

Groundhog sheds shadow on Diamond Lions

Mike Givler
Capital Times Staff

To some, he's known as "Groundhog." To Penn State Harrisburg, he's the new baseball coach. To the team, he's just one of the guys.

Wayne Geist, the college's newest coaching addition, has been playing baseball since the age of seven. But it was his love for field maintenance that earned him the name of "Groundhog." Geist said the name's has stuck with him ever since.

"I got this nickname because I like to play in the dirt," he said, chewing on a

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hunk of Dubble Bubble gum. "Working on ball fields relieves the inner tensions. I forget my problems when I'm on the ball field."

Geist, who served as groundskeeper for the Harrisburg Senators for three months in 1987, said he puts a lot of thought and preparation into the fields he prepares.

"You can see the groundskeeper's personality in the infield," he said. Geist said his style includes "cut-outs," or special trimming, around the bases and well-constructed catcher's box, where he once played.

Geist said he hopes to one day purchase his own triple-A baseball field he'll keep "his way." He said he'd also like to build a softball complex, because he believes it's a growing sport.

Prior to obtaining his current position, Geist has coached American Legion baseball in the Harrisburg area, as well as basketball, soccer and football. He is currently C.D. East's Junior High field hockey coach. Geist said he's happy to be at Penn State Harrisburg because he's never coached higher than the legion level.

Geist is hoping for a winning regular season, as well as a successful run in the playoffs. He sees no obstacles in the team's path and is looking forward to the upcoming season.

"At this level, you play to have fun, but you're still learning," Geist said. "But it's not just fun, it's about winning and losing with honor. The goals for the season will be reached while maintaining the highest scholastic level the young men can reach."

Geist's said his philosophy of not just learning how to play baseball, but learning from playing the game will be passed on to his team.

"Baseball teaches you about life and being a member of a team," Geist said. "Learning sportsmanship goes farther in life than most people think. It helps you in dealing with people."

Athletic Director Duane Crider, who served on the committee of two faculty members and three baseball players, said the group picked the former locomotive



Wayne Geist is hoping to rebuild the Lion baseball program as well as the ball field. The Groundhog sees his shadow, above, and calls for six more games in winter weather.

engineer because he was the best for the position.

"We felt Wayne was the best match for the campus and the team," Crider said. "We are hoping he will give us a good mix."

Lion pitcher Bob McDonald, who also served on the selection committee, said Geist is like one of the players.

"He's always walking around instructing and helping players learn," McDonald said. "He's more like a teammate than a coach."

McDonald added that Geist may be the person who points the team in the right direction.

"He has the right stuff to turn this group into a winning team," McDonald said. Last year the Lions finished with an overall record of 9-13, and their 3-4 district record earned them fourth place.

"I am looking forward to the opportunity to work with the adult men in a sport that I love," Geist said. "I see a lot of enthusiasm in the young men."

Geist is looking forward to working with the new players and hopes to have a "long and successful relationship with

Penn State baseball." He said he hopes he has the opportunity to assist in guiding a player's baseball career some day.

"I would like to help any young man that has the ability to play the game, get

an opportunity at a higher level," Geist said. "I just want to give back to the game what it gave to me."

Geist said his love of baseball started with his position playing for the Cub Scout team. His love for the game even cost him the opportunity to go to the 1960 World's Fair in Queens, N.Y., Geist passed on the Fair for a little league baseball game.

Now 44, Geist said he learned at a young age that there's more to the world than baseball. In 1966, the Copley High School senior catcher turned down a \$5,000 baseball contract with the New York Mets. He also turned down an opportunity to be a groundskeeper at the Mets' home park, Shea Stadium.

Geist opted to turn down the Mets' offers and go into the Coast Guard, to avoid the Army. Geist said the Vietnam War was in full swing at the time, and he knew he would be drafted into the armed services following his high school graduation in 1965.

"I didn't want to lose my life in a rice paddy," Geist said. "I volunteered so I wouldn't get sent to Vietnam."

He said he's regretted turning down the Mets' offers his whole life.

"I have suppressed my desire to play baseball ever since," Geist added. A resident of Harrisburg, Geist is married and has two children, Kerianne, 14, and Jason, 16. Kerianne is a three-sport athlete and Jason has been an ASA umpire for three years. Geist said he enjoys umping with Jason as a team, and would like to see both his kids attend college.

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