

Terry Hennessy's Great Life

On and off the Field

By Jack Sirard

SACRAMENTO – Taking his position in right-center field, Terry Hennessy hears the crack of the bat and instantly knows a screamer of a shot is headed up the alley in center. Fearing for a moment that the ball will get through to the fence allowing the winning runs to score, Hennessy takes a few quick steps to his left only to see the well-positioned left-center fielder make a routine catch.

Game over. His team wins and it's time to head to the local pizza joint for some celebrating.

"That's the beauty of slow-pitch softball," Hennessy says. "It's an active game with plenty of hitting – and the extra fielder makes the game a bit easier and a lot more fun, particularly for those playing senior softball, one of the fastest growing recreational groups in

America."

With thousands of baby boomers taking to the softball fields across the United States each year, Hennessy, who is chief executive officer of Senior Softball-USA (SSUSA), is having as much fun as anyone who's working these days.

Despite the economic turbulence of recent years, Hennessy's company has continued to grow, attracting men and women softball players both in the United States and around the globe.

Senior Softball-USA has become a multi-million-dollar business as the nation's largest softball organization with more than 30,000 players nationwide. The company is in more than 60 cities, running National and Regional championships and qualifiers plus scores of recreational tournaments. In addition, SSUSA regularly takes U.S. teams to international tournaments. In fact, in 2010, Hennessy helped take SSUSA teams to Taiwan, Japan and Cuba.

"While everyone likes to win the international games, it's more



World Championships in Phoenix in 2007 with the Sacramento Saints 55 team.



Terry Hennessy (on Rocking Horse) surrounded by brothers, from left, Pat, Joe and Dennis in 1952 photo.

“One of the stories that turned into Hennessy family lore revolved around the 1952 Brooklyn Dodgers spring training and how I almost derailed their season. My dad, Joe Hennessy, was a sportswriter assigned to cover the Dodgers’ Spring Training in Florida for the St. Paul Pioneer Press and he decided to make it a family vacation.

So the family – which at the time included my mother and three brothers, the oldest of whom was 5 years old – drove from Minnesota to Florida. I was the fourth and youngest brother at about 6 months old.

Fortunately I don’t remember much about the drive or the experience, but my father loved to tell us the story. As it happened, he knew the team pretty well and a couple of the players offered to babysit the four boys so my parents could have a night on the town.

Everything was swell until a couple of days later when I became ill and was diagnosed with chicken pox. Unfortunately the babysitting Dodgers, and a number of their teammates had never had chicken pox.

There were a few anxious weeks as the Dodgers sweated out not only the other teams, but looked for spots among themselves. Fortunately none developed chicken pox – and the team made it to the World Series.”

-Terry Hennessy



Left: Hennessy addresses teams near Tokyo during the All Japan Champion Cup International Softball Tournament in 2007. SSUSA has been sending US teams since 2000 to help promote senior softball in conjunction with the Japan Ministry of Health and Sports; Right: Hennessy presents Japanese Ministry of Health and Sports officials with a gift on behalf of Team USA and Senior Softball-USA to commemorate the 2007 event near Tokyo.

about having fun traveling, learning about new cultures and making new friends,” Hennessy says. “In the case of Cuba, we were allowed to put on the First Cuban-American Senior Softball Classic and establish critical softball contacts in Cuba.”

During the visit, American players literally gave their economically deprived Cuban counterparts the shirts off their backs as well as gloves, softballs, bats and shoes.

While his business looks like it’s fun 24-7, dealing with the complexity of national tournaments that require Economic Impact Reports and international tournaments that require US Government approval, it can be daunting. After all, it is a business and one that faces the same challenges as any other would have with thousands of customers.

Fran Dowell, Senior Softball USA executive director and a long-time friend of Hennessy, says that “over the years, we have strived

to learn from each tournament how to improve – it has been very gratifying.”

She has been with Hennessy since he first came into the business back in the 1990s and has more than her share of stories to tell about what it took to keep SSUSA moving forward in the early years. “We spent many hours building relationships with host cities, park districts, sponsors and – most important – with managers and players. Terry put us on the map in getting first-class tournaments coast to coast.”

Today, Senior Softball-USA is the largest senior softball organization in the world. Hennessy wears a second hat as editor of Senior Softball News and he’s a member of the President’s Council for the Independent Softball Association. He also helped establish and was one of the first chairmen of the National Senior Softball Summit (in 2002-2003), which represents all nine national

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softball organizations.

SSUSA has been at the forefront of developing CPR/AED training for its directors and officials, and has opened the classes to players and managers. Jim Sherman, SSUSA's national director/safety, died earlier this year of cancer, but developed the training program and SSUSA now provides defibrillators at all of its tournaments. This program has saved four lives in the past four years.

SSUSA also has been very involved in both breast and prostate cancer preventative programs over the past several years; publishing health tips and reminders, offering clinics and booths at major tournaments that distribute information to players.

Hennessy was working as a newspaper editor back in 1994 when SSUSA founder Bob Mitchell asked him to help put out Senior Softball News after his editor died unexpectedly. Within a few years, Hennessy was a partner in the newspaper with Mitchell and two years later he ran the World Championships in Phoenix, his first major tournament.

By then he was totally smitten with senior softball and in 1997 he took a year leave-of-absence from the Sacramento Bee to become SSUSA's executive director.

Four years later, Mitchell retired and Hennessy and Bill Ruth partnered to buy Senior Softball-USA. Ruth also owns the Independent Softball Association.

"We work very closely with Don Stratton (CEO of ISA) and Don and I have become good friends over the years," said Hennessy.

Since taking over SSUSA in 2001, Hennessy, 59, has spent much of his time on the road. Whether he's running the Eastern Championships in North Carolina or the Rock 'n' Reno Challenge Cup in Nevada, Hennessy is the well-known face of the business.

He estimates that he spends as much as half his time on the road. Over the past decade he has traveled to more than 30 countries and played ball in most of them with his business partner and good friend Ruth, and with Bill's wife Susan, who is director of International Sports Holidays, the SSUSA travel arm that runs the International Tours.

Ruth, who has an assortment of business enterprises across the United States and Mexico, calls Hennessy "the most complete partner I've ever had in business. In fact, he's more than a partner, he's a close friend to me and my wife Susan.

"He is hard-working, ethical, honest and sharing. In short, he's the complete package as a business partner and friend."

Ruth adds that "he is looking forward to being partners for many more years to come as the electrifying adventure of senior softball continues to grow."

In addition to Cuba and Taiwan, SSUSA has brought senior softball tours to Ireland, Scotland, Holland, Germany, Italy, Austria, Mexico, Dominican Republic, New Zealand, and Australia. Hennessy has played in Japan in most of the past 10 years as part of a program with Japan's Ministry of Health and Sports to promote Senior Softball in Japan.

Dowell who has 12 years working with Hennessy credits him with putting a huge emphasis on customer service. "When I first came to the company as the bookkeeper, I knew he would make the company grow.

"He has been very responsive to any and all ideas that the staff comes up with and wherever I go, everyone talks about the international trips."



Top: Hennessy receives gift on behalf of Team USA from the Japan softball officials at the 2007 tournament; Bottom: Hennessy gets ready to swing during the All Japan tournament in 2007.



In many cases, these tours end up resulting in friendships and, in one case marriage.

Wayne Grimes of Kansas City had been on several international tours when love struck. He saw something in the way the German player at third base moved (yes, it was a woman), and struck up a halting conversation. By the end of the trip, they had exchanged numbers and e-mails and within a few months he was in love. It took Wayne the better part of two years to get through all the red tape, but he and Alex were married last year and she is now with him in Kansas City.

"Teams we met in Germany and Japan have come to America to compete in the World Championships for several years," Hennessy says. In fact, he played on the German team last year when they were short players in a tournament and they have asked him to play again this year.

Hennessy's international travels with Senior Softball USA also have had a serious side.

In 2005, the 60th anniversary of dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese invited the U.S. softball contingent to those cities for a senior softball tournament. In each city they normally met the mayors and exchanged gifts before the games were played.

Everything went smoothly in the Hiroshima mayor's office, but when they went to meet the Nagasaki mayor they knew something was amiss. Upon entering the mayor's office, Team USA faced a score of cameras and the mayor was not smiling.

The mayor was pointing to a map, talking about those who lost their lives and were injured in the Nagasaki bombing in 1945 and of the terrible destruction the U.S. had wreaked on his city.

Suddenly the cameras turned toward Hennessy for a response and one



Terry Hennessy in 1969 as a member of the Cretin Military Academy marching band.

of his players leaned forward and whispered, "Remind him about Pearl Harbor."

"I took a deep breath, smiled and told the mayor that we were here to play softball, but in a much larger sense we were here to establish long-lasting friendships that hopefully, over time, would provide the basis of mutual understanding and peace so that war – and the pain and death produced by both sides in war – could be avoided in the future," Hennessy recalled.

That broke the tension and the rest of the trip went off without an incident.

One of the high points of his international travel, Hennessy said, was the trip

to Cuba this year with daughter Jayme. "She helped open communication with the Cuban teams by acting as translator, and she won the hearts of all the teams with her willingness to help, her smile and outgoing personality."

Hennessy's penchant for travel started back in 1969 when the Cretin Military High School Marching Band from St. Paul was selected to represent Minnesota in President Nixon's Inaugural Parade in Washington DC. Hennessy played the flute and piccolo in the band and this was his first trip on a plane.

Five years later, he graduated from the University of Minnesota and he and his wife sold most of their belongings, put the rest in storage and headed for Europe. After several months of traveling through Europe that included living on the Mediterranean in Spain and visiting Pope Paul VI, they ended up in London with \$25 and return tickets to America.

However, before the trip home, Terry called a number of newspapers and landed a reporting job in Exeter, England, that offered him an exceptional chance to learn about the country and culture and to establishment great friendships.

From Exeter, Hennessy moved to South Dakota where he took a position as an editor in the Black Hills at the Rapid City Journal. Here he spent many weekends exploring the gold mining ghost towns and trout fishing in the streams. His favorite stream was hidden away in the midst of a canyon that turned out to be the sacred spot for the Sioux. That became an adventure later. "My best memory of Rapid City was my son Bryant being born there in 1976," he says.

The family moved to Minneapolis later that same year and Hennessy worked there as Page One editor until the Evening Star folded and its name merged with the morning Tribune in 1982. "The Star was a great place to work, with eight editions a day and the newsroom was a wall of smoke from cigarettes, cigars and pipes," he says. "In addition, there were more than a few bottles of booze in desk drawers (none officially there, of course)."

When the Star folded, the Hennessy family set off

for California where Hennessy had a job waiting at the Sacramento Bee. On the ride out to Sacramento, Hennessy decided to stop at his favorite fishing stream in the Black Hills. His son had grown up hearing about this stream and it was definitely the high point of the trip. The road to the stream is a winding dirt road of several miles that wraps around some of the most beautiful scenery in the Black Hills.

"We had almost reached the end of the road, which ran about halfway up a hill, when we spotted some teepees and smoke from campfires in the valley below. Suddenly two men with rifles stepped into the middle of the dirt road and motioned us to stop," Hennessy says.

He wisely rolled the window down and was told they were trespassing on Sacred Sioux land and would have to leave.



Hennessy fishing on hidden creek in Black Hills in 1975. The area was later reclaimed by Sioux protesters as the most sacred area of the Black Hills.



Jayme and Terry Hennessy in front of one of Joe Hennessy's works of art at Joe's memorial. Joe, Terry's brother, died in November 2009.

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Young Bryant, from the seat next to his dad asked, "Can't we just fish in the stream?"

The answer was not even a smile, just a motion with the rifle to turn around and leave. Which, of course, they did. The rest of the day was spent giving Bryant a history lesson on just what had happened in the Black Hills.

The family made it to Sacramento where daughter Jayme was born and Hennessy has lived in Northern California ever since. The highlight of his newspapering days was undoubtedly the eight years he was Special Projects Editor at The Bee. The best part of journalism, he says, is when it can actually affect a change by identifying a problem.

For almost a decade, his team produced projects on the environment, the justice system, health, illiteracy and even Ronald Reagan's Star Wars plan. The results were almost always gratifying. Congress ordered an investigation of the project team's findings that many military bases were serious sources of heavy-metal pollution that threatened drinking water in several heavily populated areas. The investigation not only confirmed their findings, but broadened the scope of the study and set up several Superfund sites to clean up the pollution before it poisoned drinking water.

"In a series that directly challenged the national attitude that the only people who were going hungry were those who refused to work, we sent teams of reporters to every major food bank in California and discovered most of the hungry were women and children," Hennessy says.

And in another article, the reporting team investigated the investigation of three men held in jail for six months on horrendous charges of

Hennessey before the game winning hit at the Tournament of Champions in Florida, 2010.



Bryant and Jayme sitting, with Hennessy in 2009.





Fishing was great as usual at Silver King Lodge on an island near Ketchikan, Alaska last year for, from left, Hennessy, Don Stratton (CEO of ISA), Bill Ruth (President of ISA and SSUSA), and JB Ruth.



Hennessy nears the summit of Mt. Whitney.

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child molestation. "We discovered that they had the wrong people. The three men in jail were not even in the city when the crimes happened. They were released the day after the article appeared," Hennessy said.

Hennessy has loved living in California where he can virtually play softball year-round. He currently plays in two leagues in the Sacramento area and has played on tournament teams for the past several years, including the Sacramento Saints and Wilson Trophy.

In his personal softball career, two consecutive swings were the low and high points of the 2010 season for Hennessy. The West All Stars had just tied the East All Stars 30-30 in the bottom of the ninth when Hennessy came to bat at the Tournament of Champions in Florida. The first swing was a gigantic swinging miss for a strike. The crowd was all over him as he came back to the plate. Fortunately for Hennessy, he hit the next pitch for a game-winning RBI single.

An avid outdoorsman, Hennessy has climbed California's highest peak, Mt. Whitney where he recalls sleeping outside the night before the final ascent because the team of climbers had to be up at 4 a.m. and didn't want to waste time taking down the tents.

"That was OK, because the stars were great at that altitude. It reminded me of the times we laid on our backs on the boulders at Lyons Lake in Desolation Wilderness and looked at the stars," Hennessy said.

"Everyone was up ready to start the ascent by 4:30 a.m. Mt. Whitney rose above us; a giant slab of rock that looked deceptively easy. An hour later, we were about 1,000 feet above base camp and I turned to get a clear look at Whitney. It looked just as far away as it did at the base camp. Not a good sign."

Carrying 60-pound packs, the climbers kept a very slow but steady pace. At noon they reached the Trail Crest, at 13,600 feet, and dropped the heavy packs. They would pick them up on our way back from the summit and head down the opposite side of the mountain.

"What a feeling of freedom," Hennessy says. "We carried small fanny packs, with some food, water and a camera, during the final ascent. The final ascent took us through snow, over a series of pinacles and up a slippery slope of shale."

When they reached the top at 14,505 feet, it was flat and big – probably 100 yards square – and Hennessy says it felt like they were on top of the world. "Puffs of clouds were swept below our feet. In every direction we could see 50 or more miles. There were towns, mountain ranges and valleys. We could see into the next state."

Bill and Susan Ruth share Hennessy's love of adventure. This past April they flew to Bhutan (a country that was just opened to Western Tourism in 2000) to explore the isolated culture nestled in the deep valleys and high mountains of the southern Himalayan Mountains.

They also go up annually to Silver King Lodge, which Bill Ruth co-owns, to fish the Alaskan Inland Passageway near Ketchikan for prized salmon. The Lodge is on an island and the waterways are home to not only salmon, but whales, Orcas, porpoises and bald eagles.

One of his fondest getaways is California's Desolation Wilderness Area, west of Lake Tahoe. The trails to alpine lakes are gorgeous, providing some spectacular vistas – and fly fishing is an added treat.

Terry lives on a micro-farm in the foothills of the Sierra about 25 miles from Sacramento. The five-acre site has rolling hills, a stream and pond, barn and peace and quiet.

In his spare time at home, Hennessy continues to write. He has written two books: "Marketing for Small Businesses" and "The History of Pest Control." He has ghost-written a third: "Stress and Cancer."



Top: Nestled high atop a sheer cliff, the Tiger's Nest is one of the most ancient and sacred Buddhist shrines in the world.



Top: Group shot in the courtyard of a Bhutan farmhouse with our guide Kenlay (second from right) at his father's house (father is third from left). Bill and Susan Ruth are far left and Terry Hennessy is 4th from left.

Bottom: Dressed in traditional Bhutanese fashion, with the men wearing the Gho and Susan wearing a Kira. From left, Terry Hennessy, Bill Ruth, Susan Ruth and Namgay (our head guide in Bhutan).