

BUSINESS

Strat-O-Matic Fanatics Celebrate 50th Year

Glen Head based business – the original fantasy sports game – says followers are in the millions.

By Charleen Famiglietti February 10, 2011

No monument indicates its name.

That timeworn blue building, tucked away in Glen Head's Railroad Plaza, is headquarters to one of the oldest and most widely played fantasy sports games in the country.

Founded in 1961 by Port Washington resident Hal Richman, Strat-O-Matic – a simulation game and hobby enjoyed by millions of sports enthusiasts – will celebrate its 50-year anniversary on Saturday at the Community Church of New York in Manhattan.

Strat-O-Matic considers itself the original fantasy sports game. According to the company website (<http://www.strat-o-matic.com/>): "Strat-O-Matic produces sports-simulation games that rate real players and teams accurately for professional baseball, football, basketball and hockey, and college football. Strat-O-Matic has the best-selling board games and computer text sims in our field, because we combine statistical realism with life-like strategy decisions in games that can be completed in a small fraction of the time it takes to watch a real game. Our fans keep coming back for more, because each time they play, they know their decisions influence victory or defeat."

Over 600 baseball and Strat-O-Matic fanatics are expected to attend Saturday's all-day event, including former Major League Baseball outfielder Doug Glanville, ESPN 1050's Bill Daughtry and former pitching coach Mark Peterson.

The anniversary also marks the much-anticipated annual release of the game's cards – the basis of the game.

"Every year, the new set of cards comes out, based on the final averages of the year before," Richman explained. "These cards are coming out in 2011, but they are based on 2010."

Richman – who started the company 50 years ago from his father's Great Neck home – said that Strat-O-matic is very much a family business, even though the game has taken on a cult following in the millions.

"My sister designed all of the original game boxes," he said, as he worked alongside his son at their Glen Head office. "I started when I was 11 years old. I was a tremendous baseball fan, but I was only an adequate athlete."

While Richman said he was not good enough to make the cut for any high school or college teams, he satisfied his thirst for athletics by creating the Strat-O-Matic games.

"The games changed dramatically," he said. "As I became older and more sophisticated, the games became more complex."

Richman moved the office from his Great Neck home to Port Washington in 1965. In 1975, he bought the building in Glen Head.

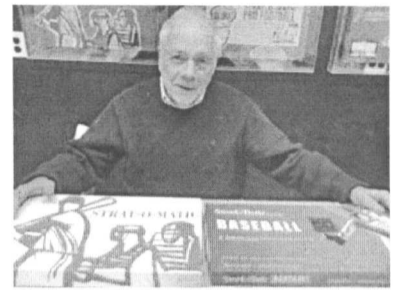
Richman said that while it's impossible to tell exactly how many people have played the games over the years, he estimates somewhere in the low millions.

"It's a wonderful father and son game," Richman said. "There's been a lot of bonding over the years. For younger kids, it's great for developing math skills; for older people, it's great for relieving stress."

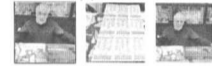
With 50 years of business under his belt, Richman is no stranger to the ups and downs of the economy, and he has recently begun incorporating marketing strategies into the company.

"The business was run by me personally for 49 years, but the games sell themselves," he said. "In this world today, we need marketing also. We've recently renovated, totally overhauled the website."

Richman said that the recent economy has been a telling test for Strat-O-Matic: "Even this last year, with the economy being as poor as it was, we were up 12 percent," he said. "We're a small company, but we've always made money."



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