

CHATSWORTH PAST & PRESENT

By Ann Vincent

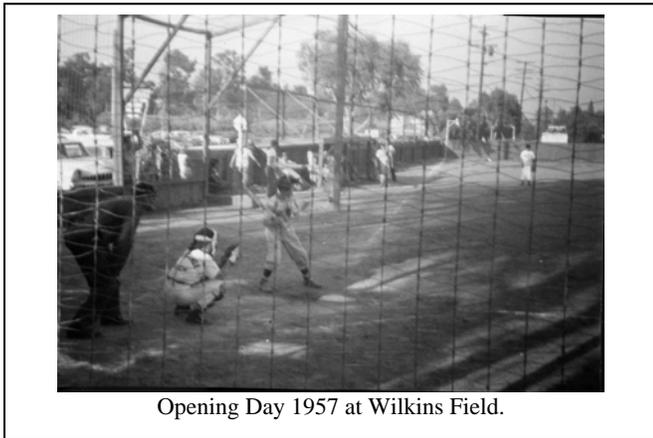
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This issue of Chatsworth Past & Present features the Chatsworth Junior Baseball League (CJBL).



Our first documented youth baseball team is early 1900 when Curtis "Tige" Graves is shown wearing his Chatsworth uniform sponsored by G&H, The Graves and Hill General Store. Some 50 years later, in 1956, the Chatsworth Junior Baseball League was founded. Hank and Ken Ditto, descendants of the Graves family and their father Hugh, were founding members/players of the CJBL.

As the story goes...at Johnny's Barbershop one day, Leonard Chenard, Warren Melrose, Bob Penmen, Rod McKenzie, Roy Endress Jr, John Koningfield and Otto Groth discussed plans to start a youth baseball league. Registration would be free and volunteers would



Opening Day 1957 at Wilkins Field.

create a labor force of managers and coaches. Tryouts were held at the Rancho San Antonio baseball field to get the league started. Four teams were created the first year from the 43 boys who participated. The first games were played on Wilkins Field on Devonshire (where the Post Office is today) on land made available by Juliet Wilkins. At the time, the Wilkins family also owned the Wilkins building on the south-east corner of Owensmouth and Devonshire which was used as a community center.

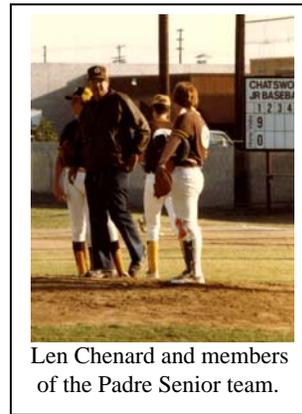
The 1958 season opened at Wilkins Field on May 17th with 150 boys in the league. Roy Rogers, honorary Mayor, was on hand to throw out the first ball for the 52 games scheduled for that season. He was assisted by Honorary Sheriff "Black Jack" O'Shea.

In 1959 CJBL purchased and built the field off of Canoga, between Devonshire and Lassen on Mayall. There were two older division Babe Ruth teams (13-15 year olds), who played against two teams from Rancho San Antonio to fill the schedule for that season. The 1959 program shows Hank playing on the Indians, a Babe Ruth team, while Ken and his younger brother Frank played for the Stars.



1959 Stars - Managed by Bob Penman

In 1960, the league continued to grow, fielding fourteen teams. In 1962 the league expanded to include Minors, Majors and Babe Ruth teams. In 1969 Babe Ruth teams were divided into Junior and Senior teams. In 1976, the Majors were divided into AA and AAA creating five divisions, Minors, AA, AAA, Juniors and Seniors. By 1980 they had over 400 players, and Minors were divided into T-Ball and A teams.



Len Chenard and members of the Padre Senior team.

In 2006, Chatsworth Junior Baseball League celebrated their 50 year Anniversary. Jodi Chenard Hotchkiss, the daughter of former professional baseball player and CJBL founder Leonard Chenard, grew up as a kid at the field while her Dad was coaching. She is now active in the program serving as Co-President of the Womens' Auxillary. Her

two boys play on the same fields and participate in the program that their grandfather helped create.

Another long time participant in the CJBL is Elmer Guenther who, for 55 years, has been the team equipment manager, coach, and/or team manager, filling any job needed since 1965. He has been honored with his name placed on the Minor field scoreboard. CJBL has created a recognition monument at the field that lists the names of many more who have been "Dedicated to the Youth of Chatsworth".



In 2010, CJBL's latest milestone was Steve Mathias being selected Chatsworth Citizen of the Year for his 17 years of service to youth sports and CJBL.

What's up for 2011? When was the last time you attended the CJBL's Annual Pancake Breakfast? It will be held on Saturday, January 20, 2011 from 8:00am to 1:00pm to kick off the new season.. See you there!

The Chatsworth Junior Baseball League is located (between Devonshire and Lassen) at 21350 Mayall St. in Chatsworth. Website: www.cjbl.org