



RE-ECHO

Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

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WESTWOOD HILLS GOLF CLUB, NEIGHBORHOOD AND NATURE CENTER

In 1928, the Westwood Hills Golf Club opened with 27 holes and 9,405 total yards. It was roughly bordered by what is now I-394, Highway 169, Cedar Lake Road, and Texas Ave. Two 9-hole courses were located on the west side of Texas, and one on the east side, roughly where the Jr. High is today. The Club was built, owned and operated by James A. McNulty. It was the only 27-hole course in the Twin Cities and was open to the public. The course was continually improved throughout the 1930s. Through the years, many famous golfers played the links there. The course was a family business that included James' son John C. and his wife Mildred, and John's sons Robert and John, who ran the golf course for a number of years until Robert redeveloped the property in the 1950s.

In 1955, the golf course was no longer profitable, and given the rush to build houses in St. Louis Park, the McNulty family began to develop the land for housing. The Murri-Mac company was formed by Robert to do the land development and he involved Lyle Murray as a partner.

An article in *The Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* on August 5, 1956 reported that 225 acres of the parcel was going to be divided into sites for 630 homes, a nine-hole golf course, clubhouse, tennis courts, swimming pool and other recreational activities. Houses were to be in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range, high-end for the time, and subject to architectural approval. The plan changed somewhat as it progressed through the approval processes and various additions. At first one of the 9-hole courses remained in place.

In 1958 the City bought 90 acres of the property; 30 acres were set aside for [Westwood Jr. High School](#), which was originally to be called Westwood Hills Jr. High. The golf course was gone by the early sixties - it does not appear in the 1961 directory.

In 1971, the City acquired 150 acres, including 60-acre Westwood Lake, to be developed into what would become the Westwood Hills Nature Center. The property was acquired with Federal, State, City, and private money, including donations from Northwestern Bell, the West Suburban Chamber of Commerce, and Rotary. The Interpretive Center was first occupied by staff on February 6, 1981.

On June 11, 2011, the Nature Center celebrated its 30th anniversary with an open house. The SLP Historical Society was on hand to display pictures of the old golf course, which had been donated by R. James McNulty, great-grandson of James A. McNulty, builder of Westwood Hills.

THIS 'N' THAT

SUMMER DEPOT HOURS: Once again we are opening the Historic Depot on Saturdays for inspection by the community. Bikers, park users, and others are invited to come and see the inside of this 1887 building.

DEPOT IMPROVEMENTS: A new furnace has been installed and we now have AIR CONDITIONING! This came just in the nick of time, as our June meeting fell on a 103 degree day! Unfortunately, funds are not available to do all of the insulation work we had hoped for, but talks are still ongoing. In the meantime, our records that are stored at the Depot are in a bit of disarray, so please be patient if you are looking for reference material.

MEMBERSHIPS are down for this time of year, so if you haven't joined, please consider joining or renewing. The membership form is on our website at www.slphistory.org under About the Society, Become a Member. Thanks for this critical support.

ALCOA HOUSE MYSTERY SOLVED: You may remember our story last issue about our historic all-aluminum house and how the *Dispatch* listed two different addresses. Turns out there weren't two houses, just a mixup. The actual address is indeed 8000 Westwood Hills Drive. The owners, who have put an incredible amount of time and energy into restoring the house, held an Open House on June 4. SLP Historical Society members who attended were very impressed with the house.

36TH STREETSCAPE ARTWORK: In May, the Mayor cut the ribbon to dedicate artwork that had been installed on 36th Street between Highway 100 and Wooddale Ave. The artist, Marjorie Pitz, placed pieces that look like little people along the sidewalk, with benches that look like reclining bodies. With the Hoigard Village development, the installation is intended to reflect a return of people to the street. Ironically, the street had been residential, with houses dating from the teens and '20s, before they were razed in the '50s to build the commercial and industrial buildings that are there now. Fun fact: the "real" Charlie Brown was a resident of the Old 36th St.

FIRE HOUSE MYSTERY: With the demolition of the Wooddale fire house, a mysterious box was found behind the cornerstone. It is in the shape of a brick, metal, with all sides welded shut. Fire Chief Stemmer presumes that it is some sort of time capsule, but there is no formal marking, just scratches. One seems to say "1963," although the station wasn't built until 1966. Chief Stemmer has not yet decided whether to open it or place it back in the new building. The fire station was demolished on May 23 and construction of the new one has begun.

REUNIONS: The Historical Society is keeping a list of class reunions that we hear about through various sources. See our home page at www.slphistory.org for the list. Another trend is the all-city birthday party, commonly held for everyone turning 60, 65, or whatever.

NEED NEW TREASURER: Our beloved Treasurer, Megan Crosby, has tendered her resignation, and we have reluctantly accepted. Our books are in perfect order and are very straightforward, so if you are interested in volunteering to be our new treasurer, please contact us. The time required is very minimal.

DATES TO REMEMBER: Please note that because of National Night Out, our August meeting will be on the 9th, which is the second Tuesday. Also note that our Annual Meeting, where we elect officers, is scheduled for our September 6 meeting. As always, everyone is invited to come and participate.

BYLAW AMENDMENTS: The Board is in the process of comparing our Bylaws, which were based on the Minnesota Historical Society's 1971 template, to MHS's latest template. Changes will be discussed at our July meeting. Also under discussion will be changes to our Collection Policy, also based on the MHS template.

DONATIONS RECEIVED

The St. Louis Park Historical Society has no museum, only administrative space at Lenox and limited storage space at the Historic Depot. Until we find a suitable space to display donations, we will accept them as we have room to store them. We thank all donors for sharing their interesting information and artifacts.

Craig Lepp recycled his yearbooks, newsletters, copies of the *Echo*, and other memorabilia from his school days in the Park.

Manny Camilon brought us some great old homecoming buttons.

Linda Harrier provided us with a copy of the DVD she made of the Class of 1965 reunion materials. This 400 page document had mountains of information and takes up such little space!

Lynn Wallin donated her copies of the *Westwinds* newspaper from 1965-66 and the *Echo* from 1967-70.

Mark Toretsky, our intrepid North Side researcher, brought in a box full of sports, business, school, and other memorabilia, including his gym shorts!

Ted Meland found a piece of sheet music from 1925 with a picture of Park Mayor Russell Fernstrom on the cover.

Our school insider, Carolyn Charles, donated a stack of pictures of St. Louis Park schools, streets, and businesses.

Jean Almquist, on behalf of the Westwood Garden Club, donated a box of the Club's records and photo albums for safekeeping. The Club started in 1955 and is still going.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD GOES TO DR. CLAYTON SWENSON

The 2011 [Distinguished Alumni Award](#) goes to Dr. Clayton Swenson, who graduated at age 16 from Park High in 1940. His father was Nels Swenson, who owned the Swenson and Redeen Grocery Store, which operated on Walker Street from 1923 to 1952. The story of this early Park business can be found in Clayton's brother Don Swenson's book [Something in the Water](#), available from the SLP Historical Society.

Clayton received a scholarship to Harvard, where he studied physics. In his senior year at Harvard, Los Alamos was looking for scientists to work on the A-bomb. After the war, he was a new graduate student in Physics at Harvard, ready to do Nuclear Physics. He was awarded a fellowship to go to Oxford and work in the relatively new field of Low Temperature Physics. After his Oxford D. Phil. (Ph.D), he went back to Harvard to set up a low temperature program, then went to MIT to work for three years before finally ending up at the Department of Physics at Iowa State University and then Ames Laboratory of the Atomic Energy Commission. Each of these activities involved an abrupt change in life direction, often not expected. He both taught and did significant published research. He was named a Distinguished Professor and chaired the Department of Physics for seven years. He spent sabbatical years in Australia at their Standards Laboratory and in England at the National Physical Laboratory and more recently six months at Los Alamos (not on nuclear physics) For 25 years, he was the only non-Standards Laboratory member on the Consultative Committee on Thermometry of the International Committee on Weights and Measures in Paris.

Dr. Swenson retired in 1987 but still goes to Iowa State University 2-3 times a week to help in the science department.

He received Park High's Distinguished Alumni award on graduation day, June 2, 2011.

Who We Are

The St. Louis Park Historical Society was founded in 1971 to collect, preserve, and disseminate the history of the City of St. Louis Park, Minnesota. The archives of the Society are located in the Historic Depot in Jorvig Park (37th and Brunswick) and at the Lenox Community Center (6715 Minnetonka Blvd.). Office hours at the Lenox site are Thursdays from 10 to noon, and by appointment. Our mailing address is:

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We do not have a central phone number, but our email address is history@slphistory.org.

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About the Re-Echo

The *Re-Echo* is published quarterly by the St. Louis Park Historical Society. Its purpose is to share information about the City's history and the Society's activities. The *Re-Echo* was started by Robert C. Reiss. The name was inspired by the *Echo* newspaper, which has been published by and for the students of St. Louis Park High School since 1917.

About This Issue

We have not included our One Stop Shopping form in this issue of the *Re-Echo*, but you can find it at slphistory.org/about/default.asp. Just click on Become a Member and you'll find the form that will let you sign up as a member, order a copy of *Something in the Water*, or change your *Re-Echo* delivery option. This includes opting to receive it via email or be taken off of the mailing list.

Join Us!

The St. Louis Park Historical Society is a nonprofit organization and is wholly dependent on membership dues and donations for its operating costs, including the cost of mailing the *Re-Echo*. You don't have to be a member to receive the *Re-Echo*, but we need new members, especially active ones. Meetings are at 7pm on the first Tuesday of the month, and are open to all. They are held at Lenox Community Center October-May and at the Historic Depot June-September.
