

Knights Honor Little League Founder at Little League Baseball World Series

by **Sir Knight Jeffrey Kuntz**

For the third consecutive year, Sir Knights of the Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania, hosted by Baldwin II Commandery No. 22 of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, will be marching in the Little League Baseball World Series "Grand Slam" parade there on August 15th. Sir Knight Wilmer E. Hall, Baldwin II's favorite son Grand Commander of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Pennsylvania, made arrangements for their participation in the splendid affair which takes place the third week of August every year. However, Knights Templar are not the only Masonic bodies to take part. In fact, local bodies of all area Masons will participate, making up an entire division of the twenty-some division parade that lasts over three hours. In order to honor the memory of their Masonic Brother, Carl E. Stotz, who founded Little League Baseball, Grand Commander Hall and other Masonic leaders decided to join the annual parade which opens the Little League World Series. Area Blue Lodges, all York Rite bodies, the Scottish Rite Valley of Williamsport, Shriners, Tall Cedars, and Grotto will all be represented.

Williamsport, a friendly city of only about 30,000 residents, is put on the world map for a week as many more thousands line the streets and attend the play-off games.

Various bands and other marching units along with numerous floats, an array of fire equipment, winning teams from across the country and around the world, and dignitaries all take part in the parade which is broadcast on nation-wide television.

The opening pitches of the games have been made by United States Presidents, vice presidents, and presidential candidates. The games are broadcast nation-wide by ESPN television channels. The Good Year blimp is seen flying over the field and the whole Williamsport area. Private jets carrying American and foreign dignitaries are seen flying into the small local airport so they can support their respective teams.

Little League Baseball grew from thirty boys in three teams, in 1938, to an organization of hundreds of teams in over 60 countries and on every continent, taking in over a million young boys and girls. In the hearts and minds of those who knew him, Carl E. Stotz (1910-1990) was a very humble man whose cares and concerns were strictly for the young players. He strongly disapproved of much of the commercialism and grandeur that has developed with that great sports organization through the years.

Stotz created the game of Little League Baseball not only to adjust the rules of the game to make it suitable for boys 8 to 12 years of age, but also to keep them off the streets, help them build character, and teach them good sportsmanship. One day in the summer of 1938, Carl was playing a game with his two nephews when one of the boys missed a ball hit by his brother. For fear of the ball ending up on the neighbor's property, Carl ran

to intercept it, but tripped over a clump of trimmed bushes, slightly cutting his lower leg. The boys ran to their uncle as he tended his minor wound. At that moment, the revelation hit him. He told his nephews, then and there that he was going to invent a baseball game with a field, gear, and rules that would make it safer and fairer for guys their age.

The next several years were, therefore, very busy ones for Stotz, the boys, their parents, and volunteers who helped clear playing fields, acquire uniforms and other gear, recruit players and umpires, solicit sponsors, etc. With the support of his Lutheran Church parish, Carl and his first recruits began their tremendous task of building their new baseball league for boys. It was not all easy, though. It took Carl nearly fifty visits to local businesses for sponsorships before he procured his first one, but then others came on board.

The building process was stymied somewhat by the onset of World War II, but with its end and the return of volunteers, Little League resumed its expansion. More and more communities formed leagues. The organization spread rapidly throughout Pennsylvania and much of the United States.

With the victorious end of the war, it was a time when many veterans and other men were inspired by patriotism, family values, and religious faith. Carl Stotz was among the many young men who felt the call to join the Freemasons. He petitioned John F. Laedlein Lodge No. 707 in Williamsport in 1946. The next year, he joined the Scottish Rite Valley of Williamsport. According to his daughter, Karen Myers, Stotz joined the Masons because he felt that the fraternity espouses the high principles he believed in.

By 1947, Little League Baseball had its own playing field, a board of directors, and teams throughout much of the country. Stotz and the board resolved to establish a national Little League tournament to provide the opportunity for teams to work toward participating in play-off games at the end of the season. This incurred the need for traveling and other expenses, so Brother Stotz ran off to New York City seeking sponsorship from the U. S. Rubber Company. He negotiated an agreement with them which included authorization for that company to manufacture the footwear for Little League. Just a couple of years later, as the organization continued to grow, the board decided to call the tournament the Little League World Series.

An executive of U.S. Rubber Company, Peter J. McGovern, was appointed full-time president of Little League Baseball and offered Stotz the full-time job of promoting it, so Carl quit his job with Coca-Cola and went on the road. McGovern started forming a number of endorsement contracts for Little League. This considerable increase of commercialization, among other changes Stotz felt was not really good for the boys, caused him to become both fearful and resentful. He felt compelled to go so far as to take legal action in order to reverse the trend and return Little League to being primarily concerned with teaching and training the young players in the ways that were originally intended. His efforts were futile, however, and Carl left Little League Baseball embittered.

Although Brother Carl Stotz was not a Knight Templar, he certainly was a man of tremendous faith who did clearly live the Christian principles taught by our Lord, Jesus Christ. As Jesus teaches us all to give in the Gospels, Carl surely did give much of himself. He unselfishly gave of his heart and soul to his community, not just by giving young boys their own version of the great American pastime but by teaching them good sportsmanship, character development, and trust in God. He was a truly a great example of a Brother Freemason who set a great example for us all.

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Knight Templar Magazine Index - ARCHIVE of ARTICLES

HOME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

[Top](#)