

Proud members of the Firebirds Family throughout the years...



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# 50 <sup>1967-2017</sup> YEARS at the "New" Eldredge Park



▲ Action from the 1967 Cape Cod League All-Star game at reconfigured Eldredge Park

By Ron Petersen

The 2017 season is a significant milestone in the history of the Orleans Firebirds and our beloved home field – Eldredge Park. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the “new” Eldredge Park in 1967. Actually, the history of the Park goes back a lot further than that, and is only one year younger than another baseball shrine- Fenway Park.

In 1913, Lewis Winslow “Win” Eldredge had acquired 250 acres of land in central Orleans, and donated 10 acres “in consideration of my affection for and interest in the young people of Orleans and my desire to provide a playground for them”. Thus began the saga of Eldredge Park. While the land continues to fulfill Win’s vision of a playground, it has also become the playing field of some of the nation’s most famous baseball players.

In 1966, major renovations

were instituted to modernize the park and the baseball field. The configuration of the field was rotated 90 degrees, with home plate being moved from what is now left field near the foul pole to where you see it today. New soil was brought in and the outfield was re-seeded. Sod was laid in the infield, and the base paths were dug out and packed with six inches of clay. The pitcher’s mound was re-done entirely in red clay, and the mound and home plate were stabilized

with wood blocks and plywood. Scores of recessed sprinklers were installed all over the field.

A Philadelphia sportswriter described the result as “A Norman Rockwell painting come to life”. Len Merullo of the Chicago Cubs, one of ten major league scouts in attendance at the game, said “This is as good a ball field as you’ll find anywhere, majors or minors.” According to Orleans Selectman Charles F. Moore, the improvements were made at a cost of



\$30,000 "plus at least that amount in donated labor and material."

The "New" Eldredge Park was dedicated at the Cape Cod League All-Star Game played at the field on Sunday, July 23, 1967 when our Firebirds were known as the Cardinals. Prior to the ceremony, the nearly 2000 spectators were treated to a concert by the Orleans Band and an "old timers" batting exhibition. Massachusetts Governor John A. Volpe threw out the first honorary pitch, and was accompanied by Lt. Governor Francis Sargent and Attorney General Elliot Richardson. Governor Volpe arrived at the game by helicopter, landing at the nearby Nauset school field.

◀ Massachusetts Governor John Volpe loosens his arm before throwing out the ceremonial first pitch. Mrs. Elliot Richardson and Mrs. Charles Moore are sitting to his right

The significance of the day was best summed up by Governor Volpe in his remarks at the pre-game ceremony:

*"As Governor, I've had the pleasure many times of throwing out the first ball for the Red Sox, but I can say in all honesty that it gives me more satisfaction to do it today because you people were so willing to work for what you got. There's a lot of personal satisfaction in doing a job well. My congratulations to Charlie Moore, Art Finlay, Laurin Peterson, and everyone else who worked so hard for this."*

The All-Star Game that followed was played under bright sunny skies after twenty successive days of fog and rain. Ed Baird of Chatham was the starter for the Lower Cape All Stars, and threw the first pitch of the game. He threw two scoreless innings on the way to a 9-1 victory for the Lower Cape team, which included Orleans players Terry

DeWald, Steve Cashore, Chuck Seelback, and Jim Conlon.

Fifty years later, Ed Baird is still with the Chatham Anglers as their Treasurer and member of the Board of Directors. While with the arch rival Chatham team, Big Ed (as he was known in his playing days) is a true baseball fan and friend of the Firebirds, always willing to collaborate with us and provide assistance in the true spirit of community that the CCBL represents. Ed still has a great arm and will be throwing out the first pitch at our 50th year celebration of the "New" Eldredge Park. Ed's favorite venue away from Chatham, to this day, "is hands down Eldredge Park in Orleans."

The present day Firebirds organization is proud of our team, our coaches, our many dedicated volunteers, and our incredible heritage. We look forward to the next fifty years with enthusiasm, optimism, and confidence in this great community effort. ○



▲ CCBL Commissioner Dan Silva speaking at the pre-game ceremony. Governor John Volpe and Orleans Selectman Arthur Finlay wait their turn

▼ The area behind home plate reserved for professional scouts. Ten reportedly attended the game



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