

# Urbandale Lions Club Park and Shelter House

The Historical Society meeting in November featured Clay Rusk's broadcast of the Town and Country Quiz in Urbandale, and also included highlights of Lion's Club history presented by Jim Caldbeck. Additional information gives references to Lion's Park development, and persons important to Urbandale community life about sixty years ago.

Clay Rusk was the first president when the Lions Club was organized in 1945, with charter members including Ralph Whitten. One of the first projects was to purchase 10 acres of land for a park from Millard Olmsted, an early settler in Urbandale and club member. To help pay for the new park, there were two big horse shows on the school grounds near 70<sup>th</sup> and Douglas. The shows were like a county fair with concession stands, food booths, and a car raffle.

Since the new park land was originally a corn field, there was much work to be done to prepare it for seeding and tree planting. Whitten, who then operated a coal yard in Des Moines, was appointed project manager. John Valerius brought his farm tractor in to level the ground. The location of the trees was marked and holes were dug with a borrowed post hole digger. One group of volunteers came along and positioned and planted the trees and others hauled water on a truck. The entire area was seeded with bluegrass by hand.

Later projects involved putting in a cement wading pool and surfacing an area for a tennis court. Some of the workers mentioned were Eldon Clements, Frank Gibson, Archie Towers, Joe and Norman Wood, E.L. Canine, Jim Ahern, Charley Chew, Laird Jones, and Les Hamilton.

The big project in the 1950's was the building of the shelter house. By this time Karl Urban was Lions president. He called a meeting of groups in Urbandale to explain the importance of the project. As a result, a Park Promotion Group, headed by Whitten, was

established. Donations were received from the Lions Club, American Legion and Auxiliary, Saddle club, Garden Club, PTA and other local groups. Clay Rusk turned the money from the Town and Country Quiz event over to the park fund.

The shelter was completed in five working Saturdays with help from Lions club members and others in the community. They used cement block for the walls and it was built to last. Some years later it was also used as a kindergarten classroom for the fast growing school district. It has served as the site for Lions club and Lioness meetings and hundreds of other community events, receptions, and celebrations today.

Mr. Whitten held many local, state, and district offices in the Lions Club and for a time supervised Urbandale city work crews and served as building inspector. In 1996 Lions Park Shelter House was officially named the Ralph A. Whitten Shelter House in his honor.

2008