



# The Re-ECHO

St. Louis Park

A Newsletter for the members of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

## Park Nicollet

The biggest "success" story in St. Louis Park is Park Nicollet Health Services. Today it is an integrated care system that includes Methodist Hospital, Park Nicollet Clinic, Park Nicollet Foundation and Park Nicollet Institute. It has 6800 employees including 485 physicians.

Park Nicollet started in 1951 as the St. Louis Park Medical Center. Eleven young doctors wanted to start an innovative group practice in St. Louis Park. At that time, most doctors had individual practices and most were located in downtown Minneapolis. With the expanding number of new families in St. Louis Park, these doctors thought it presented an excellent opportunity for them. They wanted to reinvent the group practice concept so that it would make it financially feasible for them to take time away from their practice to pursue research, teaching and other educational activities.

To start this new practice, funds were needed to build a new building. Their first support came from Morten Arneson, who owned a nursery on Excelsior Boulevard just east of what is now Miracle Mile. He agreed to a very one-sided financial arrangement to let them build on his property.

Then by pooling all of the partners' unused GI housing loan guarantees, they were able to finance the building.

On July 2, 1951 the St. Louis Park Medical Center opened for business without fanfare. They treated five patients the first day.

As the partners expected, doctors were in great demand in St. Louis Park. As the population exploded so did the Medical Center. By 1957, there were seventeen doctors and they were continually adding more. New physicians brought new energy and the clinic quickly seized the opportuni-

ties presented by this energy. This increased the group's ability to attract even more high quality talent. Cardiology, Family Counseling, Social Services, Industrial Medicine, Family Practice, Kidney Dialysis and Diabetic Education were a few of the added specialties.

Computerization and an in-house pharmacy were also part of the growth.

With seventeen doctors, the building had to be expanded and ever since, building expansion has been almost a continuing process. They ran out of room on the south side of Excelsior Boulevard and property was purchased on the north side. The seven story Northland Building was built in 1969 and later expanded to the present campus. They started to add satellite clinics and urgent care centers in 1972.

In the seventies and eighties, the cost of health care became a national problem. The St. Louis Park Medical Center, accustomed to charting it's own course, was willing to experiment. They started their first prepaid medical plan in 1972. This was the start of their HMO (Health

The Re-ECHO is published quarterly by the St. Louis park Historical Society and is edited by robert c. reiss. Its purpose is to acquaint the members, volunteers and friends on how the activities, programs and resources of the Society are used to preserve the history of St. Louis Park.

The name was inspired by the ECHO newspaper published by and for the students of the St. Louis Park High School since 1917.

robert c. reiss  
Phone (952) 470 1762  
E Mail rcreiss@aol.com

### Park Nicollet family includes:

- 25 Park Nicollet Clinics
- Methodist Hospital
- 5 Urgent care centers
- 12 Pharmacies
- 9 Optical stores
- 2 Hearing aid centers
- 3 Home care stores
- Refractive surgery center
- Family birthing center

## Park Nicollet

Maintenance Organization). The timing could not have been better. The business community was looking for an alternative to traditional health insurance. The plan brought them a whole new source of patients and revenue.

In 1981, with its combination of a private practice group, clinical teaching and research, St. Louis Park Medical Center was recognized nationally as a premier multispecialty group.

In 1983, The St. Louis Park Medical Center merged with the Nicollet Clinic to form Park Nicollet. Methodist Hospital was another addition.

Today this organization is a complex assortment of medical practices, non-profit foundations, hospitals and insurance groups. In 1983, Morten Arneson, in his history of St. Louis Park wrote:

*"The Mayo Clinic made the name Rochester known all over the world - and beyond - and so will the Medical Center make the name of St. Louis Park known all over the United States and beyond."*

**And it has!**

---

**What so  
proudly we  
hail.**

The flag in Jorvig Park now flies twenty four hours a day, thanks to J. Dudley Moylan and Nordic Ware. Mr. Moylan donated the new flag pole and Nordic Ware provided the light so that it can be flown continually. The official flag

raising was by the St. Louis Park Historical Society at 9:00 AM on June 12, 2002, just in time for Flag Day. Our thanks to Mr. Moylan and Nordic Ware. Long may it wave.

---

## Morten Arneson

From the very beginning, Morten Arneson was the champion of the St. Louis Park Medical Center. In 1950 he leased the Medical Center three acres of his Nursery on Excelsior Boulevard so they could build their building. The final agreement was very one sided and the terms were very financially beneficial to the Medical Center for many years to follow. In their first meeting, Mr. Arneson became the agent for their welfare and success.

As the building was going up, Arneson was on the site every day. He provided the water, the electricity, the phone, some extra planks and whatever all for free. Through the first years of the Medical Center, he remained encouraging and/or critical of their expansion plans.

The St. Louis Park Medical Center was not the only benefactor of Arneson's wisdom and energy. From the thirties, through the forties and into the fifties he was very active in promoting the changes necessary to the local government to accommodate the expanding municipality.

Morton Arneson and his wife, Kath-eren, moved to the Park in the early thirties and found a very lax and possibly corrupt government. He with several other residents formed the

Better Government League and through out its existence, until 1953, he was the only Chairman. The first action of this group was to find and promote candidates for election with impeccable reputations. Their first success was getting Roy Sewell elected mayor. He immediately fired the police chief and hired Andy Nelson who served St. Louis Park very well for many years. The Better Government League talked more good people into running for the Council and the village started to turn around. The role that the Better Government League saw for itself was to select and endorse the people they though would use good judgment. After they were elected the Better Government League left them alone to do their job.

When Arneson found the Planning Commission was not actively planning for the growth of St. Louis Park he got himself appointed to the Commission. He worked to get people appointed who could provide positive, professional and knowledgeable input. He spent twenty years on the Planning Commission during the period that was an exceptional time in St. Louis Park's growth. During this time, St. Louis Park was completely rezoned and it is still zoned very much the same today.

Arneson's big contribution was on the

## Morten Arneson

Charter Commission. The Better Government League set up a committee, including Arneson, to study the best form of government for municipalities. They quickly settled on the Council-Manager type. It put the administration in the hands of hired professionals and left the elected officials free to look at the big picture.

The first Charter proposal failed to pass and it was decided that it was because it was not a very good charter. The Better Government League supported a second Charter Commission. Arneson also served as Chairman of this Commission which included several well qualified attorneys. They worked for four years before they proposed a vote on it. The Charter they wrote is the one under which the City operates today.

There was no visible opposition to this Charter and it was assumed that it would pass. Last minute opposition to Arneson personally developed and this Charter failed. In 1954, this same Charter was put to a vote and passed. By this time Arneson had moved to Edina.

The St. Louis Park Medical Center honored Morten and Katheren by naming a new building built in their honor. Others were less kind. In a history of St. Louis Park, written in 1976, Arneson is barely mentioned. In addition, only two lines were devoted to the St. Louis Park Medical Center, presumably because of Arneson's association.

## Home Rule Charter

The Charter under which the City of St. Louis Park operates was adopted on December 7, 1954. The City is planning to celebrate this Charter's fiftieth anniversary in the year 2004 and is starting to plan for it. The Historical Society has been given the opportunity to provide volunteers for the planning Committee. Anyone who would like to serve on the committee please contact Bridget Wynn at the St. Louis Park Parks and Recreation Department (952 924-2538).

The Better Government League, with Morten Arneson as Chairman, in the 1940's set up a committee to study the best form of government for fast growing St. Louis Park's Home Rule Charter. This committee very quickly came to the conclusion that the Council-Manager type was the best for cities of over 10,000 people.

As the city government was set up at that time, the Mayor and each Councilman was the administrator of a department such as the Police, Fire, Street, Water and one acted as City Clerk. They were elected and had to perform functions for which they were not necessarily qualified. With the Council-Manager type of government the administrative functions were all handled by hired professionals. The elected officials were free to concentrate on the major problems of a growing city.

This was a rather innovative solution in the 1940's. In 1935, there were only 300 cities in the United States with this form of

government. In 1950 there were over 1000 and today there are way over 3000.

As a result of this Better Government League Study the District Court selected a Commission to get it started. It took four years to get it ready for a vote and it failed because of strong opposition. A second Charter Commission was selected by the District Court in 1947. Morten Arneson and Leland F. Leland were the only holdovers. This time the rest of the Commission was made up of very knowledgeable attorneys and the Charter was completely rewritten. This second Charter was put to a vote in March 1949. A group called the Charter Fact Finding Committee headed by C.L. Hurd published its opposition in a full page ad in the St. Louis Park Dispatch. Again the Charter failed.

A second vote on this same Home Rule Charter was held on December 7, 1954. The Better Government League did not campaign for its approval because there was no organized opposition. This time it passed with the necessary sixty percent of the voters approving. On January 7, 1955 the Charter became effective.

With the new Charter in place, the Better Government League no longer saw a need for itself and devolved.

**The St. Louis Park Historical Society meets at the Depot in Jorvig Park at 7:00 PM the second Tuesday of each month.**

**The next meeting dates are:**

**July 9**

**August 13**

**September 10**

**You are invited to attend.**

### **"Something in the Water"**

This book is a history of St. Louis Park prior to 1945. It is available from the St. Louis Park Historical Society for \$18.00 plus \$2.00 for handling. Send your name, and address along with a check for \$20.00 to:

robert c. reiss  
5109 Stoney Bridge Court  
Minnetonka MN 55345  
(952) 470 1762

## **Shorty and Skippy to be Honored**



The "Shorty" Dale Field will be reclaimed on Saturday July 13, 2002. This has been designated the official celebration date for the fiftieth anniversary of Skippy Field. Plans include a baseball skills clinic put on by the Minnesota Twins with a visit to Skippy by some of the starting lineup. Skippy Peanut Butter has donated money and product memorabilia. Free food will be served and a community ball game is planned. All of "Shorty" Dales surviving children will be present on the field.

It is not hard to imagine how Elmer became "Shorty" but it is unusual for a

nickname to stick for a whole career. Ben Brown makes the observation that St. Louis Park was a village of people with strange nicknames. If you mentioned the nickname you wouldn't have to say the last name. Everyone knew who you meant. Here is a small offering of some of the names he remembers: Pill, Spike, Bud, Huns, Punko, Windy, Chub, Honey, Honey Boy, Apey, Dutch, Doe, Spike, Tick, Scotty, Tuffy, Chick, Lug, Mouse, Happy, Numb, Stoge, Hayseed, Egg Head. Shorty was one of this group.

If you played or cheered at Skippy Field in the last 50 years you will want to be there on July 13th. It's going to be a big crowd.

## **What's Happening**

On Saturday, July 13, 2002 a celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Skippy Field will be held at Skippy Field. The thousands of kids who have played and cheered at the field will participate.

*Several reports have been received about alligator sightings but they have proved to be false. At Meadowbrook Golf Course it has been reported that*

*golfers are being more careful about retrieving balls from the creek. Keep looking.*

The the name of the editor of the St. Louis Park Historical Societies newsletter will not be capitalized when it appears in this issue because in the last newsletter he failed to note that the Societies own Depot is also on the National Register of Historic Places.

The ReECHO  
5109 Stoney Bridge Court  
Minnetonka MN 55345