



Rededicated Bob Long Park Sparkles with New Renovations

Perris officials Wednesday rededicated Bob Long Memorial Park, honoring a longtime City resident who started a youth baseball league, announced high-school football games and once staged a professional wrestling match during the annual Perris Potato Festival.

The City of Perris spent \$1.88 million to renovate Bob Long Park, which is located at San Jacinto and Wilson Street.

Construction crews demolished much of the existing park and built two new baseball and softball ball fields. The existing snack bar and restroom building were torn down and replaced with a modern restroom and concession building. Each ball field was equipped with three sets of bleachers with shade shelters to protect spectators from the sun. New lighting was installed as were warm-up areas. Dugouts were upgraded.

The parking lot was renovated to provide additional parking on-site and the west side of Wilson Street was widened and paved to accommodate parking on-street. For many years the park has served as the home fields for the Perris Pony baseball league.

"This is a wonderful, wonderful day for the City of Perris," said Mayor Daryl Busch in remarks to the assembled crowd. "Our City Council has worked diligently to provide parks and recreation to our residents. While some cities are cutting back, we continue to build and renovate Perris parks."

Busch said his son, Barry, played baseball at Bob Long Park as a kid. He coached the team. His wife, Kay, worked the snack bar. In those days, sugar beets and potatoes grew nearby. The field more often than not was flooded or muddy. Wilson Street was a one-lane dirt road. There was a single portable restroom.

The nearby Goodhart dairy sold milk and other products to Perris residents in a part of town that was mostly vacant.

"Kids in those days had fun," Busch said. "Today, kids playing here will have a whole lot more fun."

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans and City Councilman Al Landers sit on the Parks Committee. They worked with City staff for years, seeing the Bob Long Memorial Park renovations go from the drawing board to the finished product.

"Our parks are second to none," said Landers, who watched his children and grand-children play at the park when it was mostly dirt. "I am so grateful to our staff for working diligently to making this newly renovated park a reality. The City of Perris is aggressive and progressive when it comes to providing services to our residents. I am thankful to be part of this City Council."

Evans said she remembers having to "step over puddles and gopher holes" to get to the park when she took her children there for games.

"This is so awesome," Evans said. "I'm just glad I had something to do with making this happen."

Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough said parks are one amenity ever resident gets to enjoy, whether they are young or old, rich or poor, a great athlete or just someone looking for a place to play.

"Anybody and everybody can come to a park," he said. "Parks are very special places."

Architect Pat Hirsch, whose company designed the park upgrades, praised the City for working so well with sports leagues and Perris residents to ensure a top-quality project.

"The City of Perris has always been great to work with," Hirsch said. "Their attitude is to get the job done and get it done right."

Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley said he remembers Bob Long as a fixture at Perris High School football games beginning in the 1940s. Long walked the sidelines with a microphone in hand, calling the play-by-play action.

"He had a marvelous, gifted radio voice," Ashley said. "He could have had a career in radio. It is most appropriate to name this facility in his honor."

Bob Long grew up in Ohio and served with the Army in the Pacific in World War II, seeing action in New Guinea and the Philippines, said his son, Robert M. Long. After the war, he and his wife move to Perris.

"It was a wonderful place to grow up, very Norman Rockwell-esque," said Robert Long, who is a dentist in Hawaii. "The City was very egalitarian. It didn't matter if you a native of Perris or came from out of the area. Everybody was treated equally and the City was very welcoming."

Robert Long said his dad became well-known for his play-by-play calling of high-school football games. He always referred to penalty flags "hankies," and his expression "there's a hanky on the field" became one of his most-well remembered commentaries.

Bob Long became active in the 4-H, Perris Rotary and Perris Lions clubs and took leadership roles in the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion posts in the City. He sold electric appliances, owned a dry cleaning business on D Street and later worked for Southern California Edison.

His son said Bob Long was a natural salesman who once earned a new Plymouth for his prowess at selling electronic appliances.

In 1956, he helped start the Perris Little League, which consisted of four teams—the Lions Club, Rotary Club and teams sponsored by Perris merchant and area farmers.

Bob Long took an active role in other Perris activities, including the annual Potato Festival. One year an epidemic of equine encephalitis broke out and area residents refused to bring their horses to the festival.

To attract an audience, Bob Long contacted pro-wrestler Lou Thesz and convinced him to come to Perris for a match, which proved a great success.

"He had a great love for the City of Perris," Robert Long said.

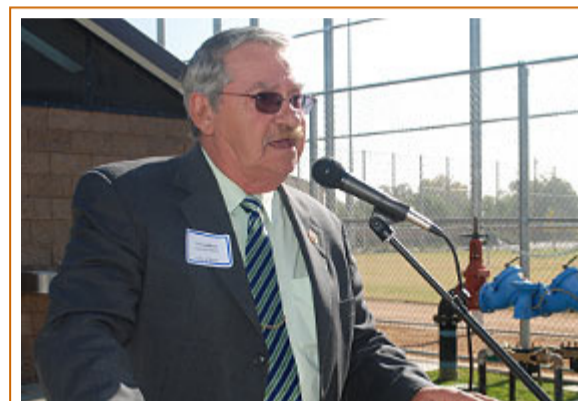
Bob Long suffered rheumatic fever as a child, which left his heart weakened. He suffered a stroke while announcing a football game in 1961 but recovered sufficiently to return to work at Edison. In November 1968, he suffered a major stroke and died four days later right around his 52nd birthday. A few years later, the City dedicated Bob Long Memorial Park in his honor.

Robert Long said his father would be "proud and honored" that the City thought enough of him to renovate the park. He said he and his family returned to Perris three years ago and took a photo of the sign at the park, a memento he keeps in his office.

"He was a man who loved Perris and helped to make it the great City that it is," Robert Long said.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch stands near a field at the newly renovated Bob Long Memorial Park. "This is a wonderful, wonderful day for the City of Perris."



Perris City Councilman Al Landers says the City's parks are "second to none."



The ribbon cutting: Mayor Daryl Busch, City Councilman Mark Yarbrough, Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans, City Councilman Al Landers, Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley, Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez and Assistant City Manager Ron Carr.



Perris Public Safety Commissioner Joseph Dapice, City Councilman Al Landers, Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley and Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez chat at the dedication ceremony of the renovated Bob Long Memorial Park.



Perris Public Works employee Allen Yun inspects a City seal at a monument sign at Bob Long Memorial Park.