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Woodbridge Essay Contest
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The History of Sports and Recreational Activities in Woodbridge

Woodbridge Township has changed in many ways since the early 1900's. However, there are some things that have not changed, and will forever be an important part of our history, and they are sports and recreational activities. In Woodbridge, residents have witnessed countless times when our athletes have made headlines. But not all headlines were about the accomplishments of sports teams. In fact, the archived newspapers from the early 1900s prove that recreational activities were also very popular. Some activities that people were involved in throughout the early 1900's were bowling, basketball, softball, going to the theatre, going to dances, and many more activities that were, and some still are, done for enjoyment and athletic purposes.

Firstly, basketball is a sport in Woodbridge that made many, many headlines in newspapers. People would gather at the different schools' gyms to watch the teams go at it and play this well-known sport. However, according to the January 12, 1934 edition of the Woodbridge Leader, the Fords Firemen basketball team not only played a basketball game, but also hosted a "Ladies Night" dance afterward. The women that attended the game and the dance didn't have to pay any admission. The purpose of this was for the firemen to "entertain the ladies." This had clearly never been done before at the time, because even the newspaper states that "the Fords Firemen will initiate a *new feature* in the sports' field in this vicinity tonight when they will hold a Ladies night" dance and basketball game at the Number 14 school, which is known today as the Ford Avenue school. This event doubles as a sporting event and a

recreational activity which I'm sure many Woodbridge residents enjoyed, including the basketball players. Although basketball was indeed a popular sport, there are many more that people reveled in at the time.

Unlike basketball, bowling wasn't that popular of a sport, but people still went out to play and support teams. Woodbridge residents could go bowling or watch bowling games at the Craftsman's Club, formerly located on Green Street. As per the January 16, 1931 issue of The Woodbridge Leader, one particular game when the Parish House played against the Knights of Columbus, was intense. The paper even read, "a snappy game was bowled between the Parish House and the Knights of Columbus." With a total score of 946 points, the Parish House won. But it were games such as this that got Woodbridge residents jumping out of their seats.

During the early 1900's, girls rarely played any sports because it was unheard of. However, the Woodbridge Alley Hawks girls' softball team existed. Although their appearance was made in the September 22, 1939 issue of the Woodbridge Independent, they rarely made any more headlines, unfortunately. According to the newspaper, the Alley Hawks were playing the Iselin Red Devils in the first of three championship games. It even reads how "the Woodbridge Alley Hawks plastered the Iselin Red Devils 16 to 2, in the first of the three game championship." During the 1900's - 1950's, and even today, softball was seen as a girls' sport. Well, in 1939, the Hopelawn Firemen had their own mens' softball league as well. Also in the same September 22, 1939 edition of the Woodbridge Independent, this men's softball league "gave the other teams in the township firemen's softball league plenty of competition." So, even though softball wasn't as popular as other sports, the township made sure to have some teams

whether you were playing it professionally for your school, or just recreationally like the firemen's team.

Although Woodbridge has had many sports teams in the past, it has also hosted recreational activities for residents throughout the early 1900's. Woodbridge used to have many theatres throughout the township, one of them being the State Theatre, which was located on Main Street. The State Theatre opened for business in 1927, however it was demolished during the 1980's in order to, unfortunately, open a QuickCheck store. During its days of operation, one could go there to watch many shows, or even get an opportunity to be casted in one! According to the September 22, 1939 issue of the Woodbridge Independent, the plays "Tarzan Finds a Son" plus "The Kid From Texas" were playing at the theatre that September. Even though the State Theatre, and other theatres that were located in Woodbridge, aren't in operation anymore, we can still recall when Woodbridge residents would go there to have a good time.

As I have mentioned before, some of Woodbridge's athletes have made headlines in newspapers because of their remarkable talents. Well, Harding Peterson was one of those well-known athletes, who was born right here in Woodbridge in 1929. Peterson attended Woodbridge High School, but lived in Fords. He was a catcher for the Woodbridge High School baseball team, and went so far as to make it to the Major Leagues, where he played for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Peterson received All-American Honors while playing baseball for Rutgers University. Harding's Major League career came to a tragic end when, in 1956, a dramatic collision at home plate caused him to fracture his throwing arm. Although Harding Peterson's Major League Baseball career came to an abrupt and unfortunate end, he made Woodbridge residents proud by his performance.

In conclusion, Woodbridge was, and still is, a township where sports and recreational activities thrive. There are many things to do here that accommodate everyone's interests. Dating all the way back from even before the early 1900's, Woodbridge residents have always found something to keep themselves occupied. Whether you are interested in sports, music, or dancing, you, as well as our past citizens, will never become bored in Woodbridge.