John Fontaine

Amenia has always been a baseball town

By Ken Pomeisl

In Amenia at Beekman Park, just beyond the center field fence of Herring Field where the Little League plays, there is scoreboard. It has been there so long now people sometimes probably don't even notice it. Last year it was given some much needed TLC by my son Joe. After the work was completed many people complemented the effort. However I soon realized that a lot of the younger kids and families in town did not know the story behind this structure or its significance. Since the Amenia Historical Society has been working on their "*Baseball Town*" project this year I thought it would be a good time to tell the story of the scoreboard and the person it is dedicated to, John Fontaine.

John is the oldest of 4 children of Laurier (Larry) & Laurette Fontaine. He was born in Canada on August 17, 1952. The Fontaine family moved to North Creek, New York when John was 5 years old. As a youngster John loved to play baseball. He enjoyed playing 3rd base. The Fontaine's moved to Amenia in 1970. John graduated from Webutuck in June of 1971. On September 2, 1978 he was married to Debbie Wilcox. On November 5, 1979 their only child Josh was born. John's parents, brothers Norm and Pat and sister Suzy still live in Amenia with their families.

John was employed at the Taconic DDSO and was active in the community. Some of his volunteer efforts were as a baseball coach in the Amenia Farm League and Amenia Little League. Life was going along normally, if such a thing is possible, until 1988 when tragedy struck. This is when John was diagnosed with the fatal disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS. ALS is commonly known as "Lou Gehrig's disease" after the famous New York Yankee ballplayer. John's family and friends rallied to support him and his family. He put forth a valiant effort but sadly in the end, ALS would take John's life at the young age of 38.

Shortly after John's death a group of volunteers and friends in charge of the existing fields and concession stand led an effort to construct the scoreboard as a way to honor John and to show support for his family. During the summer of 1991 a ceremony was held on Herring Field at Beekman Park for the unveiling of the new scoreboard. While the scoreboard itself was an impressive and welcome addition to the park, the important thing was that it was being dedicated in memory of John Fontaine. I was honored to be present that day and still remember it clearly. John's wife Debbie was there along with the entire Fontaine family. Friends and some of John's former players were in attendance as well. John's son Josh, who I was coaching at the time, said a few words. There was probably not a dry eye in the house.

I am not much of a writer but thought I would make a feeble attempt anyway. As you can guess there is a lot more behind the story. My hope is that this summary will help older residents remember John, give current residents a greater appreciation of why the scoreboard is there and encourage future generations to protect and preserve it.