

# Alive!

Serving over 18,000  
City and DWP Employees



## Best Projects in City Honored at Annual Awards

CAO — The City is brimming with innovative projects that save taxpayers time and money, and return much improved customer service. Recognizing and awarding those projects is the job of the Quality and Productivity Commission, part of the Office of the City Administrative Officer.

The annual ceremony to honor 2008's best projects was held Dec. 9 in the Tom Bradley Room, high atop City Hall. The Commission made several changes to the ceremony to reduce costs and increase efficiency.

These competitive awards promote professional and effective management practices and recognize and showcase the City's achievements at improving the quality and efficiency of service delivery, while reducing public costs.

Projects that were honored range from physical plans to administrative improvements.

For all the details, see page 50.

## All-in-One Club Store: A Big Hit

The Club Store's your one-stop shop for tickets and officially licensed apparel.

THE CLUB — The Club Store and Service Center, nearing its one-year anniversary, is a game-changer for City Employees downtown. And it had its biggest month ever in December — thanks to you!

And if you want to get your tickets and City apparel all in one place — it's the only place to go!

"It was just amazing here in the Club Store right before Christmas," said the Ticket Guy, who was breathing easier in January but preparing for a big Valentine's Day rush. "We pulled in all the staffers we could just to handle all of your holiday needs. It was fantastic being such a big hit!

"The key is that we have our tickets, with the biggest discounts for City employees, and our first-class apparel right here in one place," he said. "There's no need to go all over town. So get in on the fun and stop by and see us!"

For Valentine's Day apparel, see the Club Store offerings, starting on page 66.



## ONE Knockout Mentor



Meet Rec and Parks Retiree John Bogdanoff, who created the City's youth boxing program in the 1950s. It kept kids out of gangs, and he's proud of it.

Read the interview on page 6.

Alive! photo by Tom Hawkins



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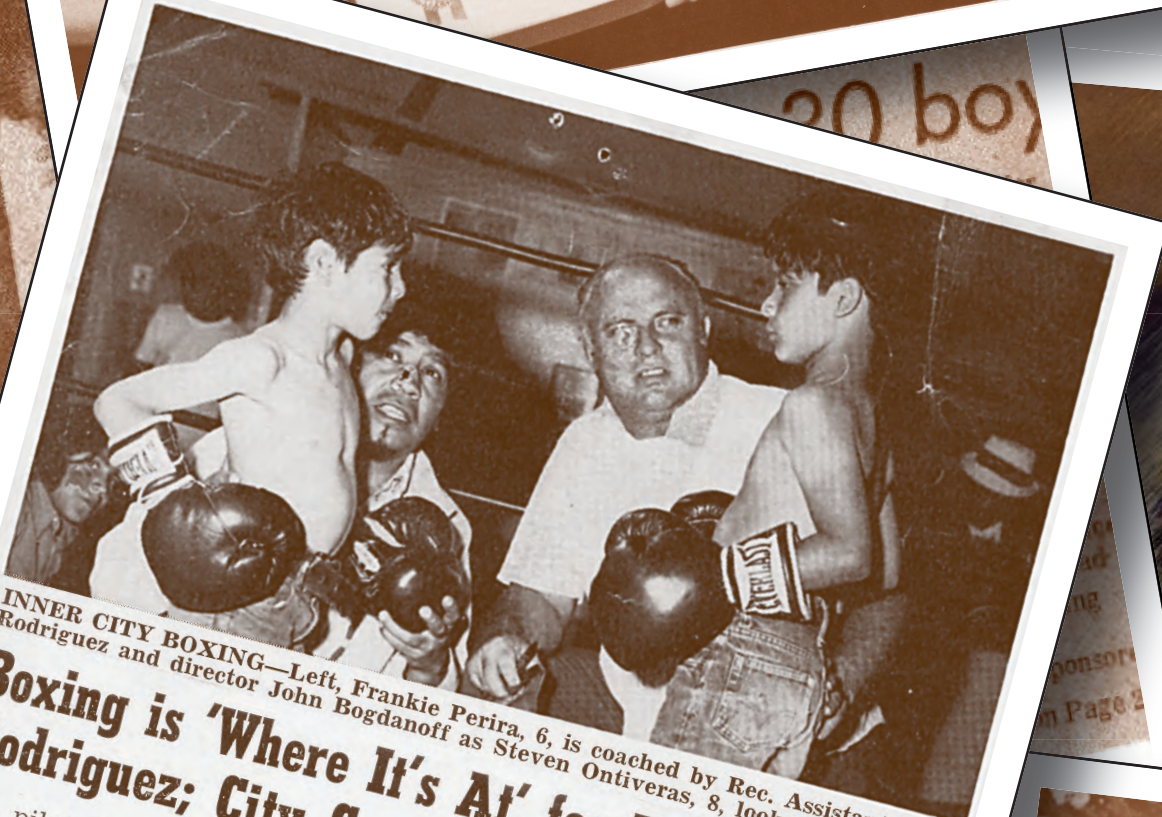
## Be My Club Valentine!

Club Members pledge their forever love ... in this month's Alive!

See page 34



# THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW



**INNER CITY BOXING**—Left, Frankie Perira, 6, is coached by Rec. Assistant Eddie Rodriguez and director John Bogdanoff as Steven Ontiveras, 8, looks on.

## Boxing is 'Where It's At' for Bogdanoff and Rodriguez; City Council Yields Support

A pilot program for citywide youth boxing, which was started more than one year ago by a North area rec director, received unanimous City Council support recently.

John Bogdanoff, rec director at Lincoln Park, has been organizing boxing matches between youth groups in East Los Angeles for the past year as City Councilmen eyed his progress.

"Since this program went into effect one year ago, many community problems involving the gangs have been curtailed," he explains.

The Recreation and Parks Committee of the Council, aware that boxing as an organized sport in Los Angeles' recreational facilities had been severely limited by City policy, urged that the program for competitive boxing be supported.

The program will start at the following six recreation centers and eventually spread out to satellite locations: Lincoln Park, High Park, Elysian Park, Evergreen Recreation Center, Costello Center, and Ross Snygggrounds.

John does not work alone. Growing programs are the best to address

"I get involved in it for the kids," explains Eddie. "They don't know which way to turn. I see them heading towards drugs or gang fights; they want attention. I know where it's at and they know I know."

"I can talk to them on their level. I see myself in them."

Any weekday after school finds Eddie and his boys (ages five to 18 years) training.

A youth boxing match in which teens from more than a dozen East Los Angeles boxing clubs (including Lincoln's) compete, is held once every few months.

The last such event was scheduled in April at Lincoln with professional boxers and ex-boxers on hand to assist in coaching the young men and judging the matches. Among those taking part in the event which has the backing of the International Youth Boxing Club were: Armando Muniz, Pedro Lovell, Rudy Jordan and Joey Orbillo.

These men and John Bogdanoff and Eddie Rodriguez

# One



REC AND PARKS



CITY RETIREE JOHN BOGDANOFF:

# Knockout Mentor



John Bogdanoff created the City's youth boxing program in the 1950s – and, by his own account, was nearly fired for it, twice. But it kept some kids out of gangs, and he helped form some world-class athletes.

**His story begins on the next page.**



THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

CITY RETIREE JOHN BOGDANOFF:

# A Ringing Success



Talking with the man who guided Rec and Parks' youth boxing program.

On Dec. 16, Club CEO John Hawkins, Alive! editor John Burnes and Club photographer Tom Hawkins interviewed Retiree John Bogdanoff at his home in Leisure World, Seal Beach. In his position at Rec and Parks, John Bogdanoff created and directed the City's first boxing program. He told stories of championships his kids won, gangs he thwarted, kids he kept on the straight and narrow, and lives permanently altered for the better. —Ed.

Alive! photos by Tom Hawkins. Archive photos courtesy John Bogdanoff.

**Alive!:** When did you retire from the City?

**John Bogdanoff:** I retired from Rec and Parks in 1983.

What was your title when you retired?

**John:** Senior Director II.

Where were you located?

**John:** Lincoln Park in the Lincoln Heights area. I guess you'd call it East LA.

Were you in Rec and Parks your whole City career?

**John:** My whole City career.

From *The Wizard of Oz*?

**John:** Right. We graduated together from LA City College while they were building Cal State LA. We were the first ones to graduate out of LA State College they called it; Billy Barty and I. There were about 30 who graduated that year so we were the first ones.

You were working with the City Education. Was that the LAUSD before there was an LAUSD?

**John:** LA Unified School District, I guess you'd call it. I worked there part time while I was going to City College.

How old were you when you started working for the City?

**John:** About 23.

What was your first job?

**John:** It was in Pecan Playground, five doors away from where I lived.

What was your job?

**John:** I was student director at that time. Then I got called from Bill Fredrickson, who was the General Manager [of Rec and Parks].

He liked me. He used to come around and visit, and see how I handled the kids. The gangs - I turned them from gangs to being sports-minded. And so I got promoted.

Right; we'll talk about the gangs in a minute. What was Rec and Parks like back then?

**John:** I enjoyed it. We had a district director who used to come around. He was a snoop. And I told him one time, "You know what? You're bothering me. I'm working with the kids right now. If you want to call me, make an appointment. We have a telephone here. Call up and say, 'Hey John, at your free time, we'd like to come visit.'" He'd make his checks around. Sometimes he wanted to check without you knowing. But I always did my job.

I was a community man. When I worked at Lincoln Park, Cesar Chavez [was living] in a tent across from Lincoln Park. They lived in what looked like a circus tent. One day, a big wind came up and blew it down. I said, "Hey, come on over. Come over to my house, Lincoln Park Recreation Center." They and their wives came over with the babies. I gave them the hall, the gym, the beds and the cots. Whatever they needed - the kitchen, the restroom, the shower.

John Bogdanoff (left) and former Lightweight World Champion Enrique Bolanos (in dark shirt), with a youth boxing participant, a member of the Recreation Commission and a parent, in Lincoln Park.



Representatives of Anheuser-Busch were frequent sponsors of events that John Bogdanoff put on, to raise funds for recreational programs.



John Bogdanoff (center) and Cesar Chavez (right) with a fellow Rec and Parks staffer (left).



REC AND PARKS



John Bogdanoff tells a story to Club CEO John Hawkins (left) and Alive! editor John Burnes.

In the morning, they cleaned up and took off, campaigning. [Rec and Parks supervisors] wanted to fire me. That's the first time they wanted to fire me.

Because you were helping out Cesar Chavez?

**John:** Yes, because I helped the people. That's my job, working with the community. Even Sam Yorty told me, "John, you work with the community." I have pictures of him giving me a citation.

The former Mayor Sam Yorty, before Mayor Tom Bradley?

**John:** Yes. Bradley was good. He come over and gave me a citation too for what I've done in the gang work.

What kind of things did you do in those early days? Was it fitness or basketball leagues?

**John:** Everything. I think I was the original who started different activities. I even had golf at Pecan Playground. I made a little golf course, nine holes with cans and granite. No grass. We had golf tournaments.

Were there a lot of kids?

**John:** Oh yes. I got them to like sports. They were of all nationalities.

Tell us some of the kids you worked with.

**John:** Floyd Jeter was one of my kids. He was a high jumper, a trackman. He went to Roosevelt High School. He lived right by the playground. When we were pole vaulting, he'd come and high jump. I [encouraged] him. [Floyd represented the United States as a member of the Goodwill Track Team in a month-long tour of Europe in 1954 and was ranked second in the world in the high jump by US Track and Field Magazine. In 1955, he was the first African American to receive a track scholarship to USC. —Ed.]

**'I TURNED [THE KIDS] FROM GANGS TO BEING SPORTS-MINDED.'**

— JOHN BOGDANOFF

Bill Novikoff was a coach at Verdugo High. He was one of my kids. He's a cousin to Lou Novikoff, the "Mad Russian." I don't know if you remember Lou Novikoff.

No, sorry.

**John:** The original [minor league Los Angeles] Angels of the Pacific Coast league played at Wrigley Field.

In South L.A.

**John:** Yes. I used to catch for Louie. He was the world's greatest softball pitcher. They knew he could hit. So the Angels signed him up. He was there for about six years. Then from there he went with the Chicago Cubs and then with Philly. [Lou Novikoff, the "Mad Russian," played in the major leagues for five years in the 1940s. —Ed.]

Glenn Wilder was a stuntman with the movies. [Wilder has more than 215 credits on the Internet Movie Database. —Ed.] He used to play tackle in front of the office.

You're not supposed to play tackle on the playground. No helmet, nothing. A lot of my kids turned out to be stuntmen because Glenn got them all jobs.

I don't know if you've ever heard of Johnny Straud, the movie actor. He was one of my kids on the playground.

Gail Goodrich, the basketball player, was one of my kids at Vic Davano Playground. Now they call it Valley Plaza in North Hollywood. [Gail Goodrich played at UCLA, then in the NBA from 1968 through 1979. He is a member of the Basketball Hall of Fame. —Ed.]

How many kids do you think you've worked with?

**John:** Oh, I'd say about a thousand, maybe more.

How many places did you work?

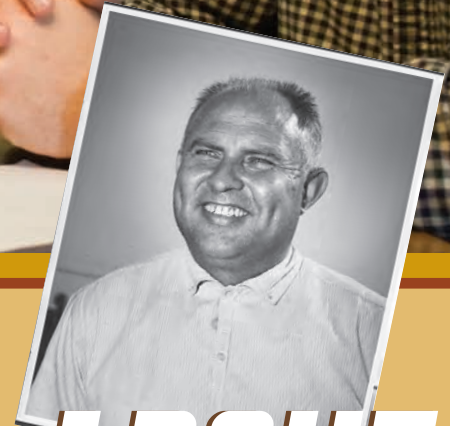
**John:** I worked at Daniels Field in San Pedro. North Hollywood Playground. And Vic Davano Playground.

I worked at Manchester Playground, near Compton, for a while. I worked at Evergreen Playground. I still see them once in a while. They still like me because I helped them out. If they got in trouble and if I knew they were right, I'd help them out. But if they're wrong, I'd say "Hey, you did it wrong. We're trying to help you out." They knew what I was there for, to help them.

When did you first notice that kids could be pulled in a bad direction like gangs?

**John:** It was there, at Evergreen. The gang situation was there. There were a number of gangs even up near Pecan Playground. But there were more out of Lincoln Park. There were about seven gangs there.

— continues



**ABOUT John Bogdanoff**

Retired, Senior Recreation Director, Rec and Parks, 1983

**Education:**

- Bachelor of Arts, Los Angeles State College (now Cal State L.A.)
- Honorary Doctorate, community work, Van Norman University

**Career highlights:**

- Retired after 35 years serving the community.
- Implemented programs for youths involved in gangs, keeping many of the young men and women off the streets and deterring siblings from getting involved in gangs. One of the programs he established was the boxing program.
- Reopened youth boxing program at the Los Angeles City Jail in Lincoln Heights
- Established the International Youth Boxing Club with Canute Reyes and Al Hernandez in conjunction with Montebello Parks and Recreation and the Montebello Police Dept.
- Instrumental in establishing and organizing programs for senior citizens in the City.
- Established the Festival of Friendship at Lincoln Park, uniting all cultures in celebrating their ethnicity.

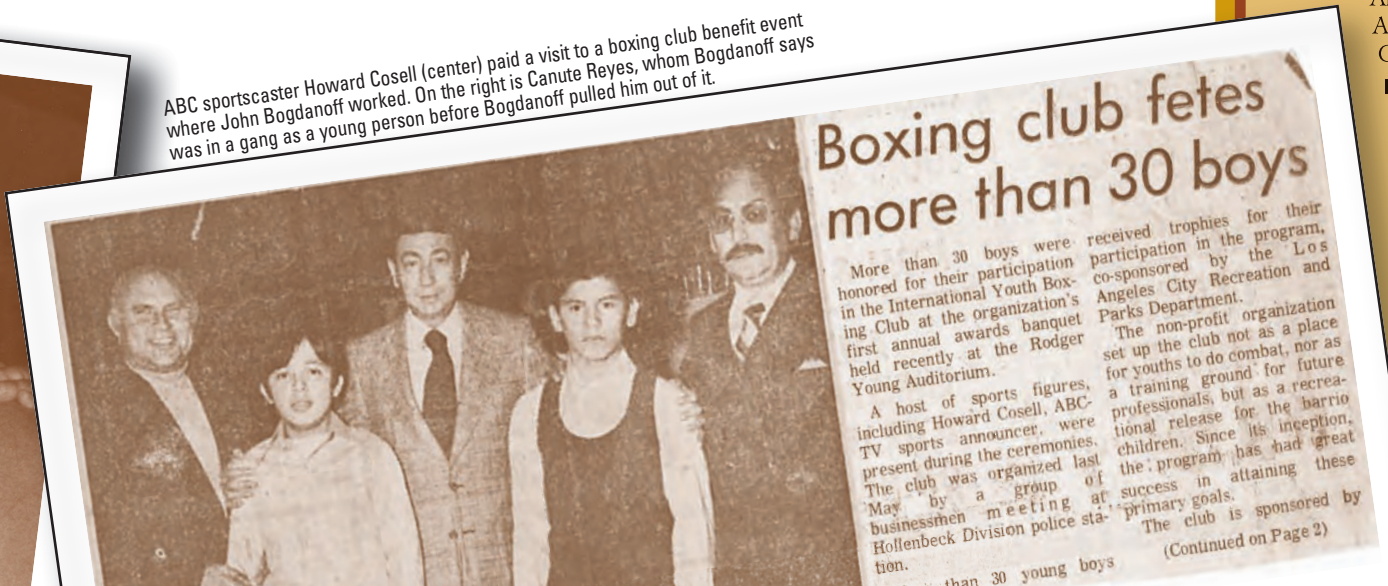
**Awards and honors:**

- Has received awards and honors from State Assemblyman Richard Alatorre; former City Councilman Art Snyder; six awards from the City of Montebello
- Has received the Lincoln Heights Chamber of Commerce award for service to the community.

**Personal:**

- Lived in Montebello for more than 48 years
- Lives with his wife, Stella, in Leisure World, Seal Beach
- Has five daughters and 10 grandchildren
- Remains active in youth sports programs.

ABC sportscaster Howard Cosell (center) paid a visit to a boxing club benefit event where John Bogdanoff worked. On the right is Canute Reyes, whom Bogdanoff says was in a gang as a young person before Bogdanoff pulled him out of it.



THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

# A Ringing Success



— continued

Even when you started, back in the early 1950s?

**John:** Yes, before I started at Lincoln Park.

So this was always part of your job and part of your concern, how to get kids out of the gangs.

**John:** My job was recreation. But I went overboard to help these kids in the gangs. I knew all the gangs. One time, I helped one kid. I'm not going to mention what he did, but I helped him out; I fixed him up. And here comes the Hollenbeck Police. He came back [later] and told me, "John, thank you." He said, "Hey John, I'm going to try to go straight." After that, I don't know what happened to him.

But you tried to make a difference.

**John:** Oh yes.

We had graffiti on the playground and the pool at Lincoln Park. I have pictures showing how the kids cleaned it up and painted it. I gave them a wall and said, "This is yours. Put a mural up." They did an outstanding job. We provided the paint for them. The painter we had was Rudy Salas. His sons have a salsa band called Tierra. So Rudy and I got them to help, and they did a beautiful job. The mural still sits at Lincoln Park. Nobody touches it.

You wanted it to be done.

**John:** Sure. "Help me and I'll help you."

## Underdogs and City Champs

Tell us about winning the basketball championship.

**John:** Right. One time, we went to the Valley from Pecan Playground for my kids to play basketball at Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks.

These were the big blondies, and I had black and Mexican kids and one Russian kid, all piled into my '38 Chevy. I had a rope to hold my side doors [closed]. I used to get ten of them in my '38 Chevy.

You piled your whole team into your old Chevy?

**John:** Oh yes. We went there and beat Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks. They were six-feet, two. Our tallest was 5-feet, ten. Coming back, I see a big old semi truck tire on the street. So we all got out there and put it on top of the roof. The police stopped us: "Hey, you got all these kids." I said we just won the City Championship and we're going to get this tire to take it back to [whomever] it belongs to. But I sold it and we celebrated.

What year was that?

**John:** Gee, that was '55 or '56; that era.

## The Boxing Program

Let's talk about boxing. Were you a boxer growing up?

**John:** As a kid, we used to fight on the playgrounds. Then we ended up playing ball at Pecan Playground.

What were all the sports you were involved in growing up?

**John:** I was an athlete. I used to pole vault quite a bit. When I was 12, I jumped 12 feet with a bamboo pole, pole-vaulting. When I was going to Hollenbeck Junior High School, Roosevelt High School was right next door. I used to go down there and jump higher than the varsity.

And we played basketball on decomposed granite. We didn't have any grass.

But then I busted my leg. Here's how it happened. I got an infection in my eye. From my eye, it went down to my shinbone. They had

to scrape my bone with a horrible syringe to get the decay down to the bone. So that kind of curtailed my activities then.

At Roosevelt High School I played basketball with a brace on. It was all wrapped. I could shoot, though. I used to hit those.

When did you add the boxing program? Where did you start it?

**John:** It was at Pecan Playground. We used to put on boxing exhibitions in the gym.

You started that?

**John:** I started that, in 1953. Then I started boxing programs at six other playgrounds in the City. We put on exhibitions. I'd have volunteer doctors come and check the kids out and make sure their hearts were okay. If they couldn't go, we wouldn't let them play.

Did you think it would give them discipline or keep them off the streets?

**John:** That's right. You'd keep them away from the gangs. When you're a boxer, they'd leave you alone because you could handle yourself.

You were seeing gang activity and you wanted to give them an alternative to that?

**John:** Right. I gave them a chance, gave them a break.

What kind of equipment did they wear in those days?

**John:** The Salvation Army was nearby. They had used supporters and headgear.

Your kids wore headgear?

**John:** Oh yes.

## "... OSCAR DE LA HOYA AS A KID USED OUR CLUB IN MONTEBELLO."

— JOHN BOGDANOFF

Did you meet a lot of resistance when you wanted to start that program?

**John:** Well, the City wanted to fire me again. "What are you trying to do?"

They didn't like your idea of starting the boxing program?

**John:** No, they said kids are going to get hurt — insurance and all that. But we did our job. I did it. I pushed it. No other playground did it like I did it.

How did you pay for it?

**John:** I had a festival at Lincoln Park. We had beer gardens; we sold beer. It was enclosed; you drank it right there. Budweiser paid for everything. We used to get it free then. We made \$20,000 that went to Lincoln Park for the Youth Program, and senior citizens [programs], and paid for a lot of uniforms.

Why did you want to start that boxing program?

**John:** Well, I like boxing. I had a distant cousin, Gus Lesnevich, who was a light heavyweight champ of the world. He came and refereed once.

We had exhibition fights at Pecan Playground on the second floor. I enjoyed boxing, and I knew the kids liked it, so I pushed them and made them better at it, too.

The boxing programs at the Rec facilities — are they still going on today?

**John:** There are some that are doing it on their own. Some directors are using their heads to help the kids out that way.

When you retired, was it thriving?

**John:** It was still going on. And I started the boxing program at the [former] Lincoln Heights Jail. A friend of mine was a Community Relations Director there. He said, "John, that building's available. Get your boxing program in there." And I got the third floor. The whole floor — we had seven rings in there, showers and everything.

What do you think it taught the kids at your facilities?

**John:** It gave them a way to take care of themselves. They didn't have to depend on anyone else to help them out. They learned discipline. With the right pushing and with the help of their fathers — I used to talk to the fathers and say, "Hey, help your son out."

You must be really proud of it.

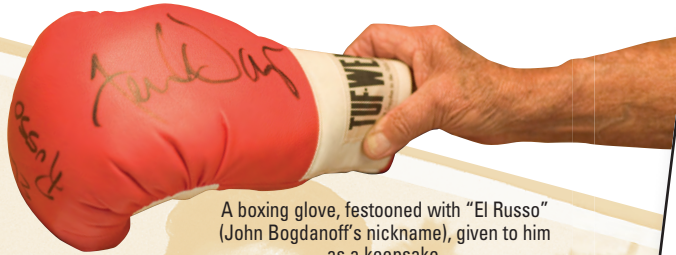
**John:** Oh gee, I can't stop. Some of those kids came back to make a documentary about it. They say, "Hey, we've been looking for you." They finally found me through the Internet. So we got together and we're going to do more with them. They're coaching their kids now.



Above, below and right: John Bogdanoff weaves tales to Club CEO John Hawkins (blue shirt) and Alive! editor John Burnes (checked shirt).



# REC AND PARKS



A boxing glove, festooned with "El Russo" (John Bogdanoff's nickname), given to him as a keepsake.

## Notable Boxing Alumni

Tell me some of the people who went into boxing or made successes of themselves after they went through your program.

**John:** Joey Olivo, one of my kids from Lincoln Park, was a flyweight champ of the world for three years. A 110-pounder. Tall, five-feet, ten.

He was thin!

**John:** He was what they called "flaco," or thin. "Flaco" in Spanish is thin. His father did a good job with him. He had some good manners, too.

There was a gang called Clanton Street Gang. They were behind Olympic Auditorium on a street called Clanton. The organizers saw what I was doing with the boxing program in the City. They said, "John, we want to put money into the boxing program and expand it." So we called it the IYBC, the International Youth Boxing Club. We were working out of Montebello at that time.

As a kid, Oscar de la Hoya used the club in Montebello. He was a young kid. He used to work out at Resurrection, which used to be a church. They turned it into a boxing gym.

Somebody called me from New York and said, "John, how'd you get this program started? Boxing is banned in the playgrounds and recreation centers." I said, "No, I went out of my way to do it."

We got the help of the Clanton gang. They had a big dance at the Hollywood Palladium, and raised the money. It went from a gang to a social club because of a priest. He was in that neighborhood and he said, "Hey. Become a social club. Get away from the gang." They wanted to come in with me, and I said, "Fine." So we started the gym in Montebello with the help of the Montebello Police Department and the Recreation Department. We were doing the same thing, helping the kids.

The gym in Montebello was a good facility. We had two rings there.

## Ring Memories

What do you miss most about it?

**John:** I miss the kids I haven't seen, the ones who grew up on my playgrounds. I would like to see Glenn Wilder, the movie star and stuntman. I'd like to see all of them.

You miss the kids who became adults and good people?

**John:** Oh yes. I do.

Thanks for sharing all your stories, John.

**John:** Thank you! ■

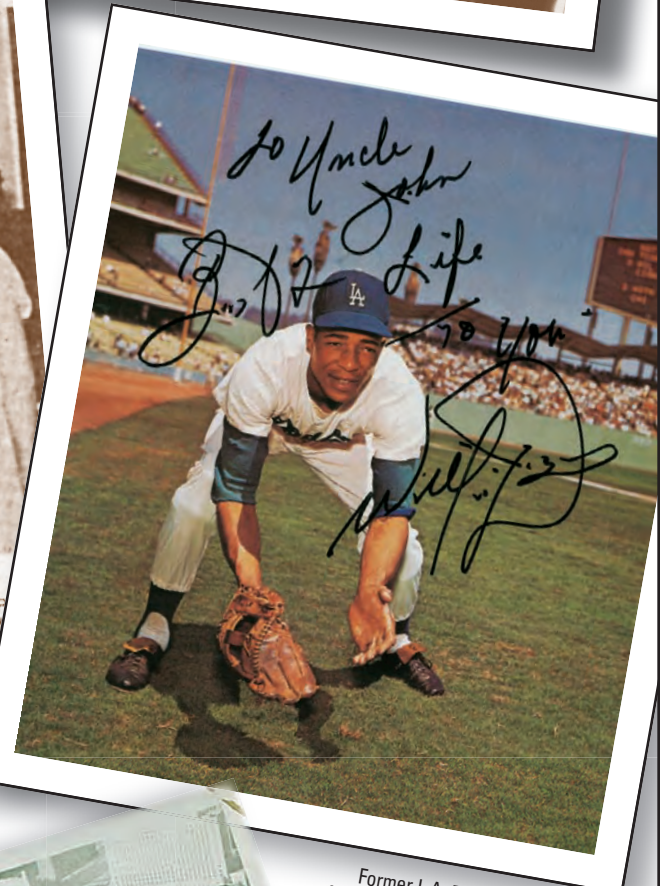


Seated (left) are the owners of this shoe store in Echo Park where Bogdanoff worked part-time. John Bogdanoff (center, in sweater) worked with a local Optimist to provide shoes for youths who needed them.



Honor park director

Bogdanoff, the recreation director at Lincoln Park, was honored this week by the Rec and Parks Commission for his 33 years of service to the department. Presenting the award were Rec and Parks Commission president Robert Selleck, and commissioner Evelyn Benson. Bogdanoff graduated from Roosevelt High, City College and Cal State. He joined the City of Los Angeles in 1970 after working at City Hall on special programs for the past 10 years. Thirty-three years ago he started his career as a student director for Pecan Playgrounds.



To Uncle John  
Thank you for  
life to you  
Willie Davis

John Bogdanoff was honored by the Rec and Parks Commission for his then-33 years of City service.

Former L.A. Dodger Willie Davis, a friend of John Bogdanoff's and a supporter of his work. As a child, Davis used to participate in Bogdanoff's City youth programs.



Boxing club fetes more than 30 boys

