

In Dinuba, California, on January 24, 2009, a softball field was dedicated to Bertha Petinak Ragan Tickey. A native of California, born to parents from Hercegovina, Bertha was a pioneer in women's sports and a Hall of Fame world champion in fast pitch softball.

Very few sports facilities are named for women, so it was only natural that her friends, family, and fellow athletes gathered last year to celebrate that very special occasion.

The opening ceremony started with the presentation of the colors by the local military color guard, the national anthem was sung, and at the same time, a brilliant rainbow appeared in the sky above, a kind of welcome home to Bertha who launched her softball career at Dinuba High School over seven decades ago.

The Dinuba school trustees, the city's officials, various sports teams, and many supporters were there to watch the ceremonial first pitch. Bertha threw out that pitch: it was caught by Melitas Forester, her catcher from 1938 and original member of Southern California's Orange Lionettes. Resounding applause and cheers filled the air as everyone retired for an evening banquet of honors, awards, and accolades.

Bertha's story began in the village of Zupci (*Zubci*), Bosnia-Hercegovina, in the late 1800's at the home of her grandfather, Jovo Pištinjat. He had four sons: Nikola, Marko, Savo, and Chetko.

In the early 1900's, three of his sons journeyed aboard ship to the United States, passing through the gates of Ellis Island. They headed west to work in the copper mines of Butte, Montana.

The family story is that the three lonely brothers longed for the beautiful girl they had left behind in Zupci. One evening, they drew straws to see who would be the lucky one to ask for her hand in marriage. Chetko chose the lucky long straw, and so his brother Marko, a seasoned world traveler, returned home and brought back Andje Lolic, bridal clothes in hand and ready to start a new life in a new land with Chetko.

Chetko and Andje were married in 1911 in Butte, Montana, and had their first child, Dušan (Dan), in Butte. At that time, they anglicized their name to Petinak.

Serbian Sof

BERTHA PETINAK

by Janice

After a few months, the three brothers moved to California. Savo remained in the field of mining and relocated to Jackson, California, where he soon lost his life in a major mining accident.



Bertha Petinak, women's sports pioneer, pitching softball at Dinuba High School in 1937.

Marko graduated from the Palmer School of Chiropractic Medicine and opened his practice in downtown Los Angeles. He became an early member of the Sierra Club, hiking the mountains throughout the West. He traveled extensively and photographed the world, writing and publishing both poetry and med-

ical books. In 1962, he closed his practice in Elsinore, California, and departed this life in 1964.

In 1913, Chetko and Andje moved to Dinuba in California's Central Valley where they settled among a community of Serbian neighbors. Living as they had in Zupci, they were very self-sufficient.

Dušan recalled walking with his father a few miles to town to buy the basics: sacks of flour, etc. The grocer would deliver the wares and give them a ride back home.

On Sundays, the neighbors would come by, musical instruments in hand. The table would be filled to overflowing with food, and the rugs would be rolled up and put aside for dancing, singing, and toasting. So many joyous events were celebrated, especially a birth or a birthday.

On occasion, the priest from Fresno would baptize a new baby. The Petinaks had seven children: 6 boys and 1 girl.

The first son and oldest child, Dušan, later served his country with the 91st Division in World War II and, later, became a celebrated chef in San Francisco. He was also a member of the Serbian Benevolent Society.

The second son was Jovo (John) who became a rancher in Dinuba. The third was Vlado (Bill or Willie) who, after serving his country during the Second World War, became the bar manager for the Horseshoe Club in Reno, Nevada.

There was a fourth son, Simo (Sam), who was serving in the U.S. military during World War II when he was killed on a troop train in Italy.

Their only daughter, Borica (Bertha), was the fifth child.

The fifth son, Milo (Bob), had a lifetime career with the United States Navy as did the sixth son and youngest child, Pero (Pete).

Softball Mom

RAGAN TICKEY

Ragan Nelson

The Petinak's neighbors—the Maikovich, Vuich, and Vasilovich families—all had children who grew up together. To this day, they have kept their native language, traditions, and friendships.

The day Dinuba High School dedicated the softball field to Bertha Ragan Tickey, I, as her daughter, spoke about my mother and about her long career and remarkable accomplishments in the sports world.

My speech, delivered on January 24, 2009, in Dinuba, California, for the dedication of the varsity softball field and celebration, is reprinted here.

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Tonight is a very special evening for all of us, especially for Bertha, her friends and family. Thank you to the community leaders of the City of Dinuba and to Dinuba High School for hosting such a memorable event and for being so generous in bestowing such an honor upon my mother.

As her daughter, I have witnessed countless awards and honors given to her, but having a sports facility named after a female athlete is truly historic. Thank you for setting such a precedent.

This room tonight also holds an incredible gathering of my mother's contemporaries, women who were the pioneers of softball and athletic achievement, women who were forward in their thinking and ahead of their time.

A special kind of independence prevailed in their attitude. They paved the way for the following generations of women. Because of them, it became all right for women to play competitive sports, complete a college education, seek equal levels of employment, travel independently, and manage their own lives and destinies.

My mother and her fellow ballplayers who are sitting in this room tonight brought about the changes that give the young girls of today unlimited opportunities. One of her former teammates,



Farewell to cheering fans. Pitcher Bertha Ragan Tickey retired from the Brakettes after a record-setting career.

Donna LoPiano, co-authored Title 9. So, thank you, ladies, for your forward thinking, and your independent spirit; it has been and will be a gift for generations to come.

Many of these women are National Softball Hall of Fame members themselves, and when visiting that landmark

in Oklahoma City a few years ago, my husband Michael and I saw their exhibits, displaying uniforms and memorabilia. Those brought back a flood of memories from my childhood.

One exhibit stood out from the rest because the trophies were from all over our living room and that uniform I had watched Mom iron countless times. This exhibit belonged to my mom, my "super star" mom in the world of softball.

Mom was often called the "female" Satchel Paige or Sandy Koufax or referred to as "a legend in her own time." These quotations were used over and over again to describe my mom. Her life became what her parents had been seeking: a fulfillment of the American Dream.

It came true for Bertha.

Bertha was born at the hospital in Orosi, California. Her name, Borica in Serbian, was changed to Bertha in English when she started school. Her parents were Chetko Petinak and Andje Lolich, immigrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who came to America seeking a better life.

Bertha was their fifth of seven children and their only daughter. Her early childhood was spent close to her mother, learning the home skills she would later need. Her brothers—John, Dan, Bill, Sam, Bob, and Pete—would play ball with her among the vineyards on Huntsman Avenue.

Her parents were Serbs, and they settled among their fellow countrymen in the Dinuba area. They farmed and lived off the land.

Their children all attended Smith Mountain School, a two-room schoolhouse on Crawford Avenue. Mrs. Worthly was her teacher.

When Bertha started school, she spoke little English and would bring her book home to go over the lessons with her mother. They both learned English together.

One day walking home from school, she saw the ambulance leaving her house and found her grieving mother alone inside. She was eleven at the time. Just one year later, she also lost her mom.

The children's godparents, Stana and Obren Vuich, became their legal guardians which allowed them to stay together as a family on their ranch. Stronger than ever were their family bonds as they struggled side by side through difficult and trying times.

For fun and entertainment, they would spend their free time playing various ball games with the neighbor boys. Of course, Bertha would be right there in the middle of all the boys—her brothers and neighbors who were All-Star Athletes at Reedley and Dinuba high schools. In grammar school, a special rule was made that one girl be allowed to play on the boys' team. That rule was just for Bertha.

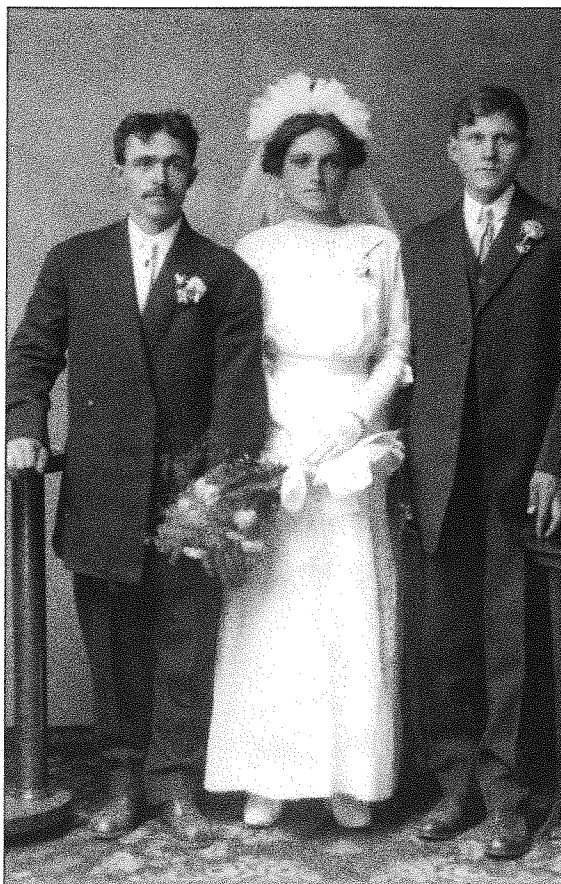
In 1937, at age 13 and in 8th grade, she joined her first locally organized girls' softball team from Sultana. She played short stop.

Bertha quickly advanced to the older girls' team from Dinuba, sponsored by Alta Chevrolet. All of those players were 18 years and older.

When, on one of their game days, their star pitcher was hurt in an automobile accident, the coach asked Mom to try her hand at pitching. Well, little did she know how that day would change her life!

Bertha could keep up with her brothers outside on the ball field, but she was all alone when it came to the household chores of cooking, washing, mending, and ironing. Before every Saturday game, she first had to launder 17 shirts for her brothers to wear during the up-coming school week. Meanwhile, Mr. Vuich would keep a watchful eye on the children and their home life.

As her athletic abilities improved, and



Bertha's parents, Chetko Pištinjat and Andje Lolić from Hercegovina, were married in Butte, Montana, in 1911. John Čurić, on the right, was the best man.

ing California highway, The Grapevine, in a '38 Ford, traveling to the first of a myriad of adventures that her softball career was to bring her.

After finishing high school, she returned to Southern California and that city. The women's softball team—the Lionettes—were to become her home.

Just as her softball career was taking off, World War II broke out. All sports came to a pause, as did most public events. Bertha became a lifeguard at the Orange City Plunge where she met, and later married, my dad, Jim Ragan.

She went to Texas with her husband, an aviation mechanic serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps. During that time, Bertha was visited by the Chicago Baseball League, a professional women's team which later became the subject for the movie, *A League of Their Own*.

Then she began raising a family. Thanks, Mom, for staying home and taking care of me. This choice separated my mom from her teammates for a few years until the war was over and the Pacific Coast leagues were organized again.

By that time, I was old enough to sit with my grandparents in the bleachers at night and watch my awesome mom and all her friends play ball.

Before the war, in 1940, and after, in '46 and '47, Bertha and the Lionettes won the Southern California fast pitch championships. She also pitched for the Monrovia Red Gals and the Owls at the 1949 National Tournament held in Portland, Oregon. There she was crowned "Miss Softball."

In 1950, when the Pacific Coast League was in full swing, Mom would come home from work on a Friday afternoon, take her suitcase and ball bag in hand, and leave for a weekend of competition in Portland, Oregon; Phoenix, Arizona; or in California's Fresno or Buena Park.

Bertha with her five brothers in 1954. Pete (Pero), Willie (Vlado), Bob (Milo), and John (Jovo). In front, Dan (Dušan) and Bertha. Her brothers, themselves All-Star Athletes at Reedley and Dinuba high schools, were her great fans.



Bertha and daughter, Janice, in 1945. When the Pacific Coast League paused during the war, Bertha married Jim Ragan and stayed home with their daughter.

A caravan of cars—filled with players, coaches, and a few loyal fans—would travel the long distances to meet for their weekend series. A double-header on Saturdays and a single game on Sundays left barely enough time to arrive home for a few winks of sleep and a quick shower before it was back to work on Monday morning at her 9-to-5 secretarial job.

Then came the headlines on the sports page of Monday's paper. The season went from training in February to league play from May to August. Then nine regional tournaments were played to decide who went to the national tournament in September.

Mom began setting records early with the Lionettes. In 1949, she struck out 756 batters in 60 games and had a scoreless inning streak of 120.

In 1950, by Greyhound bus, the Lionettes traveled to San Antonio, Texas, to claim their first World Title and went on to reclaim that prize in '51, '52, and '55.

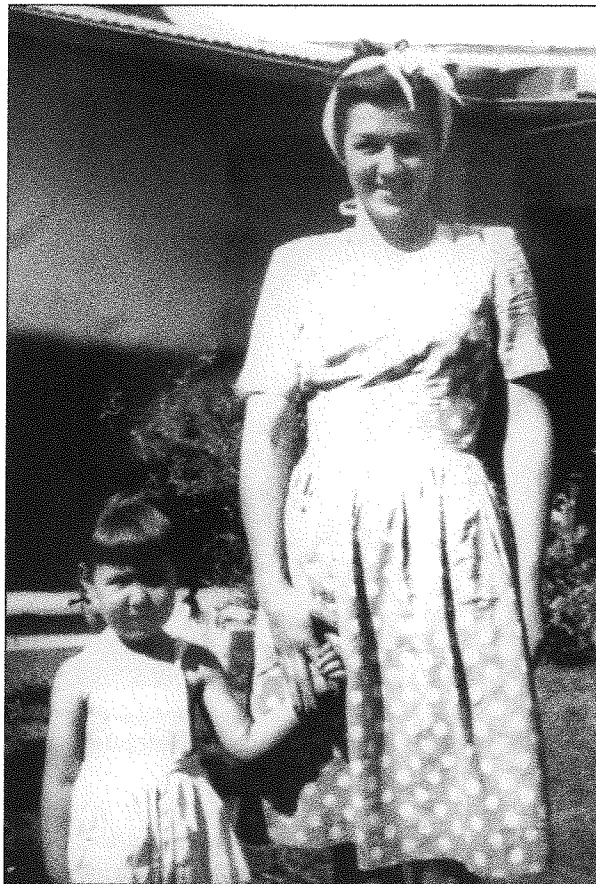
Bertha won 65 of 72 games, and she fanned 795 batters in 513 innings. She gave up 143 hits and walked 58. She also had a scoreless inning streak of 143 that year, hurling 53 shutouts and nine no-hitters. Sometimes it seemed that if the other eight players could just score the runs, Mom would strike out everybody on the other team.

The Pacific Coast League at that time was the apex for quality play and for the advancement of women's sports. It was in those heady days that the sport of softball was first mentioned for future inclusion in the Olympic games. Meanwhile, summer evenings were filled with adoring fans, including mom's loving family, in crowded stadiums, cheering and rooting for their home teams.

Bertha was a dedicated athlete all year long. Training was a large part of her life.

During the winter, Bertha kept her

Bertha Ragan Tickey with her granddaughters, Jennifer and Rebekah Nelson, in 1968. Today, Bertha is back in California, and their children visit her, their all-star great-grandmother, and have lunch after a swim in her pool.



arm in shape by bowling. She maintained a 177 average and to this day belongs to the Orange Co. 600 Club.

I remember spending many days at the beach with Mom and her friends running in the deep, dry sand. She was conditioning her legs.

She swam until she was tired, and a by-product of her time at the beach was a beautiful tan. She would look great in her uniforms, especially the white satin ones.

By this time, Mom was building her legacy. She appeared in all the national newspapers, some of which featured her in "Ripley's Believe It or Not" for her record of 100 no-hit, no-run games. Appearing on the *Groucho Marx Show*, she was one of the first women to represent softball on national television. She also stumped the staff of the popular game show *What's My Line* with her unique occupation.

About this time, I began to realize that my mom was really special to the rest of the world, not just me. People were calling, writing, and stopping by our house, asking for her autograph and, in some instances, sending her articles for her scrapbook.

In 1956, Bertha had completed many of her goals, and with the Lionettes facing the loss of their sponsor, Bertha transferred her talents to the East Coast.

William Simpson, chairman of the Raybestos Manhattan Co. in Stratford, Connecticut, was promoting women's fast pitch softball to the eastern seaboard at the level that existed on the West Coast. Raybestos, the manufacturer of brake linings, sponsored the World Championship





Bertha, with the Orange Lionettes in 1955, posing for an article in *Sports Illustrated*.

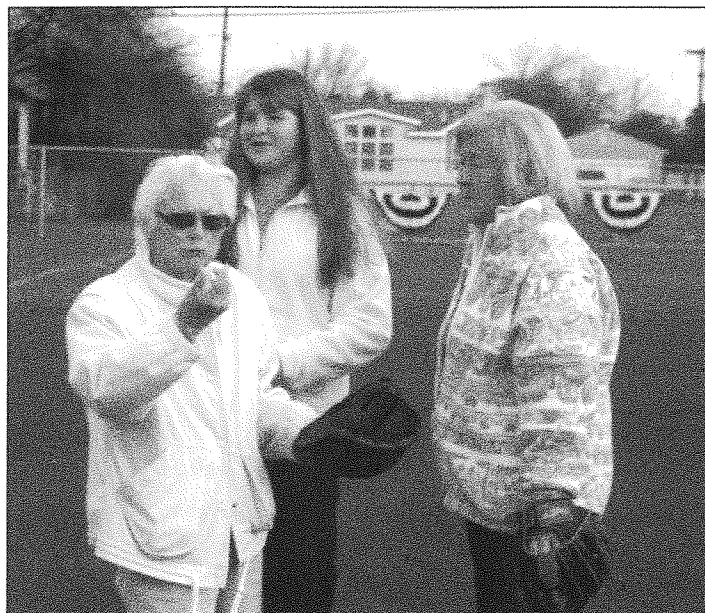
men's team named the Cardinals, and Simpson wanted the same level of play for the women's team, whom he named the Brakettes.

As a member of the Brakettes, Bertha won 285 games, losing only 26. In 2,402 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings she struck out 3,529 batters never losing more than five games per season. Her lifetime record is 757 wins and 88 losses, including 162 no-hitters.

Nineteen times she was named to the All-Star team and eight times was voted the Most Valuable Player at the World Tournament. Eleven times Bertha was a member of a national championship team, winning a record of 74 games and losing 18 in tournament play.

Under Bertha's tutelage and guidance, the Brakettes began claiming world titles in '58, '59, '60, '62, '63, '65, '66, '67, and '69. By that year, Bertha had pitched 162 no-hit-no-run games, 46 perfect games, 143 consecutive scoreless innings, and the most strikeouts in tournament competition: 20 of 21. While accomplishing these feats, Mom always played for the love of the game: the honors and the trophies were secondary, yet what was always most important was finishing first.

It is amazing that Mom can recall every pitch she has thrown to a batter. She knew her batters, their strengths and weaknesses.



Melitas Forester, now age 92, was Bertha's first catcher. The two reunited for the first pitch on the new field at Dinuba High.

Family

As we were visiting the other day, she recalled a play during the final inning of a world tournament. The tying run was on third, the game was into extra innings, there were two away, and there were runners on first and third.



Janice, the author and Bertha's daughter, in 1958 with some of her "super star" mom's countless awards.

Bertha pitched to the batter. The batter bunted. The runner on third went for home.

Bertha reached down, grabbed the bunted ball, made a fake motion of throwing to first, heard a huge moan from the fans in the stadium, but reached out and touched the runner going for home for the final out. The Brakettes won the game and the world title.

In 1963, Bertha was married for the second time, and her husband, Ed Tickey, was a world class athlete him-

self. He had played baseball for the Brooklyn Dodgers and was catcher for the Raybestos men's team.

During these years, Mom traveled for and with *Sports Illustrated*, promoting fast pitch softball at clinics throughout the U.S.A. At one of the exhibition games, Bertha participated in a fund raising event that was particularly memorable.

The event was for the Jimmy Fund in Waterbury, Connecticut, in 1961. That was when she struck out Boston Red Sox's Batting Champion Ted Williams.

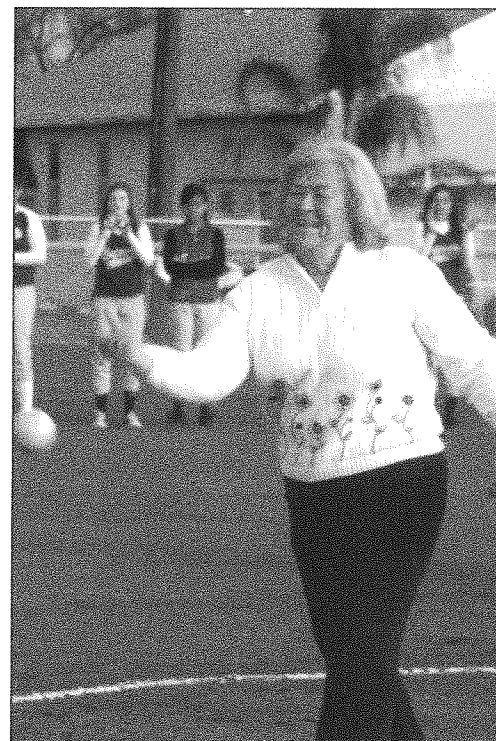
Before 15,000 awestruck fans, she pitched the full count, 3 balls and 2 strikes. She struck him out on a rise ball with a hop—to thunderous applause. After the game, Ted invited Bertha out for a drink, but she declined. She said, "He already had a blond on each arm."

In the 1960's, Bertha became a mother-in-law and a grandmother. The babies were in California, and she lived in Connecticut, but holidays and birthdays were never forgotten. The telephone lines, the post office, and the airlines were busy despite our separation.

In 1965, the Brakettes, under the auspices of the United States Chamber of Commerce, toured the world, spreading knowledge of the game and sportsman-



and friends came to Bertha Ragan Tickey Field at Dinuba High School in January of 2009 for the dedication of the new facility followed by a celebratory banquet.



Bertha throws the first ceremonial pitch in 2009.

ship in clinics and tournaments around the globe. They played teams in the Caribbean, Japan, and China and were in a world tournament in Australia. In India, women traveled three days by train and played wearing their *saris*, just to learn the sport.

On they went to Thailand, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, England and Canada. This remarkable trip opened the door for the inclusion of women's fast pitch softball in the Olympic Games, making it truly an international sport.

The years '66, '67, and '68 were growth years both for Bertha's record and for raising the bar of competitive play. In 1968 she retired, but came back in 1969 because there were injuries on the pitching staff of the Brakettes. So 1969 was formally her retirement year.

That year the Brakettes once again reached the final game of world tournament competition, and Mom was scheduled to pitch, facing her old team, the Lionettes, where she had played in the 1950's.

That night on the field before the game, Raybestos Chairman, Mr. William Simpson, surprised Bertha by bringing her entire family—brothers, sisters-in-law, me, my husband, and our children—all from California to witness her final game.

At age 46, with her famous ability to focus and concentrate, she pitched her final no-hit, no-run game, striking out 20 of 21 batters. Capacity crowds delivered standing ovations. What a finale to a glorious career that began so long ago run-

city park where she watches the multitudes of young women participating and enjoying the sport she pioneered. It is truly rewarding.

Softball honored Bertha by naming the "Bertha Tickey Award" after her.

The award is presented annually to the outstanding pitcher in the Women's Fast Pitch National Tournament.

She is also a member of The National Softball Hall of Fame (1972), The Connecticut Hall of Fame (1971), The Fresno Hall of Fame (1979), The Orange County Hall of Fame (1991), and The Central Valley Softball Hall of Fame (2006).

Mom is one of only four softball players profiled in the book *The Twentieth Century's Great Athletes*.

And now she will be remembered through the gracious and generous gift of Dinuba, naming their varsity softball field after her.

Dinuba was a wonderful place to begin her life and her career. It is a loving and caring community that encourages the All-American values that can make the American dream come true. It was Dinuba that fostered Bertha's positive, winning attitude, a good part of why she is also a world champion of a MOM! ■



Dedication plaque to Bertha Ragan Tickey, amateur softball's greatest pitcher. Dinuba High School, 2009.

ning barefoot, chasing balls among the vineyards in Dinuba!

Today she enjoys frequent reunions with her three granddaughters—Jennifer, Rebekah, and Sarah—and their husbands and her great-grandchildren who love to swim in grandma's pool and have lunch together. She also takes great pleasure in the company of many of her former teammates and her wonderful family and neighbors.

Down the street from her home is a