

Seymour's youthful athletes can say a big 'thank you' to Bill

Bill Hays never has been an athlete, but he's justly proud of being the main force behind getting equipment and facilities that have enabled hundreds of boys and girls to compete in football, baseball and basketball in the Seymour community.

Hays, who turned 63 this past Thursday, took early retirement from his job as communications consultant for South Central Bell Telephone. He hasn't retired, though, from his music ministry of 35 years in which he now is involved at Sever Heights Baptist Church . . . his church.

Bill recalls that when he attended Knoxville High School, he went out for football in 1941, but the coach sent him home because he weighed only 120 pounds. However, he did play sandlot football with the Gra-Y team.

"I was little, but fast, and a pretty good end."

Born in Lebanon, Ky., in 1927, Hays and his family moved to Knoxville when he was only 5 years old. At only 8 years, Bill lost his father in a car wreck. He remembers Lincoln Park Baptist Church members bringing a basket of groceries to his home "every week for many years."

A Navy veteran of World War II.

Hays was recalled to duty in 1949 for the Korean conflict. He had married Lois Cogdill of Seymour that same year, and it was only natural he settled in the Seymour area.

Under the GI Bill, Hays attended Carson-Newman College for some night classes in music ministry and then attended the University of Tennessee for three years.

Seymour Optimist Club duly honored Hays for his 37 years of working with

fund-raisers at various times to help buy the equipment we needed."

Bower Field, which was donated by the late Ben Bower, is the hub around which the Seymour program operates. The palatial Bower home sits high on a ridge, majestically looking down on the athletic complex.

The Seymour Optimist Club was formed in 1962, and Hays is a charter member.

"We keep hundreds of boys and girls occupied," said Hays. "We last year had 10 T-ball teams for kids ages 6-8, six Willie Mays teams (ages 9-10), six Pee-wee Reese teams (11-12), three Sandy Koufax teams (13-14) and 12 girls' softball teams (6-14)."

Asked to speak at club meetings and such, Hays has a standard beginning. "I tell them I have one wife, two cars, three dogs, four acres of land, five kids and six cents," he chuckled. "It always gets a laugh."

One of those cars he spoke of is a 1950 Plymouth sedan which he bought new. "The radiator was good for 37 years, and the original cylinder block still is in there, although I've had it overhauled twice. That car has been driven over 500,000 miles, and it's been wrecked only once. Some guy ran a stop sign when one of my daughters was driving it, and he dented the side. I've had it painted three times, always the same blue."

Former Young High star football player Rick Hill and Hays have formed a partnership to run the Seymour Driving Range, just across Chapman Highway from Bower Field.

"We lease the property from the Bower estate," Hays said. "Rick and I go back a way. He was playing at Young



News-Sentinel file photo

Bill Hays

"I felt honored they put that much faith in me . . . and I don't think I let them down."

