

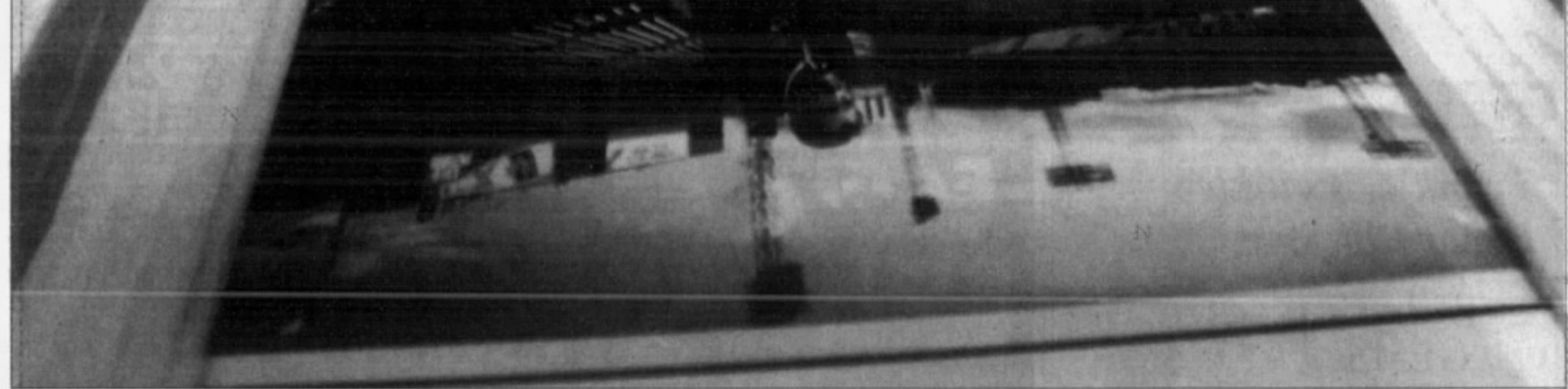
SPORTS

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A DAY IN THE LIFE





Times photos — STEPHEN J. CODDINGTON

Mike Colabelli sorts through a stack of limited-edition photographs of late baseball legend Ted Williams on Friday afternoon during his work as a director at the Ted Williams Museum and Hitters Hall of Fame.

Covering all the bases

Mike Colabelli has an array of duties as director of Florida operations for Ted Williams Museum.

By DAWN REISS
Times Staff Writer

CITRUS HILLS — Sunshine reflects off the Red Sox red tin roof and the cream stucco building.

A human-sized red No. 9 contrasts the background. Inlaid along the front sidewalk are two granite slabs, inscribed with Ted Williams' Cooperstown Hall of Fame induction speech on one side and his lifetime statistics on the other.

It's just before 9:30 a.m. and Mike Colabelli, director of Florida operations for the Ted Williams

This is a story for *A Day In The Life*, a Sunday summer series in which *Times* sports writers chronicle a typical sporting day of someone, some place or something on the North Suncoast.

Museum, walks with his wife, Susan, past two bronzed statues at the Ted Williams Museum and Hitters Hall of Fame.

Colabelli unlocks the door and quickly turns off the alarm that protects more than several million dollars of baseball artifacts and history.

Engulfing the wall is an 11-by-35-foot mural titled "The Legend" by Orlando artist Tim Todd that depicts Williams in the first paces of a run around the bases at Boston's Fenway Park.

It is in these halls that the



lizard and some worm carcasses that Colabelli finds after turning on the lights. Successfully chasing the green reptilian into a small water pail, he dumps the invader back outdoors.

"I always find (worms) upside down," Colabelli explains. "At least two or three. They just get in somehow. They ingest the chemicals we spray, sometimes still wiggling upside down until I scoop them up into a garbage pail."

Living history

With the lights on, Colabelli is ready to work and the museum is open.

During the summer months, through Sept. 5, the museum is closed Sundays, Mondays and holidays. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$1 for children under 12. No

the great hitters of the game."

In this back room there is a black and white photograph — a fake of Williams going to jail, a remanent charity fundraiser for the Jimmy Fund (Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston) where people raise money by bailing celebrities out of jail.

"I had a tour of little kids," Colabelli said. "They just sat and looked at all these cases of famous baseball players. During the recap, I said: 'What did you like the most?' One kid says, 'I liked the picture of Ted in jail.'"

It was a photo Colabelli rarely noticed before the young inquisitive mind showcased it to him. As soon as the tour left, Colabelli took the picture down and it never hung up for the public's eye again.

"That sends the wrong mes-

Mike Colabelli, left, releases a lizard that managed to sneak into the museum. Colabelli, right, places a holographic sticker onto a baseball signed by Ray Dandridge. The ball will be packaged with a certificate of authenticity, then offered for sale to raise funds for the museum.



They meet and greet, build display cases, give tours and find buckets for the leaking roof, which has five favorite spots to drip.

The 8,000 square-foot interior is laid out in the shape of a baseball diamond, chronicling Williams' life with a separate area for the Hitters Hall of Fame. Clean, white walls and bright lights surround the glass-encased memorabilia.

The stretch from home plate around the diamond chronicles Ted's humble beginnings in San Diego to his path of stardom. A minor-league career flows into the majors, jump-started by a 1941 season in which he batted .406 and highlighted in 1942 when he won his first triple crown.

Reminders of Williams' accomplishments during World War II and the Korean Conflict include a

1954. The catch was the eighth largest in the world at the time and earned a spot in the Field and Stream Hall of Fame.

"Rightfield" of the museum has a movie theater with almost 40 varieties that can be played. Baseball bleacher seats flank the room, which is covered with photos of celebrities and athletes who have visited the museum in the 10 years since it opened. On the side, is a small showcase of pitchers.

"Ted did not like pitchers," Colabelli said. "He thought pitchers were stupid people because they threw balls that he could hit over the fence. Later on he recanted and decided, 'We'll let pitchers in, but they can not be in the same room as the hitters. Not the best pitchers, but some of the greatest.'"

The original idea came from a few friends, including Sam Tampo-si, who convinced Williams to move north from the Florida Keys in his later years because the fishing was better with bay- and Gulf-side water holes.

They helped Williams make the museum a reality.

It adds new additions each February with the annual Hitters Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony.

Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and Ty Cobb are a few of the originals. Every year, two or three more are accepted, and given a centerfield showcase this season are Monte Irvin and Rod Carew.

It is here in a nearby case that a broken "Shoeless" Joe Jackson bat from a 1911 White Sox game is displayed. Black and tan with a thick base, this \$700,000 artifact — the museum's most expensive — commemorates his .408 batting average.

But for 11-year-old Chris Attanasil of Orange Park and Jacksonville's Rollin Kimball, 12, their favorite spot was seeing Gary Sheffield's memorabilia.

It is past mid-day. Colabelli makes his rounds, weaving through the people, milling about and helping at the cash register.

The museum remains a well-kept secret for many, except Red Sox fans and the locals who want their grandchildren to see a piece of history.

Little and Dixie leagues have made the stop, but none today.

In the back room, Colabelli certifies a dozen baseballs, including

greats of yesterday and today have walked and paid tribute to Williams and some of the game's best hitters. Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Wade Boggs, Barry Bonds, Monte Irvin, Joe and Dom DiMaggio, Yogi Berra, Cal Ripken, Mark McGwire, Johnny Pesky and Bobby Doerr are among the memorable group. Not to mention George Bush Sr., Muhammad Ali, Steve Spurrier and Michael Bolton, Williams' favorite singer.

But this morning, it's a lonely

one has taken advantage Friday, so Colabelli goes to the storage room to read the museum's mail.

Usually 10 or so letters a day. Some from well-wishers giving donations of money or memorabilia and others complaining about how the Williams family handled the death of their father. But the letters are coming less and less.

"I tell them it's a family position, not ours," Colabelli said. "But they don't seem to understand. We are a museum here to remember Ted the great player he was and

sage," he said, laughing. "Here I am sitting, talking about the history of baseball and that's what they remember."

An unpaid volunteer for three years, Colabelli was promoted to his current position in 2002 with the addition of executive director David McCarthy. While McCarthy courts the high dollars in the northeast from Red Sox and Williams fans, Colabelli runs the museum with the help of his wife, Susan, who is the secretary for McCarthy, and 60 or so volunteers.

photograph of Ted and future astronaut John Glenn. Plus, there are photos of Williams as manager of the Washington Senators and Texas Rangers, his endeavors as an outdoorsman and his humanitarian efforts.

"Ted would rather fish than play baseball, but unfortunately fishing didn't put food on the table," Colabelli said.

Throughout the museum are replicas of Williams' fishing exhibitions, including the 1,235-pound black marlin he caught in Peru in

Johnny Vander Meer was enshrined for being the first to throw back-to-back no hitters. Don Larsen, who pitched a perfect game in the 1956 World Series; Nolan Ryan, Smoky Joe Woods, Mike Hampton and others also are there. Williams favorites were Robin Roberts and Gaylord Perry, who each won 300 games.

Extra innings

It was only after Williams' death in 2003 that he became enshrined in his museum.

one signed by Ray Dandridge that's packed to be shipped out.

At 4 p.m. Colabelli turns off the movies and lights. He activates the alarm system and shuts the door behind him.

"As George Bush Sr. said, 'Ted was a real-life John Wayne,'" Colabelli said.

"John Wayne was revered on the silver screen as a big hero. Ted is a big hero — baseball, military, fishing, humanitarian hero," Colabelli said. "He was the real deal."