

# Make time to enjoy our community's 'front porch'

**A**fter a long winter and a cold spring, warm air is finally upon us. Homewood and Flossmoor will be sprung with the sights of blooming flowers, budding leaves and green grass growing taller by the day. This means that baseball is in the air, and softball, and I'm here to suggest that you go check them out.

By the time you read these words,

## VIEWPOINT



**Jay Readey**  
Columnist

Homewood and Flossmoor Baseball & Softball (two separate leagues with two related sports each) will have had their opening days, and baseball fields in our community – especially Flossmoor Park and Izaak Walton Preserve – will be buzzing with the energy of girls and boys

playing America's pastime.

Here's why you should go, whether you have a child in one of the leagues or not: because softball and baseball are the community's front porch.

This phrase was shared with me by a lifelong resident of the H-F community from a longstanding family of multiple generations. And he is right, during the warmer months of the year, Izaak Walton and Flossmoor Park are the places where families from all walks of life, and fans young and old, gather outdoors to share food, fellowship and fun in public spaces. Even the older and younger siblings who may not be members of a team often spend time in the nearby swing sets, playgrounds and walking trails while the games are underway. Anyone can buy a snack from concessions and enjoy a warm



Jay Readey/H-F Chronicle

Spectators gather around a local diamond to watch youth baseball at its best.

evening while the sounds of the season fill the air.

For my purposes, diamond sports (softball and baseball) are, of course, metaphors for the many other activities we undertake together in shared spaces that represent the life of the community. The Performing Arts Center at H-F High School, the many activities through the best-in-class H-F Park District, the soccer teams and adult leagues at Apollo Park, activities at the libraries or the Lions Club Pool – all are occasions where we come together in the open to perform, compete, celebrate and be with each other. To share the front porch, if you will.

I have written in the February issue of the Chronicle about the idea that Homewood-Flossmoor is special in all of America as a stable, racially-integrated community where home values are rising, people from different racial groups hail from relatively comparable class statuses, and participation in community life, civic leadership and business is broadly distributed among different groups. To sustain

this kind of community richness and civic vitality, there are clearly things we should do to keep the momentum on track. Time on the front porch is one of them.

When the civil rights movement began to dismantle de jure segregation in the 1960s, the nation as a whole and local communities across the country – each in its own way – found methods to subvert the gains of civil rights by closing other doors after legal reforms had opened the front doors.

As swimming pools were desegregated, municipalities literally started brick-ing them over and shutting them down. Private backyard pools became more popular because the idea of shared public space was in retreat. Parks in many places have become decrepit, underfunded shells of their former glory; havens left with nothing to attract anyone. We should be proud that ours are so well funded and active and celebrate their provenance with a use-it-or-lose-it zeal.

If we share neighborhoods where neighbors from different racial, ethnic



Jay Readey/H-F Chronicle

Young ballplayers watch a game from the dugout. Baseball and softball are more than recreation. The activity helps bind the community together.

and cultural groups do not naturally go to the same church, hairdresser or even grocery store, it stands to reason that we should find our way to the front porch with a little more positive intention.

To our credit here in the H-F community, we have churches, hair salons and groceries that put a premium on their efforts to serve everyone and created that common space. But we still need to make an effort to go to those spaces, spend time, energy and money in them, and nurture the new relationships that are formed when we meet people we might not otherwise have met in our ordinary patterns.

So please, take me out to the ball game. I'm rooting for the home teams in Flossmoor and Homewood because of what they have to offer to a diverse and changing America.

Please come join me on the community's front porch, and let's "Play ball!"

## Traveling Vietnam War memorial on display here in July

BY ERIC CRUMP  
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Every year, about 5 million people visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. This year, residents in the South Suburbs will not have to travel so far to pay their respects to the 58,000 Americans who lost their lives in the war.

The Wall that Heals, a replica of the memorial, will be coming to Marian Catholic High School in Chicago Heights from July 5 through July 10.

Katie Kelly, representing Bloom Township, announced at the Homewood Board of Trustees meeting on March 22 that Bloom Township will be hosting the display during the touring replica's 27th season of visiting communities around the country. This year is the 40th anniversary of the memorial in Washington.

The replica is a three-quarters scale version of the memorial. It is 375 feet long and 7 1/2 feet tall. Along with the replica wall are three video displays, including Hometown Heroes, a rotating display of the names and photos of local people

who died during the war; the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund In Memory program; and a display showing samples of the more than 400,000 items left behind at the memorial in Washington.

Kelly said the township is seeking volunteers to help.

Motorcyclists and first responders are needed to help escort the truck carrying the wall when it arrives in the area on July 5 and for security during its stay.

To help set up the display, 30 to 35 able bodied volunteers are needed on July 6 and again for breaking it down on July

10. Setup is expected to take about six hours, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on July 6.

Thirty-two volunteers also are needed each day to supervise the display around the clock.

The display will be open 24 hours a day from the afternoon of July 6 until about 2 p.m. on July 10.

Kelly also invited area residents to contact her if they know of a local veteran who should be included in the Hometown Heroes portion of the display.

For more information, contact Kelly at [katiek@bloomtownship.org](mailto:katiek@bloomtownship.org) or 708-754-9400.