Country Living in SPRINGFIELD

August 2023

Batter Up!

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Cover photo by Becky Fleury Photography

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Batter Up!

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It's a distinct sound – a baseball hitting that sweet spot on a bat; for the player it's instant gratification. For the fans, it's the anticipation of a possible homerun. Whether it's the sound of a 'crack' on a wooden bat or a 'ping' on an aluminum bat, when that ball makes that connection, it's pure satisfaction and joy.

For Gerry "Boomer" Palidwor, his connection to the game of baseball started when he was a young boy. Gerry didn't go far without a ball in his hand. His love and involvement in the game has spanned decades, earning him the right to be called 'Mr. Baseball'. For Springfield residents, if there is a conversation about baseball, Gerry's name will likely be in that mix.

Gerry grew up on his family's farm on Hazelridge Road, in what he refers to as the golden triangle, because it's centred equally in distance to Oakbank, Cooks Creek and Hazelridge. After graduating from university, Gerry left to work in a number of cities throughout different countries. He then moved back to Springfield with his family, living on the same acreage. He worked in the telecommunications industry as a Radio Frequency Engineer and travelled extensively; providing equipment support around the globe to places like Asia, Europe, and throughout the United States and Canada.

Those that have been to the CN Tower in Toronto, and visited the dizzying height of the observation deck, you should know Gerry has climbed even higher than that. He has been to the tip of the radio tower to inspect the equipment – a job a select few could do at those heights! He was also instrumental in bringing live TV to northern BC via Microwave Radio Tower systems, and travelled abroad with various network companies when introducing new products.

Gerry has fond memories growing up as a child in Springfield, one of course which was playing baseball. For those that didn't know, the Springfield Braves baseball diamond in Dugald, on the corner of Hwy. 206 and Hwy. 15, is the **second oldest baseball diamond in the WORLD, that still operates as a functional diamond**. Yes, the world! The oldest diamond is in London, Ontario – woohoo Canada! That is quite the accomplishment for Springfield, and it's people like Gerry who we have to thank. Gerry is not only the President and General Manager of The Springfield Braves Senior Baseball Club, he also provides all the maintenance on the diamond, including mowing the grass, and repairs to the field; all on a volunteer basis. Over the years, he has gone through two riding lawn mowers... that's a lot of miles cutting grass.

The first game played on the baseball diamond was in 1882 – that's 141 years ago. That is quite remarkable, as the province of Manitoba was founded 153 years ago. The diamond sat there before the railway line even came through. "I remember

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Queen Elizabeth II medal presentation with Ron Schuler

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playing on that field when I was seven years old," Gerry says, laughing. "No, I'm not that old, but that diamond has been there forever! I started playing baseball in Springfield almost six decades ago, and played for junior teams in the Interlake and for Winnipeg Senior Leagues."

Gerry's list of accomplishments is long as a player, but his legacy is the teams he has coached over the years and the programs he's developed. He's hoisted many trophies over his head at the Junior, Senior and Provincial levels, and his accomplishments are noted by Baseball Manitoba. He was inducted into the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame as a Builder/Player in 2016, and also inducted in the Baseball Manitoba Honour Society in 2018. Gerry has been the President of the Winnipeg Senior Baseball League for 17 years and is also a Director of the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame. And it's not just baseball that Gerry plays – he is also the Commissioner of the Oakbank Old Timers Hockey Association, which just celebrated their 40th year of operation.

In addition to the endless hours he dedicates to sports, he is also the Director on the Cooks Creek Community Centre Board, and the Chairman of The Immaculate Conception Church and Grotto of Cooks Creek. "I've been on the board since 1990 and in addition to religious services the church provides, we also are involved in community events." He adds, "We have our annual Winter Carnival, and there have been a number of Cooks Creek Revival Concerts. One memorable concert was in 2018 when we hosted Burton Cummings Live at The Grotto. We have done the Medieval Festival since 2004, and we hope to bring that back again in 2024." This past spring the church held a Ukrainian Relief Fund social to raise money for the efforts in supporting Ukraine. Gerry is also the current Grand Knight of St. Josaphat's Council #4138, the first Ukrainian Council in the world for the Knights of Columbus.

Gerry has several accolades in his honour, but the one he is recently proud of, is his Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee medal. "I received a message that I was to receive the 70th Jubilee Award for my service and recognition in the community. I initially thought it was a joke, until a follow-up message from someone at the Legislature inquired why I didn't respond to their invite." Gerry adds, "It was quite unexpected and a once-in-a-

lifetime experience." Recognition that is well deserved Gerry, for the countless hours you volunteer and dedicate to the community.

Gerry says he is currently 'semi-retired' from his consulting company, which will now free up more time so he can give to the community (if that's even possible). When asked if he will spend more time travelling during his 'retirement' his answer was, "No, not likely. I spent so many years trying to arrange time off the road so I could be home. I'm just fine with not having to travel anymore."

For those travelling to Boston, you can attend a Major League Baseball (MLB) game at Fenway Park, home of the Red Sox, and say you visited the oldest MLB ballpark, which opened in 1912. If you find yourself in London, Ontario you can go to the Labatt Park where they take the honours of having the oldest operational ball diamond, with its history dating back to 1877. But for the residents of Springfield, you don't have to go far to stand on the second oldest baseball diamond in the world...that is something to definitely brag about!

I had two last questions for Gerry. First, where did the nickname, "Boomer" come from? His response, "Well, it's either my slapshot in hockey or my booming voice." I personally haven't seen his hockey skills but talking with Gerry, I can attest to his deep, bass-toned voice. And I have seen footage of his singing skills from the Baseball Hall of Fame banquet in June, where he's known to sing on more than one occasion, the *Seventh-Inning Stretch – Take Me Out to the Ball Game.*

My second question for Gerry was, what is your preference, a wood bat or aluminum? His response, "The major leagues only use wood...without a doubt; wood! Nothing beats the sound and the feel of that crack on the wood when that bat hits the ball!"

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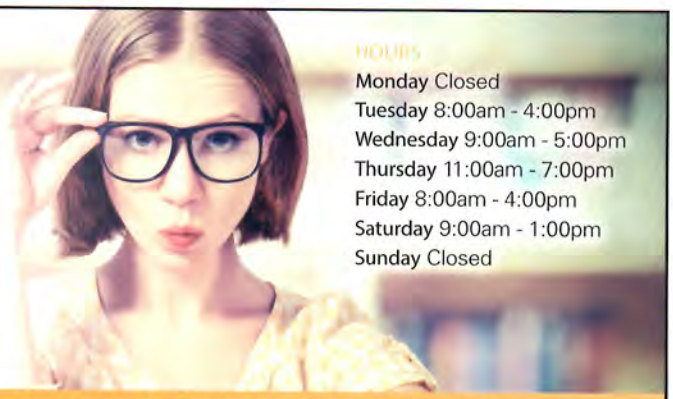

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