

STORY BELOW

type of individual who is ill-liked. He respects. He comes to work."

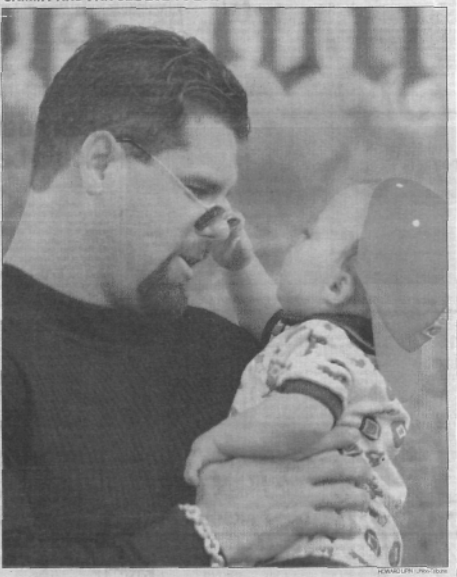
John Mincher
Editor, writing after 42 years as a collector for San Diego

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CAMMY AND FAN SEE EYE TO EYE



Padres star Ken Caminiti meets 9-month-old J.C. Copeland Gross at an EYE crisis center in Oceanside. Caminiti gave EYE \$10,000 from the Major League Baseball Players Association. Story, B 2.

Kids pitch in to help visitor Caminiti warm up

By Lela Sherman
 Staff writer

OCEANSIDE — Padres slugger Ken Caminiti couldn't resist the appeal of 2-year-old Stephanie Pitts, dressed in an oversized T-shirt that touched the ground beneath her tiny feet.

Before Stephanie could say to the Padres, last year's National League Most Valuable Player had spoken a bit stiffly from across about what he hopes it was to be here to donate \$10,000 to EYE Community and Crisis Services on behalf of the Major League Baseball Players Association.

By then Stephanie and her big brother, Kyle Thomas, 10, approached to give Caminiti a special remembrance, a plastic casing of a child's hand, the big third baseman's memento.

With her downcast eyes, she looked to please Stephanie.

An EYE center at the old Oceanside Hospital is home to 65 mothers recovering from alcohol or drug addiction and to their children. It is one of EYE's most visible programs.

The money from the ballpark will be used for all of EYE's programs in Oceanside, San Marcos and San Diego, as well as Oceanside. EYE, which started in 1988 as Oceanside Youth Encounter, runs programs to help teenagers, women and children in crisis.

"We do not usually get this kind of recognition," Kitty Bartridge, EYE's executive director, said during the ceremonies. "It gives us validation that what we are doing is the right thing, what we are doing is good."

Resident, Bartridge said, "We do not always have the fans. There is a lot of stress, a lot of stress. . . . The excitement to have better than the money."

An estimated 500 people were on hand to greet the popular Padre star. In keeping with the baseball theme, presents in the shell and pieces were the refreshments of choice, along with lemonade.

Michelle Anderson from the Padres' relief office said that Caminiti had asked her help in choosing an organization which children's families in need and that she was aware of EYE

from other fund-raising events. Caminiti is one of six major league players to be given \$10,000 by the association's Players Trust for Children. All players contribute to the fund. Each year, an outstanding player, pitcher and rookie from each league are chosen to distribute \$10,000 each to a charity of their choice.

The other 1996 recipients are Seattle Mariners shortstop Ken Griffey; pitchers Pete Hengen of the Toronto Blue Jays and John Smoltz of the Atlanta Braves; and rookie Derek Jeter of the New York Yankees and Todd Hollandsworth of the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Caminiti said the crowd that having been chosen top player in the National League by his peers meant more to him than getting the MVP award from the baseball writers.

Later, he said that, although he still makes his principal home in Texas, he has been trying to do more in San Diego, where he makes his bag. He admitted that, when it comes to

speaking before an audience, "I'd rather play baseball."

Caminiti, the father of three youngsters, also obviously enjoyed the littlest children's game, picking up, apparently, J.C. Copeland Gross and Shane Lawrence Calverton, both 9 months old, and Zach Barton, 8 months.

Away from the limelight, Oceanside artist Blake Stangard presented Caminiti with a framed acrylic painting she titled "I Dreamed I Was a Padre."

"I wanted him to have it," Stangard said, "but I did not have him. There was my chance. I was not a baseball fan. He turned me into one. I am impressed with his demeanor. The whole team seems to me to be dignified."

Stangard, an artist for 50 years, said she has works hanging in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and in Israel, Lake Placid, N.Y., and Washington, D.C., and currently has an exhibit through Sept. 2 at the Rachel Breen Vint Gallery in Vista.