

## Ridley/Helton Ballfield

Neal Ridley, nicknamed "Mr. Baseball" was a local business owner who took interest in minor league baseball in Knoxville. In 1956, he and John Duncan, Sr. made a considerable investment in order to bring baseball back to Knoxville. Ridley and his wife, Bonnie, sold tickets, worked concessions and supervised the cleaning of the uniforms. After Bill Meyer Stadium was closed in 1967, Ridley again brought baseball back to Knoxville in 1972. The Smokies became the K-Sox that year, until they became the K-Jays after an agreement was signed with the Toronto Blue Jays in 1980. Neal Ridley passed away in 1981 and his family sold the team to Toronto shortly thereafter. Neal Ridley was inducted into the Knoxville Hall of Fame on July 12, 2007.

Todd Helton was born and raised in Knoxville, TN. He graduated from Central High School with honors in 1992, leading the school's baseball team to a state championship in 1990. He received a scholarship to play both football and baseball at the University of Tennessee after turning down an offer to play for the San Diego Padres. There, he was backup quarterback for both Heath Schuler and Peyton Manning. During his junior baseball season in 1995, he was selected for the Dick Howser Trophy (Best National College Baseball Player) and led the Vols to the College World Series. Helton was drafted following that season to play for the Colorado Rockies. Helton has received numerous accolades, some of which include 3-time National League Gold Glove winner (2001, 2002, 2004), The Sporting News Rookie of the Year Award (1998), National League Batting Champion (2000), Baseball Digest Player of the Year (2000), National League Hank Aaron Award (2001), and the Associated Press Player of the Year Award (2001). When the Smokies left Bill Meyer Stadium to play at the Smokies Stadium in Sevierville, Helton made a significant contribution for the renovation of the remaining Ridley Field. City of Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam changed the name of the field to Ridley/Helton Field in honor of Helton's contributions to Knoxville.