

Jim "J.I." Hay - Hometown Hero

By Carolyn Hay Dobbins



In 1953, Eagleville boasted of 17 graduating seniors, one of them J.I. Hay, marched across the auditorium stage, received his diploma, and proceeded to go out into the world to make a difference. Little did he or anyone else know the difference his life would make in the next 53 years.

Two months after graduation he was on his way to boot camp in San Diego, California, after enlisting in the U.S. Navy. His next stop was Astoria, Oregon where he worked as a Navy clerk. During his Navy days, his talents as a baseball player were recognized as he starred on every team that was fortunate enough to have him as their catcher. His star did shine brightly during those days culminating with the announcement that he was the Most Valuable Player at a tournament played in Japan.

He came home in October 1956, with a fine record as a member of the U.S. Navy and with many baseball trophies. He worked at Avco until the spring of 1957 when a leave of absence was granted for him to pursue his baseball career with tryouts in Jacksonville, Florida. He was signed by the Atlanta Crackers and began an eight-year career as a professional baseball player.

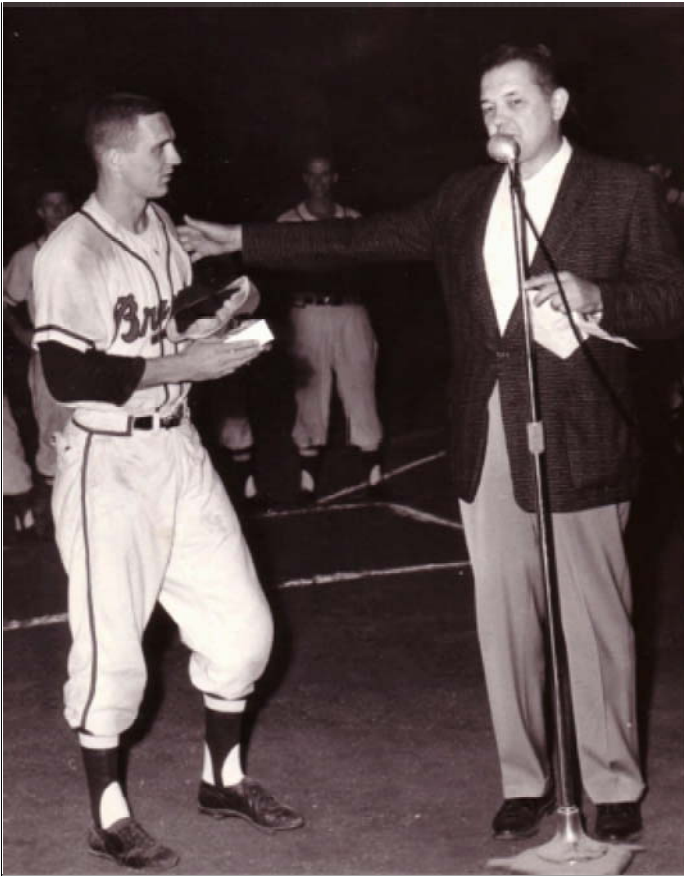
After Atlanta, he played in Panama City, Florida; Midland, Texas; Boise, Idaho; Jacksonville, Florida; and Austin, Texas for a total of eight years in the pros. After hanging up his catcher's mitt, he was offered a job as a minor league manager but turned down that job.

He earned a degree in economics and accounting from Utah State University in 1964 and in 1965 became the assistant manager of the Atlanta Fulton County Stadium, home of the Braves. While attending to all the duties that accompanied this challenging position, he was also working on his law degree from Emory University, which he earned in 1971.

He took over as stadium manager in 1975. He continued in that job until 1978 when he accepted a job with the Atlanta Falcons and went to work in the front office. He distinguished himself with the Falcons organization and quickly rose in the ranks to become executive vice president.

Through the years, he has done something few have ever done. He has ridden a motorcycle over 150,000 miles, and he did not even begin this sport until he was 62 years old. He has traveled extensively through the United States. He also has traveled in Alaska, China, Mongolia, Siberia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Austria, Germany, France, Lepenstein, Switzerland, Africa (6000 miles across this continent), Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand.





Although he has officially retired from the Falcons, he has not retired. He still works closely with the Smith family, former owners of the Falcons. He also spends as much time as possible with his wife, Molly, their three children and six grandchildren at their family homes in Atlanta and Rosemary Beach, Florida.

He has endeared himself to many people through the years for his many acts of generosity and kindness. Perhaps his most endearing deed to the people of Eagleville is his generous gift to the Eagleville Park.

One of the baseball fields will be named the HAY FIELD in his honor although he insists the name is in honor of all the Hays. At the top of the list of "All the Hays" are his parents, Alice Hay, who died in 2003 and his father, Ira Hay, who died in 1971. These two helped him become all he is today. Next on the list are his siblings, Elizabeth, Robert, Carolyn, and Sara, whom he credits for sending steady streams of inspiration his way. He was quoted as saying, "I was always challenged by the example set by my brothers and sisters."

This self-described underachiever from grades one to twelve at Eagleville School has become a highly recognized and appreciated overachiever in all the areas of life that count the most.

A story that attests to the truth of this statement was told by his sister, Sara, who now lives in Blairsville, Georgia. Sara just happened to meet a man at her farm, who was excited to share with her one of the highlights of his life. It seems that he had been hired to work on this really outstanding and famous man's house and had found him to be one "of the nicest people" he had ever met. He went on to sing the praises of this person and then identified him by name. How surprised he was when Sara proclaimed, "He's my brother!"



Hay brother & sisters: Sara Robbins, Dr. Robert Hay, Dr. Elizabeth Rhea, J.I. Hay, Carolyn Dobbins.