

Warner, Johnson make Cedar Rapids proud

Written by Jim Ecker

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They both graduated from Regis High School, they both became world-class athletes and they both care deeply about their hometown.

Yes, Kurt Warner and Zach Johnson have much in common.

Warner gladly returned to Cedar Rapids on Monday to participate in the Zach Johnson Foundation Classic at Elmcrest Country Club, helping his pal raise money for local kids.

Warner and his wife, Brenda, have their own foundation -- "First Things First" -- and he believes in giving back to the community that helped raise him.

"To me, that's what life is all about and how I've tried to live," he said Monday. "So I'm happy to come out here and support anything Zach does."

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Warner made his mark as a quarterback in pro football. He was a two-time MVP in the NFL and led St. Louis to the Super Bowl title in 1999. He passed for 32,344 yards and 208 touchdowns during his 12-year career, retiring after the 2009 season as one of the most accurate passers in league history at 65.5 percent.

Warner, 40, lives in Arizona now, but he believes in helping his old friends (and strangers) in Cedar Rapids through the "First Things First" foundation, which he said is based on faith and family.

We try to come back with our foundation and do the things we can to help the community and help it grow," he said. "It's always nice to have an excuse to come back, and now to have somebody like Zach to partner with and do a lot of things for this community, it's fun and it's exciting.

"The people here continue to support us, so we're going to continue to do what we can to support the community."

Warner's foundation is active in Phoenix, St. Louis and Cedar Rapids, helping communities where he's lived. He responded when Cedar Rapids needed help three years ago.

"The biggest thing was raising money for disaster relief when the floods came through here a few years back," he said. "We're working a lot with Habitat For Humanity, doing a lot of builds to try and get people back on their feet and get them back to a lifestyle where they can move forward and accept what's next for them.

"That's what we're going to continue to focus on for a few years yet," he said. "There's still a lot of work to do, although they've rebounded well. A lot of families and lives and businesses have come back. We want to continue to help that grow so it can get back to where it was."

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Warner said he feels "very fortunate" to have attended Regis High School, which was a springboard for success for both Warner and Johnson.

"I think the thing Zach would tell you as well as me is that God has used us in some amazing ways," said Warner, who is five years older than Johnson. "I don't think either one of us is the most talented or the most gifted athlete, but we've had faith, we've believed in ourselves, we've believed that God wanted to use us. It was that combination that I believe has gotten us this far.

"That's what I think is so unique and so special about it," he said. "Both of us, I think, are built the same way. We'd be the first to tell you that we're not so gifted that it was easy for us. We really believe there was a lot of help along the way, a lot of support and a lot of faith to believe that god wanted to use us.

"Two different paths, and we kind of converged because of what we believe in and what we stand for and what we're trying to do with our platform. So it's really been neat. So many similarities between Zach and myself, all the way back that we're both from Cedar Rapids and Regis High School."