

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD



Carl Cacciotti is entering his fifth decade as a fixture in the Altoona Little League.

Big influence

For 40 years, Cacciotti has impacted Altoona Little League

By Josh Langenbacher

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Carl Cacciotti has spent 40 of his 78 years coaching Little League, helping to mold hundreds of young lives and racking up countless memories.

But one stands above the rest.

One of his players, a 12-year-old who had never scored before, was standing at third base in his last game, and Cacciotti instructed the player to be attentive, encouraging the boy to try to score if the ball got away from the catcher.

Listening intently, the boy looked up at his coach with something else on his mind.

"All of a sudden, he says, 'Coach,

look at these mountains. Aren't they beautiful?'" Cacciotti recalled. "It's not that he was ignoring me, but he brought me back to reality. One little thing I remember, no matter how intense you get, is to look around and see the mountains. He had the right attitude."

Those who have felt Cacciotti's influence would argue that Cacciotti, in his own way, encouraged people to look around and see the mountains. Cacciotti, for all of his contributions to youth sports through his longtime affiliation with the Altoona Area Baseball Association, is the Hall of Fame's Community Service Award winner.

"Through the years, I've seen

people get (the community service award), and they're all very worthy of it," Cacciotti said. "It sort of amazed me I got it. I'm very proud. Actually, it's humbling to think they'd think of me in that way."

Cacciotti's tenure with the AABA has seen him coach all six of his children and some of his grandchildren.

Of his 12 grandchildren, he has coached two already, and two more will be on his team this year. Another will be the batboy, joining the team in 2017.

He started coaching in 1975 and currently manages Masonic Lodges;

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Cacciotti has also managed Dog-n-Custard, LG Potato Chips and Benzel's Pretzels.

"Coach Cacciotti entered my life as a baseball coach when I was drafted somewhere around the age of 12," former player Shaun Benzel wrote in a letter nominating Cacciotti. "The truth of the matter is in many ways, he's never left my life. Lessons learned from 'Coach' are still very much a part of my life, and now that I am a father, I realize even more just how significant those lessons were."

His considerable impact on the league extends beyond the lines, longtime friend John Kraft said. Kraft, who has been associated with the league for 33 years, said Cacciotti's steadying influence as a member of the rules committee and institutional knowledge is welcomed. Cacciotti also is in charge of the scorekeepers in addition to managing.

Past recipients

1998	John Conlon	2008	Miracle League of Blair County
2000	John Robertson	2010	Sue Kovensky
2002	Tom Stout	2012	Ken Koronowski
2004	Harry Sickler	2014	Bud Grazier
2006	Skip Dry		

"I can say that in the 33 years I've been involved, I've never heard a discouraging word about Carl," Kraft said. "He's always been a gentleman on and off the field. As far as the league is concerned, we need more of that. He's been a good influence on me as far as keeping it low-key."

Cacciotti, known as "Mr. C" to many of his players, becomes the 10th community service award winner, joining nine others whose lives have been spent contributing to youth and recreational sports in the area.

"Many dads get involved in Little League to help coach their sons or

daughters," Blair County Sports Hall of Fame president Neil Rudel said. "Carl Cacciotti may have done that initially, but he's stayed with it four decades and coached, mentored and positively influenced generations of youth — and their parents — at the Altoona Little League. He's not only coached baseball, he's coached life.

"His four-decade commitment to Little League is practically unheard of, and the Hall of Fame is pleased to recognize him in a long line of past Community Service Award winners who have made a great impact on families, organizations and sports in Blair County. We think he'll be very well received."

Cacciotti has no plans to stop coaching any time soon: His youngest grandchild is only 10 months old, after all.

"That's a long way off," he said, "but I tell you what, already he carries the ball around. If God would give me that much help, I'd love to be there. Hopefully I can be around."