

Bennett inducted into Colorado Hall of Fame

Written by Chris Lee

He sure isn't one that wants the attention. He just does it because he enjoys helping kids and is a fan of the game.

Tom Bennett was one of four people to be inducted into the Colorado Baseball and Softball League Hall of Fame Saturday, Sept. 29.

"I'm quite humbled," Bennett said at the banquet and reiterated Wednesday, Oct. 3. "You never think of what you do as being worthy of that scenario."

Bennett said the underlying theme behind the Hall of Fame inductees is that they are there because they want to be. Most of the 24 previous inductees have been involved long after their children have moved on.

Bennett, not having children of his own, is there because he remembers experiencing all that Babe Ruth had to offer him and hopes he can give that to today's youth.



Tom Bennett, at left, is pictured with Bob Nelson, former state

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commissioner, during the Hall of Fame banquet Saturday, Sept. 29. Nelson was the one who nominated Bennett for the award and was also inducted into the Babe Ruth League International Hall of Fame.

Bennett enjoys getting the opportunity to be around kids and giving them the opportunity to enjoy baseball. "When I was a kid, somebody did this for me. To me, every time I thought about that, I had a chance to be a part of the same program when I was a 13-year-old, 15-year-old kid. If I can give a kid a memory like that, and be a part of those memories for kids, then that is my fulfillment," Bennett said.

Bennett was joined by family and friends at the Southeast Embassy Suites in Denver for the ceremony and recognition banquet. Those attending were his wife Debbie, mother Peggy, brother Mike and wife Susan and their daughters Mallory and Amanda with husband Preston Randall, and Theresa Tharp, who is involved with the recreation program in Holyoke.

Bennett said he likes organizing things, but he can't put on a tournament by himself. He noted there are a number of people who keep coming back to help him out. Bennett said Jeff and Theresa Tharp have been a big help to him throughout the years. "They've always been there when it's time to do a tournament," Bennett added.

Bennett said the tournaments Holyoke has hosted most likely led to him receiving this award and he appreciates all of those who have volunteered their time to help make them a success.

Colorado established the Hall of Fame in 1996 to honor those persons who have played a vital role in the development of baseball and softball programs in the state of Colorado.

Colorado Babe Ruth recognizes that outstanding contributions may be made to youth through many diverse avenues. Therefore, inductees may include those involved in an official league/district/state capacity, patrons of the game and special contributors.

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Bennett along with the other three recognized in Denver, Bruce Jones, Sherri Schemahorn and Dale Terrell, join the 24 previous inductees. A new class is added every two or three years.

“To be a part of that 28 is just an honor and a privilege,” Bennett said. “I don’t think I’m old enough for that,” he added with a chuckle. “These guys are all older than me.” Bennett began his involvement at a younger age.

Also acknowledged at the banquet were Norm Travis, 2012 inductee into the Midwest Plains Hall of Fame; Bob Nelson, 2012 inductee into Babe Ruth League International Hall of Fame; and David Hargrove, 2012 Babe Ruth Volunteer of the Year.

Travis used to be the commissioner for the Midwest Plains region. The regional tournament held in Holyoke in 2011 was the Midwest Plains Regional 15-year-old Tournament. During that week, a sportsmanship award was presented, and it was named after Travis. He has been involved since 1962—two years before Bennett was born.

“It’s those kinds of people that keep coming back,” Bennett said. “They love to be a part of this organization. It really becomes a little family.”

Just over a year ago, Bennett served as the tournament director when he helped Holyoke host the 15-year-old Regional Babe Ruth Tournament. This wasn’t the first, and it may not be the last tournament Bennett has his fingertips on.

Bennett said the opening ceremony of that tournament is probably his most memorable moment of his involvement. He also remembers checking in a team from Iowa and the coach was driving a large RV. The coach didn’t have any way to get around town so Bennett lent him his car, which took the coach by surprise. It’s those helping moments Bennett enjoys the most.

He has served as the tournament director for two state tournaments held in Holyoke in 2004 and 2006, as well as six area tournaments held in Holyoke.

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Bennett served as the Border League president and treasurer for 20 years and has been district commissioner for 17 years. He helped start the Brush/Fort Morgan Cal Ripken league for two years as well as the Sterling and Yuma Cal Ripken leagues which are both presently active. He has also helped each league host a state tournament.

Bennett directed the efforts for a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant to upgrade the baseball facilities in Holyoke in 2005.

Bennett has been involved in some way or another with Babe Ruth baseball since 1990—not long after he moved back to Holyoke to get involved with banking. He also played baseball as a youngster.

As a youngster, Bennett began playing games on the Pleasant Valley ball diamond two miles south of where he was born and raised. When he was old enough, his mother let him head into town to play baseball.

Bennett was picked for an All-Star team when he was 13 and his team went on to be state champions. At 15, his team took third at the state level. From there, his playing days were over because HHS did not have a baseball team at the time. He helped organize some softball tournaments throughout the summers.

Bennett moved away to attend school at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Neb. where he received a bachelor's degree in comprehensive business administration with an emphasis in finance and minor in economics. From there he moved to Kansas City, Mo., where he worked for the Federal Reserve Bank.

Bennett moved back to Holyoke in March of 1989. He helped on the family farm for a while before beginning at First Pioneer National Bank, where he has been ever since.

He began coaching Babe Ruth baseball in 1990 and did so for 10 years. That same year, he

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began coaching high school baseball. Jerry Booher was the first head coach for the Dragons as 1990 was the first year HHS had a baseball program. Bennett served as the assistant coach for six years before becoming head coach, a position he held for two seasons.

Having successfully pulled off some high level tournaments in Holyoke, Bennett isn't sure what the future holds for the diamond. He said there is always the possibility of bringing another one back.

In his free time, Bennett enjoys refereeing basketball, traveling and working with his 20 rental units. He is also involved with Phillips County Economic Development where he is a board member. He has also served on the Holyoke Chamber of Commerce board and is currently the president of the Holyoke School District Foundation.

Holyoke Enterprise October 11, 2012