

Tim R. Berry

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Tim Berry

A lifetime of service

By Randall Jett

Tim Berry has grown with the city of Beckley. His love of the local area is evident in just about every facet of his life, with his family, his career and his community involvement.

Berry has served the community, first as a city police officer and then as a city councilman, since 1978.

He has had a much deeper involvement, though. Along with his duties on Beckley Common Council, Berry serves as chairman of the Pubic Defender Corp. for the 10th Judicial Circuit and as head coach of both the Mountain State University volleyball and softball teams. In addition, he is the intramural sports coordinator for MSU.

Beginning in 1985, Berry has been involved in youth sports.

“I actually got started with softball at Beckley Little League,” he said. “I coached the 8- and 9-year-olds. I coached with a good man named Pat Swift. He was kind of a legend over there.

“He taught me a lot about how to deal with kids. Some of the basic things he taught me back then, I still use today.”

From there, Berry began coaching in the local school system. He coached volleyball at Stanaford Elementary, Stratton Junior High, Woodrow Wilson High and Park Junior High from 1988 through 1996.

Berry first became interested in coaching through his job as a police officer.

“I saw a need for programs for the young people,” he said. “During my time as a policeman, I became a DARE instructor. I did a lot of safety presentations in local elementaries and junior highs, and even in high school, for that matter. I really enjoyed working with the kids. They need a lot of direction, especially now. That’s one of the big reasons I got into coaching. You work with a lot of different kids, and when you got in the leagues and stuff, that made it even better.”

In 1994, Berry helped organize the Beckley Babes ASA Softball Teams Inc. and presided as president and general manager from 1994 to 1999.

“I left Little League as my kids got older because we felt like there was just some place better to go,” he said. “My daughter Amber had it in her mind that she wanted to go on and play ball in

college. Also, when she went into the eighth or ninth grade we started looking at better venues. That's when we became introduced to travel ball.

“Summer ball was great. We started the Beckley Babes organization. When we started the Beckley Babes, we actually had a lot of help there. Everyone that was involved in it wanted to teach the kids and bring the kids to the next level.”

In addition, Berry organized the building of the Woodrow Wilson softball field that year.

“I took it upon myself to spearhead the project,” he said. “I couldn't have done it without all the local businesses. We had a lot of help, from the blocks being donated to concrete being donated to labor and fencing. Not to mention, the guys that came in there and did the wiring and plumbing. It just seemed like when we needed something, the businesses responded.”

In the fall of 1996, Berry found his way to Mountain State University. The institution was preparing to start a softball program and tabbed Berry to build the foundation.

“The first year, we played our home games at Woodrow,” he said. “Even though that was fine, I felt like a college team needed to have its own home. I began to look around a little bit and I incorporated the help of Racine Thompson. We looked at Warren Williams Stadium, which had been vacant.”

Warren Williams was more than vacant. Aside from the concrete bleachers, there was little resemblance to an athletic field. There was no grass on the lot, no concession area or locker rooms. The sunken dugouts were filled with debris and the field was covered with the remains of several years' worth of Woodrow pep rally bonfires.

“We've put in thousands of hours over the last seven and a half years,” Berry said.

Through donations, Berry worked to revitalize the old stadium. First came a new infield with proper drainage and a new red clay base. Next was more than 150 tons of pastured topsoil for the outfield and grass seed. After that came outfield fences, refencing the backstop, cleaning the concrete bleachers and building dugouts. Following that came the concession stand and restrooms and a deck with picnic tables on the first base side of the field. Two years ago, MSU added a locker room with a deck for the Cougar players. Finally, Berry, with the help of House Speaker Bob Kiss and then-Gov. Bob Wise, installed a lighting system.

In 2002, Berry added the title of head volleyball coach to his softball duties.

“Volleyball and softball are compatible sports,” Berry said. “As a player, a girl can play volleyball in the fall and softball in the spring. Volleyball was in the elementary schools, so a lot of softball players get their start playing volleyball in elementary school.”

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But Berry's life hasn't been just about sports. After being forced to quit the police force because

of a bad back, Berry found another way to serve his community.

“I love the city of Beckley,” he said. “Even though I couldn’t be a policeman in the police car anymore, I decided that since I was retired I could serve in a different way. That was when I made the decision to run for city council.”

Berry’s first term came by appointment as he finished out the term of Darl Poling, who had accepted a city judgeship. He has continued to serve on council, currently in his third term.

“I’ve always been a people person,” Berry said. “I met a lot of people as a policeman. I mean, a lot of good people.

“I really enjoyed public relations details. Those sometimes were just things that other officers would duck out on.”

With all of his duties, it is hard to imagine there are enough hours in the day for Berry to get things done. He says that’s not a problem, though.

“I have surrounded myself with quality people,” Berry said. “I also get a lot of family support. I’m on the road a lot. There are a lot of 80-hour weeks. I still try to be civically involved. I sat on the board of directors of the Beckley-Raleigh County American Red Cross for several years.

“I’ve always tried to be involved in the community. I think everyone should give a little back. I think that is what makes our society successful, that there are people who are not afraid to do for others.”

When Berry talks about supporters, he begins with his wife of 29 years, Mary S. Berry, his mother, Violet, and his two daughters, Keri and Amber.

In the near future, though, Berry sees some changes in how he will be spending his time.

“I am not going to run for re-election for my city council seat,” he said. “As of July last year, coach (Bob) Bolen talked to me and I, in addition to running the women’s volleyball program and softball program, am now the intramural sports coordinator for the campus at MSU. It’s kind of like having two or more full-time jobs. The great thing about it is that I have the flexibility of schedule where I can do all three jobs.”

He is also making time for a new addition to the Berry clan, his first grandson, Brayden Thompson.

“He’s the light of my life,” Berry said. “Of all the experiences I’ve had in my life, (his birth) has probably had the most profound effect on me personally. It’s hard to explain, but every time I see that little bundle of joy, my heart just melts. I’m probably going to spoil him every chance I can get.”

Still, he doesn’t rule out a return to the political arena down the road.

“I have been approached and asked to run for another office,” Berry said. “I am looking at it. I am going to sit down somewhere with my close supporters who have helped me in the past and I’ll probably make a decision within the next year as to what I want to do. Certainly, MSU is going to be a big part of that decision — whether I run or not. Right now, I’m real happy here.”

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