

Rochester Hispanic Youth Baseball League, Inc., Program History

(Updated 05/17/06 by Eugenio Cotto, Jr., RHYBL Founder/Transition Advisor)

In the winter of 1994, I was introduced to a place called "La Vida Center" that was located on North Clinton Avenue on our city's northeast side. There I met many young adults, primarily Hispanic, where we began a group called "Youth for Tomorrow". We would have teen dances and meetings in a drug, alcohol and smoke free environment. Many of them followed us, as I received help from some volunteer adult friends from "La Vida" for activities at Benjamin Franklin High School in the summer of 1995 where we would play softball, boys and girls, for endless hours. Mind you that the majority of these kids that participated spent more time in the street than any where else.

One day as we were approaching the final months of warm weather that year (1995) we had as many as 30 youths with us and one of them asked "Why is it that we do not have a baseball league where we can play close to home?" And I jumped at the opportunity, because I saw the need to engage our Hispanic kids in something that they like to do, can be a part of, be proud of, and something that they could call their own. So my answer to that young adult was "Next year you will have a league to play in; right here at Franklin"; not knowing the magnitude of the impact that was going to be created the following year to the participating youth and their families, not to mention coaches, sponsors and community people that came together to make it happen..

We began with a preliminary proposal in September 1995 where 19 community people presented themselves in support of this effort. More meetings followed thereafter, by a small group of believers that believed that this project could be successful; so we pursued the necessary needs to accomplish the task.

After many disappointments in putting things in place, including not having our uniforms ready for inauguration day, we officially started, on a first Saturday of June of 1996, what is now known as "*The Rochester Hispanic Youth Baseball League*". A total of 46 games were played that season including play-offs.

Over 120 youths between the ages of nine through 16 participated, of which 117 officially ended the season on active rosters including: girls, Afro-Americans, an Anglo, an Italian, a Laotian not to mention the diverse mix of Hispanics from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Mexico, a Cuban and others made this league what it was set out to be in filling a much needed gap in our inner-city existing ball parks for recreation in the summer months. And at the same time addressing some of their emotional needs through hearing testimonies in reference to how positive relationships were building amongst participants, coaches and parents.

In spite of ups and downs of the experiences that we had, we saw the joy of a successfully completed season in the eyes of these young people when they came to receive their awards at *their* banquet, not to mention the enthusiasm of the parents and all present including our own Hon. Mayor Johnson.

Now it's on to 1997 and we challenged ourselves to engage more youth and establish measurements to achieve even better greatness for them, their families and our community. 220 youths, between the ages of seven to 16, participated on a total of 17 teams with the aid of over 40 volunteers; made this season a success where over 100 games were played at six sites (nine ball fields) in the inner-city. Over 160 youths with family members, volunteers, sponsors, umpires and community persons came to receive the awards for their 1997 efforts and triumphs. Over 400 attended our year-end event.

A youth program RFP was submitted to Rochester City Council for the 1997 season. They approved funding, but we did not start to receive it until August 1997, when our season was preparing for post-season play. One of our main objectives, through the City and RSCD's aid, is to acquire academic information of some of our participants in the effort to promote assistance to those in need or at-risk through referrals. However, because of the funding dates, the monies will be used towards the 1998 season. These funds only represent about 40% of our total operating budget for the 1998 season.

In the 1998 and through 2002, we have averaged approximately 140 - 150 youths per season. We continued our efforts to expand the league and promote discipline standards throughout the program in order to enrich the citizenship and academic quality of our player participants with the aid of their families, volunteers and community at large in the coming season 2003. Also; with the support of such entities as QUAD-A for Kids (Rochester Area Community Foundation), Baseball Tomorrow Fund (Major League Baseball and Major League Players Association) we hope to continue in our endeavors.

In 2003 we had approximately 158 players on 14 teams and that ballooned into 238 players on 19 teams in 2004, not to mention the participation of Genesee Valley and South Side Little Leagues which added another five teams to our itineraries of game. During the end of 2003 to 2004 we acquired our Non-for-profit 501(c) 3 status. Over 120 games were played during that season. With the above mentioned league sponsors the NYS Senate has also supplied us with funding to increase our efforts. In 2005 we continued with inter-league play with 25 teams participated of which 20 teams and 250 participants were ours. Over 140 games were played that year. Currently we are in the pursuit of converting one of our ball fields into a Little League venue. As planning continues, eleventh tenth year of play is rapidly approaching us in 2006.