

City to Rename Westside Park to Larson Acres Park

The Larson family has dedicated a significant gift to help fund the development of Evansville's parks.

On Tuesday, August 8th, Evansville's Common Council accepted a legacy contribution from the Larson family, owners of Larson Acres. The Council also approved renaming Westside Park to Larson Acres Park, effective January 1st, 2024. The Larson family has committed \$500,000 to the development and completion of the park as part of the City's capital campaign. The agreement further states that the park be dedicated to the honor of Don and Virginia Larson, who established Larson Acres.

Mike Larson, President of Larson Acres, shared his thoughts about the contribution,

As we thought about the project and talked it over within our family, we reflected on Larson Acres history and that Mom and Dad bought that land and we farmed it for quite a while. We thought - what a great memorial to them. But we also believe it is so important to the community and the families of this community to have a place where memories can be made. We can remember going to the pool in Evansville as kids and taking swimming lessons. We think it is so important for young people to stay active and keep making memories.

The new name is a fitting one for the park not only for the contribution but also because the land was once part of farmland owned by the family. According to Mr. Larson, his parents acquired the property on the west side of Evansville in the 1970s and farmed it until it was released for development in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Capital Campaign Chair Matt Pooch shared his thoughts,

The Larson family has made a generous commitment to the future of Evansville. It is fitting that the park be named after two hard-working, generous, local residents, Don and Virginia Larson, who leave a legacy of love for community and neighbors.

Park Board Chair and Evansville First District Alder Cory Neeley also responded to our request for comments,

We couldn't be more excited to have the Larson family name. The Larsons are pillars of the community, employers and generous donors to a variety of local organizations. We live next door to the park. The other night at council, Pastor Matt informed us that this land we call home was once farmed by the Larson family. That makes this naming honor even more special to the community.

Mike Larson pointed out that the decision to make this contribution was a family one - three generations are currently working together to manage Larson Acres. Said Mike, "When we were approached by Matt Pooch and the Capital Campaign Committee, we hadn't really thought about donating to the park project. But we discussed it among ourselves and decided it was something we wanted to do as a family." Mike's brother Ed and his wife Barb, Ed's daughter Sandy, Jim Trustem, and their children, Brooke, Dane, and Luke, agreed that this was the right thing to do to support the community.

Community involvement is a deeply held value of the Larson family. Don and Virginia were very active in the Evansville area community. Virginia was an integral part of St. John's Lutheran Church. She was involved with the Magnolia 4-H club and the Rock County 4-H Fair. Don and Virginia played prominent roles in other community development, including helping found Evansville FFA Alumni, Evansville Manor, Evansville Golf Association, Creekside Place, and supported the Library expansion. Regarding his dad's involvement in the golf club, Mike shared, "My dad didn't even golf, he just thought it would be good for the community."

Six generations of the Larson family have lived and farmed in the Evansville area. Ed and Johanna Larson began farming in Magnolia in the 1920s. Their son Leo farmed here, and then Don and his wife Virginia bought 400 acres at the corner of Highways 59 and 104 in 1957 to establish the farm that has become Larson Acres.

At the time, Don's contemporaries, members of the Young Farmers Group that met at the school, thought he had made a mistake. But Don worked hard and made the farm a success.

Mike also shared that his dad strongly believed in keeping the farm in the family. "Mom and Dad's foresight on establishing the farm family corporation ensured the successful transition to the next generation."

Don's belief in keeping the family working together seems to have been the right vision, as Larson Acres has become one of the region's largest and most successful farms. But Mike Larson points out that the family's goal was not the size of the farm but the values guiding the Larson family in managing their operation - good environmental stewardship and compassionate care of their animals, or in the family's words, "Quality, Pride, Family."

The Larson Acres family began with Don (1927-2005) and Virginia (1928-2021), along with their six children Donald "Butch" (1950-2022) - (wife Joanne), Ed (wife Barb), Mike, Kathy Brandenburg (Evansville), Lori Koch (MN), and Ricky - who died as a child.

The half-million-dollar contribution will bring total private fundraising to \$1.6 million, still short of the Capital Campaign's goal.

Campaign Chair Matt Pooch invites you to join those who have contributed thus far to make this dream a reality. Your support will help ensure the successful completion of the City's vision and plans for revitalizing and upgrading Evansville's major parks.

If you have questions about making a gift, the campaign team will happily meet with you, share the vision, and answer any questions. Contact Melanie Crans at City Hall. And remember, the City will recognize household gifts of \$1,000 or more with a first-season pass to the new pool for summer 2024!

When you are ready, visit <https://www.ci.evansville.wi.gov/donate> or send a check payable to:

City of Evansville Campaign
PO Box 529, Evansville, WI 53536

