

THE WEST LAWN OWLS PROUDLY DEDICATE THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM TO TED PALKA

February 11, 1924 - December 2, 2013

"GOOD EVENING EVERYONE, AND WELCOME TO THE OWLS FIELD HERE AT BEAUTIFUL TED PALKA PARK....."

You know, today we spend way too much of our time being dazzled by movie stars, overpaid athletes, the Kardashians and Duck Dynasty....stars and legends in their own minds. Yet, in the midst of all this hoopla and nonsense, lived a simple man...Ted Palka...raised during the Great Depression, born in 1924, grew up poor, served his country in WW 2, came home, got married, raised his family, buried his 2 sons, served his community, worked and earned a living. Outside of our little community Ted's name means little to nothing. He wasn't a rock star, a movie star, or a Kardashian...nor did he ever want to be one. But to us, Ted was a legend....Bruce Springsteen might be the boss, but at the Owls Field Ted Palka was **'THE BOSS'** ...Ted was our rock without being the star. Those of us who knew Ted the longest... knew Ted.....gruff, crotchety, cantankerous, cranky who always growled...the loving, funny guy who liked a good Polish joke....the guy who could use the f-bomb in a variety of grammatically incorrect ways, from adverb to indirect object to prepositional phrase.....the guy who would work from sun up to sun down at the Owls Grove or the Owls Field.....the guy who would give you the shirt off his back if he liked you and felt you needed a hand.....the guy who never wanted to be the guy, but instead became the guy the guy relied on.....respected because he never asked anyone to do any more than what he was doing. The problem there was he was doing damn near everything and guys half his age couldn't keep up. When Ted got older and started slowing down, around age 80, then the younger guys could finally keep up, but then they were getting longer in the tooth, too! For those of us who knew Ted, when you earned his smile, earned his friendship, earned his trust, but most importantly, earned his respect, you knew that was something special because you EARNED it by living up to what he thought was right...hard work, loyalty, friendship. To say Ted was a part of the Owls Sports Club is like saying an engine is part of a car. Since 1963...50 years. He, at times single-handedly, kept the Owls Club solvent through what seemed to be the sheer force of his stubborn will. No one could ever count the 180 raffles he ran or the number of suit clubs he sold....a nickel here, a dime there, a dollar on Sundays...and the team had some money to buy new uniforms, or have money to buy some bats, or pay the umpires...that's not including running the concession stand in center field with the old A-Treat soda bottle machine. Ted got the Owls through the dark times of the mid 1970's thru the early 1980's. He had help, of course...Harold Steffy, Felix Lombardo, Elmer Bickta, Ben Kemp, Don Garl, among others...these were Ted's posse, his homeboys who would materialize at a call from Kingy....and not one of them could refuse a call from Ted to help out. They understood how important it was to Ted. And don't forget Arlean, who kept everybody in line and organized, who more than anyone understood how important this was to Ted. Now that's true love. Then came the meshing of the Owls Apple Dumpling Festival...that 2 day weekend party with penny pitch and prize bingo and modest proceeds....with the Township Festival...that became a 5-day miniature county fair with 20 000 apple dumplings, 2 new pavilions, cash bingo, carnival rides, a beauty pageant, a casino, a beer garden in the old tennis courts(for a while)...and Ted, who was primed and ready to go. He was in rare form during the Festival...the week before getting prepped, during the week cooking, and growling, and cussing, and having a grand ole time...and the week after during the cleaning process with his 300 hp vacuum/blower that would blow paper into Lincoln Park. And while this was going on, Ted and his right hand, Jay, and the Posse were running picnics 7 days a week, for 3 people or 300 people. And the profits came a rollin' that no one could ever imagine. Throughout all this time, Ted wasn't the brains in this venture...he never wanted to be...but he was the brawn..."THE BOSS".

Then 1992 rolls around and the Owls, with Ted's approval, take their first venture into the world of Legion tournament baseball, hosting the Region 2 tournament at George Field...it had lights...Ted's, of course, running the concession wing, raking in every nickel out there, and viola....a \$10 000 profit, which managed to put a big smile on Ted's face when that financial report was read to the Club.

Then Jay, being a little cocky, a little ballsy, and way ahead of his time, put forth the decree that it was time for the ball field side of the street to start earning its way, and that meant a whole new ball field, and only a ball field...no tennis courts, eventually no softball field, just a "yard"....but only with Ted's approval....only with Ted's approval...and Ted approved and up went the lights, and up went the electronic scoreboard in right field, and up went the new fence, and up went the new dugouts, and in came Hummer to lay down a new field, and eventually an underground irrigation system....you get the picture. The Owls Field became our Field of Dreams. The accounts were flush, the Club was back on solid financial footing, and Jay had accomplished what none of us thought possible, getting Ted's approval to move this forward. And I think, I know this was the defining moment of the Owls, for Ted, for all of us. We all had faith and trust in each other that we could make this work...and Ted agreed. And Ted became even more active because now you have the Festival and you have the Field, and he's working both sides of it and loving it...he's got his posse working right along with him, but at no time did Ted ever bellyache about the time and energy and the effort it took to do both sides of the street....well, he did, but we never paid attention because we knew better....

Then comes 1998, the Owls first PA state tournament, and we nominate Ted Palka to be inducted into the PA American Legion Hall of Fame....not because of his stellar baseball ability, or that he could run fast, or hit a baseball out of the yard, or that he knew somebody...he was nominated by us because we wanted Ted to know not only how important he was to the Owls Club in general, but how important Ted Palka was to the West Lawn Owls American Legion baseball program as a volunteer.....and watching him accept that plaque and give a speech was as proud an Owls moment as we've ever had...plus it was fun to watch Ted squirm...as our most important volunteer.

In all my years with the Owls, the most important thing we ever agreed to do was to name the Owls Field for Ted while he was still active and could bask in the respect and the love that we all have for him. The Owls Field at Ted Palka Park....it sings....and it would not have come to fruition without our Ted being a part of the Owls.

In closing, over the years every organization like ours has their own version of a Ted Palka...that one volunteer who works behind the scenes, doing a little bit of everything to help the group. For us at the Owls Club, we had the real deal, the original version who did so much, was so vital a person to the survival of the Owls, and so cherished by us, and will be so missed by us all.

So, in honor of our good friend and Owls Club member, here we go...

"GOOD BYE, MY FRIEND!

Mitch & Diane, Ian & Andrew - The Hettingers