The History Center and Fort Pitt Museum are always free for kids, supported by the Kamin "Free for Kids" Initiative. More information is available at heinzhistorycenter.org.



On the 53rd anniversary of the Immaculate Reception, the Heinz History Center announced today that the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum will be renamed as the Franco Harris Sports Museum in honor of the late Pittsburgh Steelers Hall of Fame running back (image: rendering of new Franco Harris Sports Museum entrance, to be implemented in 2026).



A longtime supporter of the History Center, Franco's leadership played a pivotal role in the development of the Sports Museum. The renaming celebrates his enduring legacy and impact, both on and off the field (image courtesy of the Pittsburgh Steelers).

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