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### **Gary Banz Awarded 2024 Larry Smith Award**

Kansas City, Mo. – With the 2024-25 college basketball season on the horizon, Small College Basketball is excited to announce Gary Banz as the 2024 Larry Smith Award winner. Banz's impact stretches far beyond the basketball court, including across continents. This year's award will be presented on Friday November 1<sup>st</sup> at the Branscomb Auditorium on the campus of Florida Southern College in Lakeland, FL. The ceremony begins at 7:30 pm EST. Larry Smith, who the award is named after, had this to say about Banz being named the 2024 award winner:

"Gary Banz embodies the true spirit of this award," mentioned Smith. "His life story is remarkable, as he's used his various platforms to make an incredible impact on others, and has left an indelible mark on the lives of many. The world is a better place because of Gary Banz, and we are so pleased to honor and recognize him for his life of service to others."

The Larry Smith award is presented annually to the person who has used their opportunity through basketball to ultimately change their life, has given back and has made a difference in our world. Banz is the sixth recipient of the Larry Smith award. The inaugural award in 2017 was given to George Tinsley Sr. In 2018, Charlie Titus was selected, followed by Cylk Cozart in 2019 and Dr. Ronn Johnson in 2022. Charlie Brock earned the 2023 award. Banz had this to say about being named this year's award winner:

"The life of Larry Smith is truly one of resilience, persistence, and success," stated Banz. "His story is an example of "only in America." To be selected by Small College Basketball as representative of Larry Smith is an honor that surpasses my ability to describe. I humbly accept the honor on behalf of all my family and colleague teammates who have walked with me on this journey called life."

A native of Sylvia, Kansas, Banz graduated from Southern Nazarene University in 1967 with a Bachelor's degree and then earned a Master's degree in education from the University of Central Oklahoma in 1973. During his freshman year, 1963-1964, the school's Board of Trustees passed a resolution to begin intercollegiate competition. Having been selected 1963 Class BB State Basketball Tournament first team all-star, Banz was given a new opportunity to extend his playing career at the college level. The school's first full season recorded an eight win, six loss record with Banz being a primary contributor. He later served as Junior and Senior Class President and was selected by the faculty as the Outstanding Senior male for the class of 1967. Banz would go on to serve as an Alumni Board President and was awarded the Southern Nazarene University "Patriot in Kingdom Service" Award in June 2017 at the denomination's international assembly in Indianapolis, Indiana.

After college graduation Banz was drafted and served in the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1970. He was awarded the Army Commendation Medal in 1970. Following a break in service, he later joined the U.S. Army Reserve and was awarded the Army Achievement Medal in 1985. While on active duty in South Korea, Banz participated in "special services after hours" with the basketball team at Osan Air Force

Base. The 1968-69 "Osan Defenders" won the Air Force Korean tournament championship and Pacific Air Force (PACAF) tournament championship held at Tachikawa AFB, Japan. Teammate Doug Williams (three time NAIA All-American from St. Mary's University in San Antonio) along with Banz were selected as PACAF All-Stars to represent the Pacific Air Force in the Air Force's Worldwide tournament. The Association for Professional Basketball Research tracks Military Service scoring records. Banz is listed twice for performances during the Kanto Base Command Christmas Invitational. He scored 48 points in a 102-97 win over Kadena AFB, Okinawa on December 18, 1969, and 47 points in a 116-127 loss to Camp Zama, Japan, December 20, 1969. Following his overseas active duty assignment in South Korea, Banz returned to civilian life in Oklahoma City. After a 28-year public educator career as a teacher/coach at three large schools, he retired in 1998.

Highlights from his professional career in education include President of the Oklahoma Boys Basketball Coaches Association in 1979-80; Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) High School Coach of the Year 1980; Class 3A State Tournament Runner-up 1985; Faith 7 Classic (Oklahoma vs Texas benefit all-star game) Coach 1984; Large East All-State Coach 1985; Oklahoma Bar Association Law-Related Education Teacher of the Year in 1985; Presidential Elector in 1996; and delegate to the GOP national convention in 2008.

After his election in 2004 Banz served 12 years in the Oklahoma House of Representatives. As a legislator, he held several leadership positions including Majority Whip, Chairman of the Military and Veterans Affairs, House Rules, and House Ethics Committees. The American Legislative Exchange Council named Banz national Legislator of the Year in 2013. The Oklahoma Veterans Council honored Rep. Banz as their Representative of the Year in 2009. In 2016 the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) recognized Rep. Banz with their "Guardian of Small Business" Award.

From 2001 to 2004 Banz served on the Rose State College Board of Regents and was recognized with the Rose State College Tower Award in 2014. In 2007 he served on the Planning Committee that raised funding for the *USS Oklahoma* Memorial at Pearl Harbor. He later served as treasurer for the Friends of the Oklahoma History Center Foundation. He received the Oklahoma Medal of Freedom from the National Guard Association of Oklahoma in 2014. He was presented the Douglas O. Dollar Distinguished Community Service Award for the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame in 2016. He was honored by the Oklahoma City/County Historical Society with its Pathmaker Award in 2016.

He is a lifetime member of Leadership Oklahoma (Class XVII) and a lifetime member of the Small College Basketball Association. Oklahoma Boys' Basketball Coaches inducted Banz into their Hall of Fame in 2014. In 2019 the Oklahoma Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) honored Banz with their prestigious Medal of Honor.

Today Banz volunteers as the Director of Veteran and Patriot Initiatives for VillagesOKC, a not-for-profit organization that empowers adults to age with vitality and purpose. As of September 1, 2024, he assumed the duties as Executive Director for the Southern Nazarene University Basketball Alumni Players Association.

For more information on the Larry Smith award or Small College Basketball, please head to [smallcollegebasketball.com](http://smallcollegebasketball.com).