

PARK POINT BREEZE

DECEMBER 1997

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Our Sincere Thanks to...

Gretchen Soetebier & the Patty Cake Shop, the Gajewski family at Bayside Market, and Larry Lighthawk for their generous donations to the Lafayette Halloween Party

The crew of the Park Point Coast Guard Station, for their donation of stacking chairs to Lafayette, and for their help with the hockey rink

Tom Richards & his wife Gretchen for the "extra-mile efforts" they've put into the Lafayette rinks. (Good luck in your new home, friends!)

Park Point Community Club November Meeting Minutes

The November meeting of the Park Point Community Club began at 7:00 p.m., Nov. 20, with Dave Johnson presiding.

Six new tables were bought by Seniors Group and PPCC. Old ones went to Rowing Club.

A motion was made by Paul McVann to give the extra money they had to spend for Halloween party. (\$300) 2nd by Andrea Zabloski. Decorations to be used next year and longer. Passed.

Dave Johnson reported first \$7500 LCMR check has arrived for Pine Forest protection. Brief discussion on copy machines followed.

Motion requested by Dave Johnson on behalf of Maggie McGillis for \$100 donation for small gifts for soup kitchen at Christmas. 2nd by Paul McVann. Motion passed.

Lafayette to be decorated by Deanna Royal (Thank you, Deanna!) Christmas party to be put together by Andrea Zabloski. Club took first vote for \$400 for Christmas party & additional decorations. Passed.

Lafayette rentals were discussed. More to follow next meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

June Jentoft, Secretary

The next meeting of the Park Point

Community Club will be on

Thursday, Dec. 18, at 7:00 p.m.

The meeting will be in Lafayette

Environmental Committee Report

The EC will meet on Tuesday,

December 16th at 6:30 PM at Lafayette. On the agenda - winter projects,

outline spring projects, information for the Web Site, feasibility of a Christmas Tree erosion barrier.

Call Kinnan Stauber at 722-6255

for further information.

The LCMR (Legislative Commission on Minnesota's Resources) Grant Project to protect Minnesota Point and the Pine Forest is going well. In the last month, we received our first check, opened a separate checking account, and have purchased a Xerox copying machine.

Latest tasks undertaken include; supporting SWL&P in tabling a proposal to preserve the Pine Knot, trail clearing by an able and willing crew in the forest area, and NRRI has begun building the base map for the GIS work under a contract with them.

On a similar vein of tasks, we have started a "Time Line" project that will tie in the knowledge of the community to the management of the Point. Your help and historical knowledge is needed to build the time line and add details of specific events.

There are a number of other items on our wish list for the community; tree-planting volunteers, photo-takers/ photo collectors with historical photos, and *Breeze* hoarders with collections of back issues (1981-91).

Please call Kinnan Stauber for details or answers to your questions 722-6255.

In Memoriam: Paul McVann

We are deeply saddened to announce the passing of Paul McVann on December 7, 1997.

Paul was a longtime Park Pointer, active throughout our community and the Community Club. (His generosity shows even in the November club minutes). Paul is survived by his wife Ruth, their four children and six grandchildren.

In a sad irony for us, when we learned of Paul McVann's passing, we were set to publish a profile of Paul's son Owen, written for this issue by contributing editor Jan Olson, Paul's neighbor and friend. It appears on pages 4 & 5.

Paul would have liked it.

Buoys & Gulls Seniors' Club

The January meeting of the Buoys & Gulls

Seniors' Club will be held on Tuesday, January 6.

The meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m., but blood

pressure screening will be available starting at 12:15.

(Get yourself checked out after the holidays!) New members are welcome; come and enjoy

the fun and fellowship of our monthly meetings and programs. For more information, call 727-8691.

Young Artists: Your Ideas, Please!

by *Tom Rauschenfels*

The theme for the February issue of the Breeze is the Family Fun Day. You can help build that Breeze cover! If you're age 16 or younger, submit a "Family Fun Day" illustration or drawing, and I'll take them all (or as many as possible) and create a collage of the entries for the February cover. Paper size has to be 8 x 11 or smaller, but can be vertical or horizontal. Get your submissions to my mailbox at 3711 Minnesota Ave. by January 31.

Having an Ice Time:

The Polar Bear Club Plunges Ahead

by *the Blizzard Lizard*

Have you been in swimming lately? Polar Bear Club members have. Not in some fancy, heated pool, but in Lake Superior herself . . .

We've picked up a few tips for Lake Superior Winter Swimming. First of all, avoid windy days. In July, whitecaps mean warm surface water, but in December, it's just surface water. Robes and coats don't work as well as big ol' blankets when you come out. Shoes protect your bare tootsies from sharp ice. Mosquito repellent isn't necessary.

Trust us on this: Your first winter plunge in Lake Superior might not be your last. It's stimulating, wonderfully invigorating, and it's making the winter seem shorter. Actually, the worst of it is going up to the lake, not coming from it, although it's a little odd watching your skin steaming. Park Pointer and Polar Bear Mike Moore summed it up: "You don't get the chills. You go right past them into Stage 2 hypothermia. It's very refreshing."

We've been called by local teevee stations and the hotshots from the newspaper, but we're ignoring them. They'd only think we were nuts, and the pasty-white news anchors would make fun of us.

Join us. Take up the challenge, and try Lake Superior Winter Swimming.

Lafayette Skating Rinks to Open December 20th.

Once again, Park Pointers can skate off their holiday calories on the pleasure and hockey rinks at Lafayette Square. Last year's Thanksgiving sleet storm got us off to an early start, but this year's unseasonably mild weather has Harold Ramey (our hard-working rinks manager) and his team of volunteers puzzling over how to build a skating rink in 40-degree temps. But this is Park Point we're talking about, and we know the cold weather is coming.

Rink hours will be the same as last year:

Tuesday - Friday, 4:00 - 8:30 p.m., Saturday &

Sunday, 1:00 - 8:30 p.m. Closed Mondays, (but

Harold usually opens up, anyway!)

Do you have a special birthday coming up? Consider having a Birthday Party Skate at Lafayette this winter.

Lafayette Christmas Party

Deanna Royal has decked the Lafayette halls with boughs and holly, and the ol' place looks stunning. Come and experience it! Andrea Zabloski is organizing the party, and she could use some extra help. Catch the spirit of the season! Volunteer for the Christmas Party! Call Andrea at 727-2756.

Lafayette Square

Christmas Party

Friday, December 19

6:30 — 9:00

Come celebrate the spirit of the holidays with your friends and neighbors .

Great Fun

Good Food,

and You - Know - Who

A Time to Give: In Consideration of Neighbors

by Jan Olson

His name is Owen McVann. When I first met him some twenty seven years ago, he was a gangly teenager rough housing with his younger sister Norine in the back yard of the family home at 3614 Minnesota Ave. Karl and I were the new neighbors, the McVann family having come to Park Point many years before us. Owen and the rest of the family, including Norine, brothers Neil and Mark and their parents Ruth and Paul, welcomed us and observed as the newcomers began pulling down old fences, planting gardens, yanking weeds. I watched the kids grow and grew fond of them. I saw extraordinary family values at work. Each one of the McVann children was a determined individual; each one was also kind and compassionate.

Owen took on responsibility with a seriousness and a sense of duty befitting a much older person. In 1971 he became interested in rowing when Bob Ringsred who was active in the Duluth Rowing Club approached him with an offer. This young teen would be an ideal coxswain, Ringsred said, because he was extremely lightweight.

And cox he did. What he didn't have in weight he made up for in voice. During those early morning rows, baysiders could hear Owen booming over the creaking of the slides and swish of the oars. His real desire, however, was to have his hands on the oars although his weight was always against him. He was just too light to qualify as a competitive rower for the DRC.

But Owen persevered. He led the Duluth Cathedral High School crew and won several high school championships. He also qualified as a rower for the Duluth Rowing Club and became its president for two terms. He used his compositional skills for four years writing for the Breeze. His educational and entertaining column, "Rowin' with Owen", was an account of rowing with the DRC.

Over his twenty seven year rowing career, he went on to win nine Northwestern International Rowing Association Championships races, a Canadian Henley Championship, a third place medal at Boston's Head of the Charles Regatta, four Badger State Games titles, and competed in four finals at US National Championship Regattas.

Throughout both Owen's and sister Norine's rowing careers, Paul and Ruth worked behind the scenes cooking up thousands of hot dogs and hamburgers for the DRC's food stand at the annual Park Point Art Fair. Their efforts earned thousands of dollars for both the Park Point Community Club and the DRC.

Owen graduated from UMD in 1979 with a degree in Speech Pathology. Over the next five years he worked with handicapped people at Goodwill Industries, Duluth and Pinewood Learning Center of Cloquet. He met Laura Harnell at Pinewood while she was completing her degree in Special Education. They were married in 1985. A year later, Owen received his Master's Degree in Speech Pathology from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. In 1991, he became the director of the Speech Pathology department of Saint Mary's Medical Center of Racine, WI.

Laura served as a Special Education teacher until the birth of their daughter Meghan three years ago. Son Evan followed a year later but months premature. Fortunately for the McVann Family, little Evan beat the odds of early birth trauma and is now a healthy, happy, busy child.

About four years ago, Owen began experiencing curious hand weakness and peculiar muscle cramping and spasms. This occurred first in his hands and legs, followed by the body, mouth and tongue. Arduous medical testing was conducted resulting in the diagnosis of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis also known as ALS or "Lou Gehrig's disease". ALS is a progressive and debilitating degenerative disease of the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, which causes a loss of voluntary muscle movement. The term amyotrophic comes from the Greek for "no muscle nourishment," and lateral refers to the affected regions of the spinal cord. The nerve cells then become damaged--sclerotic—so that they cannot transmit signals from the brain to the muscles, which then

atrophy (wither). Early symptoms include weakness in the legs and arms; difficulty in walking, speaking, and swallowing; muscle spasms; and cramps. In later stages, most patients lose control of all voluntary muscle function. Although accumulated complications make the disease invariably fatal, most patients live for several years from the time of diagnosis, but a few have lived much longer. There has not been a cure found for the disease. Stephen Hawking, the world-renowned physicist, has continued his work through more than 25 years with

ALS.

Currently Owen is in an 18 month voluntary experimental program in Madison. He has had to cut back his work load because of the effects of ALS. He intends to spend as much time as he can with his family.

Paul and Ruth recently told me of a bill that is in committee in the national legislature that addresses the plight of ALS victims. They asked if I would write Congressman Oberstar, suggesting that he cosponsor the bill. I agreed wholeheartedly. Then I began to consider what I could do to increase the chances that Representative Oberstar hear from more constituents. The Breeze has provided me that opportunity.

Park Point is often looked upon by its inhabitants as one large neighborhood. It is not rare that a neighbor from one end of the Point seizes the opportunity to help a neighbor at the other end. I would like to suggest that all of us neighbors take a moment to write Congressman Oberstar regarding the ALS bill. The McVann family has contributed to our community with enthusiasm and generosity. Now they need our support.

The following is a format you could use when writing to Representative Oberstar

The Honorable James Oberstar

2366 Rayburn

House Office Bldg.

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Oberstar,

I am writing to request that you co-sponsor
legislation (H.R. 2009), the Amyotrophic Lateral
Sclerosis Research, Treatment and Assistance
Amendments of 1997.

This legislation, co-authored by Representatives Ben Gilman and Walter Capps is designed to assist persons with ALS and to accelerate research into the treatment and cure of this always fatal disease.

Because of the short life expectancy of those with ALS, the 24 month waiting period for Medicare disability coverage is often longer than the person lives. This legislation corrects a gross inequity in the current law and provides much needed help to ALS patients.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I will follow up with you on this matter as it is very important to me and especially to the thousands of Americans who suffer from ALS.

Sincerely,

Your letter will have more impact if you rewrite the one above and put your own thoughts into the text.

There are also two efforts underway to establish trust funds and custodial accounts for Meghan and Evan. The Duluth Rowing Club has established one, the Milwaukee Rowing Club of which Owen is president, has established another. You may donate by sending a contribution to Michael Cochran, 13000 Water Street, Duluth, MN

55808 or Dan Ringsred, Investment Advisory Corp.,

12129 West Feerick Street, Milwaukee, WI 53222.

Our community efforts may aid in providing Owen and other ALS victims with assistance and treatment that could prolong life and perhaps speed research efforts that could slow or stop the terrible effects of ALS. And we can directly support Owen's family by contributing to either of the trust funds.

Now is the opportunity for our neighborhood to give back something to the McVann family.

Please help.

*For more information and/or a copy of a letter that you could sign and send to Representative Oberstar please contact Jan Olson, 722-6769 or e-mail <jkolson@cp.duluth.mn.us>

Uncle Fred

***the Big Red Sled, and the Not-So-Silent
Night***

by N. Bing

It happened on the Christmas Eve that Uncle Fred was home on leave from the Navy. He'd been back almost a month, and was trying hard not to get underfoot as Grandma and Gramps prepared for a Christmastime family reunion. Relatives were staying from out-of-town, and for the first time in some time, the big old house was full of small young children. Unused to the racket, Gramps was at the end of his patience.

"Bed time," he announced suddenly. "Santa's on his way, and he won't stop here if you're awake. Better get your jammies on. " (Fred glanced at his watch. It was only 8 p.m., and Gramps was pushing his luck.) Still, the kids hushed up at the mention of St. Nick, and they all trooped off to the third-floor bedrooms.

Soon a cozy Christmas Eve peace descended on the house, accentuated by the stillness of the cold Minnesota winter lurking just beyond the windows. The grown-ups pulled their chairs closer to each other and sat in contented silence. "Well, this won't last," said Uncle Harry.

True enough, the excitement of the most magical night of the year finally melted through the fuses of the youngsters upstairs. The first outburst came in the form of a singing contest. Christmas carols, of course, and sung all at once as each kid lobbied loudly for their own favorite.

The contest was won handily by the four-year-old twins for their shrieking version of "Silent Night. "

"They'll wear themselves out, right?" said Gramps, but there was doubt in his voice.

"I'll quiet them down this time," Harry said, and headed for the stairs.

It was a trip each of the grown-ups would make over the next three hours. Tiny running feet slapped up and down uncarpeted hallways, doors slammed, furniture banged, and one loud crash was immediately followed by "I'm telling." (That one got quick attention.)

It was almost midnight. The grown-ups had been nodding in their chairs, and were preparing

for bed themselves when Uncle Fred started pulling his jacket on. "The way I see it, those kids aren't going to quiet down until Santa Claus shows up. He might not be here for awhile, and I'm beat. If I stand in for him now, maybe

we'll be able to get some sleep. Ma, don't we have some sleigh bells in the garage?"

Five minutes later, the moonlit snow in the backyard silhouetted the form of a Navy gunner's mate (on leave) carrying a long ladder and a ring of bells he was frantically trying to keep quiet. Fred propped the ladder against the house gutters, and scrambled nimbly to the roof. He began stomping his way to the chimney, shaking the bells as hard as he could.

Inside, the effect was immediate. Grandma was reminding the tots Santa wouldn't even stop if they were all still awake when they heard sleigh bells on the roof above their heads.. That was followed by a trembly, no-breathing-allowed silence as the kids squeezed their eyes shut and forced sleep upon themselves.

Outside, Fred decided his mission was finished, and was already letting visions of sugar plums dance in his own head. He turned to go back to the ladder. Without warning, a rush of warm wind spun him around. Something heavy, something terrifically powerful caught Fred between the shoulder blades and propelled him straight off the end of the roof peak. Briefly, and in slow motion, he saw the ground far below, and a big blue spruce straight ahead. Arms and legs flailing and windmilling, Fred smacked into the top branches of the spruce. The collision knocked the wind out of him. Sliding, grasping, grabbing and gasping, he bounced down the branches to the ground, landing with a thump in a snowbank at the edge of the driveway. "Uffda," he said.

Boots crunched in the snow behind Fred, and a deep, rumbling, very concerned voice said, "Are you all right, lad?"

Fred, unsure of the answer himself, said, "I think so," and carefully stood up. He turned around, and found himself face-to-face with Santa Claus.

Fred was absolutely stunned, but still managed to squeak out, "Yeah. . . I mean, yes sir. I'm OK, sir."

"Then we have another problem," the old fellow said, and gestured around him. The yard was littered with toys, gifts, candy and boxes of all sizes, all tossed across the snow, along with a few chimney bricks. Surprised and snorting reindeer stood tangled in their traces, and a huge red sleigh lay on its side with one runner bent out and twisted up. "I'm sorry I nearly landed on you," said Santa. "I'm not used to traffic on rooftops. Oh my, oh my, look at the sleigh. What am I going to do?"

Fred, still wobbly, but starting to get a handle on the abrupt course of events, examined the sleigh runner. "Riley," he said. "We'll go get Riley. "

Riley Wilkins lived a block towards the city from Gramp's house. A tall, stringy lumberjack Riley was a sweet, laid-back guy, known for two points: He could repair anything that moved, and he had "buzzard luck". Fred expounded on the topic as he and Santa walked the block to Riley's: "The poor guy used to drive a truck for a plate-glass & mirror factory. One day his truck stalled in front of a freight train, and he ended up with 714 years of bad luck." Santa raised an eyebrow. "At least, that's what I heard," said Fred. "He and Karen have three kids. One of them, their little girl Sarah, they have to pound on her back to keep her breathing tubes clear. Here's his place; watch out for the third stair, the wood's soft."

Inside the darkened house, sitting in a kitchen lit only by a small fluorescent oven light, Riley Wilkins was only dimly aware of the clumping boots on his porch. His mind was on the mounting stack of medical bills sitting in the edge of shadows at the corner of the kitchen counter. They were as complicated and intimidating as the hospital sending them out, and even with the extra money of the double shifts he'd been working, he felt like he was only holding a blowtorch to an avalanche.

A soft cough from the bedroom off the den roused Riley from his thoughts, and he got to the door at Fred's first knock. Uncle Fred barely waited for the door to open before he started in: "Riley, Riley, we need your help. We gotta have something welded, and I mean right away. Sorry to interrupt your evening, and all, but we need you quick. "

Riley blinked a few times, and analyzed his options. There stood Fred, with that goofy, puppy eagerness of his, and some guy in a Santa suit. Maybe they were loopy, but Fred always seemed loopy. And it was cold outside. But inside, there was that stack of bills....

"I'll tell Karen I'm going out, throw a hunk of night wood into the fireplace and get my pickup keys," Riley said.

In the pickup on the way back up the street, Fred started explaining what had happened: "I was trying to surprise the kids with a visit from Santa," he began, and Riley nodded. He leaned forward in the truck, and looked past Fred to his other passenger.

"You're a good-looking Santa," Riley said.

"Thank you," Santa replied.

Back at the sleigh, Riley took stock of the situation, squinting along the bent runner as Santa Claus tended the reindeer (These people sure went all-out for Christmas, he thought, and a pang of guilt ran through him. Karen had been on him and on him to get the decorations down from the garage rafters...) Drawn back into his sad thoughts again, Riley lowered his welding tanks out of the pickup and fished a long length of chain from behind the bench seat, scooping the loose loops around his forearm as it came rattling out.

"We'll wrap this around the skid, and I'll heat up that nasty elbow you put into it, then we'll pull it all straight." He hooked the chain from the skid to the front bumper of the truck. "Fred, I'll need your help here. This'll work great," he called to the guy in the Santa suit. "It's heavy chain."

"The heaviest chains are unseen," Santa replied quietly.

In the meantime, Uncle Fred had been picking up a few of the toys scattered in the snow, bringing them to a pile beside the sleigh. Gramp's house was all dark now; so were all the neighbors, and Fred felt like yelling: Get up, everyone! Santa's here! In the yard! Look outside! Look outside! Even Riley didn't seem as excited as he should be. Fred glanced at Santa, who raised his index finger to his lips. The silence of the cold Minnesota night again fell around them, disrupted only by the hiss of Riley's welding torch as he played the flame back and forth across the bent ski. Even the reindeer were quiet. Santa stood by them with his arms folded across his chest and a thoughtful, serious look on his gentle face.

The ski of the sleigh was glowing orange when Riley handed the torch to Fred.

"Keep the heat even, and keep the tip of the torch back a bit," he cautioned. He hooked one leg through the pickup's bumper, and snaked his arms into the slack of the chain.

"Don't let the sleigh fall over on you, Fred," Riley said, and with one smooth motion, he pulled the worst of the kink out of the ski.

The idea of getting caught under the sleigh hadn't occurred to Fred before Riley mentioned it, but he thought about it a lot in the next few minutes as Riley gave him instructions on heating different parts of the ski from different angles. Working with the chain, a short length of pipe and a heavy monkey-wrench (all from the pickup), Riley massaged the bent skid back into position.

"It's about as good as it'll get," Riley said, stepping back from the sleigh after he and Fred had righted it. "I reinforced a couple welds using a piece of coat-hanger for welding material." (The remaining coat-hanger continued to serve as the pickup's radio antenna.)

"Then I'd best be going," Santa said. He clipped the heavy reindeer harness onto the front of the sleigh, and turned to Fred. "Thank you, Fred. I'm sorry I had to knock you into that spruce, but it was necessary tonight." He turned to Riley. "Thank you, Mr. Wilkins. You are an honest and generous man. Tonight you set aside your own profound problems to help a stranger in need. It's something you do often." He put his hand on Riley's shoulder, and his voice softened: "Cherish your time with her, lad. In the morning, let the spirit of Christmas carry the weight in your heart. You've earned a day off."

With that, Santa turned and strode to the sleigh. As he lifted himself in, small white lights began to glow in the snow across the yard. All the presents and toys that had been spilled were glowing, and beginning to float up into the air. As they rose, they began to slowly swirl, and soon the night sky was filled with a graceful, waltzing cyclone of lights. The sleigh, too, was glowing with the same radiant light. . . . then the reindeer. . . . then Santa himself. As they all grew brighter, they grew smaller, and soon it was difficult to distinguish Santa from the sleigh or the spiral of light the cyclone had become. Then, in an instant, Santa Claus was gone; disappearing across the sky like the beam of a beacon.

Two very astonished Minnesotans watched the sky until the light was gone, and for some time after that. Finally, Fred said, "I'll help you get your welding tanks home." They were almost in Riley's driveway when Fred spoke again: "Your house looks different," he said.

Indeed it did! Every window of Riley's home twinkled and sparkled with light, and when they opened the front door, a warm glow poured out around them. Teddy bears of all sizes filled every chair, the house smelled deliciously of vanilla and cinnamon, and twinkling lights were everywhere. Karen and the kids stood bathed in the light of a dazzling Christmas tree, gleaming with tinsel and the ornaments from the garage. One special garland, draped carefully across the branches of the tree, was a string of ancient gold coins.

Karen turned to greet them, smiling, but her eyes were brimming with tears. "How?..." she asked, but other words failed her.

"I helped out a friend," Riley said, and swept Sarah up in his arms. He turned to Fred. "I don't understand," he continued as Sarah hugged his neck, "Why didn't Santa use his magic to fix the sleigh himself?"

"He needed to find a way to get you out of the house," Fred replied. "Santa said it was necessary tonight..." After a moment, Fred smiled, and said, "Well, then, I'd best be going," then added: "My shipmates will never believe this. Have a very merry Christmas, all of you!"

Uncle Fred walked home in the cold air of an enchanted Christmas. Snow was beginning to fall, and by morning, no traces would remain of the adventure in the yard. Pausing on the back stairs, Fred looked up at the sky, and felt a sense of peace and happiness wash over him. He let himself into the house, humming "Silent Night" between his yawns.