

Tireless Clarke, 70, decides it's time to retire from Huguenot

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After more than a half century of calling balls and strikes, John Clarke says it's time to hang up the indicator, shin guards and steel-toed shoes.

One thing for sure: No one is rushing him.

"John's been my right-hand man, and I don't know what we'll do without him," said Randy Carrington, president of Huguenot Little League.

Clarke, 70, is the main man in blue at HLL's Chesterfield County complex. He has served in numerous volunteer capacities - most recently umpire-in-chief - for about 20 years.

He coordinates the league's 50 or so umpires (as young as 13) while also taking his turn behind the plate. Squatting for the better part of two hours behind a 10-year-old catcher isn't the easiest of activities on creaky joints.

"I credit that [crouching] for me being in as good a shape as I am," he said.

Clarke, a retired traveling salesman, admits to a few aches and pains, but that's not the reason he tendered his resignation.

"Just need to spend more time with the family... The way this job is, you only have about a month off a year," he said. "I've made up my mind."

Carrington is crossing his fingers, praying for a change of heart.

"John's retired before and then come back," Carrington said. "But he tells us this time is for good."

Clarke serves in a double capacity at Huguenot. Along with his umpiring chores (starting with January clinics for new umpires), he helps run the concession stand with his daughter, Kristina, a James River High graduate.

Carrington says it's nothing for Clarke to show up at the complex at 8:30 in the morning, tending to concession needs, and still be there at 10:30 at night following the final game.

"John's always around," Carrington said. "For one thing, all complaints or questions involving the umps come to him. Anytime there's a question about the rules, they look for John. He knows the rulebook inside and out."

In addition to his baseball duties, Clarke also is a softball umpire with the Amateur Softball Association.

As for the Huguenot Little League, Clarke says, "I still enjoy it as much as ever. It's a great game, and I love seeing young people doing good things."

Clarke will continue to call games in the HLL playoffs, the District 5 all-star tournament and fall ball.

From there, his assignments will stretch into winter. He has promised to give his final umpiring youth clinics.

"It'll be about January when I really feel it - really feel like it's over," Clarke said.