

The Beckum-Stapleton Little League Project

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INTRODUCTION

The Beckum-Stapleton Little League Project represents a multi-institutional partnership dedicated to documenting the history and significance of the Beckum-Stapleton Little League, the oldest African American little league outside of the South. Based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the league was established in 1964 and has been a community-based youth-baseball organization that operates to this day.



Current Beckum-Stapleton Little League Members Proudly Showing-off Their Trophies and New Baseball Gear., @beckumstapleton_lilme (Instagram, September 27, 2022), https://www.instagram.com/p/CjA2WY0u0ub/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet.

Over the decades, the league has not only developed into an institution that engenders community, but also an inter-generational social network that has been a mainstay for many in the central city's African American communities. It is for these reasons that we desire to use this project to elevate the league's visibility and further document their impact.

METHODOLOGY

Oral Histories:

- In-person and virtual interviews
- Audio and video recordings
- Primary and secondary accounts

Community Engagement:

- Bi-directional decision making
- Mutually beneficial terms
- Equal representation of all parties
- Lengthy MOU process
- Establishing trusted relationships

Additional Materials:

- Interpretive signage
- Academic publications
- Academic programming

SPOTLIGHT: MR. BECKUM

*"The kids also liked to know that I got them—they came [and thought that folks] just didn't care about them ... I had to prove that's not true. We **do** care. We had to do something to let them know that we **do** care about them." – James Beckum, 2022*



Bill Glauber, Mr. Beckum Standing in Front of the New James W. Beckum Park Scoreboard., Official Dedication of James W. Beckum Park Takes Place Saturday: A Field of Dreams Has Become a Reality (milwaukee journal sentinel, May 3, 2013), <https://tinyurl.com/4264y2ks>.

James W. Beckum was born in 1929 on a farm in Villa Ridge, Illinois. Mr. Beckum was one of seven children; however, he and his older brother were the only two Beckum children who went on to pursue baseball on a larger scale.

After serving for two years in the US Marine Corps, Mr. Beckum re-joined the St. Louis Giants, a Negro League team based in Missouri, and played with them for two years. Then in 1956, he moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and got a job as one of the first black employees at Ladish Co. He remained an employee there until he retired in 1990.

All the while, Mr. Beckum had been working alongside other community members toward building the Beckum-Stapleton Little League—one of the first organized sports in the entire city of Milwaukee.

Eager to see the league and its participants prosper, the founder, Mr. Beckum, still resides in Milwaukee at the age of 94; wherefore, this project seeks to recognize and interpret his legacy, particularly the impact of the Beckum-Stapleton Little League on the surrounding communities. Over the decades, the league has not only developed into an institution that engenders community, but also an inter-generational social network that has been a mainstay for many in the central city's African American communities. It is for these reasons that we desire to elevate the league's visibility and further document their impact.

B-SLL BACKGROUND

Highly venerated and indispensable, the B-SLL has been a vital recreational organization since its founding in 1965. Former Negro Leagues baseball player, James W. Beckum, was approached in 1964 by a local pastor who requested Mr. Beckum coordinate an activity for children living in the inner-city of Milwaukee, WI to participate in. Mr. Beckum got the league underway with the help of more than four different churches in addition to County League Manager, Chuck Stapleton, who would go on to volunteer as the league's safety officer. Whereby, the little league got its name: the Beckum-Stapleton Little League.

For over fifty years, the league has offered support and refuge to a wide-range of underserved and resource-deficient neighborhoods; thus, providing an imperative and life-long sense of community to current league members and alumna alike.

FUTURE WORK

In the interest of preserving the B-SLL and promoting its enduring impact on Milwaukeeans of all backgrounds, there are several civic relationships/partnerships that must be established. Hence, engaging elected officials on city, county, and state levels is critical to procuring the necessary supports and allowances to ensure said interests are fulfilled.

Additional objectives consist of:

- Project promotion in a wide range of settings
- Heightening community engagement
- Further establishing various avenues dedicated to commemorating the league

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