

# 1111 Echoes

Spring 2001

A newsletter from the R. I. Reds Heritage Society

## Team Members

*At the Reunion Barbecue, you may meet some of these former players who are charter members of the R. I. Reds Heritage Society:*

Stan Baluik	Aldo Guidolin
Jimmy Bartlett	Ivan Irwin
Bob Beckett	Eddie Kachur
Harvey Bennett	George Keeling
Al Bentley	Adam Keller
Serge Boudreault	Paul Larivee
Johnny Bower	Bob Leduc
Ross Brooks	Ed MacQueen
Ray Clearwater	Moe Mantha
Bruce Cline	Gil Mayer
Dave Creighton	Don McKenney
Ray Cyr	Harry Pidhirny
Buzzy Deschamps	Dan Poliziani
Bo Elik	Bob Robertson
Ferny Flaman	Ray Ross
Marty Gateman	Chuck Scherza
Eddie Giacomini	John Sleaver
Tony Goegan	Allan Soares

### *Former executives and employees:*

Tom Army	Jon Lappin
Bill Castro	Lucille (Pieri) Martin
Larry Catone	Frank McClarnon
Vin Cimini	Tom McDonough
Buster Clegg	Mike Pappas
George Patrick Duffy	Bob Paquette
Peter Demers	Bob Paquette, Jr.
George German	Louis A. Pieri
Mike Gilbert	George Sage
Eddie Ellsworth	Bob Tiernan
Les Keats	Tom Woodcock

### *Spouses and children:*

Frances Branigan	Kelly McAvoy
Barry Crawford	Shirley Toppazzini
Doreen McAvoy	

## Reunion Barbecue set for Sunday, July 29

Keep your skates sharp, your stick down and your head up for Sunday, July 29<sup>th</sup>. That's when the R. I. Reds Heritage Society will hold its first reunion for our 243 members and their guests. The place: scenic Goddard State Park, East Greenwich, RI. The time: noon 'till dusk.

Chairs and tables will be provided. Don't worry about rain; Goddard has a wonderful indoor facility...just in case.

The barbecue will offer a choice of steak or chicken (not R. I. Reds), salads, vegetables, deserts, soft drinks, plus music from the '50s and '60s. The experience: priceless. The cost: only \$25.00 per person (children 6-12, \$10.00; under age 6, free).

Activities available will include golf, horseback riding (hockey rodeo), beach walking, salt-water fishing, a "bocce" tournament, raffles and prizes, and other surprises. Golf, horseback riding and liquid spirits are available at nominal "pay as you go" tariffs. Story telling (with exaggeration expected) will be included at no extra charge.

**If you're a former player, we're counting on you to come.** We have personally talked with each of you over the last 8 months and know everyone would like to see you again. If you're an old-time or new fan, come meet the players who really made the game of hockey so popular here in Rhode Island.

To save your spot for this memorable reunion, please complete the enclosed reservation form. Help make this the best reunion ever by having **your reservation form to us by July 1, 2001.**

We are looking forward to meeting everyone at Goddard Park on Sunday, July 29, starting at noon. Let's "Roll out the Barrel!"

Regards to all from the R.I. Reds Founders Committee:

*Tom Army, Arnold Bailey, Buster Clegg, George Patrick Duffy, Frank Galasso, Tom McDonough and Billy Vigeant*

P.S. Any gifts donated for our raffle will be appreciated. If you feel so inclined, please note your intentions on the reservation form. Thank you.



**Familiar faces we hope to see at the Reds Reunion.**

*Top from left: Jeanne Flaman, Tom Army, George Patrick Duffy, Mike Pappas, Chuck Scherza and Ferny Flaman. Bottom from left: Bobby Leduc, Buster Clegg and Les Keats. All pictured are former members of the Reds family.*



# Final Tributes to "Topper" By George Patrick Duffy for *The Times*

NORTH PROVIDENCE - Zellio "The Topper" Toppazzini, the ex-Rhode Island Reds hockey great who thrilled fans at the old R.I. Auditorium, died Sunday, April 1st, at age 71.

A tall, smooth skater with powerful strides and a knack for putting the puck past opposing goalkeepers, Toppazzini succumbed after a long and gallant fight against cancer.

He is survived by his wife of many years, Shirley, daughters Katherine, Nancy and Patricia, sons Michael and Hugh, plus 10 grandchildren.

Born in Copper Cliff, Ontario on January 5, 1930, Zel, as his wife and friends called him, began his professional career in 1948 with the Hershey Bears of the American Hockey League. However, it was in that same AHL, as a fixture with the Providence Reds, known otherwise to thousands of hockey fans as the Rhode Island Reds, that Toppazzini starred.

"Topper's" last year with the Reds was in 1964 but it was his play in the 1955-1956 season that made him a household name. Starring on right wing, Toppazzini led the Reds to the Calder Cup and won the scoring title.

In 64 games, Zello scored 42 goals, added 71 assists for 113 points to win the AHL scoring title, a remarkable fete in those long gone years of pro hockey at the old rink on North Main Street in Providence, a long slap shot from the Pawtucket line. Those were the days when the Reds were the best show in town.

When the '55-'56 season and playoffs were history, Toppazzini was a first team All-Star at right wing along with teammates Camille Henry (left wing) and Goalkeeper Johnny Bower who was named the league's Most Valuable Player.

Earlier, Toppazzini had stints in the NHL with the Boston Bruins in the 1948-49 season and then three seasons with the New York Rangers before his trade to Providence in 1952. He mostly sat the bench with both the Bruins and Rangers, which is something young players had to do when the NHL was just a six-team league.

Topper welcomed the opportunity to show off his skills at the top level of minor league hockey.

"Playing for Providence is the greatest thrill of my career," he said in a mid-1950s interview.

During my tenure as a Reds' broadcaster for almost 20 years, Toppazzini became a very dear friend of this writer. This past March 26th, just six days before he passed on, the R.I. Reds Heritage Society had its monthly luncheon at the Country Inn in Warren. "Topper," despite his illness, had sent out the invitations. As almost 20 of us had lunch, few expected the ailing Toppazzini to appear.

Waiting were former Reds' GM Buster Clegg; former hockey players Ferny Flaman, Serge Boudreault, Bobby Leduc, Allan Soares and Pawtucket's Chuck Scherza, a member of the Reds for 10 years. Tom Army, whose dad, George, was the Providence trainer for 40 years, joined the gathering, as did Eddie Ellsworth, former business manager.

Amazing, and showing the same wonderful personality to go with tremendous courage, he walked in with son Mike to join the gathering. Zel took time to greet everyone, smiled, stayed a while and then left, waving a soft goodbye.

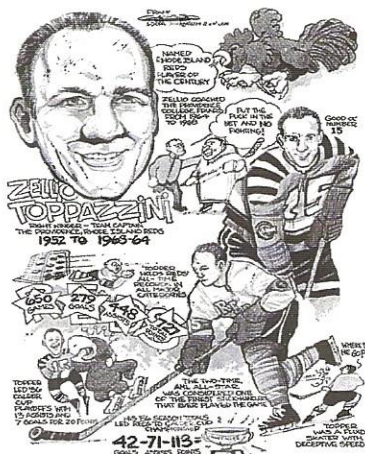
It was the last time I would see this wonderful guy. He gave me hundreds of thrills as a play-by-play announcer. I can remember the spring of 1956. The Reds had won the first two games of a best-of-seven series against the Cleveland Barons. The series shifted to the Barons' rink. The Reds swept the series.

At the end of the final game, I strung a line from the radio booth and "Topper" skated over to be interviewed. Upset Cleveland fans showered us with popcorn boxes and other debris. As always, Toppazzini smiled, put his arm around me, and said: "Duffy, you Irish son of a gun, we have won the Cadler Cup."

He has gone but I will remember this likeable big guy for the rest of my life.

In his final months of life, Zello gathered some final honors, being inducted into the Words Unlimited Hall of Fame plus entering the R.I. Italian-American Society Hall of Fame at a ceremony at the Providence Biltmore on March 22.

He was also named the "Player of the Century" by the R.I. Reds Heritage Society.



"Farewell dear friend!"

## Credits

The above article written by George Patrick Duffy appeared in *The Times* on Monday, April 2, 2001. The publication gave permission to *1111 Echoes* to reprint it with minor editing updates. The R.I. Reds Heritage Society sincerely thanks George and *The Times* for this courtesy.

The *Providence Journal* gave permission to reproduce cartoonist Frank Galasso's rendering of the "Topper Locker" scene. Frank also provided several other of his original illustrations seen in this newsletter. Both George Patrick and Frank are members of the R.I. Reds Heritage Society's Founders Committee.



# Backchecking and Forechecking

“Backchecking and Forechecking” will be a regular feature of *1111 Echoes*. It is intended to bring readers up-to-date on the “whereabouts and goings on” of former R.I. Reds’ players and associates.

This edition features profiles of eight individuals who took a few minutes to fill out and return the questionnaire contained in the Winter 2000 edition. Please complete and return your questionnaire to be included in our next newsletter.

## Backchecking

**Stan Baluik** spent five years (1959/60-‘63/64) as an outstanding center with the Reds, noted primarily as playmaker on the famous “B-line” with Jimmy Bartlett and Pierre Brillant. In his first AHL season he earned “rookie of the year” honors with 23-37-80 in 65 games. Stan played 359 regular season and playoff games and scored 130 goals, had 257 assists for 387 points. His career point-per-game average (1.08) is second only to Zellio Toppazzini (1.12) among players with 5 or more years with the Reds.



**Serge Boudreault** played parts of six seasons (1961/62-‘67/68) as a center and left-winger in Providence. He also toiled for Baltimore and Springfield in the AHL. With the Reds he played 305 games with 45-99-144. He also was a valuable role player as a penalty killer under player-coach Ferny Flaman. After the Reds, Serge enjoyed two very productive seasons in the IHL with the Columbus Checkers of the IHL.



**Bruce Cline**, a New York Ranger farmhand, came to the Reds in 1955-56 for that glorious, unforgettable Calder Cup championship season. Though he played only three seasons in Providence, Bruce made his mark both in performance and popularity. That first season he was awarded “rookie-of-the-year” honors with 27-30-57 in 64 games. Fans remember Bruce as that “big, tiny guy” who could outfox giant defensemen. He later player brilliantly for Buffalo, Springfield and Hershey.



**Ray Cyr**, another Ranger farmhand, spent only one year with the Reds, that in 1956-57. But it was a great season for the classy, center-ice playmaker. Ray scored 23 goals and had 31 assists for 54 points in his rookie AHL season. After departing Providence, he toiled in Rochester (AHL) and ended a highly productive pro career in the Western Hockey League with Vancouver and San Francisco.



## Forechecking

Stan has been golf pro at the Kirkbrae Country Club in Lincoln, RI since his retirement from hockey and decision to live in Rhode Island in 1964. He and Marg, his wife of 43 years, have two sons, David and Daren, and a daughter Karen, plus four wonderful grandchildren. Stan continues to manage Kirkbrae in the summer but the couple travels to Florida to escape our winters. *You wimps from Canada!*

Serge also planted his roots in Rhode Island. He and his wife Katherine, who tragically died of cancer at an early age, raised two sons, Sean and Rene, who in turn have given Serge three grandchildren. Claire, his wife now of eight years, has extended his family with three stepdaughters and a stepson. He is a resident engineer for the state’s Department of Transportation and coached Cumberland High hockey for 12 years. Serge is now a scout for the Philadelphia Flyers and writes his hobbies are “golf and sex.” *Fore!*

Bruce and his wife of 47 years, Elyse, live in Drummondville, Quebec. They raised three children: Linda, Debra Lee and Allan, and today enjoy nine grandchildren. After pro hockey, Bruce became a business entrepreneur. He once owned a restaurant, was a real estate agent and insurance salesman, got into sales of sports equipment, and ran a women’s clothing store. Phew! He finally retired 3 years ago. His hobbies include golf, woodworking, stamp and coin collecting and fishing. *Bruce, keep catching those giants.*

Today, Ray and his wife Rita, married for 38 years, reside in Barrie, Ontario. It’s been a long trip from his birthplace in Campbellton, New Brunswick, to Vancouver, Providence, Rochester, Vancouver again, San Francisco and now home: Barrie. The Cyrs have six children and seven grandchildren. He is retired from the post office after many years of service. His hobbies, he writes, are fishing and grandparenting. *Diapers first, Ray.*

## Backchecking

**Ferny Flaman** is perhaps the most acclaimed defenseman ever to wear a Reds' uniform. He was player-coach and general manager from 1961-62 through '65-66 guiding the Reds to three consecutive playoff runs in the 1960s. A fearless leader, Ferny was respected by his players, opponents and fans. Prior to his Providence years, he was an outstanding defenseman for 17 seasons in the NHL with Toronto and the Boston Bruins. His career was saluted when he was inducted into the NHL "Hall of Fame" in 1990.



## Forechecking

Ferny and his wife Jeanne have always been "Bostonians" since he first played with the Bruins. Today, they still live in Westwood, Mass. Married for 43 years, they have two children, Laurie and Ferny, Jr., and four "spectacular" grandchildren. After pro hockey, Ferny coached 27 years at Northeastern University. Today, Jeanne works as a hospital volunteer and Ferny is a scout for the New Jersey Devils and he loves to play charity golf. *Except with Kent Douglas.*

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**Adam Keller** was an ever-steady, low-profile defenseman for the Reds in five seasons of play (1966/67 through '70/71). He came in a trade of Montreal farmhands; Noel Picard (famous only for his trip of Bobby Orr) went to Seattle (WHL) in exchange. Adam was a better, long-term investment for the Reds. He helped gain their first playoff spot in three seasons in 1967/68 and later captained the team. After leaving Providence, Adam played three more fine seasons with Phoenix in the WHL.



Adam and Iris, married for 36 years, now live in Boise, Idaho, headquarters of the West Coast Hockey League where he is Vice President of Hockey Operations. Prior to that he was general manager of the Phoenix Roadrunners of the WHL. Adam and Iris have one son, Brad...their pride and joy: He is a special agent for the U.S. Secret Service in San Francisco. *Nice quiet defense, Adam.*

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**Bob Leduc** entered the Reds' family in 1964/65 and played eight years through '71/72. In 528 games with the Reds he scored 135 goals and had 196 assists for 331 points. A durable left-winger, Bobby played 70 or more games in five of his eight Providence years. Following his long stint with the Reds, he played three seasons in the WHA with the Ottawa National and Toronto Toros where he took on the job as player-coach.



Bobby also decided to stay in Rhode Island and lives today in Harrisville. He and his two daughters, Michelle and Natalie, own a very successful commercial complex in North Smithfield that houses the family's hardware store, its lawn and garden center and an elegant collectibles gift shop run by his girls. Bobby's hobby is golf. *Hook, plunk, new ball.*

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**Ray Ross** was an integral part of the Reds 1955/56 season of championships--regular season and especially the Calder Cup in which he notched 4 goals and 4 assists in the team's nine games. In 7 seasons with the Reds, a left hand shot who primarily played right wing, Ray appeared in 399 games with stats of 111-125-236. Three times he scored 20 or more goals. He also played for Cleveland and Pittsburgh in the AHL.



Ray has been married to Donna for 48 years and has three children and two grandchildren. He retired recently after 27 years of service with his hometown newspaper, the *Hamilton Spectator*. His hobbies include carpentry and record collecting (LPs, CDs, etc.). We owe special thanks to this gentleman for putting us in touch with Bo Elik, Aldo Guidolin and Johnny Bower--all now members. *Like Ray, please help us contact other great Reds!*

# R. I. Auditorium or The Arena?

The old R. I. Auditorium was built in 1925 by a group of investors headed by Rhode Island native Hubert Milot. It opened at 1111 North Main Street in Providence on February 18, 1926. At that time there were only two organized professional hockey teams in the United States, the Boston Bruins and New York Rangers.

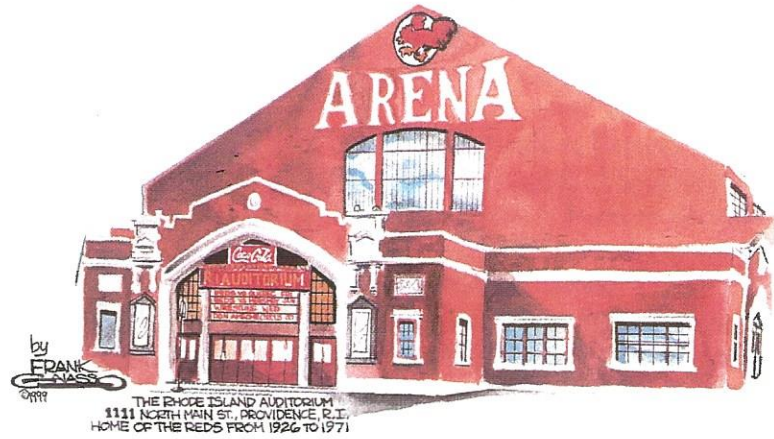
Surprisingly, when the Auditorium made its debut, it was not for a hockey game. Instead, an overflow crowd of 6,000 spectators jammed the new building to enjoy an ice skating show.

The next fall, the Providence Reds joined the Canadian-American Hockey League composed of the Philadelphia Arrows, Quebec Beavers, New Haven Eagles and Boston Bruin Cubs. Judge James E. Dooley, a leading sports figure at the famed Narragansett Race Track on the Pawtucket-East Providence line, was founder of the first Reds team.

In those early days, Jean Dubuc, a graduate of Notre Dame and former major league baseball pitcher with the Detroit Tigers, served as manager of both the Reds and the Auditorium, holding the title of president as well.

Louis A. R. Pieri, a Brown University graduate, basketball and football player, became manager of the Auditorium in 1929. Then in 1938, he and his wife Mildred, daughter Lucille and son Louis took ownership of both the building and the Reds hockey team. Pieri later became one of the most important sports figures in the United States.

For years, while the big building stood on North Main Street, it was called both R. I. Auditorium and The Arena. Photos of the



edifice show the name R. I. Auditorium, backlit by neon lights on the marquee over the main entrance. Yet high above, at the very top of the building's facade itself, was the word ARENA, painted in big, white capital letters.

The thousands of fans who flocked there for hockey, basketball, boxing and shows of ever description, called it either R. I. Auditorium or The Arena. However, dating back to its very earliest years in the 1930s, the front page of every game program called it R. I. Auditorium.

One dictionary says this about the word Arena: "An area in a Roman amphitheater used for gladiatorial combats."

Maybe that's why that grand old Providence sports landmark, plus hundreds of others around the United States, Canada and beyond, began taking on the label of "Arena."

## The Stick Boy

By Thomas "Red" McDonough



From 1953 to 1957 I had one of the most prestigious jobs in all of Rhode Island sports. I was the stick boy for the Rhode Island Reds. I learned to be part of a professional team and made some lasting and memorable friendships which have again surfaced with the establishment of the Rhode Island Reds Heritage Society.

The 1955-56 season was memorable. It was the Calder Cup year and players such as Zellio "Topper" Toppazzini, Camille Henry, Paul Larvive and Johnny Bower led the team to the championship. In my tenure I can honestly say that the players were supportive of my role.

I learned how to tape sticks and shave the blades just as the players wanted. Whether it was the lie 4 of Buck Davies or the straight-up lie 9 of Ray Powell, I became proficient. There was also the custom of putting baby powder on the blades after taping to keep the puck from sticking to the blade.

One night in Springfield I lost all the sticks on the way back to the dressing room when an on-ice brawl delayed the game. The great George Army, the Reds' head trainer, was more concerned with my safety than the sticks.

On Sundays, I used to go to the railway station with driver

Danny Desmond to meet the team, pick up the equipment and get it ready for the 8:00 PM game that evening at 1111 North Main.

When the team was out of town, the players who were injured would practice. That is when I learned to skate and shoot. Wearing the Reds jacket or coach Crawford's Hershey Bears jacket at public skating was always a thrill.

I will never forget those days. The kindness of people like Topper, Paul, and Pat Egan. The help with my French lessons from Camille Henry and Rane Pepin and the real love of the game exhibited by Chuck Scherza, Ivan Irwin and all the players made the memory and an experience of a lifetime.

*Editor's Note: Tom McDonough today is a successful businessman, collector of memorabilia, father of two sons, and grandfather of two.*

## Next Issue

The next issue of *1111 Echoes* will come out in September or October 2001. It will include a review of the Summer Barbecue Reunion, details on the public presentation of our "Tops 2001" awards to Chuck Scherza and George Patrick Duffy, reports on existing Reds' memorabilia, and more "Backchecking and Forechecking" updates on Ivan Irwin, Eddie Kachur, Don McKenney, Allan Soares, Tom Woodcock and maybe YOU!

# How the E-22 landed at the Auditorium

What do the names Kleenex, Formica, Xerox, Scotch Tape, Coke and Zamboni all have in common? Well, they are “eponyms.”

Eponyms (we had to look that one up) are proprietary brand names that have become synonymous with product categories: Kleenex with soft facial tissue, Formica with counter tops, Xerox with photocopies, Scotch Tape with cellophane adhesive tape, Coke with a color carbonated soft drink ... and yes, Zamboni with ice resurfacing.

It was in late October 1954 at the old R. I. Auditorium that a future eponym arrived. It was E-22, a new concept in restoring an ice sheet after considerable use. It was among the first ever in the northeast. It wasn't yet called a Zamboni, but rather “an ice resurfacing machine.” Louis A. R. Pieri, owner of the Auditorium and its principal tenant, the Rhode Island Reds of the American Hockey League, was among the first rink operators in the country to become intrigued by the idea of improving the resurfacing of an ice sheet between periods.

The standard method at the old ice barn had been a three-step procedure: Three or four young skaters (mostly local high school players who were called “rink rats”) would take heavy, giant scrapers (maybe 4' wide) and remove all the snow that had accumulated, then dump it into a pit of steaming water to melt. After that, Norman Rosa, building superintendent, would hose down the ice surface evenly with hot water. In the final step, the “rink rats” would return to smooth out the water using giant rubber squeegees (maybe 5' wide), thus making a new, clean skating surface for the players. The entire process took about 25 minutes.

Enter the saga of E-22. Through documents nearly 50 years old generously provided by the Zamboni Company of Paramount, California, here is how Lou Pieri landed E-22:

- October 14, 1952: In a letter to the company, Mr. Pieri requested a cost estimate to purchase an “ice scraper similar to the one you made for the Ice Capades.” The two parties must have talked further, but there is no additional documentation until 1954.
- March 8, 1954: Frank Zamboni wrote Mr. Pieri asking him if he was still interested in “our ice re-surfacing machine.” Cost would be \$ 9,275 delivered to Providence, payment over three years.
- March 17, 1954: Mr. Pieri responded, “not interested at the present time.” Probably because the season was ending and he needed time to consider.
- April 12, 1954: Three weeks later Mr. Pieri reconsidered and wrote in essence a purchase order: “This is to confirm



Lou Pieri

our understanding to purchase your Ice Making Machine for \$ 7,950...with delivery before October 1st...we will begin to make ice about October 10<sup>th</sup>.” Mr. Pieri had negotiated a better price by \$1,325.

- August 1954: A rolodex-type card from the manufacturer indicates that Mr. Pieri's E-22 was in production. But something must have delayed its October 1<sup>st</sup> delivery.
- October 18, 1954: Mr. Pieri wrote: “We have not as yet received the Ice-Resurfacing Machine, and would appreciate your advising just when we may expect it. This delay is costing us money, so please give this your immediate attention.”
- October 22, 1954 (8:39 AM): Mr. Pieri (who knew how to use leverage) sent a Western Union telegram: “Please advise immediately positive date of delivery of the ice making machine. If I can't have immediate delivery I want to cancel as it is costing me money every day that we don't have it. I might as well go back to my own way of making ice. Please wire me today.”



The E-21 of the Boston Garden, 1954

Within a few days Mr. Pieri got his “Ice Making Machine,” known today as the Zamboni. Along with it came a technician to assemble the piece and train an operator. This new machine reduced ice resurfacing to about 10 minutes as Norman Rosa proudly drove it, later with the Reds logo attached. And the manufacturer has since gone on to become the premier supplier for ice rinks throughout North America having sold over 9,000 Zamboni's to date.

The model E was the fifth version after Frank Zamboni introduced his prototype Model A in 1949. Mr. Pieri's E-22 (each machine was numbered sequentially as it was sold) joined a select group of E models. Boston Garden's E-21, purchased just before the Auditorium's, was recently retired and restored and is currently on display at the National Hockey League Hall of Fame.

## In Memoriam

Edward J. Kelly, 63, a vendor for Providence Sports Service, Inc., at the Providence Civic Center for 28 years, died Tuesday, January 23. Known as “Kell” to many of us, he leaves his wife Catherine, daughters Karen and Kim, a son Michael, a sister Frances and a grandson.

“Kell” worked many of his early years at the old R.I. Auditorium and became a friend to all. Who will ever forget his special chant: “Program, scorecard, line-up. Get your line-up for tonight's game.” The R.I. Reds Heritage Society, where he was a respected charter member, and his family and many friends, will miss him dearly. God bless.



**R. I. Reds Heritage Society**  
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