Meeting Notes – Jan. 10, 2023

The LaFayette Rotary Club met on Tuesday, January 12, 2023. Rotarian Lewis Lowe arranged for the speaker, Mr. Jimmy Stewart, Jr. Jimmy Jr. is married to Jody Stewart, and they have three grown daughters. The Stewart family settled in Chambers County in the early 1900s. Jimmy and Jody raised their daughters and continue to live on the family farm.

Jimmy spoke of his father, the late Jimmy Stewart, Sr., a renowned athlete and former professional baseball player. Jimmy Sr. came from humble beginnings. He was raised and worked hard on the same farm that Jimmy Jr. now lives on. His father was in high school when the family got their first indoor bathroom. Jimmy Sr. attended and graduated from LaFayette High School (LHS) where he excelled in many sports. At the time of his graduation, he stood 5"5" and weighed 105 pounds.

LHS's football coach, Buck Watson, was instrumental in getting an athletic scholarship for Jimmy Sr. to attend Austin Peay State College in Clarksville, TN. At home during a break in his first year of college, Jimmy Sr. met his future wife Donna while working at the cotton mill. While at Austin Peay, Jimmy Sr. was a standout in three sports, lettering in basketball, track and baseball. He is considered to be one of the greatest athletes in the history of the college. During his collegiate career he held the highest single season batting average when he hit .435 in 1961. He was named all VSAC in basketball in 1961 averaging 10.4 ppg and was named All-Regional in the NCAA South Central tournament after leading the Austin Peay Governors to a 22-9 record. In track, for many years he held the school record of 22.6 seconds in the 220-yard dash. In his senior year he received every athletic award from the college, with the exception of football awards, a sport he didn't play. He was inducted into the college's Hall of Fame in 1978. When he graduated from Austin Peay he was 6" tall and weighed 180 lbs.

Upon his graduation, Jimmy Sr. had two professional sports opportunities: to play. basketball for the Philadelphia 76'rs or play baseball with the Chicago Cubs. He chose the Cubs and baseball. There he met one of his life-long friends, Ron Santo. He played with the Cubs for four years. He was then traded to the White Sox and he considered this the worst year of his life. He was then traded to the Cincinatti Reds. He was known as the Super Sub because of his ability to play any position and to get base hits. In 1970 the Reds won the National League pennant and advanced to the World Series. That was the first of three World Series rings Jimmy Sr. would earn.

After the World Series that year, the citizens, businesses and friends of LaFayette organized a Jimmy Stewart Day in town. Jimmy Jr. said this was the greatest honor for his father and he remembered it until he passed away in. The event brought superstars Johnny Bench and Pete Rose to LaFayette. Jimmy Jr. thanked the city and all involved in organizing and recognizing his father at this event.

Jimmy Sr. was traded to the Houston Astros in 1972 where he completed his active career. At the end of his time with Houston, Jimmy Sr. and Donna moved back to family farm in LaFayette. Shortly thereafter, the Reds called him back to take the role of manager for a year, then as a scout. As a scout in 1990 Jimmy Sr. was credited by the Reds manager, Lou Piniella, as being instrumental in winning the World Series against the Oakland A's. This earned him his second World Series ring. His next move was to the Phillies in 1993 as a major league coordinator. He earned his third World Series ring with the Phillies.

Jimmy Sr. and Donna retired to Tampa, FL in 2006 where Jimmy Sr. loved to play golf. He was a scratch golfer with three hole-in-ones. He also loved fishing and spending time with family and friends. Jimmy Sr. passed away on November 24, 2012.

Also present in today's meeting was Jimmy Sr.'s wife Donna and long-time friend, Herman Hand. Herman and Jimmy Sr. played sports together at LHS. Herman shared some of his memories of Jimmy Sr. with the club.