

CHATSWORTH PAST & PRESENT

By Ann Vincent

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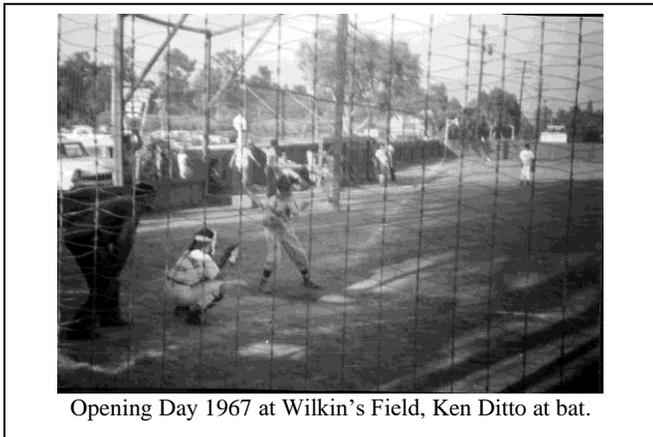
This issue of Chatsworth Past & Present features the Chatsworth Junior Baseball League (CJBL).



Our first documented youth baseball team ([Smoke Signal 2023-11](#)) was when Chatsworth elementary met Calabasas in the Valley “Little World Series” in 1908. Of the Chatsworth Nine, eight were from Homesteader families, including Jess Graves. His younger brother Curtis “Tige” Graves is shown at left wearing his Chatsworth uniform sponsored by G&H, The Graves and Hill General Store.

Some 50 years later, in 1956, the Chatsworth Junior Baseball League was founded. Hank and Ken Ditto, descendants of the Graves family and their father Hugh, were founding members/players of the CJBL.

As the story goes...at Johnny’s Barbershop one day, Leonard Chenard, Warren Melrose, Bob Penmen, Rod McKenzie, Roy Endress Jr, John Koningfield and Otto Groth discussed plans to start a youth baseball



Opening Day 1967 at Wilkin’s Field, Ken Ditto at bat.

league. Registration would be free and volunteers would create a labor force of managers and coaches. Tryouts were held at the Rancho San Antonio baseball field to get the league started. Four teams were created the first year from the 43 boys who participated. The first games were played on Wilkin’s Field on Devonshire (where the Post Office is today) on land made available by Juliet Wilkin. At the time, the Wilkin family also owned the Wilkin’s building on the south-east corner of Owensmouth and Devonshire which was used as a community center and occupied by the Women’s Club.

The 1958 season opened at Wilkin’s Field on May 17th with 150 boys in the league. Roy Rogers, honorary Mayor, was on hand to throw out the first ball for the 52 games scheduled for that season. He was assisted by Honorary Sheriff “Black Jack” O’Shea.

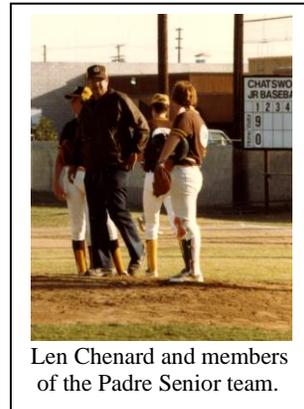
In 1959 CJBL purchased and built the current field at 21350 Mayall. There were two older division Babe Ruth teams (13-15 year olds), who played against two teams from Rancho San Antonio to fill the schedule



1959 Stars - Managed by Bob Penman

for that season. The 1959 program shows Hank playing on the Indian’s, a Babe Ruth team, while Ken and his younger brother Frank played for the Stars.

In 1960, the league continued to grow, fielding fourteen teams. In 1962 the league expanded to include Minors, Majors and Babe Ruth teams. In 1969 Babe Ruth teams were divided into Junior and Senior teams. By 1976 the divisions were Seniors, Juniors, AAA, AA and Minors. By 1980 they had over 400 players, and Minors were divided into T-Ball and A teams.

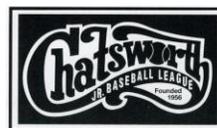


Len Chenard and members of the Padre Senior team.

In 2006, Chatsworth Junior Baseball League celebrated their 50-year Anniversary. Jodi Chenard Hotchkiss, the daughter of former professional baseball player and CJBL founder, Leonard Chenard, grew up as a kid at the field while her Dad was coaching. She was active in the program serving as Co-President of the Womens Auxillary while her two

boys played on the same fields and participated in the program that their grandfather helped create.

Another long-time participant in the CJBL was Elmer Guentner who, for 55 years, was the team equipment manager, coach, and/or team manager, filling any job needed since 1965. He has been honored with his name placed on the Minor field scoreboard. CJBL has created a recognition monument at the field that lists the names of many more who have been “Dedicated to the Youth of Chatsworth”.



In 2010, CJBL’s latest milestone was Steve Mathias being selected Chatsworth Citizen of the Year for his 17 years of service to youth sports and CJBL.

When was the last time you attended the CJBL’s Annual Pancake Breakfast?

The Chatsworth Junior Baseball League is located (between Devonshire and Lassen) at 21350 Mayall St. in Chatsworth. Website: www.cjbl.org