

# 'Mr. Softball' gets his due as East Alton-Wood River names high school field after him

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WOOD RIVER - “Mr. Softball” the late Leroy Emerick had his day on Wednesday at East Alton-Wood River’s softball field when the field was officially named for him.

Dana Emerick, Leroy's son and Oilers’ softball coach, was on hand with three siblings and other family members and an array of friends. A sign was unveiled that was donated by Budget Signs Awards & More in Wood River that said: “Leroy Emerick Field.”

East Alton-Wood River Community High School District 14 Superintendent Dr. John Pearson led the gathering before the game. In fitting fashion, the Oilers topped a tough Southwestern girls softball team 6-5 in the field commemoration contest. Leroy Emerick is a member of the Illinois Softball Hall of Fame. He was City of Wood River Parks and Recreation Director for 37 years. He was elected to the City Council and also served a term as Wood River. He was also affectionately known as “Mr. Wood River” when not on the softball fields.

He was associated with the Illinois Amateur Softball Association for 65 years and is enshrined in the ASA Hall of Fame. He also was a member of the Wood River American Legion Post for more than 50 years and served as president there. He is a member of the East Alton-Wood River Hall of Fame and was a lifelong member of the First Baptist Church of Wood River.

Leroy’s son, Dana, said he didn’t think words could describe how he felt on Tuesday, naming the field after his father.

“My dad was a doer and he just wouldn’t take no for an answer,” Dana said. “Whatever work needed to be done he would either get it done or find somebody to get it done. That is how it worked. There is an old quote that the determined create the life they want to live, while the lazy sit by and watch it idly pass away. He was the determined one that created the life he wanted to live.

“I couldn’t think of a better group of kids to share this with than these girls. They have been with the softball program since they were in the junior leagues. They have been through the whole system. After my dad passed away, they raised money for the memorial bench here at the field and brought it by my house, softball class 2018. That was an emotional day.”

Wood River Mayor Cheryl Maguire said Leroy and his wife, Helen, always had their heart in Wood River.

“Those two attended nearly every city, community or sporting event they could,” she said.

Dana recalled a memory he had as a kid, he will never forget: “I remember as a kid riding in the back of the station wagon going to softball games,” he said. “That will always probably be one of my fondest memories.”

