



# 'IT'S BEEN HIS *Ministry*'

DR. KEN LEMMON HAS SPENT 34 YEARS HAPPILY ON THE SIDELINES By Toni Garrard Clay

## PLAYERS. COACHES. TRAINERS. CHEERLEADERS. THE TEAM MANAGERS. TEAM PHOTOGRAPHERS.

These people are common sights on the sidelines of high school football games on a Friday night. And at Athens High School for the past 34 years, one more: team doctor Ken Lemmon.

Lemmon came to Athens in 1978 and, along with a fellow physician, started what would become Lakeland Medical Associates. Today they have 13 partners, and in all that time only two ever left the practice. "That's quite unusual and pretty neat, I can tell you," said Lemmon.

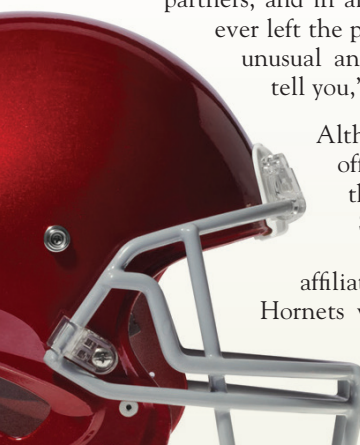
Although Lemmon was officially recognized by the school district in September for 34 years of service, his affiliation with the Athens Hornets varsity football team actually stretches back further.

"I made contact when I moved here 36 years ago," he said. "The first couple of years, we sat in the stands, and I made myself available. Then Coach Romie Maxey asked me to come down onto the field. He said it would give them a real feeling of support."

Lemmon was happy to oblige. Before that point, when needed, he left his seat in the bleachers and had to jump the fence to get to a player. In the early days, there were no trainers on the sideline. So a lot of his duties consisted of helping with on-field injuries and assessing whether a player was able to go back out. Until around the late 1990s, he said, when ambulances at football stadiums became common, he carried a resuscitation kit to every game. "It was full of drugs. I had oxygen. I could intubate someone on the field if needed."

Fortunately, onsite intubation was never necessary. The most serious case he recalls took place not long after he left the stands for the sidelines.

"There was a kid who had gotten hit, and he was short of breath," recalled Lemmon.



The game went on, the coaches went back to coaching, but the player never managed to catch his breath. This concerned Lemmon. So he talked to the parents, who drove their son to the hospital.

"I followed. When he got there, we evaluated him and discovered his spleen had been ruptured. They removed it... That could have been really bad."

Another time at a game in Jacksonville, Lemmon helped out with an opposing player who suffered a concussion. There wasn't a lot to be done on the field, but Lemmon spoke to the parents, offering advice and comfort.

"Later, I got a letter from an attorney in Jacksonville," said Lemmon, his eyes opening wide in remembered alarm. "Turns out it was the dad, who was an attorney. He wrote to thank me." Lemmon laughed. "I told him he could have used a different envelope."

Lemmon said his presence at games in recent years has been largely in the capacity of backup to the trainers, whose skills and knowledge he praises highly. "I don't know how anyone defines 'team doctor,'" he said. "I'm just here to support the kids."

Lemmon never played football, calling himself just a fan. ("I ran hurdles in high school ... very slowly.") His son, Aaron, played a few years at AHS. Both his boys played soccer, which meant, for a time, Lemmon was also the team doctor for that sport. In fact, when his son Adam played, Lemmon served as announcer. What it all comes down to is love for community.

"It's been his ministry, serving those kids," said Aaron Lemmon. "I don't think he ever wanted any recognition at all. He's just served the school faithfully as long as I can remember."

Lemmon officially retires from his medical practice on December 1, shortly after he turns 65.



*Head football coach Paul Essary (left) congratulates Dr. Ken Lemmon for his 34-plus years of service as team doctor.*

Photo by Michael Hannigan

"It's the right time for me," he said, but he certainly didn't make the decision lightly. In fact, he admits to getting tearful with at least one longtime patient. "My patients teach me constantly and minister to me," he said. "Family medicine really is about family. They're friends and neighbors. It's very special."

Lemmon's drive to volunteer won't end with retirement. "The community has given so much, I want to give back," he said. But, he adds, family will come first.

Still, he hasn't retired yet, and he will happily finish this last season as team doctor. Lemmon is almost poetic when he speaks of his motivation for serving so many years.

"I've looked out on the field and seen boys I delivered. I know the parents. I know the grandparents. It's just a joy... I've watched these families grow. Just think about how many people are involved in a football game. I look around and think, 'Look at this community.' You can't measure that."