

# An Act Of Thanksgiving Kindness: Man Gets His Softball Hall Of Fame Ring Back

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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ALTON - In a very heartfelt move, Mike Drake and a friend decided to make a former slow-pitch softball star's Thanksgiving by returning his National Hall Of Fame ring.



On Wednesday afternoon, Drake went to Alton Memorial Rehabilitation Center (formerly Eunice Smith Nursing Home) in Alton to present the ring to the Alton slow-pitch softball phenom - John Meeden. Mike and John played together on the legendary

Alton Bucks squad. Drake is a former Alton Parks and Recreation Director and also a banking administrator.

Drake had contacted the National Slow-Pitch Softball Hall Of Fame and he was willing to pay for a replica of the ring, but the organization in another act of kindness sent him a replica of one of Meeden's rings free of charge. Meeden had his previous rings and memorabilia stolen from his Alton residence.

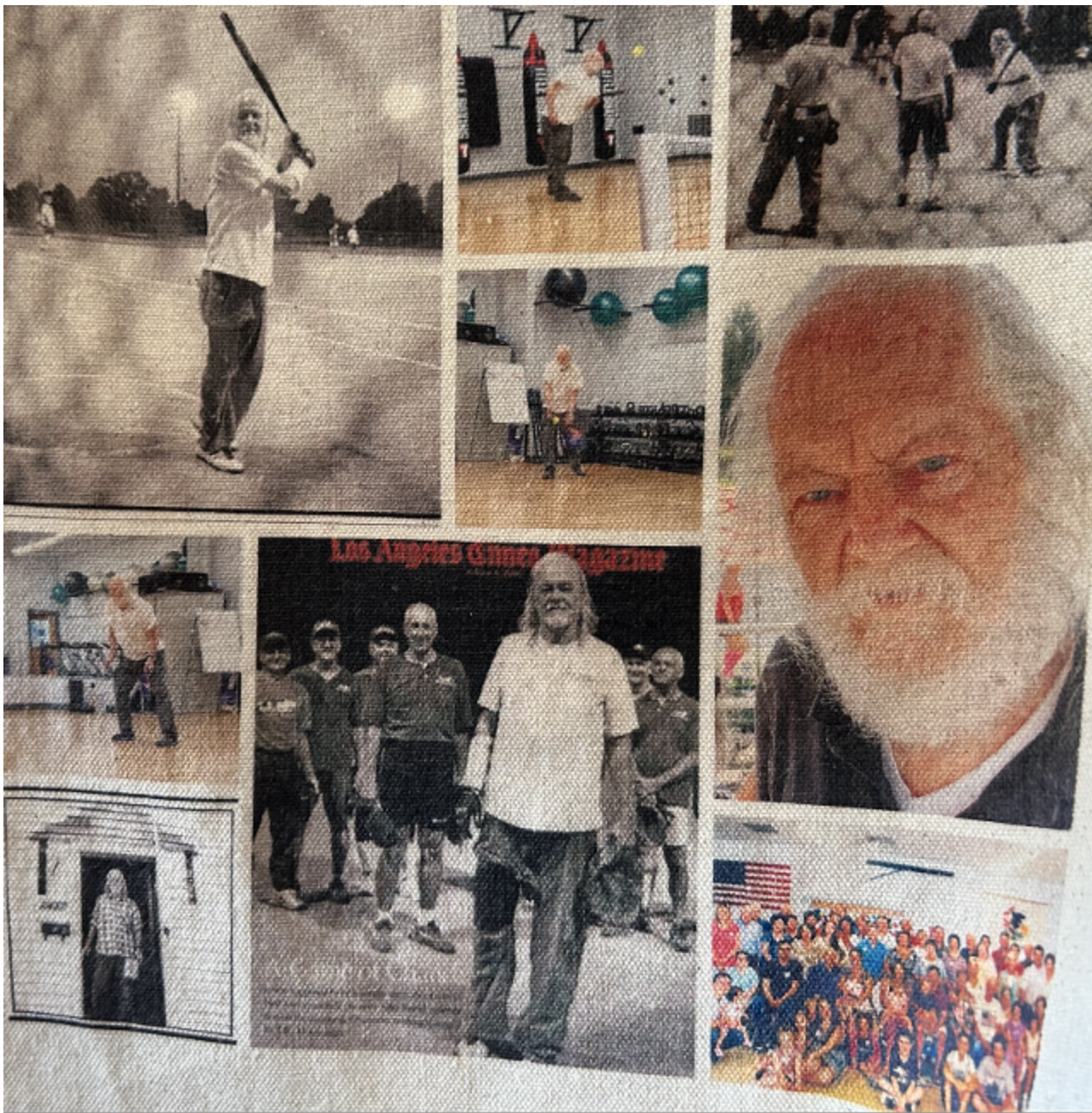
Drake said in the spirit of Thanksgiving, he couldn't wait to return the National Hall of Fame softball ring to John.

"John is such a nice guy, he has never done anything but good," Drake added. "And for him to get his ring stolen it was such an awful thing. When Wayne Dunlap called me and told me about what happened, he and I discussed finding a ring and buying it for John. I called the Softball Hall of Fame first and they were so cooperative and said they would replace it for free. For them to mail it directly to me and let me deliver it also was something special."

Drake described John as "very fast with a great bat and good arm."

"He had great bat speed and was a good outfielder," Drake said. "He was left-handed. He played outfield for the Bucks 1972-1973 but John wanted to play shortstop and thought he would make a good shortstop. He dug his heels in and our softball team was the real deal and our manager said hate to see you go but you are not going to play shortstop for us. I played in a 50-and-over league and John was 12 years older than me acting like he was 21 years old. I bet he played into his 70s."





If John was working evenings he would make sure to take dinner hour from Colonial Bakery with a bat, ball glove and spikes because the Bucks played close by. John was married for a while, Drake said, but is now divorced and he and his previous wife had two children together.

John just turned 82 years old and was born in 1941. He has spent time at Eunice Smith because he has kidney issues and diabetes. He is supposed to leave Saturday, Drake said.

Drake is in the Softball Hall of Fame on three different teams - Kohler's, the Bucks and St. Mary's.

Meeden said he was extremely thankful for the gesture that Drake coordinated to get his special ring back.

He said he was 15 when he tried out for the Cardinals and he also tried out for the Minnesota Twins and when he did felt something in his elbow go bad. Thankfully over time, the elbow healed.

He said he had to throw underhanded from shortstop for a while because of the injury.

“I liked playing softball a lot when I played shortstop,” he added.

John played until he was about 70 years old and he is 82 now.

“I remember tagging up on second and going home on a sacrifice fly once or twice,” he said. “I did go to Alton High. I had a paper route that was seven days a week and had to carry Morning Globe, Post-Dispatch, Alton Telegraph at night from 12 to 17, so I wasn't able to be on Alton sports teams.”

Drake said John often ran through the stop signs at third by the coach and scorched to home plate when on base.

“I usually batted almost .800 most of the time, thought had bad tournament if batted .700,” John said.

Most of John's singles were turned into doubles, Drake said.

“When he got on base and got his legs going, he ran like a deer,” he added.

To make the entire day, John walked Drake out with his walker. He turned and said watch this and walked faster with the walker than anyone had seen in quite some time at Eunice Smith. He still has the speed even though he is 82 years old.

This Thanksgiving Day, thanks to Drake and his friend and the softball association, John was able to once again proudly wear his treasured Hall of Fame ring on his finger while he gobbled on some delicious Alton Memorial Rehabilitation turkey.