

Norfolk City Outlook

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Keeping Norfolk's Swimming Pools Up and Running

By Diane Becker
City of Norfolk Staff Writer

Pat Mrsny knows the pools in Norfolk better than anyone else. As head of the Parks Division in Norfolk for the past 13 years, he's been watching the pool pumps carefully each year to keep them running, stopping up leaks and repairing break-downs as they occur. More than anyone else, he knows you've got to keep the pools going in the summer. They've been a great place to cool off for hundreds of kids and adults through the years. But Mrsny also sees the writing on the wall when it comes to the traditional box pools like those in Norfolk.

"Consultants say that pools built in the 70's have a 30-35 year lifespan. These pools currently meet state water quality standards but there is so much else that doesn't meet current codes and regulations that if we had to do some major repair or renovation we would then be required to bring the pool into full compliance which may very well be as costly as rebuilding all new. At some point we may not be able to keep up with the state requirements and we will then be forced to make some hard decisions," Mrsny said.

That's exactly what has happened in other Nebraska communities where the state standards for clean pool water couldn't be reached by the city. At that point the cities can either remodel the pools to make them meet the standards or build a different swimming facility like a water park. The communities of Fremont and Columbus were forced to

make a decision and chose to replace their pools with water parks.

So where do the Norfolk city pools stand?

The Liberty Bell pool on Georgia Avenue was built in 1976. The city's bicentennial pool, it's in its 30th year—the beginning of the end for pools that age. But Mrsny said the pool is in better shape since having its failed filtration moved out of an underground holding tank onto the pool deck in 2002 by installing a series of new independent filter pods. The mechanical pit and pool filter tank were both underground so that water from the filter side would sometimes go over to the dry side where the electrical panel was at.

"The mechanical side would fill with water at times. It was an ongoing battle. We had to design a whole new filter system," Mrsny said.

The pool also did not have any skimmer basket to strain leaves and cotton from getting into the pump. Threads and even walnuts would get into the pump. A strainer has since been put in to alleviate that problem.

For safety reasons, a slide replaced the high board that used to sit by the pool. This last year, city workers hung new doors and added light fixtures to the facility.

"We're making repairs and upgrades as needed," Mrsny said. He added that with all the time and money the city puts into its pools, all it

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Park Superintendent Pat Mrsny is checking the pool heater in the mechanical room at Memorial Pool.

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would take would be for the state to slightly raise its filtration standards and the pool would need a major overhaul. At that time, it would also have to be rebuilt to comply with ADA requirements at a cost in the \$2 million range.

Memorial Pool on Blaine Street was built in 1972. Unlike Liberty Bell Pool that has plastic PVC pipe, Memorial Pool has galvanized steel pipes that Mrsny said have leaked in the past.

“We received a bid to replace much of the filtration system plumbing fifteen years ago in the neighborhood of \$30,000. That would include digging the deck up and replacing the pipe under it,” Mrsny said.

Earlier this summer there was a break in the west filter tank that was blowing gravel and sand into the pool but that was taken care of with many hours of city manpower and \$2,500 of supplies. Seven years ago a new pool heater was put in at a cost of \$15,000. This last year the city had to repair it for a cost of \$12,500.

“We make about \$38,000 per year on the pools but we spend \$137,000 to keep them operational,” Mrsny said.

The wading pool at Central Park on Pasewalk Avenue was built in the 1950’s and Mrsny said that although “it’s in pretty good shape now” the

concrete around the pool is leaking and deteriorating. A new filtration system was put in the Central Park pool but Mrsny said it needs a larger pump to turn the water over quicker.

Mrsny knows that the proposed water park costs an estimated \$12 million, but he also knows that the current pools will soon have to be replaced at a cost of between \$2 million and \$3 million each and the capacity staying at only between 250-300 people per pool. For that reason, Mrsny believes Norfolk would benefit from a water park.

“Every box pool loses money. Every water park makes money. Once built, a water park almost always sustains itself,” Mrsny said.

“If we want water recreation in Norfolk then we have to be prepared. These pools are going to last only so long. I’d rather be proactive than wait until the state decides our pools need cleaner water,” Mrsny said.

Currently the water in the pool is turned over every four hours at a rate of 300 gallons per minute. In the near future the state may require that it turn over at a rate of 675 gallons per minutes.

“We’re sitting on pins and needles keeping these pools going and knowing that they are at the end of their lifespan. I don’t want to see our pools down without anything to replace them,” Mrsny said.

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Elected Officials: Mayor Gordon Adams, Councilpersons Sue Kaspar-Beckman, Ivan Van Dyke, David Fauss, Ronald Stauffer, Vicki Saunders, Jim Lange, Jim Brenneman and Erik Wilson
 City Administrator: Michael Nolan
 Production: Pat von Glan
 Contributing Writers: Diane Becker

Need for Water Park in Norfolk Still Exists

By Diane Becker
City of Norfolk Staff Writer

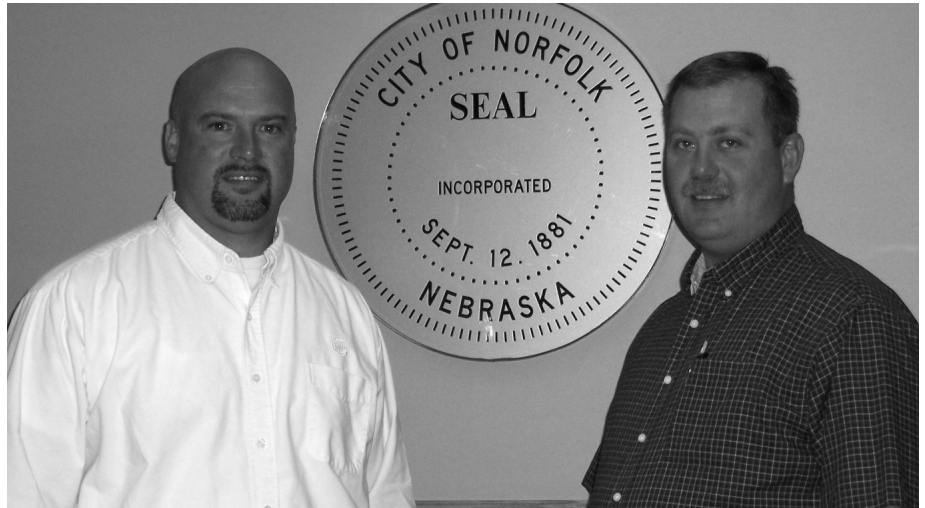
It's an issue that at least 40 people think needs to be revisited – the idea of a water park being built in Norfolk.

When the vote for or against the city building a water park was on the ballot last September, voters voted it down- 2891 against and 2,209 for. A meeting was held in June and a new committee formed whose members hope to inform Norfolk citizens about the need for better water recreation and possibly put it back on the ballot.

"I think recreation is important for my family, my kids, my business. We're trying to grow something in this town and I believe in being proactive rather than reactive," said Troy Uhlir, the head of the group. Thad Murren is also helping lead the committee.

Nancy Ronto is a representative from Burbach Aquatics, a company that builds water parks, and was project coordinator for the water park that was proposed last year. She explained to the new committee that met in June that there are two previous generations of pools that have been built. The first generation of pools was the WPA pool built in the late 1920s and 1930s. Only a few of these pools are still functioning although they did have a 70-75 year lifespan because of their heavy structure.

The second generation of pools was built in the mid-1970s. These pools had less strength and were built to last only about 30 years. Both Memorial Pool and the Liberty Bell Pool were built in the 1970s. Ronto stated that City staff has done everything possible to maintain the existing



Shown above are Troy Uhlir and Thad Murren, Co-chairmen of the Water Park Committee.

pools and that they have just been through their life cycle.

Ronto said that the pools currently being built are not the traditional box pool.

"Recreation has changed. When there was no air conditioning people went to the pool to cool off. We don't need to do that today. What gets people to come is an aquatic facility that provides a type of recreation for all age levels and all ability levels," Ronto said.

The proposed water park included slides, a water walk, a sand play area, geysers, diving boards, an inner tube slide, a tot slide, dumping buckets, a wave pool, an Olympic sized swimming pool, and a lazy river. More information about the water park can be viewed at <http://www.burbachaquatics.com/norfolk/>.

"There are reasons people will come to your community. They want good schools, jobs, retail stores and recreation. Recreation is one fourth of

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the picture when you're talking about quality of life," Ronto said.

She explained that the aquatic facilities built by the Burbach company are designed to last at least 50 years. The floors have two layers of re-bar and are 12 inches thick while the walls are 24 inches thick. Since most of the bacteria in pool is in the top 64th of an inch of the water, the pool is designed so that the water overflows continuously out the gutter lip back to the filtering tank.

David Burbach, owner of Burbach Aquatics, also attended the June meeting. He said that their company uses local contractors to do 93% of all of the construction which in turn benefits Norfolk's economy.

"We break it up into three prime contracts. First, bids are taken for building the pool vessel. The second contract is for the mechanical systems. The third is for general construction including the buildings, sanitary and landscaping. This way smaller contractors can bid on a large project," Burbach said.

When the discussion turned to why the vote did come down against building a water park in Norfolk, the reasons given were varied.

Members of the committee said they thought that not having a location selected was one reason some people came out against the park. Other possible reasons mentioned were that people thought the cost for the water park was too high. Pool maintenance was an issue some people were concerned with. It was also mentioned that some people didn't understand that the Olympic sized pool would be open for recreational swimming and swimming lessons.

Uhlir encouraged committee members to talk to their neighbors about having a water park in Norfolk. Additional information needs to be given so that people understand all sides of the issue.

According to Pat Mrsny, Park Superintendent for the City of Norfolk, the pools in Norfolk are currently costing the city \$100,000 a year to operate. Ronto explained that an aquatic center pays for itself.

Water Park Committees

Co-Chairmen

Troy Uhlir & Thad Murren

Sub-Committees

Marketing

Jeffrey Steffen & Brian Signor

Design & Location

Brenda Krivohlavek & Anne Pruss

Fundraising

Troy Uhlir & Kevin Hall

Kevin Hall, owner of McDonalds restaurants in Columbus and Norfolk, told the group that his sales have doubled at his Columbus restaurant since the water park opened there.

"We need to focus on the economic impact. Every car load spends \$50 in the area. We want Norfolk to grow. A water park can help bring jobs to Norfolk," Hall said.

The \$10 million price tag has gone up from the original water park that was voted on. The price has now gone closer to \$13 million and the committee is looking at redesigning the water park to lower the cost. The first chance for voters to decide again whether they want the park would be in May or June of 2007. If approved it would then take 22 months from the referendum for the water park to be completed, giving it a April 2009 opening. The committee is meeting monthly to decide what they can do about providing water recreation in Norfolk.

"You have to think about what you're going to do with an aging pool. Aquatic recreation will help boost the impression of your community. We know schools are important, jobs are important. You have fabulous shopping in Norfolk. You want to bring up aquatic recreation before your pools have to close down," Ronto said.

Managing a Pool

Lisa Anderson knows how important it is for kids to have something to do in the summer. As a teacher who's with kids every day throughout the school year, she likes to see kids stay busy through the summer, too.

Anderson serves as co-manager of the Norfolk City pools with Cheryl Spittler and she has seen a lot of kids and their families enjoy swimming and playing at the city pools.

"It's good exercise for kids that might normally just sit around the house," Anderson said. She's been a manager of the pools for four years. She also coaches softball and baseball for the City of Norfolk Recreation program besides teaching kindergarten through sixth grade physical education for Sacred Heart School in Norfolk.

She sees kids every day throughout the year but doesn't mind it a bit.

Not all the people who come to the pools are kids. Anderson said they have all ages.

"It's fun to see grandparents bring their grandchildren. We're seeing a lot more families coming. We like that. We'd like to see more parents come with their kids," Anderson said.

There are also a lot of regulars, people who come to the pool every day – either to swim or just bask by the pool. On hot days there could be well over 200 swimmers each at Memorial and Liberty Bell pools. That's a lot of swimmers to watch but the lifeguards at the pools have it all under control.

"We have 27 people on staff. Some of them are swim team kids. We have great quality kids. They do an outstanding job on swimming lessons," Anderson said.

About 400 different kids will go through swimming lessons at the pool over the summer months. There are four sessions that are two weeks long and they are filled up from the very beginning of summer. "We could fill more sessions if we had time," Anderson said.

The lifeguards regularly work 9-11 hour days coming in at 10:30 am to ready the pool for the



Lisa Anderson, far right, is shown overseeing swimming lessons at Memorial Pool.

day and going home at 9:30 pm after things are cleaned up. The pool hours are Monday through Friday 1-5 pm and 7-9 pm, Saturdays from 1-7 pm and on Sundays from 1-5 pm.

The hardest job about managing the Norfolk pools? Anderson said it's the upkeep.

"We're the first people to do the maintenance. Pat Mrsny (City of Norfolk Park Superintendent) showed us a lot of preventative maintenance to keep things going. We clean chlorine lines and clean filters. We maintain the PH levels and the chlorine levels and clean up a lot of messes," Anderson said.

This spring she and some of the lifeguards worked many hours one week cleaning and painting the insides of Memorial Pool, Liberty Bell Pool and the pools at Central Park. They also painted the inside of the Memorial Pool building and painted signs on the pool decks.

"People don't realize the upkeep an older pool needs. There's a lot of patchwork. We have a hard time maintaining the water level at Memorial Pool," Anderson said. Cracks have been filled in but water is still leaking out of the pool.

"Every day I wake up and hope they're still running," Anderson said.

She said she hopes the pools aren't closed down because of state regulations. If they do, she hopes there is an alternative water recreation for the families of Norfolk.

"We'll still need a place for kids to jump in and swim," Anderson said.

Michael Nolan, City Administrator of the Year

By Diane Becker
City of Norfolk Staff Writer



Michael Nolan (left) is shown receiving his award from Mayor Gordon Adams.

Norfolk City Administrator Michael Nolan was recently recognized as the Outstanding Public Administrator of the Year by the American Society for Public Administration-Nebraska Chapter.

Norfolk Mayor Gordon Adams nominated Nolan and was present at the Omaha luncheon to present the award.

In his remarks, Adams said that in his eight years as mayor he had worked closely with Nolan and found him to be “focused, intense, motivated and ambitious” in his work to improve the Norfolk community.

Adams said that in his first month on the job he had met with the fourteen city department heads and found them to be of “uniform high quality, intellectual and well qualified.” He came to the conclusion that “they had been hired and schooled by a very good administrator.” All of those department heads are still in place and Adams said he is still impressed by their expertise.

Adams said that Nolan is a frequent visitor to Lincoln when the legislature is in session, sitting in on committee meetings and successfully work-

ing to get legislation passed that has benefited Norfolk.

“He has a very futuristic outlook and pursues excellence in all that he does,” Adams said.

Adams said that under Nolan’s leadership the City of Norfolk put in a fiber optic loop to give the city high speed internet and intranet access years before many much larger cities were even considering the idea. Nolan had also worked to make the Norfolk library interconnected with other city and collegiate libraries in the area to make more resources available to a greater circle of citizens.

In the 26 years that Nolan has been managing the city’s infrastructure, the ISO rating for the city had improved from a level of 6 to 2. Adams noted that Norfolk is one of very few cities in Nebraska with this rating, attributed to management and infrastructure. The city has received GFOA certificates of conformance for financial reporting in each of the last 17 years and the GFOA award for budget excellence for each of the last 12 years.

Nolan has served in municipal government for 29 years — the last 26 of them as City Administrator for the City of Norfolk. He oversees a budget of over \$40,000,000 and a staff of 205 employees. He earned a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He has also obtained his certification as an Economic Development Finance Professional. He completed courses in Negotiation for Lawyers; Negotiations; Mediation; Advanced Negotiations; Applications to Gender Dynamics and Creating Value in Deals and Disputes at Harvard Law School.

Other officials recognized at the event were Kate Witek, Nebraska Auditor as the Outstanding Elected Official. The Lifetime Achievement Award was given posthumously to Randy Reyzlik, the City of Administrator of Fremont. Frank Peak of Creighton University was recognized as having

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received the Social Equity Award at the national level of the ASPA. Senator David Landis was the guest speaker at the luncheon held at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Michael Nolan's comments on receiving the award

I just want to say a couple things. It isn't because I have a forum that I want to talk – quite honestly, I think anybody that follows Senator Landis' speech knows there isn't any way he can best that. If I was to seek a metaphor for public service, I would chose Lord of the Rings because (1) things are frequently not what they seem; (2) public life is not only about continuously managing difficult problems: often, it's about spiritual warfare; and (3) each of us as public officials has a crucial role to play if we choose to do so. There's a line from the fourth chapter of The Brothers Karamazov that resonates with me: "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing, compared with love in dreams." That is absolutely true of leadership in action as well, especially of leadership in the public sector.

Barabbas

A few years ago, a good friend of mine who was city administrator of another large Nebraska community retired. There were about 300 people at his retirement event. I was in the queue of well-wishers who were there to see him off and had an epiphany moment I've never forgotten. When I reached out to shake his hand, he said: "You know, they always ask for Barabbas. They always ask for Barabbas." I would have laughed about that except I can really identify with what that's like. When Kate Witek a few minutes ago said that in public service there's sometimes a price you have to pay for this kind of work, this goes with it. You can have all of the great things said about you at moments like these, but you're going to have the other stuff that goes with it as well.

The other thing that you realize is that it isn't just you: progress happens because of the people you work with whom you learn to trust and create value with, and certainly the elected officials. Be-

cause you can be the most talented person there is, have all of the pedigrees and masters degrees and all the rest of it, but when it comes time to make decisions, if you don't have elected officials who are willing to stand with you and make those tough decisions, you have nothing. Statutorily that's the way it is, and they get to make them.

If I've learned one thing through 26 years of doing this, it is that really I'm nothing more than a temporary occupant of the position: that I am taking the value that was handed off to me from my predecessors. Working with a group of talented staff, elected officials and citizens who are willing to be servant leaders for the community, we are creating more value, and when we get ready to retire, we will hand off the community to the people who are coming after us. We are merely momentary stewards and that is all. That is what servant leadership is.

Thomas Merton

I want to conclude with something that Thomas Merton wrote that is one of the most powerful insights I have ever read:

"Only when we see ourselves in our true human context as members of a race which is intended to be one organism and one body, will we begin to understand the positive importance not only to the successes but of the failures and accidents in our lives. My successes are not my own. The way to them was prepared by others. The fruit of my labors is not my own for I am preparing the way for the achievements of another. Nor are my failures my own. They may spring from the failure of another but they are also compensated for by another's achievement. Therefore the meaning of my life is not to be looked for merely in the sum total of my own achievements."

I know many of you from events where we've been on the same side and sometimes on the other side. Many of us have partnered together to achieve a higher standard of professionalism for public service or in some new legislative proposal in the Legislature. Because that's what professional public people do. Life is very relational. I appreciate this award very much, but more than anything else – more than the distinction of receiving the award – I generously appreciate your kindness for giving it to me. Thank you very much.

The Man Behind The Flowers

As someone who has farmed for 33 years, Don Effle knows what it takes to grow things. In his job as a grounds keeper for the City of Norfolk, Effle plants, weeds, fertilizes and coaxes flowers to their greatest potential around the city.

Until he retired and moved to Norfolk, Effle operated a dairy farm, had stock cows, raised sows and was a custom hay hauler in the Creighton area. In 1996 he and his wife of forty-two years, Midge, moved to Norfolk. He worked in construction and retail before being hired a year ago by the City of Norfolk. Now, he spends five days a week watering and weeding and taking care of the plants around Norfolk.

His day starts at 6:30 am and he works across the city covering all of the different plots. These include plantings at Johnson Park, First and Norfolk Avenue, Central Park, the 7th Street roundabout, the 18th Street roundabout, the 25th Street roundabout, plots along 13th Street, a berm at Winter Park, the City Auditorium, the library, the US Bank Memorial on Pasewalk Avenue, plots at Skyview Park and a berm at Eldorado Hills. Some plots have hose hookups and others need to have water hauled to them. They all need weeding and an occasional fertilizing.

“I’m not afraid of hard work. I’ll work through my noon hour to get the work done. I do

what needs to be done and am always planning for the next day,” Effle said.

The work begins in early spring when he tills the plots. He then helps plant the flowers then continues to water, weed and fertilize them until it freezes.

After that, he clears the berms and digs up the canna plants – enough of them to fill fifteen large tote containers.

Effle does wish the area would get more rain.

“We’re 7 ½ inches below normal for rain this time of year. I can water and water but the plants don’t get the same nutrients from the

garden hose that they get from the sky (rainwater),” Effle said.

He buried soaker hoses in some areas to help alleviate water evaporation but said this was a tough year to keep plants going. Still, the flowers are flourishing and he has seen some cars stop and the drivers get out to take pictures of the blooms.

“We have a lot of people comment about the flowers,” Effle said.

The Effles have three children: Bryan Effle and Cindy Mills, both of Norfolk and Kathy Meyers of Tilden. They also have seven grandchildren.



Don Effle is shown by one of the City’s many flower beds that he maintains during the summer.