

Culverhouse continues her crusade for players' rights

By [IRA KAUFMAN](#) | The Tampa Tribune

Former club president Gay Culverhouse addressed a group of 50 former Tampa Bay Buccaneers Monday night, urging them to seek the health and disability benefits they have earned from the NFL and vowing to voice their concerns as a noisy advocate for retired players.

Culverhouse, who began her 3-year tenure as Bucs president in 1991, is the founder of the Players' Outreach Program, designed to aid former NFL players in accessing benefits.

"We will help you fill out the forms and then we will pay for the medical exams," Culverhouse told the group. "Then we will take the forms to the NFL. If you are rejected, we have a team of lawyers standing by pro bono who will write the appeal letter. We'll have another meeting on March 8, when you should bring in your forms. To sleep at night, I need to know I've reached out to as many players as I can."

Among the former Tampa Bay players in attendance were Doug Williams, Jerry Bell, Jimmie Giles, David Lewis, Greg Roberts, Mark Cotney, Charley Hannah, Mark Royals and Ricky Reynolds, who introduced Culverhouse Monday.

"I want to bring up a special lady who is doing special things for retired players," said Reynolds, president of the local NFL Players Association chapter of retired players. "There are some guys out there who are really hurting and Gay wanted to kick off this meeting right here in Tampa. We need to find those guys who are in need and Gay Culverhouse wants to make a difference in our lives."

Speaking on behalf of the retired players, Lewis lauded Culverhouse for her determined efforts.

"As players, it's appreciated," said the former linebacker. "When she can take on the good old boy's network, I think it's great. If what she's doing will benefit even one guy, it's worth it."

Giles said retired players often become frustrated when trying to access NFL benefits.

"I don't think the union gives two hoots about retired players," said Giles, a 4-time Pro Bowl tight end for the Bucs. "The league would tell us there are things out there to help us, but then we found out some of the language in those documents is absolutely ridiculous. In Gay Culverhouse, we have someone who is fighting for the retired players, a woman who has no financial incentive in trying to help us."

Culverhouse said the cause is well worth the personal financial cost.

"I'm funding this myself," she said. "My children are not going to have much of an inheritance the way this is going."