

## THE STORY OF THE VENZKE RELAYS

The 2009 running of the Venzke Relays marks the return of this prestigious and honored event after an eleven year absence. The originator of the meet, Francis "Doc" Sell, started the Venzkes on May 10, 1939 and directed these relays for sixteen years. The first Venzke Relays saw eighteen schools participating. As the event grew, as many as sixty schools with 950 athletes came to Boyertown to take part in the event. The Relays were held at night under the lights starting in 1960, and this year will take place on Boyertown Memorial Stadium's eight lane, all weather surface.

The Venzke Relays honor the famed "picture runner" of the 1930's, Gene Venzke. Venzke ran his first interscholastic mile for Boyertown High School in 1923. He later ran independently before becoming a student athlete at the University of Pennsylvania. Venzke was famed for his duals with Glenn Cunningham of Kansas, and he represented the United States in the 1936 Olympics. Venzke held the indoor mile record for a time in the mid 1930's with a clocking of four minutes and eight seconds.

During the many years since its inception, the Relays have hosted thousands of runners. Just a few of the great athletes who ran here include the first boy to win a single event, Robert Shellenberger of Mt. Penn High School, who won the special half-mile run in 1939 in the commendable time of 2:07.3, and Boyertown's own Jerry Karver, who won two state cross country titles, two state mile titles, and two state 880 crowns before graduating in 1941. Karver went on to stardom and national championship fame at Pennsylvania State University. Other Boyertown runners who have outstanding performances at the Venzkes are Greg Meyers, Bob Stringfellow, and Walt Reigner from the 1960's, Mark Martin, Steve Balmer, Tim Groff, and Jeff Karver from the 1970's, Creighton Rothenberger, Mike Uelses, Steve Edsall, and Bob Ilik from the 1980's, and Tim Souders, Cameron Troxel, Kristie Moser, Jeremy Culver, and Jason Hilt from the 1990's.

A special event for elementary schools of the Boyertown Area School District is the 400 meter relay race, which has always been a favorite of the crowd. Originally, only boys were in the elementary relay, but girls were added to the race in 1970. Creighton Rothenberger of Boyertown is the only athlete who has won the Outstanding Athlete Award three times (1980, 1981, and 1982). Stacy Robinson (1991 and 1992) of Phoenixville and Cameron Troxel (1992 and 1993) of Boyertown are the only double winners of the award. Other Boyertown athletes who have been chosen the Outstanding Athlete of the Venzke Relays are Mark Martin (1974), Tim Groff (1977), Mike Uelses (1984), Robert Ilik (1987), and Jeff Barker (1995).

As in any great event which brings together many athletes, the participants find great satisfaction and honor just to have been a part of the relay extravaganza. Their personal memories of victory or defeat will never be recorded for anyone else to enjoy or relive, for this is the private property of the athletes themselves who have practiced, sacrificed, and sweated to reach their goals. Boyertown Area High School is honored to have played host to the thousands of athletes who have competed here since 1939, and we are looking forward to creating new memories with the continuance of this stellar event. We hope the athletic maturity gained here will, to some small degree, provide the athletes with the necessary equipment to shoulder the responsibilities of life.