

A SHORT HISTORY OF CCC SOFTBALL
(as I remember it or have been told)
by Charlie Johnson

In 1997, Dave Lenahan and Tom Cross were playing golf and talk turned to softball since many nearby communities had softball teams and CCC did not. They began to wonder if they might start a softball team here. Eventually, they got together with Bobby Hunt, then CEO of CCC and a dream became reality. Early practices were held under the electrical lines along Robin Road. In 1998, pickup games were played with neighboring communities. Wildwood High School allowed the CCC team to use the girls' softball field as our home field. The following year, 1999, CCC entered the league play in the Sun N Fun League. There are a few members left from that team still residing here. These are the ones I remember: Jean Weddle, Bobby Hunt, and Tom Cross. Some are still living but have moved away. I didn't arrive on the scene until 2000 when I was recruited by Dave Lenahan over dinner. I had played some form of softball or baseball since I was 7 years old. In the service and after, I had played fast-pitch at a high level. Now I had the chance to compete again, but in slow-pitch. I was to learn that slow-pitch has some very fast levels also.

Dave Lenahan managed the CCC team in its early years and apparently was looking for someone to take his place. Basically, I was recruited. On a cold January morning at Hawthorne, without any warning, I was handed the scorebook and a coffee can containing about \$45.00. This is all that we had for records and a budget. Incidentally, that team went on a tear and won 11 straight games. We were ecstatic and began to get recognition from our community and our opponents.

In 2004, CCC added a second team that played in the Lakes League. It didn't win many games, but there was now a team that could accommodate players that didn't get enough game time on the other team. Cliff Bemus was the first manager. Cliff and Mike Gallus were the ones that sat through the meetings to get that team enrolled in the Lakes League. One aside: when Cliff passed away, his ashes were spread on our current field with fine ceremony.

In CCC's early years of softball, our home field was the girls' softball field at Wildwood High School. In 2005, a teacher, Dick Graybill retired from teaching. He had been a member of our team and made it easy for us to use the field. At the same time, a new girls' softball coach was named. What had been mutually beneficial, CCC maintained the field in return for the use of the field, was no longer enough. The new coach began to put demands on our teams and made it clear that it was time for us to leave. We finished the season playing our home games on our opponents' fields.

CCC players were forced into thinking about developing their own field in their own community. Many meetings were held to make plans to present to the CCC Board of Directors to build a field on community property. The players were guided by Dennis Nannt, a player and Board member. The Board President, John Steinke, favored any new amenity that would enhance CCC plus there were 2 other players on the Board. Sounds like it was stacked but until there was approval, all players held their collective breath. The players proposal called for a \$25,000 budget item because Pennbrooke had just paid that amount for their field. The Board came back with \$15,000 budget telling the players that by working, they could make up the \$10,000 shortfall. Then, as now, the players had a “can do” attitude and accepted the Board's proposal.

Before work on the field began, the driving range had to be moved. The driving range tee boxes were about where the snack bar is now and balls were driven toward what is now right field. The driving range was dug out with dozers and pay loaders leaving mounds of dirt stored in the area occupied by the current cell tower. The dirt was eventually used as fill in many areas, but primarily for building lots in Phase 3. Ball players met almost every evening to move a huge makeshift sprinkler system placed on the driving range so that grass could grow. Lots of work by many softball hands for an extended period of time!

The hill in back of the 1st base dugout once extended well out onto what is now the softball field. When ground was broken for the new field, this is where it began. The hill was cut back and the dirt was added to the fill pile (s) from the driving range excavation. A grader was used to rough-level the field and then the work for the softball players began!

A heavy drag was fashioned together to be dragged over the outfield by a tractor in an attempt to level it. This worked well but did not remove the crests and troughs of the undulating field. One Saturday, a number of us showed up with shovels and rakes to hand-level the field. Then one of the players spotted the reticulated loader sitting by the huge piles of excavated dirt. The next thing we knew, he had fired up the loader and began dumping dirt by the square yard into low spots. A few hours later, we had a field that was as level as we could make it. This served us well until it was professionally leveled a couple of years ago.

Next the infield was built. We purchased 40 yards of infield mix, a blend of clay and earth. It took about a day to distribute and drag-level the field. Rakes and shovels knocked down piles and tractor and drag did the rest. It served us well and was updated by Gene Underwood in 2016. It's considered to be the best in the league now.

One of the luckier moments happened while we were returning from a game at Spruce Creek. We got a phone call from the groundskeeper at Wildwood High School asking if we could use the old fencing that they had since the school was completely rebuilding their softball field. Eight of us descended on the school field and loaded all of the used fencing onto a trailer. There was enough materials to do both sides of the field. The fencing for the outfield and around home plate was professionally installed. By the players installing the sideline fences, about \$1000 was saved.

Shortly after this, the softball team began to sponsor the Spring Yard Sale. With a number of other fund-raisers, we began to have funds needed to equip the softball field in a manner that would make it easier to maintain and better to play on.

The year (2007) after building the softball field, the softball players began adding to the field. Cement pads were poured and the dugout roofs were put in by Jeff Ashley and Mike Dineen. Gene Underwood added the benches. Gene put up the announcers' stand with some help from LaVern Skutt. Sidewalks and more pads were poured for spectators' bleachers and for grilling. Players dug the foundations for the pads and floated the cement. There were too many people involved for me to give credit for the work done. I remember much of it was done in the heat of the summer. Shortly after this, the players purchased the initial building we now use for the snack shack and some storage. Earl Shiner was the moving force behind obtaining this.

The pavilion came into being while Mike Dineen and Jeff Ashley were sitting under a pavilion in Plantation. "Why don't we have something like this?" was the question. With Karl Dietz and Gene Underwood doing the design and obtaining necessary permits, work could finally begin. The only hitch was money! The softball club was \$1200 short. Fortunately, the CCC BOD loaned the necessary funds and the pavilion became a reality. The work was done mainly by the Mike, Jeff, Karl, and Gene with help by many others. As a follow-up, the money was repaid to the community. This amenity is now one of the more popular in our community for gatherings other than softball. This happened in 2011.

In 2015, the latest structure added to the softball complex was a storage building near the golf sand trap/pitching area. It was needed as the field maintenance equipment was too much for the back of the snack shack. Once that was in place, Ron Saemann rehabbed the snack shack kitchen area and the rear storage area. The kitchen was improved, an AC unit was added, and Jeff Ashley upgraded the electricity. Gene Underwood was president at the time of the purchase of the storage shed and that same summer 10 yards of a softball field mix of sand and clay was added to the infield making one of the most playable surfaces in our league.

There are many volunteers whose names will not get mentioned in any of these history articles. I would like to mention a few who have contributed greatly in an unseen manner. Bill Duncan, former General Manager of CCC made sure equipment was available to help in constructing the first field. Dick and Ann Hassick started a hot dog concession with an electric fry pan while we still played at Wildwood HS. Dick went on to become our first "Voice of Continental Softball" while Ann continues working the kitchen. Our first umpires donated their services, saving untold hundreds of dollars. The umpires that I recall were Bob Harbour, Bobby Andersohn, and Walt Companion. One of those memories I'll carry forever was the time we had one Miken II bat because it was so costly. Most of us used it because it was "hot". Just before playoffs, the bat fell apart from so much use. A game or so later a new Miken II appeared in the rack. One of our umpires donated it. Thanks Walt! Sam Ventri tending the field and planting flowers behind the backstop. Who would have believed this? Dee Zottlemoyer organized our first kitchen in the new snack shack. She and her volunteers gave CCC an amenity that made our field as good as any of our competitors. Today, Brenda Hopkinson carries on the good work that Dee started. There are numbers of volunteers working the snack shack, selling 50-50 tickets, working pancake breakfasts, announcing games, working playoffs and all the little or big jobs required for CCC softball to be successful. CCC players continue to work on improvements but they are very lucky to receive all the help that our community has given and continues to give.

The above history was documented in the ECHO newsletter in sections from June through September of the year 2017. These issues are still on the CCC webpage in the Residents portal.

SOME PHOTOS FROM THOSE OLD DAYS



2006 CCCPlayers at Holiday Travel

