



# Opti - Topics

Bulletin of the Optimist Club of Huntsville

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VOL. 65, No. 29, May 5, 2011

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We would not have had a newsletter this week due to the power outage that caused the Respect for Law Banquet to be postponed, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to reminisce a little on some earlier years of our Club and make it a tribute to Mary Caneer who passed on May 1, 2011 at age 96.

The Huntsville Optimist Club was organized in 1947 with 36 charter members. The Club sponsored the "North Alabama Air Show" in 1949 – the largest event of its kind in the state, where WWII planes could be closely inspected by the public before being retired or destroyed. It was estimated that 40,000 attended, paying \$5 a carload. The monies raised enabled the Club to purchase the Dallas Mills Ball Park at auction and rename it Optimist Park. Lights were installed for night use by the City of Huntsville baseball and football programs and for operation in general. The Club retained all concession rights and to use the facility for any special fund-raising programs, and to sell advertising on the outfield fence.

Being a lighted park it was very popular and events were booked almost nightly. Big league ball teams traveling north from spring training in Florida often scheduled an exhibition game against our best local talent. Special events included a frequent exhibition of the King and His Court (a softball exhibition by Eddie Feighner), and the Optimist Horse Show, featuring the world's leading Tennessee Walking Horses which became a popular annual event for 12 or 15 years.

Nightly concession sales for all events were handled by Ralph Caneer, Sr. (who, incidentally the ball field is named for) with his wife Mary right by his side, along with his family. This was truly a major undertaking by a few people. They had to supply and prepare the many needed products, make the sales, and clean up afterward. The Club is eternally grateful

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for the Caneer family's dedication, devotion and honest performance in handling large amounts of cash. While Mary and her group were the major concessionaires the rest of the Club remained busy selling fence sign advertising, and the whole Club had to get involved to make the horse show a success each year.

Mary was also active in an auxiliary organization formed in 1951 called the Opti-Mrs. Club with their own motto "Friend of the Girl" to supplement the Optimist Club's "Friend of the Boy," leading to today's "Friend of Youth," where both female and male members enjoy working together.

Those of us who knew Mary think of her often. Ralph, Jr.'s eulogy today pointed out her early development of a strong work ethic that served our Club well over many years. While eating out during the middle 50s we often encountered Mary and Ralph. It was almost a guarantee that if our choice was the Bon Aire Restaurant on Meridian Street that we'd see them. The Bon Aire was famous for their rolls. Ralph was Club President in 1963/64, and later served as Lt. Gov. and other District offices. Mary always supported him 100%. Ralph, Jr. told today of the many elderly family members she provided care for. She quietly made her mark and was a strong positive influence on all who knew her.



## CALENDAR

- 5/12 Thursday 11:45 am Downtown Holiday Inn  
**Curtis Hunt - B.S.A.**
- 5/19 Thursday 11:45 Optimist Recreation Center  
**Business Meeting - Food Jack Fauble**
- 5/26 Thursday 11:45 am Downtown Holiday Inn  
**Essay Contest Winners**

## Optimistic Quote of The Week

**And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.**

*Abraham Lincoln*