

# Norfolk City Outlook

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## Norfolk's Fire Reserves

By Diane Becker  
City of Norfolk Staff Writer

It's the National Guard of the Norfolk Fire Division. The Norfolk Fire Reserves, though not full-time employees, are always available to help fight a fire in the area.

Jim Dooley is the assistant chief in charge of operations for the Norfolk Fire Division who works with and helps train people in the fire reserve program.

"Any time we have a working structure fire, they're called in. They are always on call which is to our advantage. Since they're located all over town, they can get to a location quickly and sometimes faster than full-time staff," Dooley said.

Though the reserves are not used for rescue calls, car fires or trash fires, seven of them are rural call men and will help with grass fires and all of them help with structure fires.

Currently there are about 20 reserve firefighters and Dooley said they're looking to add seven more as there are usually 25 to 30 people on the reserves. The fire division doesn't have to do any advertising as there is a waiting list of people wanting to join. Not all of those who have applied will qualify, though.

"They have to pass a physical agility test



Shown above are several of the Fire Reserves assisting with a structure fire in Norfolk.

which means they have to be in pretty good physical shape," Dooley said.

This test isn't for the unfit. Each applicant has to wear full protective gear which includes a self-contained breathing apparatus that weighs about 50 pounds. They then have to climb five stories to the top of the Fire Training Facility with a high rise pack that weighs another 20 pounds.

After they get to the top they have to hoist a 50-foot hose that weighs about 50 pounds to the

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top of the tower. Next they must drive a 165-pound I-beam five feet. After walking 140 feet, they have to pick up a 1½-inch fire hose and walk another 75 feet and lastly, drag a 175-pound dummy a distance of 100 feet.

Each year, every firefighter and reserve firefighter has to be able to pass this test.

Besides passing the physical agility test, the applicant has a background check done and then is interviewed by Dooley and by the president and vice-president of the reserve organization.

vantage when the department is looking for a full-time firefighter,” Dooley said.

He added that at least half of the current firefighters were reserves at one time. A recently hired full-time firefighter came off the reserves.

“Having them on the reserves gives us good insight. That’s a benefit of the program. We can see if they’re team players and how they pick up on the training,” Dooley said.

Once they’re reserves, they still must take 4-6 hours of training every month by Dooley at the fire training facility. Each year the reserves must

also take a defensive driving course and are taught to drive the bigger trucks. For rural fires they have to take the grass rigs and tanker truck.

“They’re trained to do everything the trained staff can do,” Dooley said.

There are currently several fathers and their sons that are involved with the Norfolk Fire Division. Everett Beckman and his son Aaron both serve on the reserves as do Bill Greenough and his son Joe. Full-time fire employees Doug Dekker and Jim Dooley have sons Joe and Nate, respectively, who

serve as reserves. As an organization, the reserves have their own programs which include working with the Big Bang Boom.

The regular reserves meet the first and third Tuesdays of the month while the recruits meet the second and fourth Tuesdays.

Anyone interested in being a part of the Norfolk Fire Reserves can call Dooley at 844-2053 for more information.



Shown above is Fire Chief Shane Weidner as he swears in a recent recruitment of fire reserves for the Norfolk Fire Division.

Those who pass all of the requirements go through six months or at least 36 hours of basic firefighting training.

After that, they’re issued pagers to carry and bunker gear that they will keep in their vehicle, ready to help in any fire.

“As a reserve, they get \$8 per hour for training and for a call. That’s not much for their expenses and driving to the fire. It does give them an ad-

# Verges Park Flower Garden

By Diane Becker  
City of Norfolk Staff Writer

It is meant to attract birds and butterflies but the flowers and peaceful surroundings are attracting people, too.

A large flower garden decorates a portion of beautiful Verges Park, the oldest park in Norfolk.

Juaneta Swanson, the Verges Park gardener, is arranging the perennials and annuals and planting new plants here and there.

“A couple of years ago I looked at the garden and saw that there was nothing but dandelions and creeping jenny in it. You couldn’t see any of the original flowers. For five years, nothing had been done to the garden. I asked if I could work

in it and I’ve been puttering out in it ever since,” Swanson said.

The park was donated to the Elkhorn Valley Historical Society by the City of Norfolk in 1984. The Elkhorn Valley Museum and Research Center was built on the east end of the park. The Lueschen Bird Library is in the west end of the building. The Madison County Master Gardeners designed and constructed a garden outside the large west-facing windows of the library to help attract birds to the feeders.

It was a great addition to the historical park that, years ago, was the site of many social gatherings. There is a man-made cave at the park where bands played and dances were held.

The Verges Park garden was put in with the help of many volunteers but, with no one responsible for its care, it gradually was overcome with weeds.

Today, thanks to Swanson, the flowers are back.

Darlene Finkhouse and Betty Hatfield have helped her with some of the work and there’s been a lot of it.

“The sedum was buried so we moved it to the slope. They (museum workers) were going to

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Shown tending to the flower garden at Verges Park is Juaneta Swanson, on the left, and Darlene Finkhouse, on the right.

burn the hillside so we dug pestemon and other plants out first and moved them to the garden,” Swanson said. Also moved at the time were wild iris, day lilies, tiger lilies, and cone flowers.

Swanson has added perennials that she has purchased late in the season to the flower collection. Other people have also donated plants out of their gardens, sometimes leaving them in the garden like babies left on the steps of an orphanage. Ornamental grasses and yucca plants are some of the larger plants donated to the garden.

Little by little the spaces in the garden have filled in again with monarda, peonies, mellow poppies, phlox, asters and Shasta daisies. There is also a scattering of columbine, primrose, baby’s breath, coreopsis, mums, yarrow, salvia, and gailardia. Other flowers include coral bells, heather, larkspur, honeysuckle vine and double daisies. An annual flower garden has marigolds, dianthus, moss roses, salvia and sea thrift. Tulips and daffodils bloom in the spring.

“It’s supposed to be a bird and butterfly garden so the plants are chosen for that purpose. We get a lot of birds and, at one time of year, some of the plants will be completely full of butterflies,” Swanson said.

“Volunteers Make Our Park Blossom” reads one sign erected when the garden was first built. There have been other volunteers who have helped with its upkeep. Under Swanson’s direction, Boy and Girl Scouts, school groups, people needing to do community service, and others have helped in the garden. They may do everything from pull weeds to arranging a rock border around the garden.

With the garden adding beauty to the eastern portion of Verges Park and the planting of about 20 trees by the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District in the western end of the park, people are taking time to sit on the benches or enjoying picnics in the park. There have even been weddings held there.

Several dying trees have been removed from the park and benches, picnic tables, playground equipment and a grill sit under the large cottonwood trees shading the park. The Dederman log

cabin has been moved from Johnson Park to Verges and is currently being renovated.

The park has had some problems with vandalism. The shed used to store bird seed was broken into and water dumped on the seed. The pond has been damaged. Dog owners will sometimes let their dogs run loose through the garden. Swanson said donated cactus was planted on the overhang above the pond to keep people from wandering near the edge.

Still, Swanson stays loyal to her task of maintaining and improving the garden. She would like to put up an arbor with climbing roses on it for a back drop for wedding pictures. She also wants to plant the perennials in larger arrangements throughout the garden. And then there’s the watering to be done, deadheading old blooms, weeds to be pulled and sprayed and the path that goes through the garden cleared. She’s also looking for anyone else interested in helping to keep the Verges Park garden beautiful.

“We will accept any help and any donation of plants. Don’t throw them away. Call us and we’ll try to incorporate them in the garden,” Swanson said. Her phone number is 371-9331.

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## Second Fire Station Making a Difference



Shown above is Norfolk's 2nd Fire Station located on West Benjamin Avenue.

The second fire station is only in its first year of operation but has already been successful in helping to provide manpower and equipment to rapidly extinguish fires in west Norfolk.

Jim Dooley, assistant chief in charge of operations, has an office in the new fire station located on west Benjamin Avenue. The station, with complete living quarters, is a second home to the firefighters who work shifts there. The brick fire station was built to blend in with the residential area it's surrounded by but inside the specifications are designed to provide quick responses to fires.

When the alarm goes off, the large truck doors automatically open and a warning sign flashes down the street from the station, warning people that fire trucks will soon be coming out of the driveway. There are three bedrooms that resemble nice dorm rooms for firefighters who have overnight duty but the lights all come on automatically if there's a fire alarm.

If the fire fighters are in the kitchen preparing

a meal, the oven and stove will automatically turn off as will the gas grill out on the deck.

"There had been instances of fire stations burning down because of a burner that was left on," Dooley said.

There is a dining room table of sorts. But mounted on the wall above it is a video camera and TV screen that enables shift officers to have an electronic "meeting" every morning with other rescue coordinators at the fire department headquarters in downtown Norfolk. Laundry facilities, a conference room and a report room where information is entered into the computer are also available for use.

Each firefighter has to work out at least an hour a day and a gym in the basement of the facility provides them with exercise equipment to get that done.

When the embers from fireworks set a house roof on fire in July, it was the truck and firefighters from the second fire station who were the first to respond.

"With the deck and all, we may look residential but we're ready 24 hours a day to respond to a fire," Dooley said.



Jim Dooley is shown in the kitchen at the second fire station located on West Benjamin Avenue.

# City Seeks Public Input on Transportation System Plans



Shown above is one of Norfolk's busiest intersections—13th Street and Omaha Avenue.

How should Norfolk prioritize its limited transportation resources over the next one to 20 years?

The City of Norfolk Public Works Department wants to hear your answers. Citizens are invited to provide their input on problems and opportunities related to Norfolk's streets, sidewalks, and trails by filling out a questionnaire.

Citizens may find the questionnaire in this newsletter and electronically through the City Web site at [www.ci.norfolk.ne.us](http://www.ci.norfolk.ne.us).

The City will incorporate citizen input into the transportation section of the Norfolk Comprehensive Plan. This section of the Comprehensive Plan is being updated to incorporate

a traffic analysis using a computerized model of Norfolk's transportation system.

"The information from the technology – along with the input from the public – will help us to better plan and prioritize the City's future needs," said Public Works Director Dennis Smith.

Citizens may return written surveys by dropping them off at, or mailing them to, the main City office building, 127 N. First St., Norfolk, NE, 68701; or by faxing them to (402) 844-2001.

A public meeting is planned for this fall to share the results of public input and the traffic analysis and to seek feedback on the preliminary recommendations.



Shown above are vehicles maneuvering one of the Norfolk's Round-a-Bouts.

# Pat Mrsny—Softball Coach

By Diane Becker  
City of Norfolk Staff Writer

If it's June in Norfolk, you're likely to find Pat Mrsny at one of two places: checking out a repair at a swimming pool or contemplating a play on a softball diamond.

As head of the Park Division for the City of Norfolk, Mrsny is responsible for making sure the pools are kept up and running. With the Norfolk pools getting older and needing more maintenance, he is called upon more and more to help troubleshoot pool pump problems and other repair issues.

Mrsny is also the head coach for the 18 and under Golden Girls Fast Pitch Softball team so he can be found at a ballpark a lot of summer hours, too.

Seven years ago Mrsny was an assistant coach for the 16 and under Golden Girls team. Both of his daughters, Lynn and Randi, were playing softball at the time. When his younger daughter, Randi, started playing for the 18 and under team, Mrsny was asked to be the head coach and has been their coach since 2001.

Although Mrsny said he's enjoyed coaching, he admits his life is pretty hectic in the summer months.

"It's parks and people around the clock," Mrsny said.

The Golden Girls' games usually start with a tournament on Memorial Day weekend. From then on they have double headers on Tuesdays or Thursdays usually anywhere from Columbus to Lincoln. On Wednesday nights they head to Lincoln to play a double header in the Lincoln League. Then, on Fridays it's off to an out-of-town tournament for the weekend. This schedule takes them through the second weekend in July when they usually play in a regional tournament. This year they traveled to St. Louis to play.

"We go to Lincoln to play Class A fast pitch softball. It's what you have to do to play competitively. Many of the top teams in the state are in the Lincoln league," Mrsny said.

With girls on the team that are 18 or younger

before the first of the year, Mrsny said it's difficult to get them together much for practices.

"They're out for track or on a basketball team. Some are in college. A lot have jobs. People show up from January to May on a volunteer basis to practice and we try to have some team type practices in April but, basically, we go into our first game without a full team practice. This age group snaps back quickly," Mrsny said.

Not only does Mrsny coach, he is also the Amateur Softball Association Junior Olympic Commissioner for Northeast Nebraska for the under 10 through under 18 girls' fast pitch softball teams. His duties include traveling to various ASA meetings, getting players' paperwork prepared and submitted and setting up four sanctioned district tournaments. These tournaments decide which teams will go on to state, regional and national finals.

"I don't see my wife much in June," Mrsny said.

City business picks up in June also with two big items – preparing the budget and starting up the pools.

"I try to get into the office 3-4 hours before everyone else comes in for a month or so. It's some stressful weeks," Mrsny said, "It's worth it, though, or I wouldn't do it."

He said he's enjoyed seeing many of the girls who've played on his teams go on and play college softball. Half of this year's team are playing at the college level or are signed on to play on a college team this fall taking advantage of softball scholarships to help further their education and to continue to play the game they love.

Many of the girls have played softball since they were ten years old or even younger but Mrsny said he has had some latecomers who turned out to be great softball players, too.

"Unless you've played competitively when you're younger, in the 14's and 16's it's hard to

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catch up but it can be done,” Mrsny said.

Mrsny wasn't even sure he was going to have a team this year as some girls from last year were too old to play and they didn't have enough to field a team. The local Kelly softball program didn't have enough players to field an 18 and under team so they were able to pick up one of their players that was too old to play at 16 and under. Since the Fullerton Slammers 18 and under team was having the same problem, Mrsny convinced some of their

available players to play with the Norfolk team. They currently have three Fullerton Slammers playing. Team

members drive from as far away as Clarkson, Fullerton, Madison, Clarks and Albion to play on the Norfolk team. Don King and Lee Dittmer, Fullerton coaches, also came over and helped Mrsny coach this summer. Scott Cordes is another assistant coach and is also the City of Norfolk Prevention Manager.

“Having all these different girls and coaches come together and work so well towards a common goal and to have accomplished as much as they have along the way more than exceeded my expectations and it has been a real pleasure for myself to be a part of it. This is a great bunch of girls and all the coaches and parents have been very supportive,” Mrsny said.

Each girl who plays for the Golden Girls team pays a \$120 entry fee. With that fee, they are entered into all of the tournaments and receive their uniforms, helmets, equipment bags. The seniors each get a \$100 scholarship.

“The organization will spend over \$800 per girl after you figure all the expenses in,” Mrsny said, thanks to fundraisers and donations to the Golden Girls made by contributors in the Norfolk area.

Mrsny said they try to encourage families to come to the games by offering a pizza meal at the



Shown above is the team with one of this years trophies. Front row is Desi Irish, Ashley Greger, Gina Wenzl, Deanna Conover, Bethany Weich, Lanae Cordes. Back row is Pat Mrsny, Don King, Klancy Nixon, Aleisha Wells, Carlee Dittmer, Erica King, Meghan Bretschneider, Kayla Gataivasa, Lee Dittmer, Scott Cordes

motel on the Saturday nights they are out of town.

“We have found that it encourages team and family unity, helps keep the families and players from taking off in all directions after the last game of the day and helps to soften the financial burden that the families face in following their daughter to the out of town tournaments,” Mrsny said.

The Golden Girls 18 and under team has done well in the last few years and have had a very good season this year, gaining a reputation as a power softball team.

“We ended up winning two tournaments, got 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Norfolk tournament and also at State, nearly winning it. We got 3<sup>rd</sup> at Columbus and were competitive in Sioux Falls and at Regionals. We were offered a bid to go to nationals but it's a large commitment, in time and money, to go to Georgia for a week to play so we decided to turn it down,” Mrsny said.

The Norfolk girls ended up tied for 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Lincoln league which finished on July 13. Their record for the season is 44-14.

“I enjoy doing it. It's a great organization and it offers great opportunities for the girls. Fast pitch softball did a lot for my girls so after they got older and left the program I wanted to stay on and give back,” Mrsny said.