

Boosters Continues Bottle and Can Drive

By Aline Weiller

December 16, 2011 (WESTON, CT) -- When reflecting on teens in the 80s, one may envision those sporting acid-washed jeans, listening to Flock of Seagulls or perhaps, Madonna, on their Sony Walkman. That may be so, but in Weston, high school team members could also be spotted collecting bottles and cans at the Onion Barn circa 1981. The redemption initiative was the brainchild of long-time resident and uber Westonite, Jim Schaper, and has raised approximately \$200,000 to date, for varied high school sports programs.

Jim Schaper and his wife, Adele, have lived in town since 1959 and all four of their children graduated from Weston High School. During the early 1980s, their two youngest, Amanda and Peter, were number one-ranked tennis players whose team needed court wind screens, ball hoppers, practice balls and team t-shirts. Both an avid tennis player and concerned parent, Schaper said, "I wanted to raise money for the kids." In an effort to secure these much-needed items, Mr. Schaper attended a Boosters meeting and proposed the teens collect bottles and cans weekly to raise monies. His suggestion coincided with the State of Connecticut's new bottle and can redemption program. "They liked my idea so much, they appointed me project manager," reflected Mr. Schaper. And so began the bottle and can drive, a Boosters Club hallmark, that has spanned three decades.

Having been part of the Kiwanis Club's restoration of the Onion Barn, he decided it would make an ideal site for the drive and obtained the needed approval. It was at the Onion Barn, a town icon on Weston Road, that players from high school teams would gather weekly, from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon, to collect bags of bottles and cans. A team rotation was scheduled and the program follows this model today. "We are forever thankful to Jim Schaper for the redemption project. It has been a steadfast fund-raiser for the Club and we encourage residents to think of us on Saturday mornings. Instead of filling their blue recycling bins, the sports teams can greatly benefit from their tax-deductible bottle and can donations. We earn \$12 per bag and it really adds up," said Boosters Club President, Dawn Egan. Current bottle and can chairman, Ira Saferstein, added, "This is a great community service activity for the kids that raises important funds for the Boosters." Though the teens collect on Saturdays, bottles and cans can be dropped off in the bin behind the Onion Barn at any time.

In order to raise awareness for his Boosters initiative, Jim wrote letters to the editor of The Weston Forum and set out collection boxes with promotional decals. Schaper even created and placed catchy signs in the center of town that read "Cans and bottles, bottles and cans, give 'em to the Booster's fans." In addition, Mr. Schaper posted signs at local retail outlets, asking customers to drop off their recyclables at the Onion Barn instead.

These were not the last of Mr. Schaper's signs, in fact, he has since founded "Schaper's Country Signs," his own sign-making business. He prefers to work with cedar and uses certain designs, based on locale. Schaper gives kudos to his wife, an artist, who inspires the creativity involved in his craft. Much of his work can be seen around town, such as the "Happy Holidays" sign which marks the season and hangs within the over-sized wreath on the Onion Barn. In addition, after once losing his way in Devil's Den, Schaper carved hundreds of trail signs for the Den and the Katharine Ordway preserves in Weston, an effort which garnered him the first White Oak award for his volunteerism.

Hailing from White Fish Bay, Wisconsin outside of Milwaukee, Mr. Schaper was a University of Wisconsin graduate. He took a job with Ryeron Steel, was transferred to Connecticut in 1956, and stayed with the company for thirty-seven years. Soon after, he met and married his wife and has lived on Merry Lane -- in a home they've renovated themselves, thanks to his handy woodworking skills. Since then, Jim has embraced Weston by becoming extremely active in the community. He remains a Kiwanis member and has held past posts on committees and boards at Norfield Church, The Weston Field Club, The Weston Historical Society, and the Westport-Weston YMCA Y's Men.

Though retired, Mr. Schaper stays busy with his sign business, a ski-house in Vermont, and six grandchildren. Ever dedicated, he even brings bottles and cans back from Vermont to support the Boosters Club fund-raising tradition he launched so long ago. He continues to be the program's number one advocate and still urges Weston parents to "Talk it up. Save your bottles."

The mission of the Weston High School Boosters is to support boys and girls athletics, club sports and intramurals within Weston High School. All high school teams benefit from monies raised in the form of equipment, uniforms and the like. For more information on the Boosters Club, e-mail Dawn Egan at jdweston@optonline.net or visit www.whsboosters.com.



Photo Caption: Jim Schaper (center), founder of the Boosters bottle and can project, spends time at the Onion Barn with the WHS Ski Team.

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