

Cardran earns lifetime award



Courtesy photo

Joe Cardran, who has been umpiring since 1964, was recently honored with a Lifetime Membership Award by the Merrimack Valley Umpires Association.

By Mark Behan
Staff Writer

Joe Cardran observes more than just the players on the baseball field. While the average fan waits to witness a possible 400-foot bash or shoe-string catch, Cardran focuses on whether the first-base umpire puts up his right hand or left hand to signal that a runner is out.

"Occasionally I'll see umpires in the majors put up their left hand (to signify an out), but that is wrong," Cardran said. "When there's an out, an umpire must use his right hand. That's the rule."

And when it comes to umpiring, Joe Cardran knows the rules.

The 82-year-old Cardran has been involved in umpiring since 1964, when he began calling balls and strikes in the St. Joseph's Little League. Since 1981, after he left St. Joseph's, Cardran has been actively involved in the 172-member Merrimack Valley Umpires Association (MVUA), which trains and assigns games to umpires in various leagues.

Cardran has served in the MVUA as an umpire, executive board member, interpreter (teaching rules), trainer, and the go-to guy for all things umpiring. In appreciation of Cardran's 25 years of service with the MVUA, the association recently honored him with a Lifetime Membership Award.

"There's not a member in the association (MVUA) who has not been helped by Joe in some way," said Steve Martinelli, president of the MVUA, who attended umpiring classes taught by Cardran. "There were times when he'd teach classes in his kitchen. He takes umpiring and training future umpires very seriously. He still goes to clinics and games to find out what umpires are doing. He's always looking for ways to help the young umpers and he passes on what he knows to them."

Cardran is proud of the honor and of the fact that the MVUA is so rigorous in its training of future umpires.

"That (training program) is something I instituted when I was on the executive board," Cardran said. "In the old days, umpires were being thrown

to the wolves without training. Now we have classes, testing, certification programs, and indoor/outdoor clinics where we put umpires in different situations they may experience during the game and then we evaluate them.

"I don't believe in quantity (of umpires). Our goal is to have better quality umpires, and since we have started training there's been a big improvement."

Cardran, who worked 32 years for Marble Motors, started umpiring in 1964. He did not wake up one day and say, "I want to wear a blue uniform and take guff from parents and coaches for the next 42 years." No, he was recruited.

"I was registering my son (Gary) for Little League," Cardran said, "and one of the guys from the league (St. Joseph's) came up to me and said, 'Hey, you are just the guy we need to umpire.'"

That Cardran knew nothing about umpiring didn't matter. He was a Paul Bunyan of a man with a booming bark,

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Umpired St. Joseph's Little League for 17 years

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and St. Joseph's officials figured that no parent, coach or kid would give the 6-foot-1, 260-pound man any trouble.

"I went up to the field (Swasey's) the first night," Cardran said. "I picked up a rule book and then talked to some experienced umpires about what I should do. The rest is history."

For 17 years, Cardran umpired St. Joseph's Little League games three nights a week. He was not paid a dime for umpiring until the final couple years of his tenure.

"I think we got five dollars per game near the end. But it was a fun time. I couldn't buy that experience," said Cardran, who umpired his last baseball game in the spring of 2004.

Cardran said there is a big demand for umpires, as many "leagues are begging for umpires." And the pay is decent, he said, adding that a Little League umpire can make up to \$45 per game, depending on the league, with Legion and high school umpires making over \$60 per game.

As for what makes a good umpire, Cardran said he must possess these qualities: fairness, tolerance and politeness.

"Obviously, the umpire must know the rules, and always keep his cool," Cardran said. "If there's an argument, let the other person have his say. Hear them out. But don't argue. Two angry people will never solve anything."

It's also important to look good, Cardran said.

"Appearance is very important. If an umpire walks out on the field with his shirt untucked and shoes not shined, people are going to immediately judge him. An umpire must look professional," Cardran said.

While many umpires aspire to call games in the college or professional ranks, Cardran was happiest working Little League games.

"At that age, you can still teach the kids and hopefully have a positive impact on their lives," Cardran said. "There's no greater reward than seeing youngsters I umpired 30 years ago becoming outstanding citizens as adults. It's nice knowing that maybe I had something to do with that. It's a warm feeling."