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Conroe's "Mr. Baseball" enriched the community both on and off the field

By Sondra Hernandez, shernandez@hcnonline.com Published 3:26 pm, Friday, June 2, 2017



IMAGE 1 OF 8

Clyde Thomas "Dolly" Gray not only worked for George Strake in the Conroe oil fields, he was a gifted athlete as well. He played on the Conroe Wildcat baseball team owned by Strake and later was the voice of ... [more](#)

Sarah Bess Gray Crow recalls every vacation her father, mother and brother went on when she was young had to include an outing to a baseball game – no matter what city or town they visited.

He also never missed a baseball game on the radio or television.

That's how passionate **Clyde Thomas** "Dolly" Gray was about America's favorite past time.

Gray, an oil field roustabout and later oil field superintendent, was also a gifted athlete. He played baseball to help support his single mother, then played baseball for the Strake Wildcats oil field team and even into his 60s played with the Tamina Rebels baseball team.

He was also the voice of **Conroe little league**.

Over the decades he earned the distinction of "Mr. Baseball" in Conroe.

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Early years.

Gray was born Sept. 25, 1907 in the sawmill town of Fostoria in East Montgomery County.

Crow said her father was the oldest of four children and his father was a barber who traveled from sawmill to sawmill.

"Each of the four children was born in a different place," Crow said.

When the family was living in Houston and Gray was about 7 years old, his father abandoned the family.

Gray still had many ties to the Conroe area as both his grandparents' families – the Grays and the Dampiers – lived in the area.

At a young age, Gray excelled at sports and began taking jobs to support the family and his single mother.

He'd work for a company and play baseball as well to help support the family.

He played on all the championship teams in Houston in the 1930s and he signed with the Houston Buffs an American minor league baseball team based in Houston.

He played with the farm team in Monroe, La. until the Depression brought about the demise of the team.

Return to Conroe

Gray returned to Conroe and began working for **Fred Nutter** Sr. who owned with his brother George a company selling International Harvester parts.

He also managed two miniature golf courses for Nutter.

Also in the early 1930s, he met **Bessie Morris**, one of "the beautiful Morris girls" of Conroe.

They married on May 17, 1933 at a home in Conroe, according to Crow.

His big break came when filling in on the Strake Wildcats baseball team, owned by oilman George Strake.

Gray hit a home run in the game, according to Crow.

"Back then they'd pass the hat after the games," she said. "When it got to my dad, there was a note in it from Mr. Strake that said 'Report for work in the morning.'"

Gray was a roustabout in the oil field and in 1946 became foreman of the Strake field. The Gray family lived in Conroe when Gray was a roustabout and he drove back and forth from the oil field each day.

She said the house they lived in was originally built for driller **Harvey Lee** and his wife. Lee was the driller who brought in Strake's first oil well.

It was on **Duffy Lane** and across from the Strake Oil field Warehouse about seven miles from Conroe.

"The home was a Sears & Roebuck Craftsman home that Mr. Strake purchased and had shipped to Conroe," said **Butch Bateman**, president of the **Heritage Museum** Board in a previous Courier article. "It was put together piece by piece in Conroe. If you go up in the attic, you won't find a crooked board or knot in the wood."

Behind the main house on Duffy Lane, was a "Roughneck House." Men would come from Houston to work in the oil fields and they'd sleep and eat in the bunkhouse and head back to work while their families remained in Houston.

Crow moved to the house when she was four and she has many fond memories of her swing set that was made of pipe from the oil field, going to fetch salt tabs from the warehouse across the street and the big trucks that would drive up and down the dirt roads.

By the time Crow moved there, the Roughneck house was mainly used for storage of baseball equipment.

Her father's reputation for playing baseball was legendary and he was the voice of Conroe Little

League and did much for the baseball community.

He also played baseball well into his 60s.

His last team to play for was the Tamina Rebels and they played at Elmore Field, the current field for the **Conroe High School** baseball team.

This team played up until 1964.

Later years

Gray lived in the same oil field house until his death in 2003.

He also continued a routine started when he was superintendent in the oil field.

Each day he'd drive into town and meet with other men of the town like **Thomas Earl Gentry** and Judge Foster. They go to the bank and drink coffee and catch up on the news of the day. He'd also swing by the post office to pick up any mail.

Crow said he continued this routine up until he couldn't drive anymore.

He also enjoyed hunting, fishing and gardening and entertaining the older gentlemen of the area.

She said he was in really good shape until his stroke.

He died on Jan. 13, 2003 at the age of 95.

His legacy lives on

After Gray's death, Crow, along with her niece and nephew, **Emily Gray Garcia** and Tom Gray, donated the **Strake-Gray Oilfield House** and the Roughneck House to the Heritage Museum of Montgomery County.

The Strake-Gray Oilfield House has undergone renovations and restorations. One room houses

Gray's desk and typewriter. Another room features many photos of early baseball in Conroe.

A special day is coming up for the Strake-Gray Oilfield House.

On June 10 at 10 a.m., a grand opening with Conroe Mayor **Toby Powell** along with Sarah Bess Gray Crow and **George W. Strake, Jr.** will take place.

Visit the Heritage Museum of Montgomery County at 1506 I-45 North in Conroe's Candy Cane Park.

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