

Veterans Ball Park

Celebrating It's 60th anniversary in 2012

By Richard Van Wagoner

During 1951, the Utah County Commission, through taxation, amassed a sizable fund to erect suitable, county-wide memorials to honor veterans of World War II. The Lehi Memorial Building, soon-to-be-home of the Hutchings Museum, paid homage to our local World War I servicemen. Veteran's Memorial Ball Park ultimately became the project which honored our World War II veterans.

Members of Lehi's American Legion Post 19 and other veterans met in April 1952 to decide how to spend Lehi's \$11,371.22 allocation from the county commission. They decided on a baseball park. And their initial consideration was to develop on a baseball park. And their initial consideration was to develop part of the grounds of the new Lehi Elementary School. Potential flooding problems from Dry Creek, limited space for future expansion, and unacceptable stipulations from the Alpine School District resulted in an eventual rejection of this locale.

Veteran's committeemembers Ruel Evans, Dean Kirkham, and Ernest Cedarstrom were the liason between between the American Legion and other community organizations. While the vets provided much of the funding, and a considerable portion of the manpower, the project ultimately succeeded because of the united efforts of the American Legion, Lehi City Corporation, the Lions Club, the Jaycees, the Lehi Civic Improvement Association, and the Utah National Guard.

In July 1952, members of the ballpark committee, chaired by Stanley M. Taylor, voted to build the memorial ball park on a ten-acre site at 11th West on the Saratoga Road (former Bridge Street). An immediate problem with the property, then owned by Mrs. LaVerde Kirkham, was a high water table. This was ultimately resolved by a dredging and diking project which prevented damage from irrigation water.

Dee Hanson, engineer for the Soil Conservation Service surveyed the site in November 1952, setting the grades for filling and leveling. Both the Lehi National Guard unit and Lehi City provided trucks and heavy equipment for the preparatory work. Actual construction began in the spring of 1953.

Initial plans for Vet's Park, as the facility is best known, included a baseball diamond, picnic areas, an ice skating rink for winter, and a golf driving range for summer. In 1955, the Lehi Wildlife Association, with permission of the Veteran's Council, established an archery range at the northeast corner of the ballpark. Lehi City agreed to contribute up to \$500/year for maintenance and upkeep, provided that no organized activities be permitted in the ball park on Sundays.

Vet's Park was formally dedicated on June 2, 1958 when a large bronze plaque was hung over the entrance. Twenty-four high-power lights, obtained through the combined efforts of Lehi City and the Veteran's Council for a cost in excess of \$11,000 were purchased and installed by Wasatch Electric Company of Salt Lake City.

Over the years Vet's Park has changed substantially. The local Jaycee organization installed a flagpole at the southeast corner of the field in 1968, during the midst of the Viet Nam War. In 1971 members of the Lehi Lions Club met with the city council and proposed erecting restrooms and snack bar facilities at the park. This project was completed for the 1974 baseball season, funded by the combined efforts of the Lions Club and a \$700 grant from Lehi City Corporation.

The biggest change in the park, however was remodeling the huge playing field into four separate ballfields. This modification has allowed dozens of tournaments to be played on the area over the years. Today the town's premier baseball area, the park has hosted thousands of American Legion, Pony League, Colt League, Little League, semi-pro fastpitch and LDS Church softball games. For nearly thirty years the park has also been the site of the annual Fourth of July fireworks display sponsored by the Lehi Volunteer Fire Department.