

# Changing Uniforms

## From Baseball Player To Law Enforcement Officer

By Randy Olson

**W**hen arm problems prompted the end to the professional baseball career of Bob Sykes, he wasn't bitter at all. In fact, he was ready to begin a new chapter in his life and spend more time with his family.

"Baseball was fun for awhile, I reached the major leagues and had a little success, but trying to start a family and being away from home so much really takes a toll on you," said Sykes, "especially when I began losing feeling in my fingers and struggled near the end. I knew it was time to move on to something else."

Sykes, a Wayne-White Coop member, spent five seasons in the major leagues as a left-handed pitcher. He broke in with the Detroit Tigers, where he spent two seasons in 1977-78. He pitched for the St. Louis Cardinals from 1979-81 before being traded to the Yankees organization. Although he missed out on the 1982 World Series Championship with the Cardinals, he still has fond memories of playing baseball for Whitey Herzog.

"Whitey is a great man," said Sykes, "we still stay in touch with each other and he would do anything for you." That fact became apparent a few years ago when Sykes telephoned Herzog and asked him to come to Carmi to help raise funds for an Alzheimer's unit in the area. Herzog happily obliged and helped raise \$18,000 for the Alzheimer's unit.

"That's just the kind of guy he is," said Sykes, who still routinely returns to St. Louis every year for the Winter Warm-Ups. "It's nice to stay in touch with former teammates as well as players who played before and after me in a Cardinal uniform."

Sykes still takes a lot of ribbing from sports fans who remind him that he is the answer to a baseball trivia question. Who did the Cardinals trade to the Yankees in October of 1981 in exchange for Willie McGee? The answer is Bob Sykes. After the trade, Sykes would never pitch another



game in the majors due to arm problems, while McGee went on to an 18-year career including an MVP season for the Cardinals. Yankee fans still talk about that trade. But, in his healthy prime, Sykes was a very effective left-hander, both as a starter and a long reliever.

He pitched four complete games, including three shutouts for the Cardinals in 1981, a feat that today's pitchers seldom do. Sykes finished with a career ERA of 4.65 while winning a total of 23 games.

He is originally from New Jersey, but met his wife, Jane, while he was a member of the Evansville Triplets Triple A Team. After his major league stints with Detroit and St. Louis, the Sykes settled in White County, where Bob worked in the oilfield for 22 years.

At the age of 50, Sykes decided to enter the Police Academy and became a Deputy Sheriff and (SRO) Student Resource Officer for Doug Maier at the White County Sheriff's Department in Carmi. Sykes and Maier have col-

laborated to develop a unique program called "WE CARE," which builds relationships with students in 13 different school buildings covering Carmi, Norris City, Enfield and Grayville.

Sykes interacts consistently with students from pre-K to Freshman although grades 4 and 7 sit out a year. By investing so much time with the students, Sykes has developed a level of trust through real relationships. "It is easier to help a kid when they

see you consistently and they realize that you really care," said Sykes. "I really enjoy building the relationships with kids and I truly feel like we are making a difference, they know they can call upon us anytime."

The Sykes' recently became member/customers of Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative, where we installed underground electric service. "The trenching and installation crew did a great job," said Sykes, "we appreciate the speed and efficiency by which the project was completed."

While Bob works in law enforcement and the WE CARE program, his wife, Jane, works as a school nurse. They have two grown children. Their son works for the Jackson County Sheriff's Department, while their daughter is a Neonatal nurse. Bob continues to stay near the game of baseball by operating a part-time instructional facility called "The Ballyard" in Carmi. Sykes and Pat Stewart can combine to instruct up to seven players an hour in two cages.

The fundamentals are taught on a personal one-on-one basis. "I have been instructing students at the Ballyard now for 13 years," said Sykes, "our prices are still the same as they were when we started; we want to keep it affordable for kids who are serious about improving their game." If you are interested in more information about "The Ballyard" or the WE CARE program, contact Bob Sykes at (618) 384-4505. The transition from baseball uniform to law enforcement uniform has been a long journey for Sykes, but in both situations, he is a winner.



Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative

www.WWCEC.com