

# Karl W. Lezette

## Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame Inductee 2009



**Karl 2009**

The Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame Club has selected Karl William Lezette as a 2009 inductee. Karl has built his Hall of Fame resume as a player, coach, organizer, administrator and sponsor of Saugerties sports. His participation in the Saugerties sports domain is wide ranging and has made a significant impact on others and the overall community.

Karl W. Lezette was born on August 8, 1958 in Kingston N.Y. He is the son of Karl H. and Tonita Lezette and has two sisters, Karin Terwilliger and Denise Dittus. He married Meg Caffrey on July 26, 1986 and is the very proud father of Jacqueline, Kevin, and Jonathan Lezette.



**Front: Jonathan**

**Back: (L to R) Kevin, Meg, Karl and Jacqueline**

Karl began his sports journey playing baseball in the Glasco East-Kingston Little League as a member of the Hudson Cement Giants (1967-1970). In 1970 he played for the Ulster County Moose 12 year old All Star team in Sidney NY, and was runners up to Poughkeepsie in the New York State finals. During the same timeframe, Karl participated in S.A.A. Biddy basketball playing for the Pistons. From 1970-1973 Karl moved up to the Saugerties Babe Ruth League, playing for the Saugerties Bowler's Club, and was selected as an All Star, playing on 13 year old and 14/15 year old teams. Karl and his teammates won the district's 1973 14/15 year old title, earning a trip to Vestal N.Y. for the New York State 14/15 Babe Ruth Tournament. Karl was a versatile baseball player, as a pitcher, catcher and outfielder at all levels of youth baseball.

At Saugerties High School, Karl continued his growth in sports. In Junior High School (1971-1972) Karl played football, baseball and even tried his hand at wrestling. As a freshman in 1973, Karl anchored the SHS JV football team as a center on offense, and middle linebacker on defense. In his 1974 sophomore season, he anchored a JV team that went undefeated in the 1974 Dutchess County Scholastic League (DCSL), playing under Hall of Fame coach Hank Smith, before being called up to the Varsity level early in that same season. On the baseball diamond, Karl was the catcher on another talented Saugerties JV team, under coach Larry Nevil and again was called up to the Varsity squad early in his Sophomore season.

In his three seasons under Varsity football coach Fred Seither, Karl continued to play both sides of the line at offensive center and middle linebacker and although competitive, the '74-'76 Sawyers were unable to achieve any of the success in the DCSL that was accomplished by teams of the 1960's and the early 1970's. However, it was with the Varsity baseball squad that Karl continued his development as a solid catcher, leading to two of the most successful seasons in school history. In his junior year of 1975, Karl's Sawyers posted an impressive 11-7 record to qualify for the sectionals, in which they dropped a 1-0 14 inning heartbreaker vs. Port Chester. The following year, Karl was a senior co-captain of Coach Tony Vizzie's Sawyer squad that experienced one of the best years in Sawyer baseball history, winning 18 games while losing only 6. Karl's strong defensive skills and clutch hitting helped lead his team as far as they could possibly go at that time, winning both Section I & Section IX Regional Championship titles, which earned him All DCSL, All Daily Freeman, and SHS Varsity Baseball Most Valuable Contribution recognition in 1976. Defensively, Karl's ability ranks him as one of the best catchers in Saugerties' long baseball history.

In addition to his high school sports achievements, Karl was developing into a well-rounded student-athlete, and was nominated for the prestigious Michael Bond Scholarship Award which was won that year by his friend and teammate Jay Harris.

In the summers of 1975-1977 Karl played for the Saugerties American Legion Post 72 Baseball Team. In 1976, after winning the Ulster County Championship, his team came within one out of going to Cooperstown for the N.Y. State Championship, before losing a heartbreaker to East Chester, Long Island. Karl once again was a focal point of this team's success, keenly handling the catching duties and providing timely hitting and leadership.

After graduation Karl continued his sports career attending Division I Middle Tennessee State University in 1977 and 1978. As a walk-on in 1977, Karl made the traveling team and lettered for the Blue Raiders. In his freshmen year he saw limited play time, however in his first Division I start, he caught a no-hitter against University of the South (Swanee) further demonstrating his unique ability in handling pitchers and controlling the game. That same year, Middle Tennessee went on to the Ohio Valley Conference Championship before losing to Murray State of Kentucky. In 1978, Karl took the year off from baseball to concentrate on his studies and in 1979 transferred back to Saugerties where he attended Ulster County Community College and played one season there.

As an adult Karl continued his participation in sports. From 1975-1977 he played baseball for Fred Davi's Kingston Braves in the Hudson Valley Rookie League and was a solid contributor to the Braves championship teams. He was joined on the Braves by fellow Saugertiesians Rich Koegel, Tom Whitaker, Jerry and Nick Malgieri and high school battery mate Tim Cole.

It was during that time that the idea of a Saugerties-based adult baseball team was conceived by these Saugerties players, which led Karl and Nick Malgieri to approach Hall of Famer and Mr. Saugerties Sports himself, Jack Keeley, for guidance. Jack in turn introduced Karl and Nick to Hall of Famers Roy and Greg Helsmoortel, and the rest is history. At that time, there had been a void for nearly twenty years in the Saugerties baseball scene, with the lack of an adult team at the town level. The Helsmoortel's became the sole sponsor of arguably the most exciting sports team Saugerties had ever seen and Karl was instrumental in pulling it together...the successful return of the Saugerties Dutchmen.

Karl's contribution as an organizer and player was instrumental in helping the Dutchmen immediately become a first-class organization as well as to capture the Hudson Valley Rookie League Championship in 1980, in their inaugural season. Due to an arm injury, Karl's tenure with the Dutchmen was limited to only two seasons, however his impact to the organization and to Saugerties would be felt for years to come as the Saugerties Dutchmen provided many years of quality baseball for the appreciative fans of Saugerties.



**Karl warming up in bullpen (1980)**

In addition to the Dutchmen & other prior baseball successes, Karl displayed his all-around athletic talents in many other sports, such as the Town of Ulster Touch Football from 1976-1979 and SAA Sawyer, Premier and Half Court men's basketball from 1975 to 1982 playing on championship teams in each of these sports. In 2003, Karl made his hockey debut playing a season in the men's ice hockey league with the "Dutch Tavern" before officially retiring from hockey that same year. Currently, Karl still plays in the SAA men's softball league and has for all but a few of the last 36 years.

Karl has not only contributed to the Saugerties sports scene as a player, but he has also contributed as a coach. In 1980 and 1981 he served as Saugerties Jr. High assistant football coach under Gary Schnell and JV assistant football coach under Glen Maisch respectively. In addition to his coaching football, Karl also acted as advance scout for the Sawyer Varsity football team from 1979-1981 under Hank Smith and Larry Nevil. In 1982 Karl had the privilege to serve as a volunteer assistant baseball coach at Ulster County Community College under fellow Saugerties sports great, the late-Larry Panella.

His involvement evolved into the youth sports community, where from 1997 to 2008, Karl served as a Little League coach at the Glasco East-Kingston Little League coaching children at the T-Ball, Minors, and Major League levels. With coaching, he became more involved with the league, becoming league president in 2003. During his tenure, there was significant growth, improvement & success in the league infrastructure and teams, and as Glasco's 2003 9/10 Year Old All Star team manager, posted an undefeated 7-0 record, followed by successive District 15 championships for the 11 Year Old Glasco teams in 2004 and 2005 – Glasco's first Little League title winners since 1969.

Simultaneously, from 2006-2008, he also served as a Saugerties Babe Ruth League coach, including 13 and 14 year All Star teams. If that weren't enough, during the same time period, Karl coached the 13, 14, 15 and under Mid Hudson Tigers youth travel baseball teams highlighted by his 14 and under team's recognition as "2007 Triple Crown Baseball- North East Team of the Year".

Not afraid to venture out of his comfort zone, in 2001 and 2002 Karl also coached in the fledgling Saugerties Youth Hockey League at the newly built Kiwanis Ice Arena. As with his earlier involvement with the baseball Dutchmen, seeing a need for something new to the Saugerties sports scene, Karl was instrumental in introducing skating and ice hockey to children 9-12 years old, many who had never played or skated, and ultimately seeing the youth hockey league's participation increase five-fold since its 2001 inception.

In addition to coaching, Karl also has served as a basketball official, refereeing games at all levels of play including adult SAA Half Court, Sawyer League, and Premier League as well as youth Bidy League Basketball.

As an administrator and organizer, Karl is best recently known for his involvement with the Glasco East Kingston Little League where he served as president from 2003-2008. With the merger of the Glasco Little League and the Saugerties Little League in 2009, Karl continues to participate in Little League administration, now as a member of the Saugerties Little League Board of Directors, where he is committed to see through the successful merger of the two leagues, to the benefit of the entire town's youth baseball programs.

Through the years Karl has been a financial sponsor and supporter for various organizations and teams.

He has been a long time sponsor for the Saugerties and Glasco East Kingston Little Leagues, Saugerties Youth Hockey League, Kingston/Saugerties Area Hockey Team, Saugerties American Legion Post 72 Baseball Team, SHS Varsity Football and Baseball Teams as well as the Varsity Girl's Lacrosse Team.

Karl has many great memories and thrills from his time as a player. Some of his more memorable are the 1976 SHS Baseball team's Regional Championship, the Saugerties American Legion Post 72 baseball team's 1976 bid for Cooperstown, the 1977 Middle Tennessee State University OVC Championship, and last but certainly not least the 1980 HVRL Championship won by the Saugerties Dutchmen. Karl however notes that his biggest thrill has and will always be watching his children participate in sports.

Along his journey, Karl was inspired & guided by many. He was inspired by Jack Keeley's and Fred Davi's selfless devotion to the advancement of sports in Saugerties. He was also inspired by SHS teammate Tim Cole and

Kingston Brave teammate Paul Runge, for their dedication and determination (both who coincidentally signed with the Atlanta Braves). Lastly, he cites Hank Smith, Tony Vizzie and Fred Seither for their leadership and guidance. Karl has and continues to pass on the lessons learned from those who inspired him while adding his own life's efforts for the benefit of the youth programs and adding to the legendary history of the Saugerties sports community.

The Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame Club extends its congratulations to Karl for his induction into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame. Your accomplishments and contributions have made your family and your community proud.