

Glenn Erickson: Honoring a living legend

By JEFF CASPERSEN

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Rarely does a community embrace a journalist as Ukiah did Glenn Erickson. The former Ukiah Daily Journal sports editor, who spent more than 40 years penning sports stories for the paper, was the subject of collective adoration at Saturday's Little League 35 district finals opener, hosted by the South Ukiah Little League complex.

On the field which bears his namesake, Little Leaguers — from Ukiah and beyond — and local luminaries lined up to pay their respects to the local living legend.

The 82-year-old Erickson was on hand, sitting in a wheelchair, while kind words flowed out over the facility's loudspeaker.

"He's my Little League hero," said a teary-eyed District 35 Administrator Don Goodman, a good friend of Erickson. "I remember whenever tournament time started, he'd call and wake me up — well, most of the time my wife Neva answered. 'Is Don there?'"

The 6 a.m. score-seeking phone calls to Goodman were just the tip of the iceberg for the hard-working Erickson, who poured his heart and soul into covering the local sports scene.

Kelvin Chapman, who grew up in Ukiah and went on to play professional baseball in the New York Mets organization, remembers receiving similar calls.

"At every level I played at, the team secretaries would always call me in and ask, 'Do you know a Glenn Erickson? He's on the phone.' He'd get stats on every game I played."

Both Goodman and Chapman delivered emotional speeches Saturday before a backdrop of Little Leaguers from North Ukiah, Kelseyville, Petaluma National and Windsor lining the diamond's edge.

The city of Ukiah issued an official commendation declaring July 16, 2005, Glenn Erickson Day. Community Services Supervisor Sage Sangiacomo made the presentation.

Following the ceremony, each young baseball player waited in line to shake Erickson's hand.

"He's your favorite man, whether you know it or not," said Goodman. "He's probably written about your dads, uncles, cousins."

Erickson, who hailed from the East Bay, moved to Ukiah and began writing for the Journal in 1956. The 1944 U.C. Berkeley grad retired in 1986, though he continued to write — in some capacity or another — for the paper until just a few years ago. Erickson wrote daily — sometimes producing two or three stories a day — and would come into the office daily for at least 10 years after his official retirement.

Prior to his tenure at the Journal, Erickson wrote for The Associated Press, United Press, The San Francisco Chronicle, The San Francisco Examiner, The Berkeley Gazette, The Richmond Independent, The San Mateo Times, The Pittsburg Post Dispatch, The Antioch News and The Tulare Advance Register.

"He covered Dick Button when he won his first national figure skating title. He's seen Jackie Robinson play. He saw Jesse Owens," said Jamie Connerton, a former track coach at Ukiah High School and longtime friend of Erickson. "He's covered a lot of big events. Then he came here and covered every Little League game like it was the Rose Bowl." *Contact Jeff Caspersen at udjsports@pacific.net.*