

Family of former players and coaches take over at TC Valpo

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VALPARAISO | Many major league teams suffer from a shortage of pitching.

But not the Ritthalers.

Kari Fryar-Ritthaler was a four-year starter and team captain for the Goshen College softball team. Her husband was a four-year letterman at Valparaiso University, where he led the Crusaders in earned run average his sophomore year.

Both are still in the game as new owners of Triple Crown Valparaiso Baseball and Softball Center.

"We took over on Aug. 1," said Kari, who had been giving lessons at the facility for several years before they bought the 2902 Cascade Drive location from Rich Bafia, who owns Triple Crown in Schererville.

"Rich still gives lessons here, but he decided to let someone else take over the ownership duties," Kari said.

After graduating from Goshen, Kari assisted her father, Bill Fryar, during his tenure as softball coach at South Central, where he helped the Satellites win six sectional championships and gain a Final Four State Championship berth.

Fryar is also a co-owner.

"I just love the game so much that I want to stay with it," said Fryar, who also coached travel softball with his daughter. "I would like to get back into coaching (high school), but it would have to be the right situation."

In addition to Kari, Mike and Bill, Triple Crown Valparaiso has several former professional players on its staff. One is Mike's former Valparaiso University teammate, southpaw pitcher Jim Crowell, who reached the major leagues three times during his career.

The first time was with the Cincinnati Reds when he was 23 years old. The second time came seven years later with the Philadelphia Phillies, and a third stint with the Florida Marlins the following year.

All were essentially "cups of coffee," but Crowell relished every moment.

"The first day you arrive it's like a dream come true," Crowell said. "I remember having to do rookie things like carry Reggie Sanders' luggage when I first came up.

"But there's mutual respect among rookies and veterans. Everyone knows how difficult it is to reach that level."

Triple Crown Valparaiso has three hitting cages and a pitching lane. Most of the lessons offered will focus on hitting and pitching.

"But we can offer one-on-one fielding and throwing lessons," Kari said.

Triple Crown Valparaiso Baseball and Softball Training Center is located at 2902 Cascade Drive, Valparaiso. For details about private instruction, cage and facility rentals, or individual and team memberships, call (219) 462-3927.