



Historically Speaking

*with Eastchester Town Historian
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Milt Gibbons and the Police Athletic League

The year was 1923. A mother of two boys who were in trouble with the law for vandalizing a candy machine was frightened about what the Tuckahoe village judge would do to her sons. She approached a Tuckahoe police officer named Milt Gibbons, an amateur boxer and wrestler of great ability, to intercede on her behalf. Milt approached the judge and the boys were placed on probation under Officer Gibbons' supervision. Not only did the village judge put these two boys under Gibbons' care but as other boys got into trouble, he placed them under the care of "Milt" as he was called.

It was at this time, with these boys as a nucleus, that Gibbons organized the Tuckahoe Police Associates. Nightly, ever-growing numbers of youngsters flooded to the cellar of the patrolman's home. Here he had installed such athletic equipment as he could afford. These boys were trained in boxing and wrestling. Within a year these boys were carrying off prizes as amateur boxers and wrestlers throughout the east.

Milt's program expanded. Mothers from other communities whose sons were in trouble with the law put their sons under Milt's care. Twice a week he took boys interested in wrestling to the Mount Vernon YMCA and twice a week he took boys interested in boxing to the Yonkers Hollywood Inn boxing gym. By 1930 branch clubs similar to the one in Tuckahoe had been formed in Yonkers, Mt. Vernon, and Eastchester. It would be at the Knights of Columbus Hall in town that the first Police Athletic League tournament was held. These tournaments became annual affairs and as its popularity expanded had to be held at the newly completed Eastchester High School.

Word of the success of the Tuckahoe Associates became widely known. The New York City police, who had started the first Police Athletic League in 1914, consulted with Milt Gibbons and stated a program of their own patterned after the Tuckahoe Police Associates. Washington DC, Mount Vernon and Yonkers would follow. Today Police Athletic League boxing tournaments take place all across the country.

Other activities initiated by the Tuckahoe Youth Associates included baseball, football,

basketball, a cadet corps, a fife and bugle corps, and annual track-and-field contests. Service organizations like the Lion's and Kiwanis Clubs gave needed financial support. Unbelievably during 10 years of the Great Depression from 1930 to 1940 when at one time one of every three workers were unemployed, there was not one instance of case of juvenile delinquency in Tuckahoe.

At the start of World War II both Gov. Herbert Lehman and President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent letters of praise to Mayor Gibbons commending him for his great progress. Six hundred fifteen boys over the age of 18, including 234 boxers, every member of the Tuckahoe Police Associates, were members of the armed forces. When it became known that Sgt. Milt Gibbons was about to retire, the governor of New York State, Thomas E. Dewey, sent him the following letter:

"It is a pleasure to congratulate you upon the invaluable record you have achieved in your 26 years of service as member to the Tuckahoe Police Department and as a founder of the Police Associates. You may be proud that within 10 years you succeeded in wiping out juvenile delinquency in your community..."

The Village of Tuckahoe paid their respect back to Milton Gibbons by electing him to the position of mayor from 1949 to 1965.

Milt Gibbons contributed greatly to eliminating juvenile delinquency in Tuckahoe but there were other factors. The Village of Tuckahoe was a unique community. Italian and African American families who made up 90 percent of the population lived side by side, attended the Main Street School, and supported each other and the other groups that lived in the community. While there was some tension between the Irish and Italian communities, people watched out for their youngsters and when one stepped out of line, they were quickly put in their place.

But the fact remains that if Milt Gibbons had not opened his heart and his home to those two boys in trouble in 1923, Tuckahoe and this country would not be the place that it is.