

## FAIRPORT LITTLE LEAGUE

Little League baseball was founded in 1939 by Carl Stotz in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and has been a part of the Perinton and Fairport scene since 1951. In 1950, the Fairport Rotary Club asked several of its members to investigate the possibility of bringing Little League to the community. (East Rochester already had four teams.) It was hoped that teams could be organized to play a short season in the spring and summer of 1950. Sponsors pledged \$200 each to supply uniforms and equipment, and a local builder offered to level an area in Potter Park for a diamond. However, residents of Potter Place were not happy with the prospect of screaming children and heavy traffic three to four nights each week and complained to the Village Board. The Board ruled that village property could not be used by any outside organization and since Little League was headquartered in Pennsylvania, they could not use Potter Park. Little League was on hold, but not for long.

The next year, 1951, four organizations, Lions, Masons, Rotary, and the Fairport Fire Department formulated plans for bringing baseball to Perinton and Fairport youngsters. The executive committee included Tod Malcolm, Napoleon Mancuso, Gene Malcolm, and Hugh Stevely. The fields would be located in the then unused Fairport Park (today's Perinton Park). Frank Wood, a local contractor, volunteered to bulldoze the area, and volunteers from the sponsoring organization completed the preparation. That year, Little League began its first season in Fairport/Perinton with four teams and 48 players.

The games were popular and had many fans, among them a young man who was, because of crippling rheumatoid arthritis, unable to play. David Marsh was often asked to throw out the first pitch of the season and in 1953 was named Honorary League President. In that same year, the field was named David Marsh Field. Marsh died in 1964, and in 1988 an historic marker in his memory was erected at the site of those first Little League fields.

Within ten years, the number of teams had doubled to eight and there were opportunities for boys younger than 8 to participate. Donations provided money for baseball and grounds keeping equipment, a P.A system, and a snack bar. By the end of the 1960's, there were 700 boys playing on 50 teams, and games took place not only at David Marsh Field but also on school fields. It was obvious that the League needed more space.

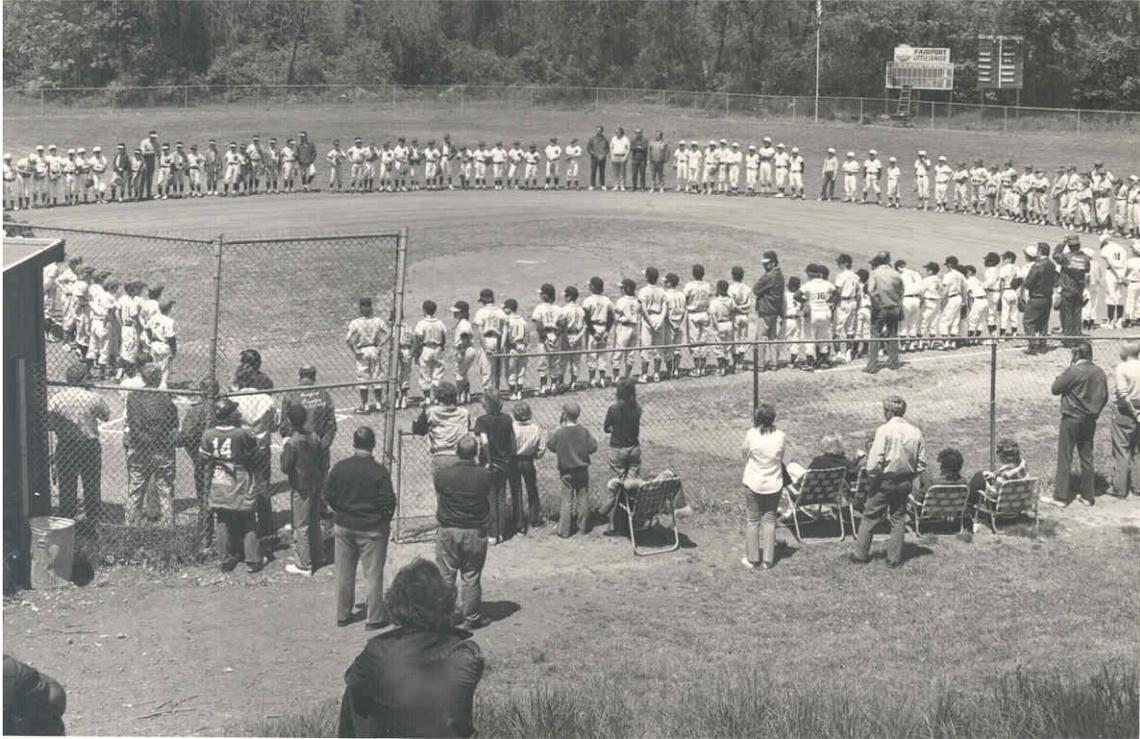
In 1969, ground breaking for new state-of-the-art ball fields took place at a 20-acre site on Lyndon Road just north of the Erie Canal. Present were Gerald Zornow, Kodak president; Cal Ripken, Red Wings manager; Chico Fernandez, Red Wings coach; and George Sisler, president of the International Baseball League. Within ten years, the Lyndon Road complex opened with eight fields, a snack bar, and a storage building. It was the largest Little League complex in the state.

Local participation continued to grow with 78 teams and over 1,000 participants in 1978 and 84 teams and 1300 players by the late 1980's. To accommodate the growth, the Lyndon Road complex was renovated and expanded to include eleven fields, and three new fields were constructed on High Acres land in 1994-5. A new concession stand was opened in 2004 at the Lyndon Road site.

Little League has grown and changed since its inception. In addition to leagues in every state, by 1951 the league went international with teams in Canada and Panama and is now represented in 80 nations around the world. By the middle 1950's the Little League World Series was being televised. In 1974 the first Little League girls' teams were started, and in the 1990 the Challenger Division was created for those with physical and mental disabilities. Little League also sponsors softball teams.

Fairport Little League celebrates its 60th year in 2011 by welcoming over 1400 players in baseball and softball. The Challenger Division enters its 21st year with over 40 players. Fairport Little League is also offering fall ball for baseball players, following the success of girls' softball last fall with over 85 players.

Little League depends on dedicated volunteers and sponsors. Over the years literally thousands of parents and baseball fans and local businesses have made it possible for youngsters between the ages of 5 and 18 to participate in a game that is traditionally known as the "National Pastime."



*Little League opening day probably in the 1960's (photo by Alfred D'Annunzio)*