

Oiler Pride: Wood River Museum hosts exhibit for city's extensive sports history

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
August 9 2018 2:29 PM



WOOD RIVER – The Wood River Museum has opened a new temporary exhibit proudly displaying the sports accomplishments of Wood Riverians throughout the 20th Century.

Museum curator Jean Bruce said the exhibit took around six weeks to complete and has been finished for around two weeks. She said it would continue being open to the public through the end of September. The exhibit is adjacent to the Lewis and Clark exhibit

and promotes the East Alton Wood River Oilers sports teams, including basketball, baseball, wrestling and swimming as well as other sports in which students of that high school have participated.

Among the display items are Oiler alumni who participated in major league sports such as Ken Retzer, who played for the Washington Senators. A photo of Retzer shaking hands with then U.S. President John F. Kennedy was on display in the exhibit.

NBA All-Star Harry Gallatin was also commemorated in the exhibit, despite the fact he was transferred to Roxana High School during his sophomore year from Wood River High School. He was in fact a Wood River native, having lived on 10th Street.

Another man whose name is tied to another nearby municipality is on display for his athletic prowess as well. East Alton Mayor Joe Silkwood played minor league ball for the St. Louis Cardinals System and was even commemorated in the St. Louis Amateur Baseball Hall of Fame on April 13, 2017. Silkwood signed to the Cardinals in 1982 as a free agent and played minor league through AA for three years.



“I would have loved to have seen him play,” Bruce said. “He's real humble about it and doesn't talk about it much now, but he was great in his day.”

The Wood River Museum is located at 40 West Ferguson Avenue in Wood River. It is funded by community donations and fund-raising, including sales of its calendar. This year's calendar theme is a collection of the iconic Sears catalog homes originally constructed and purchased by workers at the then-Standard Oil refinery. Next year's theme will be the 70th anniversary of the Wood River tornado of 1949.

The museum also has a miniature rendering of the soon-to-be demolished Wood River Aquatic Center. That center was built on the foundation of what was once the largest pool in the country. It was originally built and dedicated to the city by the Standard Oil Company and Rockefeller Foundation.



[Steven Spencer also contributed to this story.](#)