

Baseball from page C1

Papa Bell, who was described as so fast that he could steal two bases on one pitch.

Often overlooked, however, is the accomplishments of lesser known players.

"This exhibit showcases the hidden chapter in baseball history," said Larry Lester, curator of the exhibit and a former research director at the Negro League Baseball Museum.

"Discover Greatness," set amid a makeshift baseball diamond, is divided into four sections: 1901-1919 — The Great Independents; 1920-1931 — A League of Their Own; 1932-1946 — Heyday; and, 1947 — The Color Barrier Falls.

The compelling story that emerges isn't necessarily confined to what happened between the foul lines.

A diamond reflection

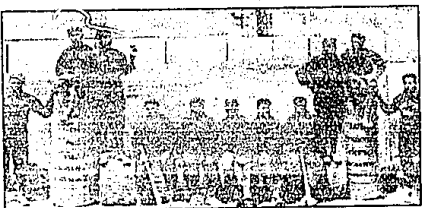
What emerges in the retelling of the "hidden stories" is the parallel path of professional baseball and American segregation to integration.

Dissecting the histories of the black and white baseball leagues is both a reflection and a precursor of social change.

"Baseball is a mirror image of life in America," said Lester. A point that filmmaker Ken Burns made in his exhaustive documentary, "Baseball."

Contrary to the images of an idyllic, leisurely game, there's a potent parable of the struggles of racial tolerance surrounding America's favorite pastime.

Until the U.S. Supreme Court decision, Plessy v. Ferguson in 1892, blacks and whites played on the same teams. With "separate but equal" written into law, a "gentleman's agreement"



Baseball memories: The 1895 Page Fence Giants are one of the teams featured in "Discover Greatness! An Illustrated History of Negro Leagues Baseball."

among baseball owners restricted blacks.

Consequently, black teams began to barnstorm towns, challenging local semi-pro teams and eventually established their own leagues.

"People who've gone through the exhibit have said that they remember their grandparents talk about these players," said Lester. "They thought these players were just folk tales."

Indeed, there is a sense of the mythic and an enchanted folk history in the photos of old ball parks, buses with the sign of the team emblazoned the side and anecdotes of Herculean feats on the diamond.

There's plenty to talk about, from Satchel Paige's stamina to the Page Fence Giants winning 82 consecutive games to Josh Gibson hitting more than 1,000 home runs.

Yet there's no turning away from the most compelling part of the exhibit.

Before Brown v. Board of Edu-

ca, and the Civil Rights Act, there was the graceful Robinson establishing a new standard for both white and black players. While Michael Jordan might have reinvented the notion of "celebrity athlete," Robinson embodied "social justice" every time he took the field.

"Baseball was breaking barriers before anyplace else," said Lester. "Americans saw white and blacks coming together for a common cause."

"When teammates hug each other, they're not thinking about the color of their skin."

Ironically, the demise of the Negro Leagues commenced with the integration of the major leagues. By 1960, all that remained of the league were occasional scrimmages among old-timers.

"Their ultimate victory was integration," said Lester. "Fans wanted to see the best — whether black or white."

In that simple ideal is perhaps the lasting power and promise of America's game.

By KURT ANTHONY KRUG
SPECIAL WRITER

New York Times best-selling writer and Bloomfield Hills-resident Elmore "Dutch" Leonard was not aware that his books had a deep, hidden meaning.

"One professor told me my (novels) are 'Indictments of civilization and its byproducts.' They are? I'm just trying to make a living," Leonard said referring to an English professor who made his books required reading for his class.

"I wait for Scott Frank (screenwriter of 'Get Shorty,' and 'Out of Sight,' both are movies based on Leonard's novels of the same name, respectively) to tell me what themes my books are."

Leonard read the most memorable letters he ever received from readers at a presentation held recently at Wayne State University in Detroit. A 12-year-old girl (no names were mentioned) wrote to say she aspires to be a successful author like him. As he continued reading, the girl stated that it's a general rule of thumb to write what you know and told Leonard he knows plenty of "seizeballs and howies."

A convict, wrote and wanted to know if Leonard had ever been in prison. Leonard was told his novels are gaining popularity with the heroin users but not with the cocaine users because "they aren't as educated."

"My fans aren't that kind either," Leonard said, reading a

letter from a woman who said his novels have too many explicit. The woman then used profanity to criticize him, something that turned her off from his work in the first place.

All these letters elicited laughter from the audience of more than 100 people.

Leonard said when writing for Hollywood you can't take things personally if movie executives dramatically change your novel. He follows the advice of the late Raymond Chandler. "If you've had enough (of Hollywood), then it's time to say goodbye. Say it with a smile. You may go back. You may have to go back."

Leonard, 73, is one of a select few writers who has successfully switched genres — from Westerns to crime thrillers. He's also written screenplays during his prolific writing career, which has spanned 48 years. He is renowned for his realistic dialogue.

Leonard graduated from the University of Detroit Mercy in 1950 with an undergraduate degree in English and philosophy. By 1961, he had written and sold 30 short stories, five novels, and two screenplays.

A typical writing day for Leonard begins at 9:30 a.m. and concludes at 6 p.m.

"It's a good day if I come away with 4-5 (pages)," he said. He spends the next day revising the pages. His manuscripts are usually 360 pages long, with the exception of "Cuba Libre" (Dell

Publishing, \$7.50), which was 400 pages. He felt that since it was a historical novel, it needed "more heft."

"I have no idea where (a book is) going or how it'll end. I don't worry about the ending until (I write) 300 pages," he said. "I write to please me. I'm having an awfully good time."

Leonard never reads fiction when writing a novel because he doesn't want to confuse his plot with another plot. He has read books by Alex Garland, Robert B. Parker, and Ed McBain.

"No one does (police) procedurals better than (McBain)," he said.

His recent novel, "Be Cool" (Delacorte, \$24.95), is on the New York Times Best Selling list for the fifth consecutive week. In it, ex-brooklyn-turned-movie-producer Chili Palmer (who was played by John Travolta in the 1995 film, "Get Shorty") tries to make another movie about a singer named Linda Lee.

Palmer has many pitfalls along the way, encountering record industry executives and Russian mobsters. Four songs by the rock band, the Stone Coyotes, are featured in the book. A new song, "Odessa," was written specifically for the book.

Leonard talked to Travolta about reprising his role as Chili Palmer should "Be Cool" be adapted for the big screen. Travolta told him that he needed a break because he just finished filming "A Civil Action."

ART BEAT

Send items for consideration in Art Beat to Frank Provenzano at fprovenzano@ec.homecomm.net Or write to: The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009.

MEADOW BROOK THEATRE

ANNOUNCES 1999-2000 SEASON Meadow Brook Theatre will feature several familiar plays and personal crowd pleasers in its 34th season.

The line-up includes:

■ "The Odd Couple," by Neil Simon, Sept. 15-Oct. 10

■ "Tintypes," a musical set at the turn of the century, Oct. 20-Nov. 14

■ "A Christmas Carol," Nov. 20-Dec. 28

■ "Dangerous Obsession," a psychological thriller, Jan. 5-30

■ "All My Sons," the classic by Arthur Miller, Feb. 9-March 5

■ "Chagall's Arabian Nights" by Karim Alrawi, Meadow Brook's playwright-in-residence

■ "Crimes of the Heart" by Beth Henley, April 19-May 14

ART ON THE WEB

Resources of the Michigan Arts Council can be found on the

world wide web.

The 1999 Arts FAIR Guide for the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs is available at <http://www.cis.state.mi.us/art>.

The guide provides basic information about Michigan's many visual arts and crafts fairs held throughout the state.

WOMEN IN ART

The Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center has expanded its spring class offerings.

New classes include beginning drama for youth, oil lacquer miniature painting, stone sculpture, basic auto design, and several creative thinking classes.

■ "A History of Women in the Visual Arts," taught by artist Nancy Thayer. The class explores the political, legal and social restrictions that female artists have faced.

Writers from page C1

Ready for repartee

There's little doubt that Verdi-Hus is not only the generous host for the twice monthly meetings, but its facilitator. She begins meetings by asking who's prepared to read.

Sullivan steps up. He reads a chapter from his published novel, "The Phases of Harry Moon." His words strike a steady rhythm, and his very sensibility turns and twists with the narration.

After Sullivan is finished, Verdi-Hus encourages a discussion about the work.

"Tom is the best liar I know," said Jim O'Keefe, oddly complimenting Sullivan's imaginative use of setting and dialogue.

Sullivan isn't to be outdone. "The two best things I like about Jim are his face."

To-dum. Algonquin, eat your heart out.

On a more scholarly level, Estleman draws a comparison between the literary conceits employed by Jonathan Swift and Sullivan. Cerebral stuff. Everyone nods.

Perspective is at hand.

Into the dampness

Any writer who has struggled over a phrase, or stumbled to make sense of a blank page has

realized that humor balanced with perseverance is the only saving grace. The writer's ideal can never be realized, only approximated.

That truth isn't lost on the Monday night writers group.

"The difference from the Algonquin Round Table is that eventually we know we're going to get some booze," said Wydra, a computer analyst by day and a short story writer by night. (The Algonquin Round Table's meetings were held during Prohibition.)

When the writers have read their work, reported on the progress of their latest literary endeavors, they move on. And out.

On a rainy March evening, they head out into the dampness. Some head to a nearby bar. Others head home, back to their word processors and typewriters. Perhaps encouraged. And certainly feeling a bit warmer about an art that requires as much isolation as tenacity.

For another Monday evening, they shared each other's company, a common sense of purpose, and found a means to measure their literary progress.

That's what a conversation around the water cooler can do.

Conversations from page C1

The irony of original music being played by a youth orchestra, rather than by professional musicians, isn't lost on Hartway.

"Most (professional) orchestras worry about performing new works because it might not go over with an audience, who expects to hear music they've heard before."

Who would've thought that far from hanging out at malls, or meandering on the Internet, a

group of high schoolers would be doing their part to keep alive a musical art form.

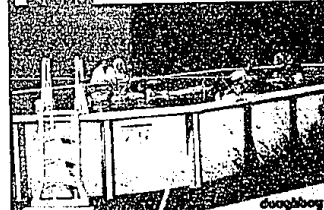
Amazing what can be accomplished when the door to opportunity is opened.

Frank Provenzano can be reached at (248) 901-2557, or at fprovenzano@ec.homecomm.net

Or write to: The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009.

POOLS & SPAS A GO-GO SUPER EXTRAVAGANZA PRESEASON SALE

POOLS



FREE winter and solar covers with each pool purchased before 4-18-99

doughboy

DOUGHOY POOL PACKAGES

STARTING AT

\$1093

VOGUE

VOGUE POOL PACKAGES

STARTING AT

\$1466

16' ROUND

48" DEPTH

18' ROUND

52" DEPTH

EVERY POOL PACKAGE INCLUDES FILTER, LADDER, VACUUM, AUTO SWIMMER, HAND BUMPER, THERMOMETER, CHILDREN, FOOT BATH, TEST KIT, POOL CARE BOOKLET.

Super Deep Discounts

SWIM & PLAY POOL PACKAGES

SIZE	15'	18'	21'	24'	24' x 15'
SALE	\$899	\$969	\$1129	\$1199	\$1299
WAB	\$147	\$1521	\$1839	\$1818	\$2083

SPAS



Coleman Spas

We're Michigan's largest Coleman Spa Dealer

Journey	Coopersage 195	Spectrum 250
\$2399	\$3599	\$5099
save \$700	save \$300	save \$1200

Hurry in while savings last! 90 days same as cash. Financing available.



SELECTION
SERVICE
PRICE

Pools, spas, chemicals & accessories.

www.poolandspasago.com

*WITH APPROVED CREDIT

BLOOMFIELD HILLS
3100 G. ROCHERSTEN
248.652.8300

BENTLEY
2750 WEST 12 MILE
248.389.4577

UTICA
40270 VAN DYKE
810.739.5335