

“A TRIBUTE”

INTRODUCTION

In early March of 2020 when the Covid-19 Pandemic hit the States, I knew I would be spending a lot of time by myself quarantined. I knew I had to have something to keep myself occupied with. I needed a project.

I decided to research a time in Chesaning that has all but been forgotten, a time when the town was alive with fun and excitement.

The Chesaning Men’s Softball League that played in Showboat Park created quite a stir in its day, and I thought it was worthy of being preserved. Once I started, I just couldn’t let it go.

After three months of researching scrapbooks, newspaper articles and talking with many managers, coaches and players, I had collected enough information to write a tribute to this once in a lifetime league. After six months, I had collected enough articles and pictures to build a display case too.

After a year of working on the display case and tribute, the display case was moved into the Chesaning Historical Society Building. here in town. in mid March of 2021.

Along the way, I discovered some amazing statistics about the league. how it came together and how it functioned for thirteen years, 1973-1986.

So. to all the players of that era, I salute you and hope you enjoy reading about what we accomplished as a league together and the great times we had playing the game. Tom T.

THE GAME

During the summers of the 1960’s and early 70’s, Chesaning was a bustling village. Farmer Peet’s Packing Co., Hehr Manufacturing, Roycraft Mobile Homes and McDonald Dairy employed many people and attracted many families to the area. War veterans were returning from Viet Nam, college students were home for the summer, the Showboat was steaming down the Shiawassee River and the swimming pool in the park cooled many kids. Showboat Park was a busy, busy place. Along came the Game and things would get a lot busier.

Slow pitch softball was in its infancy and was being played by thousands of teams across the state. If you were a ball player or just a fan who liked to watch the games, Showboat Park was the place to be.

Showboat Park would become the home of many champions over the years 1973 through 1986. Chesaning and the surrounding area were blessed with many great ball players. Teams from Montrose, St. Charles, New Lothrop, Maple Grove, Oakley, Brant, Albee, Owosso and even Elk’s Corners would supply teams to the league at one time or another over the years. Sponsors were numerous. Bar owners found softball good for business. Car dealers, clothing stores, hardware stores, bowling alleys, lumber companies and insurance companies did as well. Numerous sponsors were eager to get in the Game.

Fast pitch softball was phasing out. It is a pitchers game and pitchers were becoming a dieing breed. Fast pitch players looked at the slow pitch game as “little brother” until they came to realize how important fielding, base running and hitting were to putting a winning team on the field. Slow pitch gave players more fielding chances and at-bats during a game.

Not only did a slow pitch pitcher need to throw strikes, they had to be good fielders as well. Pitchers suffered many injuries from line drivers back up the middle. First basemen and third basemen also were injured by line drives down either foul line. Teams soon came learn how having a good defense could keep you in a game, and with a decent offense, teams could compete with anybody. And compete they did.

There were many “softball widows” back then. I don’t know how we managed to get away with playing so much ball. But I think if you asked any of the players back then, they would tell you it was some of the best years of their lives. We all fell in love with the Game. (The wives? Not so much.) What a game!

THE LEAGUE

In 1969, a blooper ball league was formed and played on the lighted diamond on the north side of Showboat Park. By 1972, the league transitioned to slow pitch. Bob St. Gordon’s Farm Bureau Insurance (FBI) team won the league from ‘69 thru ’72. Bob’s team was made up of many Easton/New Haven Township players. At the end of the ’72 season, through the Chesaning Community Education Dept., Chesaning was invited to form a team to compete in a 26 team, many of which were made up of all-star teams, single elimination slow pitch tournament to be played as part of the Mid Michigan Olympics held in Alma, MI. This was the first slow pitch tournament experience for players from Chesaning. They would compete against teams from as far away as Grand Rapids and Midland.

The Mid-Michigan Olympic team was selected by the managers of the Chesaning teams. The team was comprised of Dave George, Mike Clement and Ric Rehmann of Pin Town Lanes, Bob “Saint “ Gordon, Jack Schultz, Paul Danek, Larry Danek, Jim Szappan and Wayne Scanlon of FBI, Ron Krzciok and Ken Gengler of Bob’s Bar, George Gewirtz of Gewirtz Hardware and Dave Sheib and Tom Tithof of Permabilt Homes. The managers were Saint, Walt Tithof and Elmer Wirt. This team won the gold medal at the games using wooden bats and punky softballs. After this tournament, the Chesaning league would evolve into a league to be reckoned with for the next twelve years. They would bat .425 as a team and play lock down defense. The win was a great confidence builder for the new league.

In 1973, Richard Nixon was in the White House (but not for long), the Oakland A’s would defeat the New York Mets in 7 games in the World Series, and 4 more teams would join the league. The league would grow to 10 teams. In 1975, the league would grow to 12 teams and split into two divisions, A and B. By 1976, we had three divisions, A, B and C. The league was now playing 4 nights a week, 3 games a night. The last game was played under the lights “Just like the Bigs”. Saint’s FBI team would be favored to win the league. However, a new team, Rehmann’s Clothing, was about to emerge that would create a rivalry that would last for the next 10 years.

Dave (Fly) Richardson and I first met in freshly plowed field on Peet Rd. in 1951. A dirt ball fight ensued. We’ve been great friends for the past 70 years. In early January of 1973, Dave and I had an extended conversation in Bob’s Bar. We agreed to join forces for the upcoming ‘73 season. He would bring himself, Mike Clement, Dick Adams, Dave George and Ric Rehmann, and I would bring myself, Dave Scheib and Gary Azelton. Ric said his father and uncles would like to sponsor the team. Upon high school graduation Rob Rehmann and Bruce Larner joined the team. Ron “Blue Moon” Krzciok also was a teammate.(as the No. 1 substitute. Of course, we had to beg him for four hours to agree to terms and play with us. Ron would never tell anyone how he got the name “Blue Moon”) The Rehmann’s roster would also include Chris Beckman, Al Damic, Joe Damic, and Bill Rogers. Richardson would serve as manager for 9 of the next 10 years.

FBI's roster was made up of Bob St. Gordon, Jack Schultz, Jim Hemgesberg, Ron Lucious, Paul Martin, Wayne Scanlon, Jim Szappan, Walt Zintek, the Daneks, Paul, Larry, Fred, Tom, Jeff, and Tom Dodak and Mike Rodriguez.

Other up and coming teams were sponsored by Gewirtz Hardware, New Lothrop Tavern, Western Auto, Farmer Peet's, Bob's Bar and Chesaning Manufacturing.

Chessaning Mfg's roster included Mike Hemgesberg, Ron Wendling, Don Birchmeier, Jim & Dick Kopshitz, Tom and Rick Cassady, Tony Wendling, Dave Poppenheimer, Fred Yaklin and Gary Birkmeier. (This roster would remain mostly in tact with other sponsorships: Knights of Columbus, Elk's Tavern, and Vic's Bar.)

Farmer Peets' roster was comprised of Wally Peet. Dan Azelton, Mike Knecey, Don Anderson, Mike Anderson, Don Pumford, Mike McWilliams, Ed Otte, Don Gross, Al Schlaack, Don Platt, Gary Butzin, Tom "Roach" Kovick and Maurice "Moose" Bates. This roster stayed together for 2 years. (Gary, Roach and Moose retired to the bar to watch NASCAR, shoot pool and play cards. What a trio, what great friends, what great guys.)

Some great friendships would form over the years. Teams were "tight" as we would used to say. Although league play was very competitive, there was mutual respect across the league. There were no cheap shots or dirty play. Arguments and confrontations were few. Everyone understood that it took great team work and sportsmanship to be successful. It grew into a great league. What a time it was!

The Gewirtz Hardware featured many Chesaning Union Schools teachers on their roster including Ray Guzy, Bob Sager, Jim Freeland, Tom Schlachter, Duane Ferry, Linus Laskey, Don Flory and T.J. Tithof, Larry Mishler, Mike Coughlin, Dennis Himm, Eugene Hemgesberg, Steve Hemgesberg, Scott Lorencz, Don Mort and George Gewirtz. These guys stayed together for the next 9 years.

Bob's Bar was a collection of Chesaning Our Lady of Perpetual High School grads Jerry Keiffer, Bill Krzciok, Ken Gengler Joe Deitering, Louie Giesken and Gary Krzciok, and Bob Henige, Larry Azelton and Rich Martin, who according to Rich, was the best player on the team.

Ben Dubay, owner of Western Auto, assembled a roster comprised of Jim Alden, Jerry Stover, Tom Richardson, Randy Hoerner, John Cowman, Mike Novak, Les Konkus, Mike Tithof, Rick McDougall, Ken Redburn, Doug Tithof, George Rumisek, Gary Willing, Wayne Suppes, Gary Soukup and Steve "White Haired" Schulte all solid players. Dubay kept these guys well hydrated.

1973

As expected in 1973, Rehamann's and FBI would slug it out for the First Division title. Rehamann's would go on to win the league and tournament championships, finishing 21-3 for the season. FBI would finish 2nd in the league and 3rd in the tournament, 18-5 for the season.

Also in 1973, Gewirtz's finished 3rd and second in the League Tournament, finishing with a season record of 17-6. Chessaning Mfg. finished 5th in the league and 4th in the League Tournament. Western Auto finished 4th in the League and 5th in the League Tournament. Bob's Bar finished 6th in the League and 6th in the League Tournament.

After the 1973 season, discussions were held about improving the field. All the players chipped in to make the facility better. Each team was responsible to sell an equal number of raffle tickets to fund improvements to the Showboat Park facilities. Adding a second diamond to accommodate the growth of the league was also discussed.

1974

Entering the 1974 season, the year Richard Nixon would resign the presidency in August due to the Watergate break-in, the league became sanctioned by the Michigan Amateur Softball Association (MASA). This enabled our teams to participate in state championship competition. Slow Pitch teams received A and B classifications while Fast Pitch had four classes, A thru D.

Again, Rehmann's won the league, undefeated at 18-0, entering the league tournament. (No team would ever again go through league play undefeated.) They suffered their 1st loss to Gewirtz's, 2-1. However, they came back through the loser's bracket to win their second League Tournament. In addition, they won two invitation tournaments in Durand and Brant. They entered the 1st state tournament as the league's lone Class A representative at 33-1. They won the Bay City District going 6-0, but lost in the Midland Regional to Midland Howard's ARCO on a diamond with Fast Pitch dimensions. The team felt that had they played on a field with larger dimensions, their defense would have compensated enough to win. They finished the season 39-2 and became dubbed the "Green Machine", a la the Cincinnati Reds "Big Red Machine". What a year!

In 1974, FBI would add Gary Gerken and Mike Vogl to their rosters, two excellent additions. Gary came with great credentials from the Saginaw area where he had played on the celebrated "Means Stamping" fast pitch team. Mike came from the Owosso fast pitch league and was a bonafide "5 Tooler", hitting for average, hitting for power, fielding the ball, throwing the ball and running the bases. They finished second to Rehmann's in the league. They captured a District title and finished Runner up in the Class B state tournament in Marshall finishing the season 36-7. Saint was a happy man. Upon the season's closure, FBI's pitcher, Jack Schultz and his wife Sally, and Rehmann's sponsor, Rich and Betty Rehmann, would host celebrations, complete with good music, a pool, cold beer and streakers!

Other teams in the league beefed up their rosters as well. Gewirtz's added a shortstop, Jim Freeland. They participated in the Chesaning Chamber of Commerce Honey Festival, Showboat Festival and state tournament finishing the season 25-15.

Elk's Tavern added Dick Koptschitz, George Birchmeier and Dick Diffen. Kopshitz would bring great power to the team. George and Dick were good back-up players. They enjoyed a 14-10 season record. {A humorous anecdote: Vic's arranged to play the inmates of Jackson Prison. The prisoners were the home team. I asked Jim Koptschitz who won the game? He couldn't remember because the score book came up missing after the game.}

The first two seasons created enough public attention to attract teams from Maple Grove, New Lothrop, Montrose and Oakley. Oakley's representative was sponsored by Fred's Bar with a roster comprised of Billy Devereaux, Lynn Palazeski, Joe Mahan, Les Shuster, Ernie Perry, Ron Brainerd, Steve Podhorsky, Ed Walser, Joe Walser and the Rodriguez Brothers, Bob, Mike, John and Rommy. (No season record was available.)

1975

The off season prior to the 1975 season saw teams taking the upcoming season as serious as a heart attack: playing basketball through the winter to keep their legs in shape, lifting weights, running 3Ks and going to gyms throwing to get their arms in shape for the spring.. Those who thought Slow Pitch was an old man's game were highly mistaken. Slow pitch players were in much better shape than fast pitch players.

By 1975, one would find the diamond in Showboat lined with spectators packing the bleachers, down each foul line and cars three deep circling the outfield fence. The 'Park was ROCKIN' and the best was yet to come. God it was fun!

In 1975, New Lothrop Tavern was a new team in the league and they would battle for the "B" League title with General Meats. The NL team roster included Les Schlachter, Fred Yaklin, Larry Collins, Ed Birchmeier, Fred Ustishen, Chuck Yaklin, Dave Moore, Rich Kneiper, Bill Gillet, Al Green, John Quaderer, Vic Gross and Bryan Gross (a 5-tooler). Season record: 16-6

The Meats countered with Lynn Larnar, Mike Kiniocy, Dave Tithof, Pat Tithof, Mike Anderson, Chuck Larnar, Doug Larnar, Pete Hemgesberg, Eugene Hemgesberg, Al Darling, Larry Tithof, John Alden and managed by Bill Fogel. Season record: 24-10. I wish I could have found more information on this team.

NL Tavern would win the battle earning the right to move up to the "A" League in '76. This powerful outfit would have an immediate impact in "A" League. Each of these two teams would join the rest of the Chesaning teams in raising hell across the state. It was GAME ON!

1975 also saw Rehmanns win the "A" league again and bring in three new players. With the addition of Al "Kaline" Krzciok, Rick Mallard and Jim Ealy, Rick adding outfield depth, Jim adding infield depth and Al adding "Book" depth in the dugout. Bruce Larnar was emerging as a 5-tooler. They played in the Shenanigan's finishing second. They entered the first annual Showboat Tournament and won the tourney. They finished second in MASA Saginaw/Bay City district. One of their outfielders would crash into the fence breaking three ribs and forcing Manager Richardson to place him on the disabled list for a few games. They compiled a season record of 36-6, another great year for the Rehmann's Softball Club.

FBI would pick up Jeff Danek and Kenny Perry for 1975. Jeff helped the infield and Kenny the outfield. They finished 2nd in the league, 2nd in the league tournament, 2nd in a Tawas tournament and after winning the MASA Saginaw/Bay City district, they finished 4th in the Class B State Finals in Republic, MI. They compiled a 38-10 record leaving "Saint" strutting like a peacock and for good reason.

Gewirtz Hardware added Tim O'Rourke and Larry Mishler in '75 immediately making them a legitimate "A" league contender. They finished 16-12 for the year featuring a 3rd in the league Tournament and 2nd in the MASA district with a narrow loss to FBI. Season record: 16-12

Other teams making player moves were Western Auto and Vic's Bar. WA added Gary Krzciok a 5-tooler and Steve Hemgesberg, a hustler supreme. They finished 4th in the league tournament and lost a heartbreaker to Jim's Bar in the Class District Final. Season record: 17-10

Shortstop Rick Cassady and outfielders Rob Kopshitz, Gary Birkmeier and George Birchmeier would join Vic's Bar. Buddy Wendling and Greg Krupp would keep the cooler full. Vic's enjoyed a 12-9 season.

1976

In 1976, Jimmy Carter occupied the White House, the nation would celebrate a Bicentennial of Independence, our troops were home from Viet Nam and The Game was thriving. Communities across the state were hosting weekend tournaments and Chesaning teams were traveling to these venues often resulting in an all-Chesaning tournament final. The league was bulging with talent.

The growing popularity of Slow Pitch softball in 1976 led to improvements to playing fields, lengthening fence dimensions, higher quality softballs, improved gloves and uniforms. Perhaps

the improvement that made the greatest impact was the switch from wooden bats to aluminum and/or titanium bats with the Worth Bomb Bat being the Cadillac bat. The “crack of the bat” changed to the “ping of the bat”. More home runs were hit, more runs were scored and more of the outfield needed to be covered. It hurt the game. After a while, the game became a home run derby.

1976 also saw the emergence of a new team. They were called the Villagers, so named because they sponsored themselves. Their roster was comprised of Bob Basham, Dave Gasper, Steve Maniel, John Michalsik, Steve Sedlar, Brady Bitterman, Pete Hemgesberg, Eugene Hemgesberg, Rick DeLong, Skip Quaderer, Hal Lehman, John Sedlar, Kevin Wendling, Mike Wendling and Bill Stevenson. They were managed by Bill Fogel and Steve Maniel. (The team would have many future sponsors: Bob’s Bar, Fox Bar, Budweiser, Prairie Saloon and Main Beverage of Owosso.) Their first tournament resulted in a 2nd place finish at Wicke’s Field in Brant. They also competed in a tourney in Mason and in the MASA Class C Saginaw/ Bay City district finishing as the runner-up. The team would become known for their stellar defense and overall team speed. When their power numbers improved they were ready to “run with the Big Dogs”. Season record: 34-19

Rehmann’s added utility player “Billy Reh” Rehmann in 1976. Billy Reh would fill in when and where needed, keep an unforgiving book and be the rah-rah guy in the dugout. Every team had their own version of “Billy Reh”. Another player who joined Rehmann’s was 6-6 pitcher, Bob Laney. He didn’t surrender many hits up the middle. Joining Billy Reh and Laney in 1976 was 3rd baseman, Jim “Rooster” Mishler replacing Gary Azelton who continued his fine career with Furstenberg Lumber. The Rooster would become an integral part of the continued success of the Green Machine.

The 1976 season would feature Rehmann’s winning their 4th consecutive League and League Tournament championships. They were also victorious in six invitational tournaments and runner-up in two others. They represented the MASA Saginaw/Bay City Class A District in the state finals played in Grand Ledge finishing with a 2-2 record. Season record: 56-8

An interesting anecdote in ’76 involved FBI’s Bob St. Gordon. FBI was scheduled to play Rehmann’s and their regular pitcher, Tom Vogl running late. Saint said “I’ll pitch until Tom gets here.” He had Jim Hemgesberg and Jack Schultz in the bullpen. After 3 innings, Rehmann’s led 12-1 with a bevy of home runs. Still no Tom. Saint motioned for Jim to come in in relief. Jim, putting up both arms replied, “I can’t go. My arm is killing me.” Saint turned to Jack. Jack’s response? “Screw you Saint! You started this. You can finish it!” FBI would go on to finish second in the league, compete in three weekend tournaments and come in second in the Saginaw Bay City MASA Class B District. Season record: 28-12

Western Auto won the 1976 B League title and finish third in the League Tournament. They did well in the Lake Huron Tawas and Honeybee Tournaments. Sponsor, Ben Dubai, was a happy man. Season record: 24-9

It should have been against the law to have as much fun as all the teams were having. We were all so involved in The Game we didn’t realize what an era we were creating. It was not uncommon on weekends for 4 or 5 teams to travel all over the state to play in festival tournaments and come home Sunday night with 1st, 2nd or 3rd place trophies.

That season, Gewirtz Hardware finished 3rd in the A Division, 3rd in the Showboat Tournament, 3rd in the League Tournament and go 4-1 in their 45 team MASA Class B State District. Manager George Gewirtz, along with his brother Tim, operated the Hardware for 35 years. If you needed information about nearly anything, “Go ask George”. Great guy. I always thought George would have made a great news reporter or a bookie. Season record: 27-14

New Lothrop Tavern added power hitters Craig Brier, Bill Stevens, Bob Wicke and Jamie Van Wagner and shortstop Ralph Henige. They became a formidable team to deal with. They finished 3rd in the A Division. Outside the league they went to Vasser for the Cork Pine Tournament, finish 2nd in Chesaning's Honey Bee tourney, take 4th in a 50-team Houghton Lake tournament and finish runner-up in the 65 team MASA Class C State District under manager Dale Keeler. Season record: 37-12

Ballard's Bakery/Yule Photography had a roster made up of Rob Ballard, Ron Westervelt, Mike Wendling, Norb Birchmeier, Joe Toma, Rick Stoddard, Al Reis, J. Birchmeier, W Birchmeier, Bob Bovee, Mike Rumisek, George Rumisek, R. Stoddard and manager Tom Lerner. I think they lasted one season. Bob and Tom would hook up with Rehmanns and George with Western Auto.

1977

In 1977, Vic's would add outfielders Rob Kopschitz, Chris Coffin and veteran pitcher Gerry Birchmeier. Gerry really bolstered the Orange infield. They would finish 4th in the A League, go 2-2 in the league tournament and 1-1 in the District, go 3-2 in the Maple Grove Invitational, play in the Byron tournament and go 6-2 for 2nd and go 3-2 in the Blueberry Tournament. Their sponsor, Vic Birchmeier was quite a player himself in his day. His favorite song was "Put Me in Coach, I'm Ready to Play". He made sure His Boys could "celebrate" at his place in Layton Corners. Season record: 24-16

In 1977, Gracie's Restaurant would pick up Corky Birchmeier and Gary Mishler and be ready to roll. They finished 3rd in the early Showboat Tournament, 2nd in the Auburn Pine-Cone Tournament, 2nd in the league tournament, 2nd in the league forcing a playoff with Rehmann's, which Rehmann's won. They finished 3rd in a 42 team district tournament in Bay City in Class B. Just a great effort by the New Lothrop guys. Season record: 51-19

Farm Bureau in 1977 would beat Rehmann's in the second half, and finish 3rd in the league and 3rd in the league tournament, played in Portage, took 4th in Petoskey, played in the Genesee county invitational with 140 teams and took 6th and played in the Showboat Tournament and took 2nd. They finished at 38-12. Another great performance by the Bureau.

Stear-LaClair (Gewirtz's) in 1977 would finish 4th in the league, win the league tournament, to stop Rehmann's 5 year rein, or run for the title. They played in the Showboat, Honey Bee and Good Ole days tournaments in town and placing in all of them. They played in the Class C District in Saginaw and went 6-1 to finish the season at 36-14. Another great year for LaClair's.

Western Auto would win the B League for the 3rd time. They finished 3rd in the league tournament, play in the Honey Bee and Showboat tournaments, play in Auburn and take 3rd, played in Houghton Lake and got 4th and played in the 142 team District in Chesaning and got 3rd, finishing at a very respectable 28-12. Ol' Ben Dubay was a happy man. More beer!

The Villagers became Bob's Bar. Their season included a B League Championship. 3rd place in the League Tournament, 1st in the inaugural Montrose Blueberry Tournament and would go 7-1 in the Class D State District. I would watch Maniel's guys literally run teams out of town. This speedy team would continue for 8 more years. What a year, what a team. Season record: 39-19

1977 saw multiple roster switches strengthening individual teams and the overall competitiveness of the league's divisions with B players joining A teams and C teams joining B teams. It was our version of the Major League Farm System. On weekends our teams would gather their families and scatter across the state, camping, sleeping in vans and RVs and in some cases their vehicles. The kids had a great time and the wives and girlfriends put on quite a fashion show.

In 1977, Rehmann's would win the A League and League Tournament for the 5th consecutive year. The season would witness them compete in 7 invitational tournaments, 4 in Chesaning, 1 in Saginaw, the Lake Huron Tournament in Tawas and 1 at Wicke Field in Brant, winning them all. They were also invited to play in the Michigan Parks and Recreation State Tournament in Marshall finishing 3-2. Another great year enjoyed by the Green Machine. Season record: 54-6

1978

1978 saw the league flex its muscle again throughout Mid-Michigan taking the region by storm. Four teams would represent the league in four classes of MASA State Finals: Rehmann's in Class A in Jackson, FBI in Class C in Traverse City, Gracie's in Class B in Portage and Vic's in Class D in Lapeer.

FBI had early success in Petoskey finishing 2nd in a 42 team invitational that featured many Detroit area teams. They would go on to finish 2nd in the A League and League Tournament and 2nd and 3rd in the Showboat and Honey Bee Tournaments in Chesaning. FBI prevailed in the Saginaw/Bay City District MASA Class C, earning the right to compete in the state finals in Traverse City. FBI would become Class C State Champions and finish the season 38-14. Saint and his team had now amassed State Finals record of runner-up in Class B in 1974, 4th in Class C in 1976 and a State Championship in Class C in 1978. I doubt if any other Class C team could match their 5 year run. Season record: 38-14

With the addition of Gary Krzciok, who could play anywhere, and Rick Mallard replacing Tom Tithof in left, Rehmann's would win the A League and League Tournament for the 6th straight season in 1978. Weekend tournaments saw them win the Showboat and Honey Bee events, place 2nd in the Lake Huron Tawas tournament, 2nd in the Midland Cooper Chevrolet invitational, 2nd in the Chesaning Good Old Days and win the Saginaw/Bay City MASA State Class A District earning the right to play in the State Finals in Jackson bowing out with a 1-2 record. Season record: 51-11

Gracie's Restaurant (formerly NL Tavern) record for 1978 included 3rd in the A League, 2nd in the League Tournament, 1st in Akron/Fairgrove, 4th in Lansing, 3rd in Grand Ledge, 1st at Saginaw Hoyt Park, 2nd in Oscoda and win the 142 team Saginaw/Bay City MASA State Class C District. They finished 2-2 in the State Finals played in Portage. Great year for the NL guys. Season record: 60-16

Vic's added two players to strengthen their outfield in 1978 Tom Tithof and Eddie "Wheels" Cassady joining Tom and Rick Cassady on the team. Eddie would patrol right field as he had for Gracie's and Tom would play left field as he had for Rehmann's. They would finish 4th in the A League and 3rd in the League Tournament and 2nd in Byron. They won 9 games to capture the Saginaw/Bay City District MASA Class D title and advance to the State Finals in Lapeer finishing 2-2 capping a great year for the "Grove" team. Season record: 39-14

Bob's Bar (the Villagers) had moved up to the A League finishing 4th and 3rd in the League Tournament. They played in the 150 team MASA Class D District State Tournament winding up 4th in the District won by Vic's. Season record: 27-13

LaClair Sales (formerly Gewirtz Hardware) placed 3rd in the A League and 4th in the Showboat Tournament. They won the 60 team Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class C District advancing to the West Branch regional, losing 8-7 to FBI, (who went on to win the Class C State title) barely missing a trip to the State Finals. Season record: 25-13

After adding George Rumisek and Steve Hemgesberg, Western Auto won the B League, defeating Confer's Market in a playoff. They would go 2-2 in Midland, go 3-2 in the League Tournament,

3-2 in Tawas and place 3rd on the Showboat and Good old Days tournaments. In the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class D District the Auto just lost in the finals. Season record: 29-15

Slow Pitch players suffered a variety of injuries, just like the pros. Some of the more common ones included sprained ankles, pulled groins, rotator cuff tears, broken toes, ribs and fingers and back problems. Guys often played hurt in fear of losing their spot in the line-up or letting the team down.

The most famous injury occurred during a game played between Fox Bar and The Farmer's Inn. As usual a keg of beer was on the line. Loser buys. In the bottom of the 7th, with two outs and a runner on 3rd, the score was tied 8-8. Farmer's battery was pitcher, Leonard Miller, and his brother, Roy Miler, catching. Frank Lycka came up to bat and popped up the first pitch into the air as high as I ever saw one between home and the mound. The ball went into the air above the lights. As the ball started to descend, Leonard and Roy began to converge between home and the mound, both calling for the ball.

Leonard and Roy were big fellas, each 6 feet and 280 pounds. As both yelled "I GOT IT! I GOT IT!", they each bolted toward the ball at full speed, (after all, a keg was at stake) resulting in a resounding collision. The sound of the crash created a noise I had never heard before. Possibly similar to the sound of two Mountain Goat Rams clashing during their rut. Through the ensuing confusion, Dallas Tithof snuck home from third with the winning run. Game over.

Neither Leonard nor Roy was seriously hurt. Just a few stitches, abrasions and bruises. They probably would go through concussion protocol today. They were both back on the field for the next game.

The Miller boys incident was symbolic of how the players across the league "played for keeps". We played some serious ball and couldn't get enough of it. It was a blast for all the guys who competed throughout the league over the years. What a time it was!

Throughout this era (1973-1986), our teams received excellent local newspaper media coverage from the editor of the Tri-County Citizen, Dan Lea. He would print pictures and game recaps of league games and weekend invitational tournaments. This league was the power of the area. It wasn't uncommon for 10 league teams to be traveling on the weekend to a variety of communities to compete. The Midland, Bay City, Saginaw and Flint papers didn't feel our teams worthy of covering. As the league grew stronger, it became impossible to ignore the competition going on in Showboat Park. Come to find out, the league was writing their own story.

The 1978 off season saw roster switches. The dissolving of Bob's Bar allowed Bruce and Dave Gaspe to move to Furstenberg Lumber, Bill Stevens to Gracie's and Steve Sedlar, Bob Basham, Jon Michalcek and Rick DeLong become Fox Bar members. These moves, and others, forecasted a very competitive 1979 season. No season record for Fox Bar could be found.

1979

1979 would see Rehmann's winning their 7th consecutive A League and League Tournament Championships. The Green Machine would also play in a Chesaning 6 Team Round Robin going 6-0, win the Bay City All Sports Trophy Tournament, finish second in the Flint Chucks Sports World Tournament, finish 2nd in the Chesaning Good Ole Days Tournament, come in 2nd in the Chesaning Showboat Tournament and place 3rd in the 45 team Lake Huron Tournament in Tawas. They would lose in the second round of the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class B District. Manager Richardson could be seen that season pacing in the dugout with hands in hip pockets similar to his role model Billy Martin. Season record: 60-16

Bob St.Gordon would retire the FBI sponsorship in 1979 turning it over to American United Life (AUL) Insurance. They finished 4th in the A League, 3rd in the League Tournament, 3rd in the Showboat and after receiving an automatic invite as reigning MASA Class C Sate Champion to the MASA Class CC State Final in Brighton, AUL finished 2-2. Season record: 22-15

Gracie's added good bench depth in 1979 by bringing in Dan Yaklin, Dave Roach, Tim Nelson, Louie Krupp and Corky Birchmeier. They began the year winning the Local 699 Tournament at Hoyt Park in Saginaw. They continued the season winning the Wooden Keg Tournament, take 2nd in the Showboat, finish 2nd in the 42 team Oscoda Chamber Tournament, earn 3rd in a Lansing tournament, place 3rd in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class C District, get 3rd in the A League and 3rd in the League Tournament. Gracie's had a successful year. Season record: 44-18

A new sponsor, Furstenburg Lumber of Montrose, would enter the B League and capture the championship in 1979. They went on to win the Fox Bar Tournament in Marion Springs, get 2nd in the Western Auto Tournament, 4th in the League Tournament, and go 1-1 in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA District Tournament. The team was made up of lumber yard pals of Larry "Butch" Cline. Duane Birchmeier and Walt Wendling would manage. The roster was made up of Keith Vincke, Ernie Beckman, Pat Wendling, Skip Quaderer, Gary Azelton, P. McDonald, Louie Krupp, Jim Ealy and Smilin' Vince Wendling who played third like a vacuum cleaner and added left handed power. Vince loved playing the game. Season record: 45-25

This team was really good and would eventually become a State Champion. As Bob's Bar split up, Furstenbergs would add pitcher Dave Gasper, a shifty south paw pitcher. He maneuvered the ball all over the strike zone keeping hitters, especially lefties, off balance. On top of that, he fielded his position superbly. At bat, he was a slap hitter with great bat control sending the ball wherever he saw a hole in the opponent's defense.

Bob's Bar would become the Fox Bar in 1979. Their roster was made up of Rick DeLong, John Michalcek, Steve Sedlar, Bob Bashem, Steve Sedlar, Larry Zubek, Tom Theil, Rommy Rodriguez, Roger Hollerback, Tom Anderson, Ron Alden, Al Shultz, Leon Moore, Hal Lehman, Ken Wenzlick and Elmer Wirt as managers. They played in the B League and finished second to Furstenbergs. They won the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class D District by defeating Chesaning squads sponsored by Hancor Tile, Steel's Body Shop and Prairie Saloon advancing to the State Finals in Portage. Their season also included weekend tournament wins in Brant and Bay City. Bob Basham would now be leading their defense. What a player! Season record: 36-6

LaClair Sales would finish 3rd in the A League in 1979, 3rd in the League Tournament, go 2-2 in the Good Ole Days Tournament and finish 4th in the 60 team MASA District. Jim Freeland played a stellar shortstop for LaClairs. Season record: 19-12

Western Auto finished 3rd in the B League and 3rd in the League Tournament, go 2-2 in the Lake Huron Tawas Tournament, take 3rd in Mason and get knocked out in the 3rd round of the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class D District. However, Ben Dubay and his crew would eventually taste a State Final. Steve Schulte was the glue that held Auto together. The Twin Brooks ground gang veteran was the outside guy and "Bow Camp" leader this team needed. His major strength was locating the nearest pub. What a guy! Season record: 25-17

In 1979, Vic's would play in 9 tournaments and finish no worse than 3rd in any of them. Possibly their biggest win was in the 40 team Montrose Blue Berry Festival by coming out of the loser's bracket to prevail including 8 games on Sunday and defeating a strong Baddell's team from Flint, the 1978 MASA Class B runner up. This performance was probably the highlight of their careers. Other competition included a 2nd in Byron, 2nd in the League Tournament, 1st at Maple Grove, 2nd in Montrose, 3rd in the Lake Huron Tawas Tournament, 2nd in the A League and 2nd in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class D District. Vic Birchmeier, sponsor of the team, and their loyal

fans dubbed the team "The Orange Crush". Their team colors were orange and brown. "The Crush" represented the league well wherever they played. Season record: 57-17

By 1979, the games would attract large crowds. Fans of teams made of wives, their kids, girlfriends, relatives, moms and dads and just plain softball fans would ring the field and fill Showboat Park. Tailgaters particularly enjoyed the games. Gerry Keiffer would bring his hot dog/popcorn stand to serve the crowd. Just like "The Bigs". Festival tournaments would be accompanied by food trucks and a beer tent causing the players to feel like they had died and gone to softball heaven. For good reason, The Game was the talk of the town. The 70's were the formative years. The 80's would be the payoff years for the whole league.

The great competition in the leagues made every team a dangerous outfit to face in out of town play. When teams traveled, they had been battle tested and ready for action. Our local competition is the primary reason our teams were so successful in out of town tournaments. The league benefited from two great diamonds to compete on over the entire twelve years. Holy Cow we played a lot of ball during those years. A monster had been created and the monster was hungry.

1980

In 1980, Ronald Reagan occupied the White House, our Iranian hostages were home and the country was at peace. The Phillies beat Kansas City in the World Series and our league was sizzling. We couldn't wait for the first week of May for the season to begin.

The Chesaning Men's Softball Association would see Rehmann's win their 8th straight A League Championship and finish second in the League Tournament. Weekends saw them win the Good Ole Days tournament, a Greenville invitational, finish 2nd at Saginaw Valley State University and in the Showboat tournament and place 3rd in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA District bowing out against league rival Gracie's. A good year for the Green and Gold. Season record: 46-15

LaClair Sales finished 3rd in the A League, the League Tournament, 3rd in the Good Ole Days tournament and 4th in the Saginaw/ Bay City MASA District. Season record: 19-14

Western Auto would win the B League and 4th in the League Tournament, take second in Midland, compete well in the Lake Huron Tawas Tournament and lose in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA District to Vic's Bar. Good season for Auto, Dubai was smilin', "More Beer!" Season record: 31-10

FBI had become American United Life (AUL) and placed 4th in the A League, go 2-2 in the League Tournament, 3rd in the Good Ole Days Tournament and struggle in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA District. Season record: 15-14

Furstenberg's season would result in a tie for 4th in the League and finish 3rd in the League Tournament, 2nd in the Blue Berry, 2nd in a 4th of July tournament and lose in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA District final. Season record: 38-17

The Brass Bell fielded a team in 1980, but unfortunately no one could remember any stats on the Bell Ringers.

The Prairie Saloon of Albee Township would have a team in the league that featured Mike and Jeff Stole, Greg Neumeyer, Doug Hemker, Brian Wilson, Denny Hoffman, Jim Wesley, Gary Kunik, Mike Moore, Tom Smith, Gene Alexander, Mike Wendling, Kraig Vincke and manager Steve Manial. They won the B League and got beat by the Fox Bar in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA District. Great year for Steve Manial. Season record: 18-12

Vic's Bar would be 13-7 in the league, good for 2nd place. They would have a playoff with Rehmann's for the 2nd half and lose 7-12. They also played in the Blue Berry and finish 2nd, took 3rd in the Showboat tourney, played in Byron and went 4-2 for 2nd place. We would win the D District in Saginaw and go 6-0, play in the State Finals in Lapeer and win a runner-up State Championship. A week later they were invited to play in the Tournament of State Champions in Clarkston and got runner-up again. They finished the year 56-21. The Crush had arrived.

Gracie's Restaurant opened the season finishing 2nd in the 42 team Oscoda Chamber of Commerce Tournament. They won the Honey Bee Festival, Corunna Chamber of Commerce Tournament and the Flint Local 659 Wooden Keg invitational. They finished 3rd in the A League and win the League Tournament. They won the 160 team Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class C District to reach the State Finals played in Muskegon and finished Runner-up State Champions. Just a super season for the New Lothrop squad. Season record: 62-18

1981

In 1981, Ronald Reagan survived an assassination attempt by John Hinckley Jr. He would go on serve another 6 years.

1981 proved to be a banner season for the Chesaning Area Softball Association. The growing excellence of the past seven years would blossom with 5 teams competing in MASA State Finals: Rehmanns in Class BB in Cadillac, Gracie's in Class CC and Vic's in Class C in Thompsonville, Western Auto in Class D in Sault St. Marie and The Fox Bar in Class E in Portage. I think the league really exposed itself for what it was and had been for the last 7 years.

In the previous two years, 1980 and 1981, The Chesaning Area Softball Association placed 7 teams in multiple classes of MASA State Finals. Just a super performance by our league!!!

In the 1970's and early 1980's the first week of May and Labor Day Weekend were the most important dates on the calendar. For ballplayers, if you were playing on Labor Day Weekend, you were a "Somebody" and we had a lot of "Somebodies" in 1981.

By 1981, Rehmann's Clothing had won just about all there was to win except an MASA State Championship. That void would be filled in 1981. They won their 9th consecutive A League championship, finish 3rd in the League Tournament, win the Good Ole Days tournament, win the New Lothrop Merchants Tournament, win the LaFrance Oil Tournament in St. Charles and represent in the Lake Huron Tawas. In August, they won the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class BB District and with it a berth in the MASA Class BB State Finals to be played in Cadillac. The Green Machine emerged as MASA Class BB State Champions, one level below Class A. It may have taken a while to earn that state title, but it was a helluva ride to arrive. What a Team! Season record: 53-8

By 1981, Vic's had two veteran players, Tom Cassady and Jim Kopshitz, who were "5-toolers". The duo had played together since 1969. Tom was a versatile fielder playing multiple positions, mainly 1st base. Jim was a hard nosed third baseman. Both of these guys were hard nosed competitors, and they each batted over .500 for 3 or 4 years in a row. They became the driving force on the team from 1973 to 1986. What a duo.

Vic's would finish 4th in the A League and 2nd in the League Tournament, 2nd in Byron, 3rd in the Blue Berry and 3rd in a late season Chamber Tournament. They received an automatic bid to MASA Class C State Finals losing to eventual State Champion, Grand Blanc Printing, 4-3 and finish 1-2 in the tournament.. Layton Corners was still hoppin'. Season record: 36-28

Gracie's would finish 2nd in the A League, win the League Tournament, 2nd in the 44 team Oscoda Chamber Tournament, 1st in the Showboat Tournament, 1st in a North Star tournament and represent the Saginaw/ Bay City Class CC MASA State Finals with an automatic bid based on the 1980 tournament finish. They would go 3-2 in Thompsonville. The Purple Gang had reached a new plateau. Season record: 50-17

Western Auto won the B League, 3rd in the League Tournament, compete in a Vasser Tournament and finish 2nd in the Good Ole Days tournament. Auto won the 32 team Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class DD District Tournament earning a slot in the MASA State Finals at Sault St. Marie to wind up the season. Just a great finish for Ol' Ben Dubay. He was a proud man, and proud of his team. More Beer! Season record: 35-13

Fox Bar finished 2nd in the B League and 2nd in the League Tournament. They won the 28 team Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class D District Tournament in St. Charles and advance to a 4th place finish in the MASA State finals in Portage. Season record: 28-9

I couldn't get a lot of information about Furstenburg's, but did get the scorebooks for them from 1981, 1982 and 1983. The books revealed some strong batting credentials. Ernie Beckman was their big stick with 26 HRs, 102 hits, drive in 96 runs and hit .455 just shy of Duane Birchmeier's .464. The top five hitters were Duane Birchmeier .464, Ernie Beckman .455, Terry Wendling .440, Gary Azelton .418 and Dave Gasper .407. They played in many tournament s, but I couldn't find any details. In 1981 they finished 3rd in the A League and 3rd in the League Tournament. Season record: 42-31

LaClair's finished 4th in the A League and 4th in the League Tournament and 3rd in the Good Ole Days in their final year in the League. Many of their players went on to coach H.S. sports, the golf course or the tennis court. They had a good 10 year run. Season record: 13-13

The Brass Bell, Hancor Tile, Steel's Body Shop, Fred's Bar and Alexander's Restaurant all sponsored teams in the League but no stats could be located.

1982

By 1982, the players were getting older and interest was beginning to wane. Players were retiring and moving on to other interests such as coaching football, basketball, baseball, softball, tennis, golf and Little League.

In 1982, the Rehmann's Clothing Softball Club won their 10th consecutive A League Championship and wind up 4th in the League Tournament. They played in an early season tournament in Laingsburg and finish 2nd. They competed in the Lake Huron Tawas Tournament and the Showboat Tournament and won a late season tournament in Cadillac. Rehmann's wrapped up the year with an appearance in the MASA Tournament of Champions in Davison. Season record: 33-14

Vic's would finish 5th in the A League, 3rd in the League Tournament and play in several weekend tournaments. They won the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class C District Tournament and proceed to compete in the MASA State Finals at Sault St. Marie finishing 4th. Season record: 42-13

In 1982, the Prairie Saloon would have a managerial change bringing in Steve Manial and all of his experience and knowledge of the game. The Saginaw native had played baseball, blooper ball, fast pitch softball as well as slow pitch softball. He provided the spark this team needed. He inspired the Prairie Saloon to play with the confidence to win the B League title, be competitive in weekend tournaments and finish runner up in the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class E District. Steve was just the medicine those guys needed. Amen. Season record: 38-13

1982 marked the end of a couple of stalwart teams in the Chesaning Men's Softball Association. The Gracie's sponsorship decided to sponsor a church league team causing Brian Gross, Ralph Henige, Bill Stevens and Jamie Vanwagner to move to Furstengurg's.

The core group of guys who made up the roster of the FBI/AUL/Bob's Bar sponsorships would only compete in Chesaning tournaments. They finished 5th in the A League and 4th in the League Tournament. They bowed out of the Saginaw/Bay City MASA District early. The team would ultimately break up. Some of the guys would hook on with other teams ending their run in the State Tournaments. Season record: 14-18

In 1982 Furstenburg Lumber finished 3rd in the A League, win the League Tournament and lose in the third round of the Saginaw/Bay City MASA District. Their top hitters were Duane Birchmeier .465, Vince Wendling .440, Ernie Beckman .428, Keith Vincke .415 and Jim Early .385. No season record was available.

Vic's Bar would go 9-11 in the League, 25-12 in weekend tournaments. They won another Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class C District and advance to the State Finals finishing 4th. They finished with a season record of 42-31.

In 1982, The Prairie Saloon would have a new team and Steve Manial would take over as manager. He had a ton of respect. He was from Saginaw and played baseball as a youth. He played both blooper ball and baseball on the Eaton Corporation team in the early 70's. In 1972 he played on the Pin Town Lanes team that was competitive in 1969-1971 in the Chesaning blooper ball league. He was the spark they needed to play with confidence. He took them to a B League title. They were 21-7 in weekend tournaments and finish runner-up in the MASA Saginaw/Bay City District. Season record: 38-13

1983

Rehmann's finished second in the A League, 3rd in the League Tournament, grab 2nd and 3rd in two Chesaning weekend tourneys. They went 28-12 for the season. It was time to put the Machine in the barn. Sadly, the glory days of the league were fading.

In 1983, Furstenburg's would win the League, be 2nd in the League Tournament, win their 2nd consecutive prestigious Blue Berry, compete well in 2 or 3 weekend tournaments and lose in the MASA District finals. Season record: 36-11

The Prairie Saloon was now in the A League. They finished 12-7. They came in 3rd in the League Tournament and participated in numerous weekend tournaments. They won the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class D District in Saginaw and go on to the State Finals in Springport, finishing in third place. Great season for the Albee squad. Manial was smilin' with his team playing sweet ball. Season record: 45-15

1984

Vic's Bar would finish 7-14 in the League in 1984. They went 18-13 in weekend tourneys. They lost in the second round of the District. Season record: 25-27

Also in 1984, Steve Manial would take his Villagers/Bob's Bar/Fox Bar/ Prairie Saloon team into the MASA Class D State Finals in coldwater and finish 5th out of 36 teams. I asked Steve what his most memorable game was. He said, "Well, we played a tournament at Hoyt Park in Saginaw in 1983 and finished 5th. But the great thing about it was one of my players, Steve Sedlar, won the MVP Trophy. He played 7 different positions in the tournament and batted over .700. Steve also

said some of his teams played over 100 games a year. He did not know what their record was for each year. All he could say was “What a ride!”

1985

In 1985, Vic’s would go 7-14 in the League, go 1-1 in the District and 18-13 on the weekends. 1985 would mark the end on of Vic’s sponsorship in the league. Some of the players would go on to play with Furstenburg’s, Confer’s Market or in the Maple Grove blooper ball league. Season record: 26-28

In 1985, Tom’s Softball Club entered the League. It sported a roster of stars from former teams including Bob Basham, Gary Krzciok, Bill Stevens, Ralph Henige, Jamie VanWagner, Bob Laney and Brian Gross among others. They finished second in the League, won the League Tournament, come in 2nd in the Blue Berry, take 2nd in the prestigious 50 team McMillan Cup in Davison, won a Saginaw/Bay City MASA District in St, Charles and wind up 3rd in the Owosso State Finals. I believe the Tom’s Softball Club had a two year run as I couldn’t come up with any other information beyond two years.

1986

In 1986, Furstenberg’s was the top dog in League, the area, and the state. They trophied in every weekend tournament they played. They won the Saginaw/Bay City MASA Class D District in Chesaning earning a spot in the State Finals in Owosso where they came out MASA Class D State Champs. Just a great credit to the Lumbermen and our League as a whole. Their season record was unavailable.

This concludes my Tribute to a “Once in a Lifetime League”, its teams, its players and its sponsors. Preparing this account of who we were and who we became has been a joy. It brought back some great memories for me and I hope it has for you too. We played hard, we played fair and we played to win. I salute all you champions. It was a privilege to have played with and against all you guys. Tom T.

Now I have to thank many of those who contributed background, stats and stories to make this whole thing possible. In no particular order, thanks to Dave Gasper, Bob Basham, Steve Manial, Dave Richardson, Steve Schulte, Jim Alden, George Gewirtz, Jim Freeland Jim Kopschitz, Gary Birchmeier, Jack Schultz, Gary Gerkin, Fred Yaklin, Doug Bishop and Ernie Beckman. There were so many who contributed, I apologize to those I left out. The scrap books, score books, photos and information proved invaluable.

To the fans – thank you for being there when we needed you. You were a big part of who we were and what we became.

As a League, we won 3 State Championships, 3 runner-up State Championship Finalists, 3 third place State Finals finishes, 4 fourth place State Finals finishes, 2 fifth place State Finals finishes and 25 Saginaw/Bay City MASA District Champions. Chesaning would have at least 1 team playing in the State finals from 1974 to 1986. We would also win over 200 1st, 2nd or 3rd place trophies in weekend tournaments. All of these gaudy numbers were accumulated in a 12 year period.

My Managers of the Year:

1973 Dave Richardson

Rehmann’s Clothing

1974	Bob St. Gordon	Farm Bureau Insurance
1975	Dave Richardson	Rehmann's Clothing
1976	Dave Richardson	Rehmann's Clothing
1977	George Gewirtz	LaClair Sales
1978	Bob St. Gordon	Farm Bureau Insurance
1979	Dale Keeler	Gracie's Restaurant
1980	Tie: Dale Keeler	Gracies's
	Gary Birchmeier/George Birchmeier	Vic's Bar
1981	Dave Richardson	Rehmann's Clothing
1982	Gary Birchmeier/ George Birchmeier	Vic's Bar
1983	Steve Manial	Prairie Saloon
1984	Steve Manial	Prairie Saloon
1985	Duane Birchmeier & Walt Wendling	Furstenburg's Lumber
1986	Duane Birchmeier	Furstenburg's Lumber

My Players of the Year:

1973	Mike Clement	Rehmann's Clothing
1974	Mike Vogl	Farm Bureau Insurance
1975	Brian Gross	New Lothrop Tavern
1976	Gary Krzciok	Western Auto
1977	Bill Stevens	Gracie's Restaurant
1978	Tim O'Rourke	LaClair Sales
1979	Vince Wendling	Furstenburg's Lumber
1980	Greg Neumeyer	Prairie Saloon
1981	Jim Mishler	Rehmann's Clothing
1982	Duane Birchmeier	Furstenburg's Lumber
1983	Tom Cassidy	Vic's Bar
1984	Jim Kopschitz	Vic's Bar
1985	Jamie VanWagner	Tom's Softball Club
1986	Louie Krupp	Furstenburg's Lumber

My Most Versatile Players (10 year minimum number of seasons):

A League: Jim Ealy
 B League: Steve Sedlar

The Chesaning area was fortunate to have so many sponsors who supported their teams so well. At the top of the heap was Rehmann's Clothing. Rehmann's Clothing was inducted into the Michigan Amateur Softball Association Hall of Fame in 2004 in the sponsor's category. Over the years the Green Machine would sport multiple sets of uniforms, often 9 different combinations per season. When I asked Manager Richardson how he determined what the team would wear in a given game he replied, "Before we played that night, I asked Sandi (his wife) "What do I tell the guys we're wearing in the next game?" She told me what combination was clean. So that's how I told the fellas what we would be wearing in the next game to prevent mix ups. Very simple eh?" I knew Sandi was calling the shots in that roost.

A big THANK YOU is extended to all of the following sponsors (in no particular order): Bob and Sue St. Gordon, Rich & Betty, Don & Babe and Al & Beth Rehmann, Joe and Carol LaClair, Ben and Dorothy Dubay, Vic and Mary Birchmeier, George & Shari and Tim & Yasmin Gewirtz, Bill and Sally Gewirtz, Gracie and Joe Besaw, Walt and Sally Tithof, Dave and Diane Gewirtz, The Farmer's Inn Bar, Prairie Saloon, Steel's Body Shop, Hehr International, Chesaning Manufacturing, Fred's Bar, Elks Corners Tavern, Budweiser of Owosso, Furstenburg's Lumber, St. Charles Bank John and Nancy Dennis to name a few. Without these great sponsors, the

League would have been just another small town recreation league. Because of your genuine support, we all went on to greatness. Thank you again.

I also want to thank our umpires. No league can function without having its rules enforced. Our League was no exception. The following is a list of umpires who kept things under control: Junie Tithof, Bill Barnum, Gordy Krizan, Tim Tuller, Jamie VanWagner, Ron Krzciok, Don Gross, Bob Dooley and Lyle Rettinger. I'm sure I missed a few of you guys, but you guys missed a few too. So we're even.

Also, Blue, you guys deserve an apology for all the abusive comments directed your way: "Blind! Stupid!, Crazy!, Idiot!, Fool! Get in the Game! How much is the other team paying you guys?!"

The strangest call over these 12 years was made by Junie Tithof. He ruled a ball that rolled under the fence a "Ground rule Triple. You're out!"

If there are players out there who have additional information, pictures, articles, patches or trophies, they can be added to the display at the Chesaning Area Historical Society Museum located at the corner of Broad St. and Clark St. in Chesaning.

Thanks to the help of my brother-in-law, Greg Krupp, who helped me when I needed an extra pair of hands crafting the League's display case. Also, thanks to George Gewirtz, Doug Muirhead and Tom Selleck for helping me move the display cabinet into the Historical Museum.

Lastly, a heartfelt thank you goes out to wives, moms and girl friends who allowed us to pursue our dreams of becoming the best of the best.

My final thanks goes to the Chesaning Area Historical Society board members Chairperson Bonnie Ruff, Secretary Fran Young, Treasurer Nancy Rowe, Diane Stanusek, Connie Murdoch and Brett Russell for accepting the Chesaning Area Men's Softball Association display case to be displayed in the Chesaning Historical Museum. Tom T.