



Walter Johnson

April 4, 2012

The first African American to serve on the Toledo Mud Hens board of directors, who learned his love of the game at his mother's knee, Walter E. Johnson died April 4 in his South Toledo home. He was 81.

The cause was unknown, his wife, Lucille, said. He used a wheelchair after a fall about four years ago. He and his wife continued to attend ballgames and concerts.

He was appointed to the Mud Hens' board in 1999. He was named to the advisory board a decade earlier at the invitation of Gene Cook, the team general manager and longtime Toledo councilman who noticed that Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were regulars at Mud Hens games.

"That was his passion, the ballpark," his wife said.

The day he died was the first game of the year, the April 4 exhibition against the Tigers. The Hens opened with a moment of silence in his honor as his picture was shown on the video board. The flag was at half staff in honor of his military service.

"We thought it would be appropriate to let his family know we would be missing him sorely," said Joe Napoli, Mud Hens general manager.

Board chairman Mike Miller said: "We enjoyed the history he had with the ball club. His perspective was always appreciated."

Mr. Johnson's late mother, Lola Ollison, drew him to what became Ned Skeldon Stadium in the early days of the Mud Hens' revival. She had followed Negro League teams that barnstormed through their Prescott, Ark.,

hometown. And when the family moved to Toledo in the 1940s, she soon found her way to the Mud Hens' longtime home, Swayne Field.

"She loved baseball, and he loved it too," his wife said.

He retired in the late 1990s from the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services, where for 15 years he helped veterans find work. A retired Army sergeant major, he served from the late 1940s to the late '60s, including stints stateside and in Germany and tours of duty during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

He was a member of Buddy Frankowski VFW Post 5530.

He was born July 24, 1930, in Texarkana, Ark. He graduated from high school in 1946 in Prescott, Ark., and joined his mother in Toledo. He attended the University of Toledo before he joined the Army. He was in San Francisco, getting ready to go overseas, when he met his wife's famous uncle, Art Tatum, the Toledo-born jazz piano great. The pianist played a medley for his nephew-in-law.

The Johnsons' daughter, Deborah, died in 1972 of an intestinal condition. She was 22.

Surviving is his wife, Lucille, whom he married July 27, 1949.

Visitation will be from 4-7 p.m. Thursday in the Dale-Riggs Funeral Home Chapel, with wake services at 10 a.m. Friday in the mortuary. Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. Friday in Grace Presbyterian Church, where he was an elder.

Contact Blade staff writer Mark Zaborney at:

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or 419-724-6182.

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Tribute Wall

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“ *Walt was well loved and will be long missed and remembered. He deserves to be happy in heaven. The tribute at the Mud Hens was really very nice and well earned.*

don & martie moline - April 12, 2012 at 01:26 PM

DM

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don & martie moline - April 12, 2012 at 01:24 PM