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“Smokey and Memorial Park”



There's only one person who's had a private entrance to Memorial Field for the last twenty years and that's Smokey Voecks. As a City of Norfolk maintenance employee whose backyard abutted the Memorial Field, he was assigned the job of turning sprinklers on or off on the football field, which sometimes had to be done in the middle of the night. To make his job easier, city workers put in a gate so he could easily enter the field through the tall chain link fence. A padlock was put on the gate so that spectators weren't accessing the field through his yard. Having his own

private gate has its perks.

“During games I occasionally go in and get a hotdog and some popcorn at the concessions stand,” Voecks said.

His given name is Norm and he and his wife, Marge, moved to Norfolk 47 years ago. They lived on the south side of the park for years until moving to their current location on Logan on the same block of Veterans Memorial Park just east of the football field.

“I used to have to shut the sprinkler heads off at midnight. There were three rows of eight and I'd had to shut each off individually. If I didn't time it right I could really get sprayed. By the time you'd get done you were all soaked and wet,” Voecks said.

Through the years Voecks also helped bring in bleachers on the visitors' side. He helped mow and fertilize the grass and cut shorter grass with a push mower where the lines went. He'd also mix the paint with water, pour it into a special pressurized tank and paint the lines on the field.

Voecks helped put in the underground sprinklers and lights on the baseball field next to Memorial Field. He pulled weeds and cleaned the restrooms at all the city parks.

There were perks to living next to the Memorial Park. Besides being able to walk home for lunch, Voecks had a clear view of the events going on in the field area without having to leave his kitchen table.

“It really gets wild when Pierce and Norfolk Catholic play. We can watch games right out the window until the teams get way down on the south end,” Voecks said.

In the past, when the Shrine Circus set up their show on the football field, the Voecks would set chairs on the top of their roof and watch the lions, tigers, elephants and trapeze artists.

“One night some exotic birds got away and flew over us,” Voecks recalled with a smile.

They’ve also had a front row view of the annual marching band competition held at Memorial Field and enjoyed watching all of the entries lining up in the Memorial Field parking lot getting ready for the Lion’s Club Parade.

Though they’ve enjoyed living near the park, the Voecks also know it’s time for an updated facility. They have their house for sale thinking that at age 81 (Smokey) and 83 (Marge) it’s time to move to an apartment where there isn’t a lawn to mow or sidewalks to shovel.

Until then Marge said they have a new three-ring circus going on in their backyard again as they watch the all of the construction work at Memorial Field as work progresses on the football field, the baseball field and the aquatic facility.

“When they bladed and packed the field the first week I thought they were sure getting that done fast then they continued to blade and pack it for weeks,” Voecks said.

They’ve become accustomed to the dinging sound made by heavy equipment backing up. The site of mounds of dirt and piles of rock have slowly disappeared as the rock was scattered as a base layer under the new field and the dirt was moved to the parking lot area. Voecks was enthralled with the process workers used in lifting the huge new lights at the field and is anxious to see what the finished park will look like.

“We’ve got a lot of young kids here in town. It will be nice,” Voecks said.