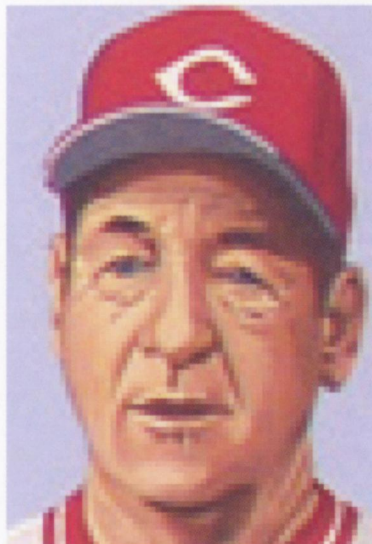


The

PORTSMOUTH MURALS

ANNUAL
BASEBALL
BANQUETS

A HISTORY

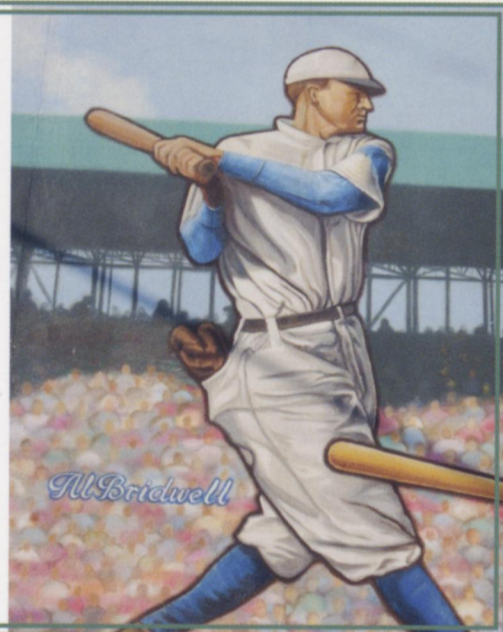




Dude Blake (OF) Cleveland Spiders (NL) 1894-1898, St. Louis (NL) 1899

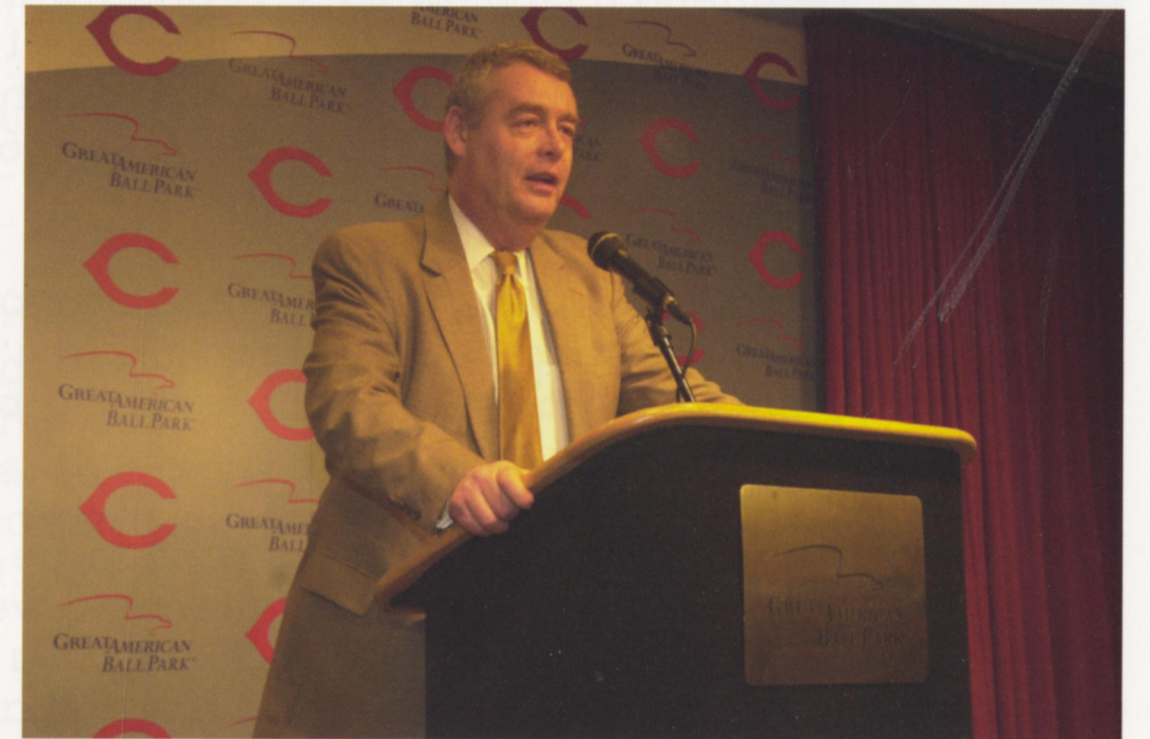
Special note: Dude Blake was the first major league player from the area and he played with the Cleveland Spiders from 1894-1898, playing only one year for the St. Louis National League team in 1899. In 1899 the owners of the Cleveland Spiders and the St. Louis Perfectos pulled a major switch, exchanging the players in St. Louis for the Cleveland players and vice versa. The Perfectos took the field on Opening Day 1899 in new red-trimmed uniforms. A sportswriter overheard a lady fan seated near him remark, "What a lovely shade of cardinal" - meaning red... and he wrote it up in his column. He used the nickname so often that it gained in popularity and by 1900 the team was officially known as the Cardinals.

Al Bridwell played his first organized baseball with the amateur Portsmouth Victors. He next played for the semi-pro Portsmouth Navies on the same team as Branch Rickey. A minor league contract with Columbus followed and in 1905 he signed his first big league contract with Cincinnati. He is best remembered for his play with the New York Giants and Chicago Cubs. He had 1064 hits but is most famous for his one hit that led to the baseball's infamous "Merkle Boner" which contributed to the Giants losing the pennant in 1908. Later he played for Chicago and got the Cubs to Portsmouth for a barnstorming exhibition game in 1913.



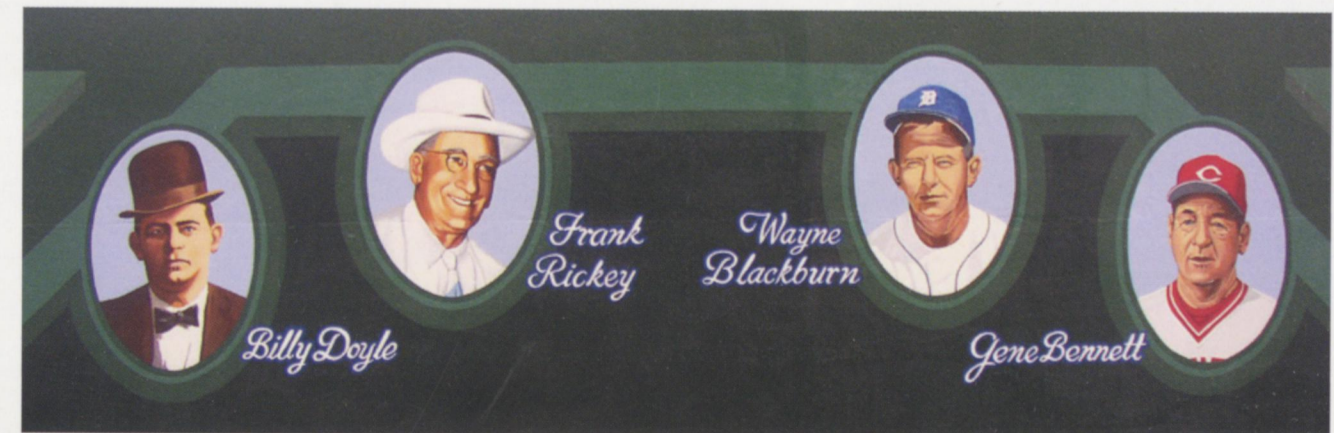
Cover Photo (Bottom Row L-R): Gene Bennett, Cincinnati Reds; Terry Craft, Major League Umpire; Don Gullett, Cincinnati Reds; Al Oliver, Pittsburgh Pirates

The idea of the Baseball Murals as a continuation of the Portsmouth Floodwall Murals Project began with the formation of a special committee/task force of Portsmouth Mural Board of Trustees. It was formed in February 2004. Community people who agreed to serve on this committee to provide baseball information were Gene Bennett, Al Oliver, Bill Newman, Dale Taylor and Bill Warnock. The first meeting was held March 3, 2004. Trustees who became members were Bob Morton, Chris Lute, Ann Sydnor, Rick Brown, Bob Luchi, Bob Wilson and Trustee Emeritus Bob Cook. It was initially called the Baseball Wall of Fame and was to be located on Madison Street featuring local Portsmouth legends Branch Rickey, Al Bridwell, Rocky Nelson and Al Oliver. Muralist Robert Dafford began work in August 2004 and a dedication to this first phase of the Baseball Murals was held November 6, 2004. In conjunction "Rickey", a one-person play by Jerry Holt, Shawnee State University, about the life of the legendary Branch Rickey, was featured at SSU's Vern Riffe Center for the Arts as part of the dedication ceremony.



John L. Allen

During the winter meetings of 2004-05 it was decided to only show players from Scioto County, Ohio and Greenup County, Kentucky on the murals. Players discussed were Larry Hisle, Del Rice and Gene Tenace from Portsmouth and Stan Spence and Don Gullett from Kentucky. Famous baseball scouts from the area were mentioned also, Billy Doyle, Frank Rickey, Wayne Blackburn and Gene Bennett. A listing of all Major League Baseball people was compiled starting with Harry "Dude" Blake, the first major league player from the area. Blake played for Cleveland starting in 1894 when this team was in the National League.



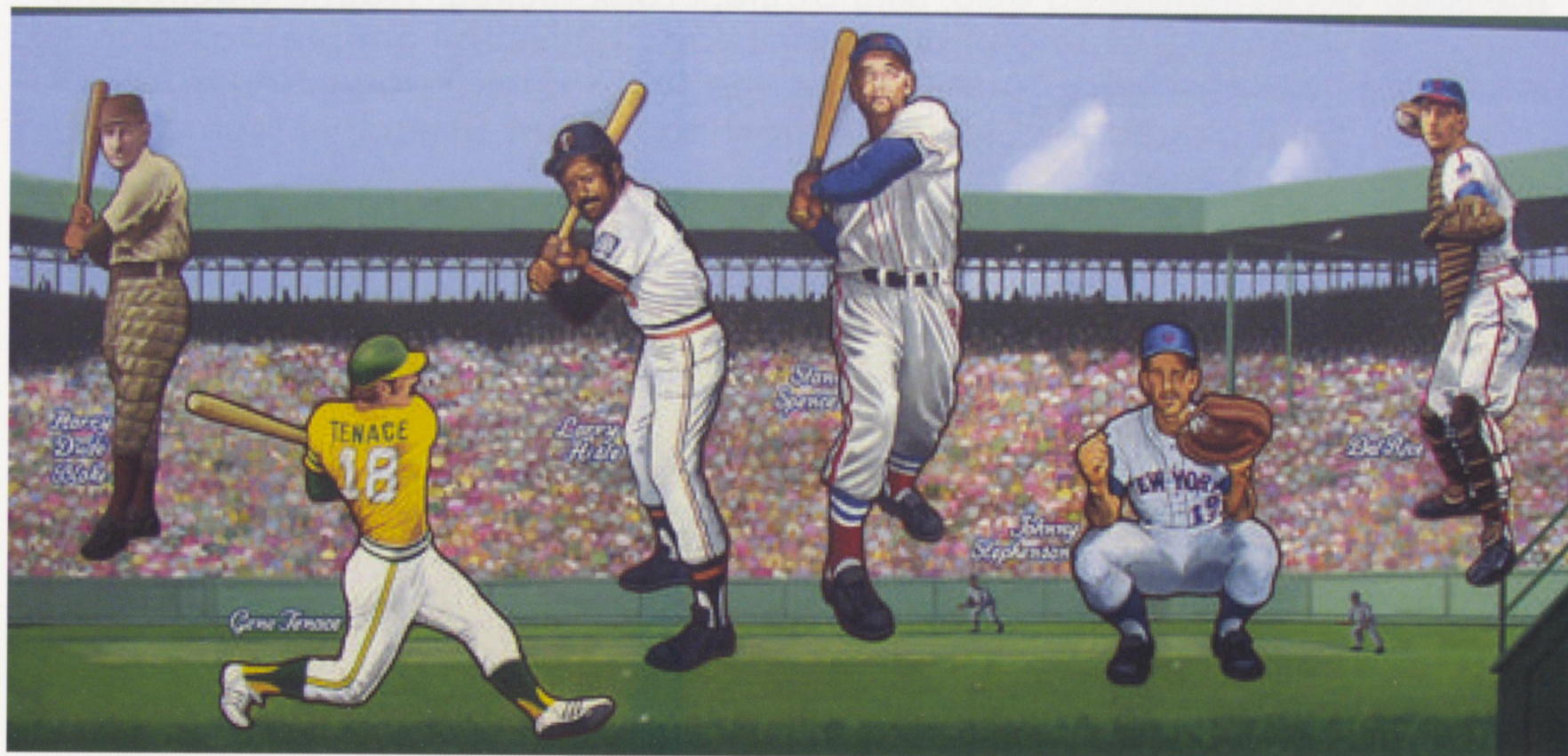
In early 2005 Gene Bennett was asked by Portsmouth Murals, Inc. if he could get someone from the Cincinnati Reds to speak at the annual Chamber of Commerce dinner. Gene succeeded in getting John L. Allen, Chief Operating Officer for the Reds to be the dinner's Keynote Speaker. Allen was in his 11th year with the Reds and was involved in all aspects of the building the Reds Great American Ball Park. Gene also spoke. He was in his 53rd year with the Reds and was the Senior Special Assistant to the General Manager and Advance Scout. The dinner was held May 5, 2005 at the SSU's James A. Rhodes Athletic Center.

John Allen shared a humorous story about working with former Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott: "I was the comptroller at the time and Mrs. Schott had me attend a MLB owner's meeting with her. She had just been suspended and the owners were all curious about who was going to run the club in her absence. To their surprise Mrs. Schott announced that her 'bookkeeper' would be running the club." After a 60-day interim period, Allen became club president.

On a more serious note Allen discussed the economic woes facing a number of MLB teams and then quoted Branch Rickey: "The successful solution of every problem facing professional baseball is based upon the integrity and devotion of the owners."

The dinner was considered the first of soon to be many banquets honoring baseball. Former Major Leaguers attending were Al Oliver, Dave Tomlin and John Herrnstein. Stan Spence's sister Zola Coffee also attended. Unfortunately, Rocky Nelson was ill and couldn't attend.

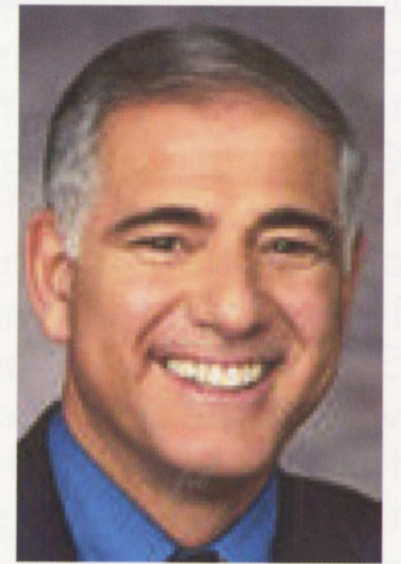
During the summer of 2005 players painted on the wall were Gene Tenace, Larry Hise, Stan Spence, John Stephenson and Del Rice. Also, a special picture of Harry "Dude" Blake was added and the utility building for the floodwall was transformed into a dugout scene.



2ND ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET

JANUARY 2007

The PMI trustees decided to hold a special dinner on January 18, 2006 to dedicate the additions to the Baseball Murals. For this second dinner celebrating baseball Gene Bennett again obtained the speaker, George Grande, a famous broadcaster who had worked for the Yankees and Cardinals and was the first ever anchor for ESPN Sports Center. He was a Reds television announcer at this time.



George Grande

The dinner billed as a banquet was a huge success but unfortunately George Grande was not able to fly out of Connecticut due to weather conditions. Gene Bennett arranged for a pinch hitter to come in. This was former Reds pitcher and then Reds television color commentator with Grande, Chris Welsh. He did an excellent job.

Robert Morton, President of Portsmouth Murals, welcomed everyone to the new Welcome Center and introduced Bill Warnock, publisher of the Community Common newspaper who was the Master of Ceremony for the evening. Warnock introduced each Major League player and gave a brief recap of their careers.

Several of the baseball dignitaries were asked to make comments. Al Oliver, who had a long distinguished Major League career, and was a member of the banquet planning committee stated that "I am more than pleased with the banquet and have high hopes for next year, which has already been scheduled for the Life Center to make room for people wanting to come who could not get in."



Larry Hise

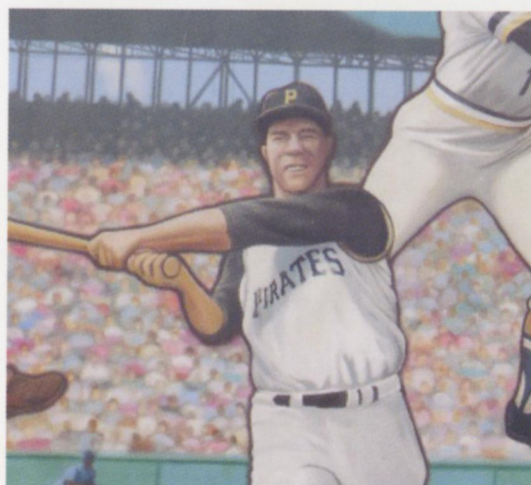
Larry Hise who came from Wisconsin talked about being happy to be home saying "The people in Portsmouth had more to do with my success than I did."

Gene Bennett commented, "I have not done any free agent scouting since 1991. Really though that is the most exciting job you can have in baseball if you are not a player. Every year you get a new breed of players. I was lucky I was able to sign quite a few." Among the many players Gene signed were Barry Larkin, Don Gullett, Paul O'Neil, and Chris Sabo to name a few.

Gene Tenace stole the show when he came to the mike and spoke off the cuff. He had the audience laughing in the aisles. When asked if he did this often Tenace said, "No, I am a rookie at off the cuff speaking. I am a baseball person. It is easy to get up there and talk baseball."

Another star close to the hearts of Kentucky and Ohio fans was Don Gullett. He pitched for the Reds and Yankees and coached for Cincinnati. Don said, "This is a great turnout tonight and I am honored to be here. There are a lot of local heroes here and it is great to be with my friends." Gullett and another South Shore, KY player, John Stephenson, were scheduled to be painted on the murals the summer of 2006. Stephenson played for the New York Mets when Casey Stengel was manager.

The main speaker was television analyst Chris Welsh who had teamed with George Grande the scheduled speaker for 15 years in the Reds TV booth. Welsh stated that "George rarely if ever misses an engagement. He called from Connecticut and explained how he could not get out. We are like brothers, we have been together for years and he would do anything for me and I him. I am always ready to talk baseball. I would fill in for George and I would do it for Gene Bennett." Again Chris Welsh did an excellent job as banquet speaker stating, "When I heard all the guys who would be here I was ready to come. Some I played against and some I played with on the same team. I would not miss this."



Rocky Nelson, a Portsmouth native, played nine seasons in the big leagues and helped the Pittsburgh Pirates win the World Series in 1960. Rocky hit the first home run in the 7th game that Bill Mazeroski ended with his legendary home run.

Al Oliver's concluding comment was, "It will take a great effort to top the 2006 edition but it can be done. It was a moving experience for me and guys coming in for the banquet."

It would be remiss to not mention a couple reasons the Baseball Murals were conceived. The first idea came from a newspaper clipping Bob Morton found in the archives at Ohio Wesleyan University. It showed a picture of Branch Rickey in a New York uniform taken in 1907. Rickey was a catcher for the New York Highlanders which changed their name to the New York Yankees in 1913. The other



One of the stories learned from John Stephenson who played for Casey Stengel and the New York Mets was as follows: Casey had a problem remembering players' names so he always carried a roster with the names and numbers. One day Casey saw some players during Spring Training throwing baseballs to fans. At this time the team prohibited this and Casey went out to scold them. They proceeded to run backward off the field so Casey couldn't read their numbers and escaped his scolding. Stephenson stated he was a favorite of Casey's and he was the only person who ever called him Stevie.



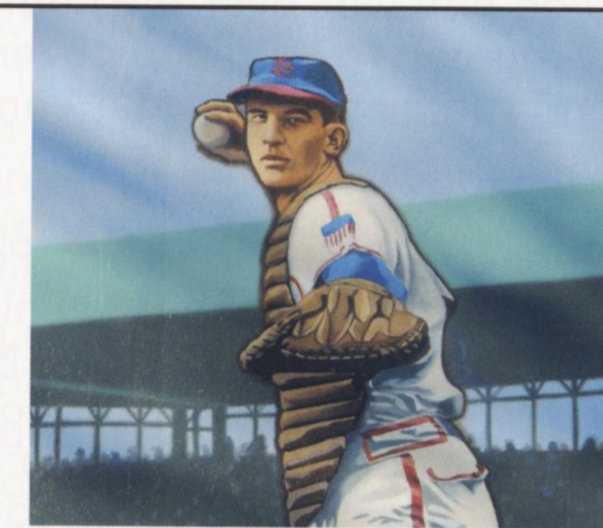
Branch Rickey

ideas came from the two baseball books written by Shawnee State University professor Dale Taylor, Baseball Through Small-Town Eyes and Simpler Times: Baseball Stories from a Small Town. Many of the images of players were taken from photos that appeared in Dale Taylor's books. Taylor was a special guest at the 2006 banquet. He sat at the head table along with the muralist Robert Dafford who had traveled from his home in Lafayette, Louisiana to attend.



Stan Spence, from South Portsmouth, KY, had a nine-year major league career with the Boston Red Sox, the Washington Senators, and the St. Louis Browns. Spence enjoyed his best batting years with the Senators, hitting .323 in 1942 and .313 in 1944 while driving in 100 runs. He played in the outfield with Ted Williams and Dom Dimaggio when he was with Boston, played in 1,112 major league games between 1940 and 1949, and played on five All-Star teams.

Del Rice, a native of Portsmouth and a major league catcher, started in professional baseball in 1941 and was called up to the St. Louis Cardinals in 1946. He played his first World Series game that year as St. Louis defeated the Boston Red Sox. Most of his playing career was with St. Louis and he played in the 1953 All-Star game. Traded to the Milwaukee Braves he played in the World Series again as the Braves defeated the New York Yankees in 1957. He became the manager of the Los Angeles Angels in 1972 and managed there for one year. Rice was the only area player to become a big league manager. Portsmouth's Del Rice Baseball League was named in his honor in 1957.



The 3RD ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET

JANUARY 2007

The third banquet was moved to the SOMC Friends Community Center to accommodate more people. A crowd of over 400 people attended. Jennifer Schackart of SOMC was a big help in making the move to the Friends Center.

Gene Bennett, Don Gullett and Terry Craft were honored along with scouts Wayne Blackburn, Billy Doyle and Frank Rickey. These six were the most recent additions to the Floodwall by muralist Robert Dafford. The Community Common's Bill Warnock served as emcee and introduced the keynote speaker George Grande. Grande was the Cincinnati Reds television play-by-play announcer since 1993. Each July since 1980 he has hosted the

National Baseball Hall of Fall inductee ceremonies in Cooperstown, NY.

Grande, who was making his first visit to Portsmouth, commented "It is truly amazing the impact and the contributions this small community has made to the game of baseball." He also raved about the murals and made some good-natured comments about Gene Bennett. Each of the honorees later addressed the audience.

Bennett told the story of how when his playing days were over Branch Rickey aided in his decision to become a scout for the Reds. Bennett also said Rickey's advice served him well over the years: "He said to get as many bird dog scouts as you can to help you cover the area, see as many games as you can see and run as many tryout camps as you can and you can't go wrong."

Two players signed by Bennett Barry Larkin and Paul O'Neill sent special videotaped messages that were shown that evening. O'Neill commented that he had already accepted an invitation from Michael Jordan to be in his golf tournament in the Bahamas and was sorry he could not attend. O'Neill was a star for the Reds and later the New York Yankees. In his video, Larkin commented, "There are a lot of great baseball people from the Portsmouth area. They must be putting something in the water. And, Gene, I hope they made you look nice on the mural."

Don Gullett, a left-handed pitching star for the Reds and Yankees posted an incredible 109-50 win-loss record in nine big league seasons before retiring due to injuries. He also excelled in the postseason spotlight with a .686 winning percentage. He later served as pitching coach for the Reds from 1993 to 2005.

Terry Craft, who worked more than 1700 games, earned a reputation as a top umpire. He started late serving seven years in the Army prior to his 27 years of umpiring. He retired in 2006. Terry worked the 1997 All Star game and several postseason games. Three notable games he worked were a Nolan Ryan no-hitter, Robin Yount's 3000th hit game and Ricky Henderson's game where he set the record for most stolen bases in a career.

Both Gullett and Craft are Greenup County, Kentucky natives and both graduated from McKell High School in South Shore. It is noteworthy that both were put on the baseball mural during the same year. Craft was a big hit at the podium lacing his talk with down home humor. It was a successful banquet and plans were made to continue holding it at the SOMC Friends Community Center.



4TH ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET

JANUARY 16, 2008

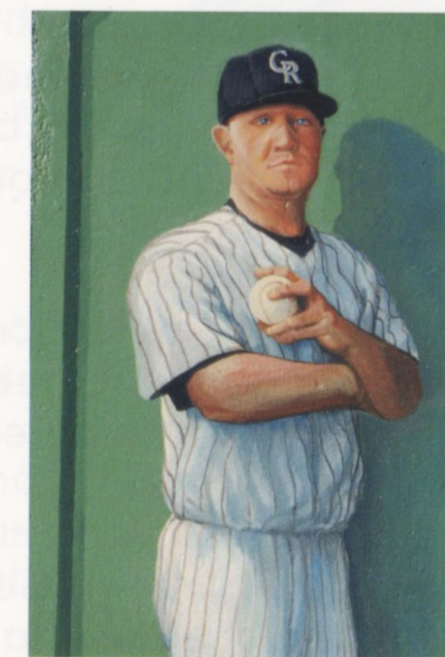
Cincinnati Reds television broadcaster Chris Welsh returned as the keynote speaker. He spoke in 2006 as a "pinch hitter" for broadcast partner George Grande, who couldn't make it due to weather conditions. Welsh and Grande were the longest running television duo in Reds history. Welsh in his presentation congratulated those in attendance for keeping the mural project thriving. "It's a true civic treasure you have here and it must be supported," Welsh said. One of the most memorable lines from Welsh was, "A lot of people don't realize it but I was a 20 game winner in the big leagues. It just took me five years to do it." Welsh had a 21-31 win-loss record in five Major League seasons. Another noteworthy comment from Welsh was, "Al Oliver belongs in the Hall of Fame, not tomorrow but yesterday."



Chris Welsh

Emcee Bill Warnock of the Community Common and now a Portsmouth Murals, Inc. board member seamlessly weaved speaker and honored guests introductions and anecdotes into the program which lasted short of two hours.

Among the notables in attendance was Arizona Diamondback Brandon Webb, 2006 National League Cy Young Award winner from Ashland, KY; Josh Newman from Wheelersburg, OH, who made his Major Leagues debut with the 2007 National League Champion Colorado Rockies as a left-handed relief pitcher; Hal McCoy, Hall of Fame baseball writer for the Dayton Daily News; Randy Marsh, a 25-year veteran Major League umpire from Northern Kentucky; Johnnie LeMaster from Pikeville, KY who was a star at shortstop for the San Francisco Giants for many years from Pikeville, KY; and John Herrnstein of Chillicothe, OH who played 220 games in the Major League mostly with the Philadelphia Phillies, was an advisor to the Chillicothe Paints professional baseball team, and was also a former captain for the University of Michigan football team.



Josh Newman

Josh Newman in a later interview with the Portsmouth Daily Times stated, "I was driving down here today and I was talking to my wife and we were kind of laughing and I said 'We have just been blessed in so many ways and getting caught up in living your dream and finally it worked out.' It has just been unbelievable." Newman further commented "you never stop being a little boy in the game of baseball. When the time comes, then you really have to ask yourself some questions. Every day when I go into the clubhouse, I get goose bumps walking into my locker and seeing my name with Todd Helton, Matt Holiday and the list goes on. Just being a part of that camaraderie and atmosphere that we experience is unbelievable."

The Colorado Rockies won the National League Pennant in 2007 and lost to the Boston Red Sox in the World Series. Newman received a World Series ring. His last Major League appearance was August 21, 2008 with the Kansas City Royals. He played college baseball at the Ohio State University and after his professional playing days returned there as a coach. Newman is now the pitching coach for the Marshall University baseball team.

Bob Morton, president of Portsmouth Murals, Inc., made some comments on mural maintenance. "Last year (2007) we had a huge maintenance bill around \$12,000 so the major portion of the money raised at this banquet goes for this purpose and we are going to need that much again for 2008. The other portion of money raised went to the new bicycle mural and we've got around \$30,000 in that mural."

Several comments by guests and honorees made from the podium and later for the newspapers are worth mentioning. Hal McCoy, who has a vote for the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame, said that he doesn't believe the steroid controversy will have a lasting effect on baseball but he is sure of how it has affected him. "In the long run people who are involved in this like Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa, etc. will never get my vote for the Hall of Fame. I'm on record as saying I won't vote for anybody who cheated."

Cy Young award winner Brandon Webb said that the award was not something to take for granted. "To win an individual award like that, you hope and cross your fingers, but I didn't want to set any hopes so high that if I didn't win it I wouldn't be too disappointed. So when I got that call it was totally exciting."

Don Gullet, who lives across the river in Lynn, KY, said he frequently takes friends and family to see his likeness on the baseball mural. "They have a good thing going here with the murals. It's something that adds a lot of history to the area."

Wheelersburg native Gene Bennett who's credited with bringing over 40 people from the baseball world to the event said "We have guys come from all over the country and if I can promote the city of Portsmouth and Scioto County, I'm always glad to do that."

Al Oliver, a lifetime .300 hitter, said the event means a lot to him and he

spoke about the importance of another Major League great from Scioto County. "I can't help but think about Branch Rickey, the Dodger executive who helped break the color barrier by signing Jackie Robinson. If it wasn't for him Larry Hisle and myself would not have had the opportunity to play."

Oliver won the batting title as a member of the Montreal Expos, but said his fondest memories were playing with the 1971 World Champion Pittsburgh Pirates. "That's the thing I will never forget and we were led by the late great Roberto Clemente. I can't help but think how great a player he was but more important to me was the type of person he was."

Gene Tenace, a Lucasville native and Oakland Athletic great and a World Series Most Valuable Player said he is always excited about coming to the banquet. "I still have a lot of ties to this area. I grew up around here and I've got a lot of friends and family who still live here, so I get to come to this function and I get to see my relatives."

The 5TH ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET JANUARY 16, 2009

Hall of Fame radio announcer Marty Brennaman was the keynote speaker for the 5th annual Portsmouth Murals Baseball Banquet held again at the SOMC Friends Community Center. The 2009 season was Brennaman's 45th as the voice of the Cincinnati Reds. In 2000, Brennaman received the Ford C. Frick Award at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. He joined Red Barber and Russ Hodges as the only Reds announcers to receive this prestigious award. Joining him on the podium was Joe Williams, Chairman of the Board of the Cincinnati Reds, who made some remarks to the audience.



Marty Brennaman

Brennaman shared many stories about his late broadcast partner Joe Nuxhall. They hold the honor of being the longest running radio tandem in baseball history. He had taken a tour of the murals and stated, "You hear about the murals but it doesn't prepare you for what you folks who live in the area are so proud of. It's really impressive. I was amazed." Throughout the evening Marty graciously kept busy signing autographs.

People shown on the mural who were in attendance were called on by emcee Bill Warnock to share some memorable stories. Al Oliver, a former

Pittsburgh Pirate and 1982 National League batting champion, shared his moment of seeing one grandson throw and the other catch the ceremonial first pitch at PNC Park in Pittsburgh during the previous season. Former Reds pitcher Don Gullett told his only career home run was in a playoff game against the Pirates in 1975. This drew a groan from Oliver and a laugh from the crowd. Gene Bennett talked about being inducted into the Baseball Scouts Hall of Fame. He then shared the news that he was slated to be honored with the first ever "Legend of Scouting" award at an event in Los Angeles that coming weekend. Terry Craft, former major league umpire from South Shore, KY, revealed a fond memory saying: "One of the first games I umpired was a game involving the Reds and the Big Red Machine. When the game started, and I saw Johnny Bench and Joe Morgan and Pete Rose, I thought 'Wow, am I privileged to be standing on the same field with these guys.'"

Bob Morton, President of Portsmouth Murals, Inc., talked about the importance of the banquet and how it provides money for maintenance and for new murals. He further explained, "If you drive down and look at the murals you will see that several have cracks and the big thing with maintenance is repairing these cracks." Morton went on to credit Gene Bennett for bringing out the stars stating, "Several of the major league people are here because they are Gene's friends and that gets them out. I think the banquet really does put Portsmouth on the baseball map."

In the program Morton introduced a special guest, Jim Host of Host Communications, Lexington, KY, and told some history that Jim was the first person to receive a baseball scholarship from the University of Kentucky.

Hal McCoy, Hall of Fame baseball writer for the Dayton Daily News, was also in attendance for the second straight year. He later wrote in his Reds Report column: "If you haven't seen the murals on the Portsmouth, Ohio flood walls, it is worth the drive. I, too, was skeptical about wasting time gandering at some paintings on a wall. But when I did, it was breathtaking. The murals are huge and they are works of art. There is a portion devoted to the amazing baseball heritage of the area around Portsmouth beginning with Branch Rickey." Also, in McCoy's column, he wrote about guest speaker Brennaman: "And if you think big men don't cry, especially a hard-boiled guy like Brennaman, well most of his speech was about his days with Joe Nuxhall in the radio booth, and by the end of his talk, Marty was sobbing."

The banquet event was considered another success and it included a music video entitled "Talking Portsmouth Baseball" and a silent auction. Chef Bill Schaefer of Haute Stuff did the catering as he had done in previous years.



6TH ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET

JANUARY 2010

Major League umpire Charlie Reliford, an Ashland, KY native, was the keynote speaker for the 6th Annual Portsmouth Murals Baseball Banquet. At this point in his career he was a 19-year veteran and had worked two All-Star games and two World Series.

Reliford took the podium to a high round of applause and then asked the crowd to greet him in the manner umpires are used to being greeted. Thundering boos resulted and he began his speech in a humorous tone that carried throughout the evening. Reliford stated, "Gene Bennett asked



Charlie Reliford

me to speak, he's a great man who's played a big part in my career. This is about home, throughout my big league career I've been very proud of what this area represents and to come back and be a part of it is a tremendous honor that I gladly accepted when Gene asked." He then noted that this was his fourth banquet he's attended.

"We use the game of baseball to support the murals and to be a part of this is special. The murals are something fabulous, I tell people

who are not from here about the murals and they don't get it when I say the murals are some fabulous art on the floodwall. That's like me saying the Grand Canyon is a big hole in the ground. You cannot imagine how good it is until you see it."

Stars shown on the floodwall said a few remarks from the podium led by Gene Bennett, Don Gullett and Al Oliver. Bennett commented on special people who attend regularly such as Hall of Fame sportswriter Hal McCoy, Johnnie LeMaster, a star shortstop for the San Francisco Giants who was born in Portsmouth and many people from the Cincinnati Reds organization. Oliver spoke about when he signed his first contract, "I took my first check to Fred Brown Oldsmobile in Portsmouth and bought a new Olds Cutlass right off the showroom floor. Then I drove it 300 miles around the streets of Portsmouth, which is hard to do in Portsmouth." Also attending for the first time and sharing the spotlight was Tim Maxey, a Portsmouth native, who is the Joint Strength and Conditioning Coordinator for Major League Baseball. Maxey

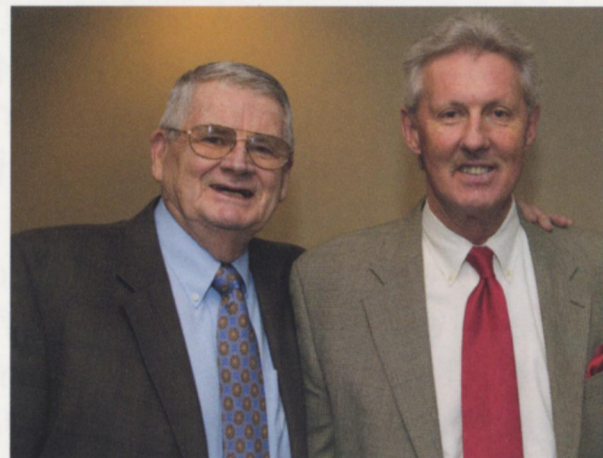


Tim Maxey

was previously with the Kansas City Royals and the Cleveland Indians.

Hal McCoy in a later column wrote, "One never knows where or when one will hear a piece of baseball trivia one never knew, let alone sit at the same table with the subject. This was the case when I attended the annual Portsmouth Murals Baseball Dinner. Someone at my table asked me if I knew the only man in baseball history to hit an inside the park home run in his first Major League at bat. I admitted I didn't and he pointed across the table to Johnnie LeMaster and said, 'That man'."

Also in this column McCoy related a story Charlie Reliford told about Don Gullett at the banquet. "You all think Gullett is a such a nice guy, I remember a day he was pitching and he sauntered up to me and said, 'Hey, Charlie, flip home plate over and read the directions because you ain't getting 'em right'."



Hal McCoy and Johnnie LeMaster

Still another story came out from McCoy who wrote "Remember the day Reds pitcher Tom Browning left Wrigley field and sat atop a brownstone apartment across the street, in full view of everybody in Wrigley. I was umpiring the plate that day," said Reliford. "Reds catcher Joe Oliver said 'Check out what's across the street on the roof.' Reliford said he told Oliver, 'You can't see a girl from this far away.' Said Oliver, no, no, Tom Browning is sitting up there in his uniform." McCoy also reported that Browning did it to win a \$300 bet from teammate Tim Belcher, which helped pay the \$500 fine manager Davey Johnson slapped on him.

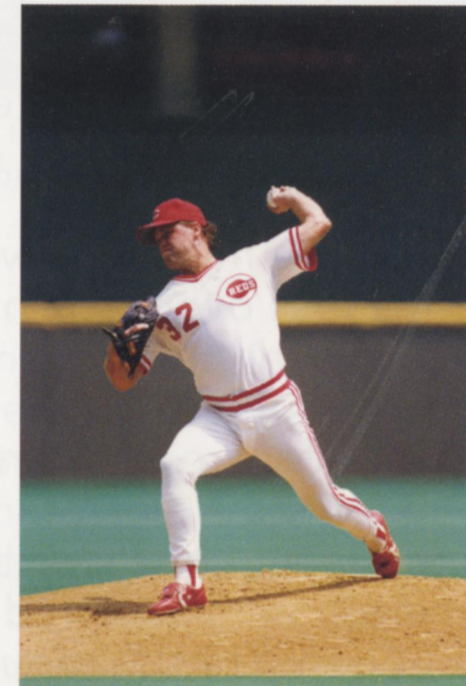
A Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce magazine article on the banquet stated, "The list of big leaguers went on and on. So what draws them to such an event in our small southern Ohio community? They obviously have a love for the game but one man, Gene Bennett from Wheelersburg, is so well respected throughout Major League Baseball that these men literally drop what they are doing to attend the banquet. Gene makes the calls and the next thing you know you are in a banquet hall among a roster of baseball stars from the past, present and future. Gene, a living legend in the baseball world, gets the people and Bob Morton, who serves as the Portsmouth Murals, Inc. president works industriously with the mural board throughout the year to pull it all together as the successful star-studded event that it is. Each year it's a challenge to top the event but we are sure Gene and Bob have something up their sleeves. Mark your calendars for January 12, 2011."



7TH ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET

JANUARY 12, 2011

Tom Browning, former Cincinnati Reds pitcher who has the nickname "Mr. Perfect", was the keynote speaker for the 7th Annual Portsmouth Murals Baseball Banquet. This is what Gene Bennett had up his sleeve that he had kept secret the year before.



Tom Browning

Portsmouth Daily Times writer Sam Piatt had this in his column: "The Good Book tells us that only one man who ever walked the Earth was perfect but for nearly two hours, September 16, 1988, Tom Browning was perfect - writing his name in Major League Baseball history's books by pitching a perfect game. More men have orbited the moon than have ever pitched a perfect game - no hits, no walks, no runs, nobody on. Twenty-seven batters up, twenty-seven batters down."

In his speech Browning said, "I didn't feel any different coming out to start that game than I did at my other starts. There had been a two and one-half hour rain delay and I was in the clubhouse thinking they would reschedule the game as part of a doubleheader. Then they came in and said 'you're pitching, let's go'. I went out there totally relaxed, found the strike zone right off and kept on finding it." The game was a 1-0 victory against the Los Angeles Dodgers at Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati. Barry Larkin scored the winning run and Tim Belcher was the losing pitcher.

The Chamber of Commerce newsletter commented that Browning's colorful antics kept everyone laughing throughout the evening. Lisa Carver, the chamber executive, said, "I believe he could have talked for hours and still kept the attention of the crowd, which by the way was over 450." They also noted that honorees attending were Gene Bennett, Al Oliver, Don Gullett, Gene Tenace who traveled from Oregon, Terry Craft from Colorado, and John Stephenson from Louisiana who shared their bigger-than-life baseball experiences. Gene, who recently retired from the Reds is so respected that every time he got up to speak he received a standing ovation - at least three times.

Hal McCoy in his column wrote, "Browning dazzled the throng for over an hour with his stories, drawing laughter with some of his blue-tinged stories. Browning acknowledged that he was a guy who liked to have a good

time, 'except on the days I pitched. Then it was all business. I called the days I pitched 'Red Drawers Day' because I wore red underwear on the days I pitched.'"

Browning, a minor league pitching coach for the Reds, recalled recently having to console a pitcher who had given up nine runs in an inning and told him, "Hey, keep your head up. It happens. There's always tomorrow, always better days. Of course, I never gave up nine runs in an inning. I gave up ten."

Browning grew up in Casper, Wyoming and was always a Reds fan, even as a kid. He then pointed to Gene Tenace in the audience and said, "I still hate you for what you did to the Reds in the 1972 World Series."

Among the honorees was retired umpire Terry Craft, who asked, "What's all this fuss over Browning and other guys pitching perfect games. I was perfect every day."

Gullett in his remarks recalled the years after he left the Reds in 1977 to pitch for the New York Yankees and volatile manager Billy Martin: "The pitching coach was Art Fowler and Martin really used to let Fowler have it if the pitchers screwed up. I was having trouble throwing strikes so Martin sent Fowler to the mound. He said, 'Billy told me to tell you Babe Ruth is dead. That ain't Babe Ruth up there so throw strikes. Please, Gully, throw strikes or Billy is really gonna be mad at me.'"

The 8TH ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET JANUARY 2012

Al Oliver gave the invocation as he had done for every baseball banquet, "Father God, we give you thanks for this community and for this evening in the name of baseball and service to each other," and the continuing words of this prayer set the right atmosphere for the evening. Oliver who has lived pre- and post-professional baseball days in Portsmouth takes great pride in giving back to the local community. He is a deacon at the Beulah Baptist Church.

Major League umpire Greg Gibson gave the evening's keynote speech: "We all make mistakes. But I assure you as a baseball fan I give you my very best every time I step on the field." Gibson's Major League career started in 1997 with the National League and since 2000 he has worked in both leagues. At this point he had worked six Division Series, one League Championship Series, and the 2011 World Series.

Gibson, whose talk was quite inspirational said, "I became a fan of baseball during game 6 of the 1976 World Series. On this day my favorite Reds player, Don Gullett, signed a Bible for me. I think I was eight years old and I knew then that I wanted to be in baseball and be that kind of influence to others with my life."

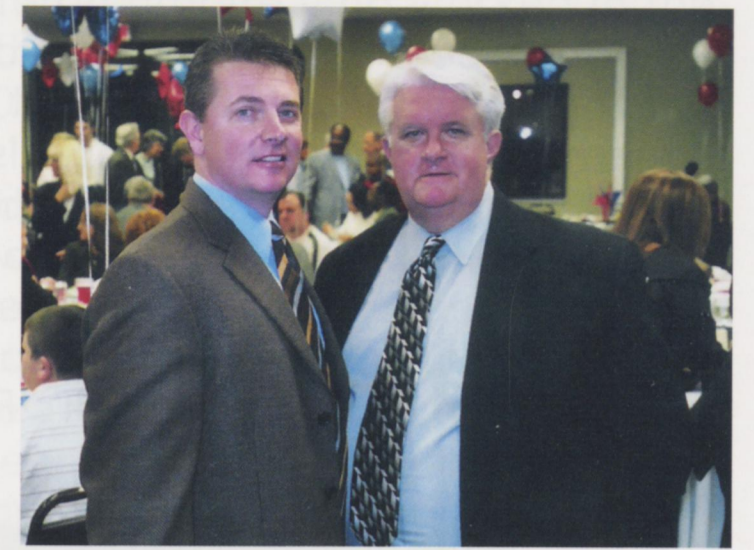
Baseball greats from the area who are shown on the mural took their turns speaking to the sold-out crowd. They were Gene Bennett, Don Gullett, Larry Hise, John Stephenson, Al Oliver and umpire Terry Craft.

Bennett, in his remarks, told how the Reds drafted and signed Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin. In June 1985 a day before the draft the Reds had projected Larkin a fifth or sixth round pick. Gene thought he should be number one. Bob Howsam was the President/General Manager of the Reds and was in a meeting with all the scouts when Bennett got up and said "Do you know how foolish we are going to look when we don't sign Larkin? He's a hometown guy from right near downtown Cincinnati. Somebody will take him ahead of us and we will look stupid when he becomes a star. Nobody said anything and nothing changed.

"Later that day I was at the water cooler when Mr. Howsam walked by and said, Gene, how soon do you think Larkin can make it to the Majors? Dave Concepcion is still pretty good but we are going to need a shortstop real soon." Bennett said he looked at his watch and it was 9:45 on June 23. I told him 9:45 on June 23 and Mr. Howsam said "You're saying he can play in the Majors right now?" Bennett said "you can put him at shortstop right now and defensively you won't skip a beat. Give him a couple of months to get adjusted and he'll hit, too."

The next day, draft day, Bennett walked into the conference room where the scouts and Howsam were seated. "It was real quiet, said Bennett. Nobody was saying a word. I looked at the blackboard and whose name do you think was at the top of our draft list? Right, it was Barry Larkin. Mr. Howsam asked me, "Do you think you can sign him?" I said I know I can. So he said, "Get to his home right now and let me know because we're taking him first."

This story was taken from one of Hal McCoy's columns and he commented further: "And that's how close the Reds came to not drafting Larkin." McCoy also reported that because the Reds didn't take Gene's advice they missed two other players who are future Hall of Famers, John Smoltz and Derek Jeter. Also before Don Gullett blew out his arm before the days of Tommy John surgery, he was on his way to a Hall of Fame career. Gullett was a Reds number one pick.



L-R: Greg Gibson, active MLB umpire and Bill Warnock, master of ceremony.

During the evening Murals President Bob Morton reminded the audience that the purpose of the banquet was to raise money for the maintenance of the murals and for new murals. "We usually clear around \$20,000," said Morton, "and this past year spent a lot more than this amount to replace the Branch Rickey Mural and repair the Portsmouth Spartans Mural." This work had been done the past year and a Dedication Ceremony was held with many of the Rickey family attending. Lee Lowenfish, author of the book "Branch Rickey, Baseball's Ferocious Gentleman," was a special guest at this ceremony.



It is unique that we have two major league umpires from our area. Terry Craft from South Shore, Kentucky and Greg Gibson originally from Franklin Furnace, Ohio and presently lives in Ashland, Kentucky.

The 9TH ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET JANUARY 2013

The ninth Annual banquet began on a sad note. Emcee Bill Warnock announced that Gene Bennett would be absent from the occasion due to his wife's illness. "I think we need to remember the Bennett family in all of your prayers," Warnock said. "Loretta is special to me and my family. She was one of my mother's best friends and God bless the Bennett family this evening." Al Oliver then gave the invocation, asking for those in attendance to keep the Bennett family in their thoughts and prayers. Loretta Maxine Bennett, 82, passed away Friday, January 18, 2013. She was a wonderful housewife and mother and huge Cincinnati Reds baseball fan and close friend of former Reds owner Marge Schott.



Randall Gibson Marsh

The banquet was honored to have Randall Gibson Marsh, Director of Major League Umpiring for Major League Base-

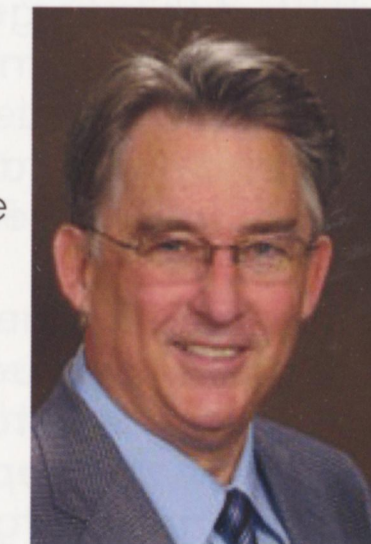
ball, as the keynote speaker. Randy is a veteran umpire who worked in the National League from 1981 to 1999 and both major leagues from 2000-2009. He umpired the World Series in 1990, 1997, 1999, 2003 and 2006, serving as crew chief for the last three Series, and in the All-Star Game in 1985, 1988, 1996 and 2006, calling balls and strikes in the 1996 game. He is the tenth umpire in history to serve as crew chief for three World Series. He has also officiated in eight League Championship Series (1989, 1992, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2009) and in five Division Series (1998, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006). He has been a crew chief since the 1998 season. Marsh retired from umpiring in the 2009 season to become the Director of Umpiring for Major League Baseball. Marsh is a graduate of Covington Holmes High School and the University of Kentucky.

During the course of the evening, Bob Morton, President of Portsmouth Murals, Inc., lightheartedly reminded the audience "Please remember that we moved the banquet date to the third Wednesday of January so next year the date will be January 15, so put that one your calendar. The reason for holding the banquet is to raise money for new murals and for maintenance of the ones we have." Morton also noted, "We have many baseball dignitaries every year and this year we have for the first time two active Major League bullpen coaches attending." They were Jim Lett, coach for the Washington Nationals and Willie Blair, recently hired coach for the San Diego Padres.

The evening had a special highlight when the 2012 State Champion Division 3 Wheelersburg High School Pirates baseball team was introduced individually and recognized for this achievement.

The 10TH ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET JANUARY 15, 2014

Branch Barrett Rickey, the grandson of Branch Rickey, was the keynote speaker for the 10th annual baseball banquet. He currently serves as President of the Pacific Coast League. Rickey is noted for the redevelopment of minor league baseball as a "fan friendly" sport that caters to a broader audience of families, women and children. Prior to his involvement as a league president, Branch spent over twenty years in Major League Baseball with the Pittsburgh Pirates and Cincinnati Reds as scout assistant, scouting director during the 1970's



Branch Barrett Rickey

and in the 1990's as director of player development. Rickey comes from a long line of baseball men of the same name. His grandfather, Branch Rickey, implemented the baseball farm system, and is best known for breaking the color barrier and admitting Brooklyn Dodgers star Jackie Robinson to what had been an all-white baseball league. His father, Branch Rickey, Jr., served as farm system director for the Dodgers and the Pirates.



Gene Tenace and Pat Borders, both from Scioto County, were World Series Most Valuable Players. Tenace, in the 1972 Series against the Cincinnati Reds, led the Oakland Athletics to victory going 8 for 23 with 4 home runs and 9 runs batted in to earn the MVP. Borders, in the 1992 Series against the Atlanta Braves, led the Toronto Blue Jays to victory hitting .450 with a home run to earn the MVP.

Rickey gave a very inspiring presentation and made a point of directing part of his address to the Wheelersburg High School baseball team. The team was seated in a special section and for the second consecutive year was being honored as Ohio Division 3 State Baseball Champions. Rickey expanded on his background and stated that he earned a philosophy degree from Ohio Wesleyan University. After graduation he became a Peace Corps volunteer working in Venezuela for two years before working as a Peace Corps recruiter for several years after his return to the U.S.

Rickey also spoke of how his grandfather's name was recently brought to the national spotlight again when the movie "42" was released earlier in the year. Branch Rickey, as president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, signed Jackie Robinson to play for the Dodgers in 1947. Robinson became the National League Rookie of the Year in 1947, Most Valuable Player in 1948, was a six-time All-Star, and inducted in the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

Scioto County native Branch Rickey died in 1965 and is buried in Rushtown Cemetery in Scioto County. It is interesting to note that Branch Rickey, Roy Rogers (Leonard Sly) and former Ohio governor Ted Strickland all grew up on Duck Run just a few miles from one another but in three different generations.

"A debt of thanks goes to Gene Bennett who always arranges the banquet speakers for obtaining Mr. Rickey as our speaker," said Bob Morton, Murals President. "Bennett and Rickey have been friends for many years and this year Gene got an assist from Greg Gibson, an earlier banquet speaker and a personal friend of Rickey who helped persuade him to come to Portsmouth.

The concluding comment was made by Al Oliver who said that over the 10 years of the banquet he had only missed one year. "It's good that the community can come together for this common cause. They have done a great job with the upkeep of the murals, when I look at those murals its amazing. It's good that everyone can have a fun evening and I am glad to be part of it."

On the day of the banquet a special guest Lee Lowenfish author of the book

"Branch Rickey: Baseball's Ferocious Gentleman" along with Branch Rickey held a special book signing at the Holiday Inn. One of the quotes about this book was the following: "It's an impressive achievement in historical reporting on a unique character and will serve scholars for decades to come." - Neil Best, Newsday.

Lee Lowenfish, a historian and freelance writer is a also the author of "The Imperfect Diamond: A History of Baseball's Labor Wars" and he collaborated with Tom Seaver on "The Art of Pitching."

The 11TH ANNUAL MURALS BASEBALL BANQUET JANUARY 21, 2015

Hal of Fame baseball writer Hal McCoy was the keynote speaker for this banquet. Hal has attended most of the past banquets and each year has been sponsored by William McKinley of Lucasville, Ohio. In an article by Lisa Carver for the Portsmouth Metro magazine of the Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce, she wrote, "Hal McCoy is currently the Cincinnati Reds writer at FOXSportsOhio.com and a former beat writer for Dayton Daily News (Dayton, Ohio), covering the Cincinnati Reds baseball team since 1972. McCoy spoke about covering 'The Big Red Machine' of the 1970s and his run-ins with former controversial Reds CEO Marge Schott. McCoy recounted a time when Schott banned him from the players' dining room but noted that his favorite player, Eric Davis, brought him pizza.



Special fans who attended the 11th annual banquet and were seated at the AAA sponsored table. Standing (L-R): John Morton, Gail Moore, Tammy Morton; Seated: Darlene Moore.

The Portsmouth area boasts an impressive number of major league players, scouts and coaches spanning all eras of baseball. All of them are portrayed on the floodwall murals and many modern day personalities such as Gene Bennett, Al Oliver, Don Gullett, Josh Newman, Terry Craft, Gene Tenace and Larry Hisle attend the banquet most every year. The banquet has a long, crowd-pleasing history of making these celebrities available for a handshake and an autograph and this year was no exception.

Murals President Bob Morton concluded by reminding everyone of the the next banquet in January 2016. He stated that Gene Bennett had already arranged the speaker. He also asked everyone to go by the baseball murals to see the newest people, pitcher Josh Newman and Coach Tim Maxey, who are shown on the dugout scene. He noted that Tim is the first coach to be pictured having worked for the Kansas City Royals and Cleveland Indians as a strength and conditioning coach. He is now with Major League Baseball.

The 18 Honorees pictured on the Baseball Murals in alphabetical order are: Gene Bennett, Dude Blake, Pat Borders, Al Bridwell, Terry Craft, Greg Gibson, Don Gullett, Larry Hisle, Tim Maxey, Rocky Nelson, Josh Newman, Al Oliver, Del Rice, Branch Rickey, Frank Rickey, Stan Spence, John Stephenson and Gene Tenace.

Faithful baseball celebrities who have attended through the years are: Hal McCoy, Johnny LeMaster, Jimmy Lett, Jim Tracy, Chris Hook, Jay Sorg, Larry Lubbers, Ron Nitzwicz, Willie Blair, Walt Terrell, Drew Hall, Galen Cisco, Brandon Webb, Chris Welsh, Tom Browning, Bob Miller, Nick Krall, Randy Marsh, Charlie Reliford, Vince DeVita, John Herrnstein, Marvin Lowe, Ron Slusher, Dean Schuler, Brett Roberts, Pat Arnold, Brad DelBarba, Nick Hostetler, Keith Madison, Ryan Niemeyer and Greg Gibson.

The Baseball Banquets would not have been possible without the assistance of many people. Donna Arnett, the Chamber of Commerce secretary who does the administrative work for Portsmouth Murals, Inc., sending banquet invitations, handling ticket sales, dealing with sponsors and many more details. Lisa Carver, Chamber Executive Director, who wrote many stories on banquet happenings in the Chamber bulletins. The staff at the Portsmouth Daily Times and Community Common newspapers; Wayne Allen, Richard Bussa, Frank Lewis, Doug Kinsey, John Stegeman, Ali Keaton, G. Sam Piatt, and Bob Strickley. The radio coverage provided by WNXT manager Rick Mayne, Steve Hayes, Sam McKibben and Roger Gray, WIOI Radio with Chip Maillet and WLGC Ashland, Kentucky. The loyal table sponsors who have been with us from the beginning are AAA, Gene Bennett, Desco Federal Credit Union, Glockner Enterprises, Lute Plumbing Supply, J. William McKinley, OSCO, and Southern Ohio Medical Center. The other consistent supporters have been American Savings Bank, Brown Medical LLC, J & H Erectors, King's Daughters Medical Center, Howerton Engineering, Ron LeMaster, Our Lady of Bellefonte, PNC Bank, US Bank, VFP Fire Protection Systems and Verizon.

A special thank you goes to Newberry's Sporting Goods for providing Louisville Slugger souvenir bats for each banquet and Donna Chabot, Portsmouth Murals board member who made arrangements.

This brief history is dedicated to my wife Janet who was a faithful attendee of every banquet until her passing in December 2011. The photo below was taken January 14, 2009 with Reds radio broadcaster Marty Brennaman who was the keynote speaker at the fifth annual banquet. Jan always rooted for the Reds but she was a Cleveland Indians fan at heart having grown up in Columbus. Jan was an original Portsmouth Murals, Inc. board member.



Pictured (left to right): Karen Morton Davis, Marty Brennaman, Jan Morton.



Pictured (left to right): Terry Craft, MLB Umpire; Bob Morton, PMI President; Vince DeVita, Cincinnati Reds Scout

Robert Morton, a native of Indiana, was raised in Cross Plains where he went to high school, played baseball and basketball and worked in his family's general store. He graduated from Indiana University in 1954 with a BA in Economics and also received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army. He served on active duty at Fort Knox and in Germany. He was discharged as a Captain in 1965. Bob began a lifelong career with the American Automobile Association in November 1961 at their national headquarters in Washington D.C. He served AAA in many areas, mainly in Ohio. He retired as President of the AAA South Central Ohio, Portsmouth in May 2003. Locally he is a member of Rotary, a past president of the Chamber of Commerce, past president of the Sister City Association, the current president and one of the founders of Portsmouth Murals, Inc. This booklet is dedicated to his wife Janet whom he married on February 17, 1964. This publication was completed with the help of many people and with the invaluable assistance of his son James Morton who edited the final copy.

The PORTSMOUTH
MURALS
BASEBALL
BANQUETS

A HISTORY

Written by: Bob Morton

Book Design: Barry Carver, Carver Creative

Photos furnished by Pam DeCamp Photography