

Vendor keeps hungry fans happy

By Tim Smith
staff writer

The most popular man in Tiger Stadium isn't Jack Morris, Kirk Gibson or Lance Parrish. The most sought after person in the ballpark after night doesn't even wear a baseball uniform or carry a glove.

It's Southfield's Art Witkosky, who is Mr. Popularity at Michigan and Trumbull, and what he does carry is a smile and a charcoal-heated pot filled to the brim with steaming Ball Park Franks.

The 62-year-old Witkosky, also known around the stadium as "Witt," has been slapping mustard on franks there since 1975.

And he absolutely loves it.

"IT'S LIKE a family," Witkosky said of his clientele from his perch in the lower deck between the plate and third base. "You see the same people over and over again."

"I meet a new friend almost every day in addition to my old friends," he said as he swung into motion for a customer, pitch-forking a hot dog bun.

They seem to say a baseball game isn't complete without a Ball Park Frank.

When not selling 200 to 300 of the quarter-pound franks during a baseball game, the white-haired Witkosky keeps busy by bicycling through the streets of Southfield, near Nine Mile and Berg, or by ushering at Faith Covenant Church in Farmington Hills.

"I've been doing that regularly for 30 years. And my wife (of 38 years, Elizabeth) has been singing in the choir that long."

The couple have four children — Sharon, 36; Karen, 33; Dwight, 31; and David, 28 — but they are still waiting for their first grandchild.

WITKOSKY, WHO worked as a salesman for the J.L. Hudson Co. for 18 years before retiring in 1976, also sells Detroit Red Wings' souvenirs

during the winter at Joe Louis Arena. And he is called on to work concerts there as well.

The hot dog vendor said he knows when to approach customers and when to ignore them. But he also said people seek him out all the time.

"I sell most between innings, and it's sold from the first through the seventh innings. In the eighth and ninth all the fans want to concentrate on the game."

"Then all their intensity is on home plate and they generally ignore me. So I keep moving."

He didn't have to move much for business during the interview.

At about 5 p.m., 30 minutes before the start of a twilight doubleheader with Cleveland, several fans were waiting patiently for "Witt" to do his thing.

THE AMICABLE Witkosky and others like him around the stadium — have doing out dogs down to a science.

• First, grab napkin, then jab bun with fork, placing it into napkin and spreading open.

• Second, flip open the lid on the hot dog compartment, which Witkosky estimated contains about 80 franks, heated by charcoal and not steamed as most fans have always thought. Pierce hot dog with fork and place inside bun.

• Third, squirt mustard onto frank, hand to customer and pocket \$1.50.

Another factor, he said, is how the team is playing.

"When the team is winning, I tend to sell a lot more — I'd say 30 percent — than when it's losing."

WITKOSKY ADMITTED that he sneaks glances at the action on the field, particularly late in a game, when the final outcome is on the line.

"I've always enjoyed baseball — the crack of the bat and the atmosphere," said Witkosky, who was interviewed on PM Magazine during the 1984 World Championship season. "This is an opportunity for me to see 75 games a year."

And it's nice to sell to an old ballplayer in the stands, like a Greenberg or Gehring, that you remember seeing on the field.

Witkosky said he has sold it all during his time at Tiger Stadium, including popcorn, peanuts, hot chocolate and soft drinks. He prefers selling hot dogs, though, and doesn't envy the vendors who roam the ballpark carrying souvenirs.

"Sometimes the souvenir (vendors) will walk around 10 times before the kid finally convinces his mom or dad to buy something."

HE SAID he wants to stay on at the ballpark as long as possible.

"You have to love talking to people and meeting their needs. Witkosky said, grabbing his hot dog case and moving toward some hungry customers.

"Red hot! Get your red hot here!"

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(FJC)



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

If flipping a package of hot dog buns high into the air doesn't catch customers attention, Art Witkosky resorts to waving his cap and barking: 'Get your hot doggies!'

obituaries

IDA B. VICINI

Mrs. Vicini, 89, of Farmington Hills died Aug. 10 in Mt. Carmel Hospital.

Born in San Marino, Mrs. Vicini was a homemaker.

Survivors include her sons, Antonio, Paul, Mario and Pier; a daughter, Anna; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Services were Aug. 13 at the McCabe Funeral Home, Farmington Hills, with the Rev. Joseph Drogowski officiating. Burial was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Southfield.

RICHARD W. STRANE

Mr. Strane, 56, of Farmington died Aug. 14 in Oakland General Hospital.

Mr. Strane worked for Creative Universal Inc. in film production.

Survivors include his wife, Arline; sons, R. Jack and Scott; brothers, Robert and Donald; one grandchild; and two step-grandchildren.

Services were Aug. 16 at the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. Holger G. Cattau of Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rochester. Burial was in Glen Eden Cemetery, Livonia.

FRANCIS (FRANK) E. ROBERTS JR.

Mr. Roberts, 26, of Pontiac, formerly of Farmington, died Aug. 15.

Mr. Roberts was a machinist. Survivors include his son, John Michael; parents, Francis and Marie Roberts; sister, Jane Marie; and grandmother, Marie Schumacher.

Services were Aug. 19 at the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington, Mass was celebrated at St. Alexander Catholic Church with the Rev. Oswald Mascharenas officiating. Burial was in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Southfield.

RAY H. BURROWS

Mr. Burrows, 58, of Farmington died Aug. 15.

Mr. Burrows was an accountant for Bob Lo Amusement Park.

Survivors include his wife, Bettie; sons, David and Gerald; daughters, Janet Schwind, Allison, Anne and Karen; mother, Alice Burrows; brother, Dale; and two grandchildren.

Cremation was in Evergreen Crematory, Detroit, with the Rev. James Davison of First Baptist Church of Birmingham officiating. Arrangements were made by the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington.

ELSIE STANLEY

Mrs. Stanley, 81, of Farmington died Aug. 16 in Botsford Hospital, Farmington Hills.

Born in England, Mrs. Stanley was a retired clerical worker for the automotive industry.

Survivors include her son, Theodore Holloway; brother, Harold Baron; and one grandchild.

Services were Aug. 20 at the Heene-Sundquist Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. William Whitledge of St. Paul Presbyterian Church officiating. Burial was in Glen Eden Cemetery, Livonia.

KATHERINE MAY KUBAT

Mrs. Kubat, 90, of Farmington Hills died Aug. 16 in Oakwood Hospital.

Mrs. Kubat was a seamstress. She was a member of 1st Presbyterian Church of Farmington.

Survivors include her nieces, Noreen, Patsy and Eleanor; and nephews, James and Douglas.

Services were Aug. 19 at the McCabe Funeral Home, Farmington Hills, with the Rev. Terry Pervis-Smith officiating. Burial was in Grand Lawn Cemetery, Detroit.

IVY GRACE ROOT

Mrs. Root, 73, of Novi died Aug. 17 in Botsford Hospital, Farmington Hills.

Born in Canada, Mrs. Root was a registered nurse. She donated her time to sew clothes for the Farmington Rotary Club.

Survivors include her sons, Paul

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