

## Little League of their own)

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Remember the 1992 film "A League of Their Own," starring Tom Hanks, Geena Davis, Madonna, Rosie O'Donnell and Lori Petty? It was based on the true story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League that was started in 1943. The league began because men's baseball was collapsing during World War II. The men were at war, so that left women to do the pitching and batting.

Backed by Philip Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, the girls professional baseball league flourished until 1954 and gave more than 600 women baseball players an unparalleled opportunity to play in the big leagues.

One of those women was Lou Arnold, a pitcher for the South Bend Blue Sox from 1948 to 1952 (the Blue Sox won the league championship in 1951 and 1952). Arnold is aunt to a close family friend and Wilmette resident Carly Callans, 12, an all-American girl baseball player in her own right. Callans has been playing baseball since she was 5, despite often being the only girl on the team. Like Arnold, Callans also pitches, and the two bond about their love of the game.

"The years I played baseball were the best years of my life," Arnold says, noting that her uniform was No. 13, a perfect fit since she was the 13th child in her family.

Right now, Callans is starring in what could be an updated, younger-cast version of "A League of Their Own." She and nine teammates, ages 10 to 14, from different backgrounds and neighborhoods in the Chicago area, are on a quest to participate in Disney's Sunshine Showdown, an international girls' baseball tournament to be held Oct. 6 to 9 at Disney World in Orlando.

"Carly has always loved baseball and never minded playing with all boys," says her mother, Judy Callans. "Because she could hold her own -- she was not treated different than any of the other players. She's most enjoyed having competitive coaches that take the game seriously."

Her teammates -- most of whom are on the honor role and are active in their communities -- feel the same way. "Carly was very excited and surprised to practice with the team," Callans says. "The girls are all excellent athletes that can really play baseball."

Because of their athleticism and dedication to baseball, the girls were selected for the team by the American Women's Baseball Federation, a tax-exempt, nonprofit amateur sports organization that organizes and promotes baseball tournaments for women and girls.

Collectively, the girls aspire to represent the United States in Disney's Sunshine Showdown. Countries participating in the tournament include Japan, Australia and Canada, but as of right now, no team from the United States is scheduled to be there because of a lack of funds.

The team, aptly named the Chicago Pioneers, is raising money through fundraisers: Two teammates recently raised \$65 by selling lemonade and cookies one weekend.

But they need about \$6,000 more to make it happen.

Arnold, now 83 and the inspiration to Carly Callans, is on hand with encouragement and hard-won advice from her days as a professional baseball player, and she is hopeful the girls will earn the money they need to get to Florida. "Never give up, and have fun doing it," she says.

If you would like to find out how your daughter can join the team, or if you would like to help them get

there, here's how to reach the right folks.

- The American Women's Baseball Federation, Attn: Jim Glennie [WWW.AWBF.ORG](http://WWW.AWBF.ORG).
- You also can contact Judy Callans for more information, (847) 401-9049.

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