

I've seen a few apples falling from trees and the edges of sumac just starting to redden. Is summer winding down already?

As kids return to school, some will get a class assignment to write an essay about what they did over the summer. This week's column is my essay about my summer experience.

I spent a lot of time at Lake Leota Park. With the dredged lake, the park is a favorite. I love going to the park and seeing kids fishing from shore, the Boy Scouts practicing their canoeing, and people enjoying the lake as they picnic or walk the park road. And what a beautiful, fantastic backdrop for all the ballgames from t-ball up to Home Talent.

Lake Leota Little League

This spring I met with Mason Braunschweig and Mike Maves to discuss the city's little league program. Mike was excited and wanted to get away from the pitching machines and begin live pitching. He told me how it would better prepare the kids for more advanced baseball as they get older: hitting a live pitch is a very different experience than hitting from a machine. And it would help for them to have experience pitching and catching as well as a renewed emphasis on fielding. The fundamentals should be the focus in developing our young players.

Quite honestly, I wasn't sure about the change. I dreaded the idea of parents or coaches complaining about a change they weren't expecting. The city council and department heads have been focusing on continuous improvement, and here was another service we could improve. So I accepted that I really had no option and said, "Ok, let's do it."

I haven't played since t-ball myself. But this was my third year coaching. It may be the city's program, and I may handle a fair amount of the team rosters and game schedules, but I very much see myself as another volunteer when coaching. It's about caring for Evansville and doing the right thing.

We made a few other improvements to the program this year. One, following on the change to live pitching, we got a last-minute chance to fill an open spot during the Fourth of July celebration. Our older teams (ages 8-12) each sent a few players to our first All Star Game. The kids had a blast, and hopefully we can continue this with future Fourth of July.

Two, for all the kids, a photo CD with player and team photos was included in the registration. This was the idea of photographer Karissa Wendt. Thank you, Karissa! She spent a Saturday at the start of the season photographing most of the teams and kids; then she had to chase after a handful for make-up photos. Since we included all the players, we were able to negotiate a good price and able to do it without raising registration fees. And it allowed them to use the photos as they wanted: print them, post them on Facebook, or email to the grandparents.

This summer we fielded 26 teams of 307 boys and girls, ages 4-12. Evansville's recreational baseball program gives the kids an opportunity to learn the fundamentals of baseball as well as teamwork, sportsmanship, and fair play.

The last few years, we've had local business sponsors. There is an obvious financial side to it. With money from the sponsors, we were able to reduce registration fees a couple years ago and have held them since then. Also, having local names for the teams adds an element of community spirit to our baseball program.

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And a thank you to Sandy Franklin of Sew Many Threads. She prints all the t-shirts and stitches all the caps. And with late registrations and changes, she handled eighteen change orders. I'm sure it was hectic.

Veterans Memorial Aquatic Center

Rick Hamacher resigned from the aquatics director position in mid July.

The pool is one of those iconic Evansville experiences. A few years ago Jim Sewell, Senior Preservation Architect of the Wisconsin Historical Society, was amazed when he visited the park store; he said it was like taking a step back in time. Generations have learned to swim here. Families escape the summer heat and play in the water. It is a favorite of kids and daycares. We field a popular and competitive swim team despite the short season of an outdoor pool. It has been well run to be safe, clean, and fun.

With six weeks to go in the season, it was important for the public to see the pool under control with someone as an overall supervisor. And it would be unfair and unrealistic to just leave the senior staff responsible for anything unexpected.

And as it turned out there were plenty of unexpected details to supervising the pool: response to a blown diaper, response to vomit, ordering inventory for the park store, testing and maintaining pool chemistry, changing the acid tank, receiving a chlorine delivery, troubleshooting a blocked chlorine feed, thunderstorms, thermal blankets for cool nights, rescheduled birthday parties, and a break-in at park store (the burglars learned we make daily deposits and don't keep cash on premises).

Despite the interruptions and distractions, I did accomplish administrator work while filling in as acting aquatics director. With a laptop computer I reviewed payroll, read legislative updates, caught up on emails, prepped for city council and committee meetings, drafted ordinances, wrote a couple newspaper columns, read much of the book *Bringing Citizen Voices to the Table*, prepared for union negotiations, worked on next

year's budget, and compared proposals for refuse and recycling service. One of the guards took to quipping, "Reading again?"

Truth is we had a lot of help for the pool. The staff at the pool is great. One of my first days there, a frequent (season pass) visitor to the pool told me that they were professional, responsible, and knew what they're doing. I put the compliment on the whiteboard in the pool office for all the staff to share.

Later I passed on compliments that they were all well-trained and communicated with each other (a compliment to both the staff and their trainers), a swim lesson teacher had done a wonderful job, and they were helpful and friendly. The last few weeks of the season, we began training two of the lifeguards into more supervisory responsibilities (itself a different kind of recognition).

Thank you, Anne Gohlke. Anne is the aquatics director in Edgerton, and she does a top-notch job. The first Monday morning she came in before work to teach pool chemistry to a couple of our senior staff and me. She inspected our pool and discussed the pumps and controls and maintenance with us. She also agreed to let us operate under her Certified Pool Operator certificate so we'd continue to meet state permit requirements. And she was on-call to help if we had trouble. When we had issues with the diaper and later with the clogged chlorine injector, Anne actually called me to follow-up and make sure we were doing fine.

We also had help with Lisa Hrdlicka-Phelps and Jamey Davis taking shifts as the on-site acting aquatics director. Lisa has been our swim team coach for many years and brought a familiar face to supervising the pool.

Jamey was a lucky coincidence. At the time, he had been through most of the vetting process to be hired as a police officer, and he had prior experience managing a pool. Jamey brought additional credibility to supervising the pool.

As I said, we had great help. But the Evansville Night Out really helped me realize it. There were big crowds for the park store. And the evening closed with a free pool party. With the loud music, tons of kids, and the busy energy of dancing and splashing and playing – I was anxious; it was a lot of activity for the lifeguards to keep watch. And all the staff (from the park store to the guards to the basket room) did an excellent job under extra busy conditions.

Late in the season, one of the guards suggested a staff pool party. I agreed they had earned it. So after work last Saturday evening, they had a chance to play in the pool, and they responsibly took turns with one out of the water on guard duty. They played on a big inflatable dolphin, caught footballs off the diving board, and generally had fun. And they enjoyed pizzas, sodas, and cupcakes. The only drawback was that it was late, after we'd lost a couple of staff returning to college.

At the start of my comments, I said that the pool is an iconic Evansville experience. It is the work of our responsible and friendly young adults in the park store, basket room, and the pool itself which make it a special place for the Evansville community.

Thank you, Hannah Anderson, Aaron Campbell, Megan Foley, Holly Gullede, Holly Hammann, AJ Johnson, Sarah Nimz, Rachel Otto, Sam Otto, Dana Powell, Jonathan Rooney, Zach Schneider, Sara Schroeder, and Reece Whitehead. I'm glad I got to work with you this summer.