

The Paper

November 2015

A bus of many colors

By Scott Smith sports@thepaper24-7.com

Most Montgomery County natives know a large portion of the movie “Hoosiers” was shot in New Richmond, and that many of the county residents were extras in the film. However, what you may not know is the school bus that took the fictitious Hickory Huskers from gym to gym came from the other side of the county in New Ross.

There’s a long strange story about how that school bus ended up on the set of Hoosiers, and how the Indiana Pacers plan to use it when they wear their Hickory Pacers uniforms in 10 games this season.

You see, the 1939 Chevrolet bus was used in the Indianapolis and Lebanon school districts until 1949. That’s when Lebanon decided to change out their fleet. Jack Baker of New Ross, who was a mechanic and gunsmith and owned Baker Garage, purchased one and refurbished it to an RV. He and his family and friends made several cross country trips in the 216 cubic-inch, 85-horsepower, stovebolt six cylinder engine.

In 1986, David Anspaugh, the director of the movie, and Angelo Pizzo, the writer, were looking everywhere across the country for a bus to use in the filming. Having struck out at every turn, someone told them to contact Mr. Baker who had the 1939 Chevy. It was exactly what they were looking for, and that’s when the journey started to convert it from an RV to a bus.

After filming, the bus was returned back to Jack, but he sold it to Charlie and Helen Bronaugh after believing no one wanted it, much to the chagrin of his family, including his grandson Darryll.

Charlie and Helen used the bus in the State Fair, as it celebrated the team from tiny Milan, Indiana, and parades throughout the state. However, when Charlie passed in 1994, the bus wasn’t used as much and it deteriorated past functioning.

In 1996, Darryll reached out to Helen to see if she would be willing to sell the old bus to him. However, she had already promised it to either the head coach of Milan or the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame. So, he asked if he could bring his grandfather, who was 91 at the time, one last time to sit in the old bus. She agreed and Darryll showed up the next day. After seeing Jack sit in the driver’s seat, Helen agreed to sell the bus to Darryll on the spot.

The bus needed not only cosmetic work, but the entire thing needed new wiring, lighting and mechanical work. He contacted Terry Nichols, a former crewman on Indy Car machines, out of Russellville and asked that he rewire and get the old bus running. Terry handed it off to Dale Roll, out of English, IN, who restored the body of bus.

Darryll, who was a US diplomat at the time, worked with the two men on getting the bus back to its original condition.

The bus has been in numerous car shows and parades, including some on the National Mall in Washington DC. They took it to the Hoosier Gym in Knightstown in June 2010, for the 25-year anniversary of the movie where some former Milan players, including Bobby Plump, and stars of the movie, including Jimmy Chitwood, helped in the celebration.

Fast forward five years to 2015, and the 30th celebration of the movie of Indiana’s pastime and bring in the Indiana Pacers. The Pacers, wanting to honor the movie, and the

Milan Indians, will wear the Hickory throwback uniforms and honor six Indiana teams during their six home games, the first being this coming Friday, November 6, against the Miami Heat in a nationally televised game. They will also celebrate Crawfordsville as the birthplace of Indiana basketball and the 1911 Indiana State Champions.

Seeing this, Darryll contacted the Pacers and asked if they'd like to use the bus in their game day promotions. Not hesitating at the offer, the Pacers jumped on the opportunity.

"We're very excited about this promotion," said Pacers Senior Vice President of Community and Public Relations Bill Benner. "We feel it's only appropriate to celebrate Crawfordsville as the birthplace of Indiana basketball and the first state champion."

Some of the proceeds of Friday's game will benefit the Basketball Heritage Project based out of Crawfordsville. The group sponsors local middle school players and helps pay to send them to camp during the summer months to keep the tradition of basketball alive.

"We're very excited about the Pacers recognition and their generosity to give back to the Heritage Project," said Carolyn Teague, President of the organization. "We're also putting together a basketball heritage trail video that this will support as well."

The Pacers will show a short video during halftime celebrating Crawfordsville and the surrounding areas, as eight of the first 10 state champions came from within a 30-mile radius of the city. Mayor Todd Barton, and State Representative Tim Brown will also be on hand, as will Darryll, who the Pacers are flying to see the event.

They'll have items from the Crawfordsville area that are currently in the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, in New Castle, on hand in a display case inside the arena. And yeah, the bus, "will be prominently displayed somewhere downtown or near Bankers Life Fieldhouse on game days," added Benner.

"I couldn't be more proud of the storied history of that bus, and to have it associated with the movie Hoosiers, and the Indiana Pacers," said Baker. "It is now not only a valued piece of history for my family, but a piece of history that represents the greatest basketball state in the country, Hoosier Hysteria."

The Pacers will have possession of the bus for this season. They're hoping to take it back to Knightstown, New Castle, to the Basketball Hall of Fame, and maybe even a stop in Crawfordsville.

So, the next time you watch the movie Hoosiers, and you're looking for friends and family that may be there as extras, know that when they board that bus, it's the bus that Jack Baker built.