

SPORTSFLASH

Strat-O-Matic Makes 40 Years

By Bob Herzog

STAFF WRITER

The crowd, which eventually numbered more than 200 people and snaked around the simple one-story building that is Strat-O-Matic headquarters near the railroad tracks in Glen Head, turned its attention to a large object covered by a white sheet that was being hung above the front door. A few chants of "Bar-ry, Bar-ry" rang out.

When the sheet was removed by the man on the ladder wearing the "Strat-O-Matic 40th Anniversary" T-shirt, a giant replica of Barry Bonds' 2001 game card was revealed. Most of the crowd applauded, though there were some scattered boos, reflective of the strong baseball passions of those who journeyed from near and far on Friday to receive the latest cards or computer version of the popular baseball board game on the first day they were available.

"The best card of all-time," Hal Richman said of the card that reflects Bonds' record 73-home run season. Richman, who invented Strat-O-Matic in 1962 and still runs the company, was a busy man Friday.

Besides shaking hands with as many of his customers as he could, he had to make sure the distribution of his product went smoothly. Minutes before the doors opened at 1 p.m. for people who had begun arriving hours earlier to claim orders placed weeks in advance, Richman said: "It's like a bakery. You get a number and you pick up your order."

One of those waiting for his 2001 card set was 75-year-old Bill Sindelar, a white-haired man wearing a Cleveland Indians jacket he was happy to remove to display the Indians' logo tattooed on his left arm.

He flew in from the Cleveland suburb of Sagamore Hills, Ohio, to mark the company's 40th anniversary. It was an anniversary of sorts for him, too. Richman confirmed that Sindelar was his very first customer back in '62.

"Yep, I bought the first game," he



Photo by Michael Ross Wacht

Harold Richman, creator of the 40-year-old Strat-O-Matic baseball board game, holds a card and rolls the dice in an inning of play with a fan at the factory in Glen Head.

said. "I had played every baseball game on the market back then and they all lacked accuracy. This is the only game that makes sense. To me, it's the perfect game."

All around him, people swapped stories. Little did many of them know that the best story of all was unfolding right in their midst. At a small table in front of the Strat building, Katrina Marino of Monroe, N.Y., stood with her two young children. On the table was a display of Strat-O-Matic dice,

cards and a homemade baseball stadium. They belonged to her husband, Ken, a member of the New York City Fire Department who was killed in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11.

"He played the game since he was in high school," Katrina said. "He used to come here to pick up the new cards religiously, every year. He loved the game. I wanted to be here with his friends and show off his stuff. That was Ken. His firefighting, his family, his Mets, his softball and his Strat-O-Matic."