

The logo for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle. It features the word "ROCHESTER" in a small, sans-serif font at the top. Below it is a stylized illustration of a city skyline with several buildings of varying heights. The main title "Democrat and Chronicle" is written in a large, bold, blackletter-style font, with "and" in a smaller, simpler font between "Democrat" and "Chronicle".

ROCHESTER Democrat and Chronicle

Friday, August 3, 2012

Fan preserving baseball history

ALAN MORRELL

In his day time job, Joe Territo photographs retinas at a medical center in Brighton.

Many nights he focuses his camera eye on Frontier Field, as a team photographer for the Red Wings.

And on the weekends, Territo is often at Genesee Country Village & Museum, suiting up to play 19th century-style baseball.

On deck for the Greece resident: Continued development of the Rochester Baseball Historical Society, of which he is president. The group is

dedicated to preserving Rochester's long and rich history of the game, which Territo said includes a former meadow downtown where baseball was played nearly 200 years ago.

"For him, it's all about baseball," said Territo's wife Kim. They met while both attended Greece Olympia High School, with Joe graduating in 1979 and Kim the following year. Their Stone Road home includes a room that Joe converted from a photo studio to what Kim calls his "man-cave" (He prefers "museum.")



CARLOS ORTIZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Joe Territo, seen here among his old-time baseball collection at his Greece home, is president of an organization called the Rochester Baseball Historical Society.

GET TO KNOW JOE TERRITO

Favorite baseball movie: *A League of Their Own.*

Favorite ballpark: Fenway in Boston. "I'm a Yankees fan, but, however, I'm a baseball fan first, and as a baseball fan, you can't beat Fenway,"

Must-have snack/drink at the ballpark: Hebrew National hot dog with sauerkraut and a Rohrbach Scotch Ale.

Favorite piece of memorabilia that he owns: 1930 Red Wings team signed baseball.

If he could go back to any era in baseball, it would be: The 1860s amateur era.

Favorite baseball player who he has photographed and why: Andy Pettite of the Yankees, who pitched a game in Rochester this year. "For such a big star, he was a class act during his rehab start at Frontier Field."

Joe Territo, 51, once worked as a sports photographer for the Rochester Americans hockey team. He later worked for years as a surgical technician at Part Ridge Hospital, where he was “part of the team” in the operating room. At the same time he maintained a commercial photography business with his home studio.

Territo’s main job title now is ophthalmic photographer at Retina Associates of Western New York. He figured that was a perfect blend of his medical and photographic backgrounds.

The only drawback is that job doesn’t include baseball. He gets his fix through the other activities.

The idea for the Rochester Baseball Historical Society surfaced years ago, Territo said, among people he met at the Genesee Country Village. He’s been playing for 11 years – “since day one” he said – and mostly plays as a third baseman for the Rochesters.

They play as to the rules that were in place in the 1800, including no gloves. Those in the vintage style formed a network that grew.

“People started sending me emails about strange Rochester baseball history,” Territo said. That included discussion of a place called Mumford’s Meadow, near the site of the present-day Andrews Street Bridge. A document from 1825 described

baseball being played there, Territo said. That’s years before the game was more-or-less officially invented by Abner Doubleday. (The game’s true origins have been vastly studied but have never truly been determined.)

The Rochester Baseball Historical Society is still “kind of loose-knit,” Territo said, but its mission of promoting local baseball history is intact. Territo said that he wants to hold a program at Mt. Hope Cemetery to point out the graves of baseball pioneers. He’s appearing at the Greece Public Library at 2 p.m. Aug. 25 to discuss “Early Baseball.”

Priscilla Astifan of Webster, a member of the society, said she didn’t come from a baseball loving family but was instantly captivated by the game.

“I didn’t find baseball, it found me,” said Astifan, 68, who is a board member of the Red Wings “When I was 15 years old, I discovered I was hopelessly in love with the game.”

Decades later as an adult student at what now is The College at Brockport, Astifan became fascinated with the history aspect while writing a paper on the roots of the Red Wings for a history class. The idea for the Rochester Baseball Historical Society began with a meeting of like-minded fans in Astifan’s home about five years ago.

“This past spring, these talented and baseball acquaintances helped bring it together,” Astifan wrote in an email. Territo has been at the forefront. He said the local organization is very similar to the Society for American Baseball Research, which has more than 6,000 worldwide members. The Rochester group is not an official chapter.

Territo’s collection of artifacts includes a turnstile and seats from the old Silver Stadium, dozens of vintage baseball gloves and uniforms. He speaks reverently about a 1919 “cabinet” photo of a team called the Canandaigua Devil Dogs, which included one player, Roy Wilkinson, who was a member of the ill-fated 1919 Chicago White Sox. Eight members of that team, which was dubbed the “Black Sox,” were banned from baseball for conspiring with gamblers to lose the World Series. Wilkinson was not among those banned.

Territo spoke appreciatively of the 1971 Rochester Red Wings, considered one of the best in team history. His childhood days were filled with bicycle

trips to area sandlots for pickup games with neighborhood kids.

“A summer day wasn’t complete without a baseball game,” he said.

He briefly abandoned the game in his early 20s, then rekindled the flame as a “four night a wee, easily” softball player. The flame burned more intensely when his son, Nick, now 25, started playing Little League. The Territos also have a daughter, Stephanie, 23.

Territo has his share of autographs, but said he never got into collecting memorabilia for financial reasons. It’s the history that he finds most compelling.

“The old artifacts, to me, are more interesting,” he said. “Were else are you going to see a flat bat from the 19th century?”

If Territo and his colleagues have their druthers, the Rochester Baseball Historical Society will be such a place.

Morrell is a freelance writer from Rochester.