



Mike Schenk photo

A photo taken from Portage Road shows the Miller Field baseball complex today.



Daily Record file photos

An aerial view photographed in 1958 shows the new Miller Fields. At the bottom of the photo is Portage Road.

Field

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admitted into the Wayne County Sports Hall of Fame in its charter class in 1976.

"Denton Fuller was my idol," said Gary Wertenberger, who was 10 in 1958 and entering his first year of Little League with Wooster Lumber. "He was the man."

"Miller Fields was a wonderful place to play ball," Wertenberger added. "The parents would sit on the side of the hill and watch ... it was the greatest place in the world."

"It really was unbelievable," Lincicome said. "Everyone took so much pride in the park, and Mr. Fuller was one fantastic person. The kids who played there in those years all had a good teacher."

"And he treated everyone equal. Denton said, 'I don't care what color a kid is or where he comes from, if he wants to play ball, he's going to play ball.' He made sure every kid on every team got to play in every game."

Gary Plant was one of those youths who looked up to Fuller. Plant began coaching a Little League team while he was a sophomore in high school and continued until 1964.

"Denton was very organized and very authoritative — he made sure everything was exactly as it should be," Plant said. "When he'd schedule a work session, he expected all the fathers and coaches to be

there, mowing grass, picking up stones — if you were going to play there or your kid was going to play there, he expected you to help.

"And he didn't have any kids of his own, so he gave a lot of his personal time to the kids in Little League and to the league," Plant added. "Here's how Denton was — I remember one game he was umpiring and someone in the stands was questioning a call. He called time, took his mask off, went over to the fence, pointed to the guy and made him come down there. He took down the guy's name and phone number, and said, 'The next time we need an umpire down here, I'm going to call you.'"

"The Little League program we have today, that's just continuing the foundation set down by Denton Fuller."

When Fuller accepted the deed to Miller Fields from Arthur Miller that Sunday afternoon, he characterized it as "a dream come true."

"I would admonish you boys that we must work to keep this facility a credit to the man to whom this is dedicated," Fuller told the young players.

"We don't have trouble with kids," Fuller added. "Sometimes we have a little difficulty with the parents ... we're working with the nation's — the world's — greatest source of wealth."

Strong leadership

One of the keys to WYBI's success over the years has been consistency in the leadership position. After Fuller's death, Bill Wile served as director from 1967 until his death in 1991, and Brian Smith served from 1991-2002.

"It's funny to think I've been in charge for 19 years and Denton was in it for 17," said Wile in a 1986 interview, "but it will always be Denton's program."

One of Wile's goals was realized three years after his death, when the new Denton Fuller Field was opened for play.

"After Bill died, they started working on Portage Road. They took a lot of material off that hill so we asked the construction company if they would dump it on our property," said Smith in a 1994 interview. "We needed a lot of fill, and they were happy to do it because it saved them a lot of trucking costs. They filled the area up three times and leveled it."

"That was the major thing that got it going. Then, when they built Wal-Mart, they had a pile of topsoil and we had it trucked in."

At the same time, the two original fields were renovated and electronic scoreboards were installed.

And, in keeping with the tradition of generosity, Don Bue-

hler of Buehler's Markets and Ralph Jones of Wooster Glass helped in the fund-raising for the new additions. The two teams they sponsored kicked off the Farm League season that year. Additionally, the practice field and cages built several years ago are named in Jones's honor.

The words of Dr. Williams, spoken 50 years ago, still ring true today. They've also been shown in the deeds of the many citizens of Wooster who have followed the long-time motto of WYBI: "No man stands taller than he who stoops to help a child."

"We are met here to dedicate a recreation park to the youth of Wooster," Williams told the crowd on that June day. "One cannot overestimate the value this gift will have for the community."

"It will contribute to the character and moral fiber of our young people — today, and to generations yet unborn."

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The late Bill Wile, who was director of Wooster Youth Baseball, Inc. from 1967-1991, is shown standing in front of land that eventually became Denton Fuller Field. The third baseball diamond in the Miller Field complex was completed prior to the 1994 season.

Namesake

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Holmes Construction, built the fields.

William Miller was a 1937 graduate of Wooster High School, where he was president of his senior class and the WHS Student Senate. He excelled on the football field as a quarterback, defensive back and, not surprisingly, a team captain.

As a senior, when the Generals were 5-3-3, he snared six interceptions on defense. In a 13-0 win over Orrville, he pinned the Red Riders inside the 10 with punts three times, and he also ran in an extra point after Wooster's first touchdown.

At The College of Wooster, Miller played quarterback and punted and served as his class president as a junior and senior.

Following his graduation in 1941, Miller joined the Army Corps of Engineers. As a captain, Miller was awarded two Bronze Stars for gallantry in action.

During the ceremony held on June 8, 1958, to dedicate the park in Miller's name, one of the speakers was Dr. John Williams of the First Presbyterian church, with Miller's father and his widow Barbara among those in attendance.

"Bill Miller was as clean as they come, a true sportsman, a strong competitor and a man of honor," Williams said in his remarks. "He lived as he died — and we can never forget that he sacrificed his own life to save the life of another. Even so he did live, not for himself, but for those with whom and for whom he lived."

"Even if Art Miller has nothing to do with the establishing of this Park, it would be most fitting that it be named as a memorial to Bill Miller," Williams added. "For character cannot be created without an ideal and Bill represents that ideal."

"People grow into the image of the ideal they constantly hold before their mind. If Bill's true story could be told to every youngster who uses this field, told without adding or subtracting anything, the youngsters will be the better for it."

A leader — on the fields of play and battle and in the classroom — William F. Miller Sr. is honored by the ballpark bearing his name. There is a plaque in his memory on the concession stand at Miller Fields.

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Derek Bertschy of Domino's Pizza gets a hit during play in the Wooster Farm League at Miller Field last week. Bertschy and his teammates play in a complex that was dedicated 50 years ago this summer.

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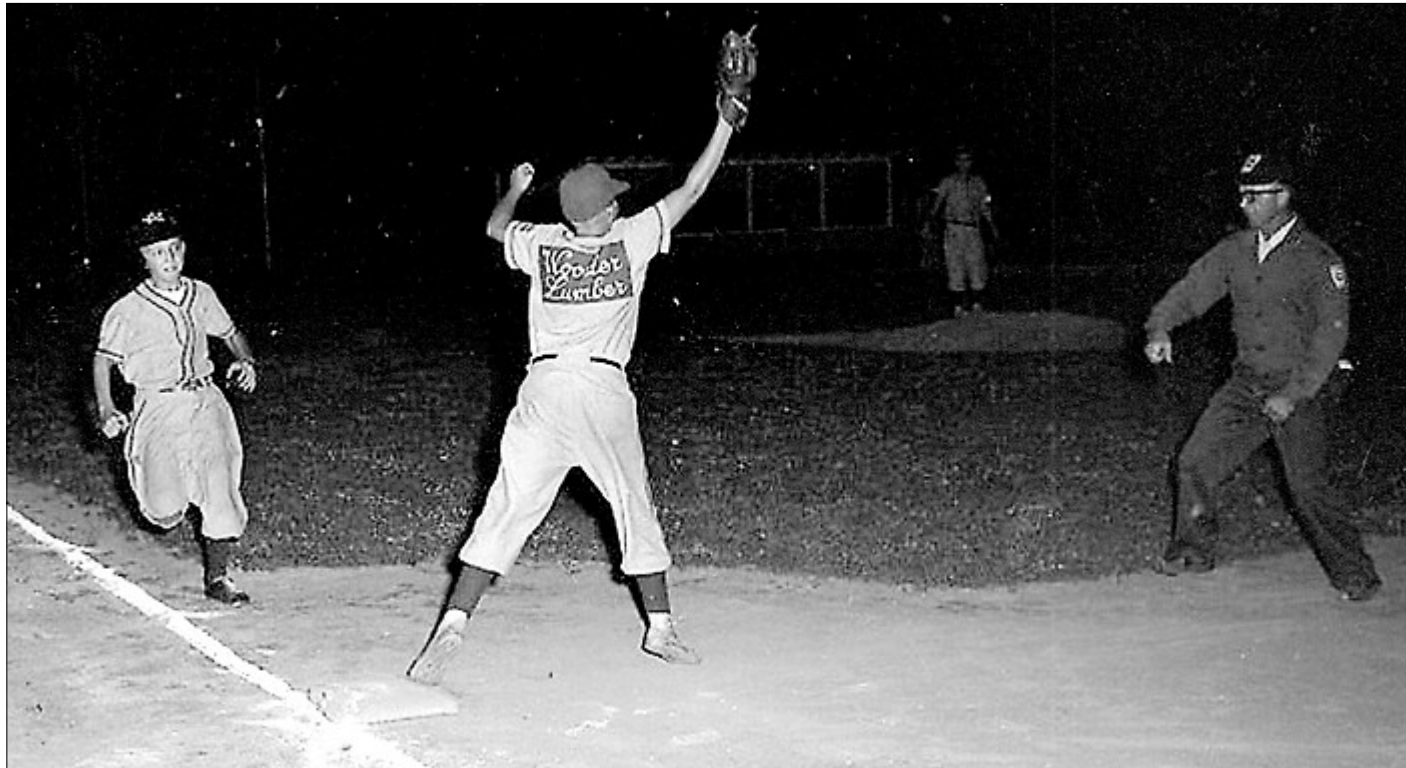
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In this photo from the 1959 City Series, played under the lights at the new Miller Fields, Wooster Lumber's Andy Mathis stretches to flag down a throw and retire Randy Hoffman of Stout News. The Lumbermen went on to win the title in two games.