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PRESS RELEASE

WATTS NAMED 2024 MIDWEST PLAINS LEFTY GOMEZ REGIONAL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

The late Vernon “Lefty” Gomez was one of Babe Ruth League’s most dedicated volunteers. One of the reasons he was so committed to the program was because he witnessed firsthand the positive impact Babe Ruth League had on its young participants.

The “Lefty Gomez Volunteer of the Year” Regional Award Winner Program was introduced in 2023. The eight Babe Ruth League Regional Commissioners select one volunteer from their region, who has gone above and beyond to promote and further develop the Babe Ruth League program, to receive this prestigious award.

Michael Watts of Boonville, Missouri, was selected by Midwest Plains Regional Commissioner Tim Kuntz as the 2024 recipient.

Kuntz said, “The Lefty Gomez Volunteer of the Year Award is among the highest honors to be bestowed upon a regional volunteer. Its recipient must embody the spirit of the Babe Ruth League philosophy, which is to provide the best possible sports experience for every child wanting to play. Michael Watts admirably and enthusiastically exemplifies this philosophy.”

Watts has been involved with the Babe Ruth League program since the mid-1980s when he started volunteering as an umpire and scorekeeper for the Boonville Babe Ruth League.

In 1987, when his son was old enough to play, Watts was proud to step up as a coach for his team. He continued coaching his son’s team, as well as other teams for the Boonville Babe Ruth League until 1995. During his coaching career, Watts’ teams captured five League Championships and participated in several All-Star competitions.



In 1992, Watts was selected as League President for Boonville. He was appointed the Missouri District 6 Commissioner in 2021. A man whose dedication knows no bounds, Watts still serves as League President and District 6 Commissioner today.

In addition, Watts has served on the Task Force for several Cal Ripken Major/70 World Series hosted by Branson, Missouri.

During his Babe Ruth League tenure, Watts has been instrumental in:

- The continued operation and advancement of the Boonville Babe Ruth League. While many youth leagues have been on the decline, Boonville has more teams and players today than ever before.
- Designed and implemented the League Website.
- Conducted many fundraising efforts for the league, including local business banner placement at the ballpark.
- Proposed and implemented the use of a Pitch Count for local league games.
- Served on several committees to raise funds for field improvements.
- Assisted in the establishment of the Boonville Babe Ruth Softball program in 1999.
- Secured sites, coordinated, and served as Tournament Director for 21 Missouri State Tournaments and 13 Midwest Plains Regional Tournaments.

Watts' support for young people goes beyond the Babe Ruth program. He has volunteered for the Boonville High School in many capacities since 1992, such as an official statistician for the varsity football team, scoreboard operator for all basketball and wrestling events, and scorekeeper and announcer for baseball and softball games. He is a past member of the local Jaycee's and Boonville Pirate Booster Club and has offered service to many other organizations over the years, including the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Telethon.

Besides receiving the 2024 Babe Ruth "Lefty Gomez Volunteer of the Year" Regional Award, Watts was recognized for his distinguished service to the Boone's Lick area by the Boonville Chamber of Commerce in 2005 and was inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame in 2021 as a member of the 1974 Boonville High School Football State Championship team.

Watts said, "Receiving the Lefty Gomez Volunteer of the Year" Regional Award is a surprise and an honor. There are so many volunteers in the Midwest Plains Region who make Babe Ruth League the great organization it is. To single me out is probably not fair. But I am proud to represent every volunteer in the Midwest Plains. We all, as a group, not only enable kids to succeed on the playing field, but also in the classroom, and in life beyond the game."

Babe Ruth League, Inc. is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to developing better citizens by providing properly supervised baseball and softball competition for 4 through 18-year-old players. It is the basic intent of Babe Ruth League that every player who has a desire to play the sport is allowed to participate and have fun.

For Immediate Release to All Media