

The History of

Fort Wayne

PAL



The History of PAL

In-depth - 1957 - Present



IT all started with an idea - nurtured for weeks by a group of police officers who were members of Indiana Wayne Lodge #14, Fraternal Order of Police.

THE year was 1957, and the officers agreed that a youth program should be started in the Fort Wayne Community; one that enjoined youngsters with law enforcement officials in mutual athletic enjoyment and endeavor. The local pioneers of this idea agreed that such a program would be called, "Police Athletic League", using the name given a similar program in New York during the depression years of the 1930's.

A committee was formed within the local FOP, and the Police Athletic League was officially launched in in Fort Wayne the following year. A registration was held for boys in April of 1958.

What is a Police Athletic League?

SOON after the kids and cops got together, the organization's name was popularly (and naturally) shortened, using the synonym for Police Athletic League, "PAL", which could easily be identified as a youth program, thereafter. However, the official name would still be used in the charter, and the committee vowed that any youth enrolling in PAL would not be charged, except for a group picture, insurance and personal items - if their parents could afford it. Otherwise, nothing!

ENROLLMENT would also be open to any youngster regardless of race, religion or ethnic background. These stipulations made by the founders have persisted ever since.

THE Fort Wayne Police Athletic League

was supervised by the committee of FOP until June of 1961, when PAL incorporated as a separate, not-for-profit youth program, in compliance with State and Federal guidelines.

Why a PAL?

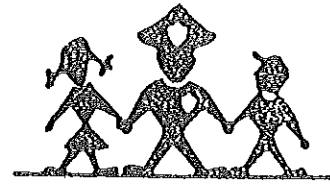
IF a person were to ask, "Why a PAL?", the answer would given in one word - "youth." PAL reaches out to communicate with young people of Fort Wayne and Allen County, especially those who may be otherwise unaffiliated, or disadvantaged, those who need direction and who have shown the motivation and energy to develop skills that benefit and prove themselves as individuals. Simply, those youngsters who have time on their hands and want to do something worthwhile with it.

PAL is purely a preventative program - not a corrective one. For solving behavioral problems through recreational programs alone is not the whole answer. But it is a vital instrument in any prevention programming.

How Does PAL Help?

KIDS are helped through a wide-ranging curriculum of sports activities that provide coordination, guidance, coaching, facilities and equipment. A great number of youngsters are drawn into PAL for these reasons. Individuals' aptitude and talent are taken into consideration, so they can be guided into those activities that best suit their needs. Offered in PAL is football, basketball, tennis, cheerleading, self-defense, ice-hockey and baseball. PAL even sponsors programs for the physically and mentally disabled.

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*"Our Greatest Resource—
Our Youth"*

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Who Operates PAL?

THE organization is controlled by a board of directors who are Fort Wayne and Allen County police officers, along with at least one citizen, and several honorary members who can be police officers, but not necessarily. The directors make all major decisions in PAL, and institute guidelines for the nearly 150 police officer and citizen volunteers in various programs.

PAL operates some type of program in every area of Fort Wayne, and in many parts of Allen County. Although most applicants are drawn from from the immediate Fort Wayne area, many youths are attracted to PAL from outside Allen County. Over the years the Fort Wayne PAL has grown to become a model for other programs in Indiana, Ohio and Michigan, who wish to start their own PAL groups.

Who Supports PAL Financially?

THIS subject is always important to a non-profit organization, and especially for PAL, because it is completely independent and does not belong to the United Way or any similar source that offers support. PAL is not tax-funded, and the only grants it receives is for building improvements. The organization simply relies on contributions from the citizens and corporations of Fort Wayne and Allen County. An annual variety show is conducted each year, where citizens are asked to purchase tickets, and the organization has several events where "PAL Booster" decals are offered for \$1.00 donations. Needless to say, PAL is concerned because of so many organizations now solicit money from the public - unlike in the 1960's and 1970's - when PAL and just a few others solicited in the manner. Our concern is that the "charitable pie" gets bigger, but the slices

are getting smaller.

BUT, PAL is unique in that it pays no salaries and all the proceeds, which never exceed \$80,000. per year, go directly into the programs. Another unique feature, is that PAL still charges nothing to the enrollee, with the exception of group pictures, personal items and insurance, and even then it is voluntary. For example if a family cannot afford these small expenses, all they have to do is tell a PAL official - in confidence - and there is no cost to the family. Also, in respect to large families, PAL only asks for a donation from the family for one child enrolled, not two or three and sometimes more.

BECAUSE of continued community support is the lifeblood for PAL, a broad base of assistance from individuals and the business community is, and continues to be, vitally necessary for the survival of the organization.

Generations of PAL Kids

SINCE its founding in 1958, the Fort Wayne Police Athletic League has overcome many obstacles on it way to becoming a familiar household name. Nearly every Fort Wayne citizen recognizes the name, "PAL", today. This was not the case, of course, in 1958, and the kids who played during first few years now enjoy watching their sons and daughters participate in sports, just as they, themselves, enjoyed PAL many years ago. Word-of-mouth is the reason PAL exists today, since thousands of youngsters have participated in PAL since 1958, and have passed the word to the younger generations.

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Dailey Field - Kids Rendezvous

IT was just another field at the edge of Fort Wayne in 1958. Located on West Jefferson - a site now occupied by Allen County Motors. It was a place where hundreds of youngsters played a special brand of baseball for over one decade.

IN early 1958 PAL didn't have a site to start a baseball program, but one resourceful policeman contacted Mr. L.W. Dailey, Sr., a local contractor, and he generously allowed PAL to construct a baseball diamond on land that he owned. Of course, it was named, "Dailey Field." It was finished in time for a Spring enrollment, and just as soon as school let-out in May, nearly 100 kids came to this first PAL facility and played spirited baseball through the Summer months of 1958. What made Dailey Field unique was its location. This site drew kids from the Main Street neighborhoods, the Catalpa Street neighborhoods and from the more affluent areas South of Jefferson. But, most of the kids came down to Dailey Field from an area once called, "Hungry Hill", a large area starting from Spring Street, South.

THE place was literally a melting pot that saw kids from a cross-section of cultures and race come together for a common purpose. There were kids from every ethnic group, but they all had one thing in common - All were just kids eager to play baseball. A few even were physically disabled, but they were welcomed by all, and competed very well.

IT was a Summer that the kids and cops would remember. That simple program. PAL's first. One that can still be vividly recalled. An experience that shaped the PAL philosophy that prevails to this day.

PAL Expands To Winter Months

IN the Fall of 1958 and early Winter of 1959, PAL decided it could not hibernate in the cold seasons. A boxing program was started in a building at the corner of Lewis and Calhoun Streets. Also, public school gyms were rented and many former PAL baseball players turned out for the game of basketball. The organization kept expanding both programs for the next several seasons.

A Home For Indoor Activities Needed

AFTER a few years of renting facilities for its indoor sports, it was felt by the police officers of PAL that a building to house these activities was needed. A ways and means committee was formed, to find a way to fund the project and a place to locate it. The site was found, thanks to the local FOP. They leased ground to PAL on Olladale Drive, adjacent to the FOP lodge, for \$1.00 per year, for 99 years. A fund drive commenced in 1960, and local contractors assisted in planning the project.

IT took several years of building the new PAL Youth Center, since off-duty police officers and citizen volunteers did all the labor, and materials were purchased as money became available. This construction took place all-year around, and through two very severe Winters, but finally, in 1966 the building was completed - just in time for the basketball program to move in.

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Dailey Field Closed - Football Started

SADLY, in 1969, Mr. Dailey died, and the heirs sold the ground, where the PAL baseball facility stood, to Allen County Motors. Ten years of memories for PAL kids still remain, and the only remaining object still standing, where Dailey Field once was, is an old Oak Tree, now gnarled and acorns but few, can be seen from the road. Hundreds of kids, parents and coaches once shaded themselves under the great umbrella of the Oak, and many picnics were once spread under its gracious branches. Some say, while passing near, that they can still hear the cracks of the wooden bats - and the cheers of the players!

THE death of PAL's old baseball field brought life to a new sport in PAL's curriculum. In the Fall of 1969, PAL Football was born. This program started with four teams, and a long waiting list to enroll. Early games were played in Fort Wayne parks, but after expanding the program, the games are played on regulation football fields at middle and high schools.

SINCE 1969, PAL Football has become the programs most successful endeavor. Today, PAL has ten varsity teams and ten junior varsity teams. All games are officiated by IHSAA officials, and high school rules of the game prevail - amended to fit the age group, which is 9 thru 12. Many outstanding players have been produced by PAL Football, and each year high school teams are filled with former PAL players. Most notable of the PAL graduates is Rod Woodson, an All-State at Snider High School, an All-American at Purdue University and an All-Pro in the NFL.

PAL Proud To Serve The Community

PAL is proud of its long service to the community, and police officers and citizen volunteers, numbered in the the hundreds, are thankful to have been able to associate with the boys and girls who have participated in the many programs.

THE PAL officials feel a strong mandate to continue the Police Athletic League for as long as the organization is accepted in the Fort Wayne Community. The great lessons will continue. Lessons shared by police officers, citizen volunteers and the youth they are proud to serve. Perhaps PAL has made a difference. If just a little - it was well worth a tremendous and enjoyable effort!

WRITTEN BY JOHN R. NELSON -
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OFFICER AND ONE OF THE
FOUNDERS OF PAL..

NELSON HAS BEEN THE PAL
ADMINISTRATOR SINCE 1961

