

Once Part of Segregated Arlington, Now ...

Jennie Dean Park is expanded with larger playground, renovated picnic pavilion, softball and baseball, plus art that honors its history.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Nine sparkling pink hip hop mini divas line up across S. Nelson Street and march around the corner to open the festivities for Jennie Dean Park's grand reopening May 21. Eight of the Crossroad Riders, led by Crazy D, Vice President of the Club, follow on their Harleys.

An afternoon of festivities to celebrate the reopening of Jennie Dean Park begins with memories and comments by local officials, community leaders and a baseball/coach player. Robin Stomler, VP of the Green Valley Civic Association (GVCA) opens the program remembering they "pushed, persuaded to raise the collective consciousness." She remembers the "voices of disrespect."

Portia Clark, President of the CVCA, sits in the shade waiting for her turn to bookend the program. "I'm elated today. We've waited so long."

A History Walk has been set up along the fence, recalling the days of the Green Machine, BG Reds, Lady Cold Blood and Over the Hill



Brittany Garner and her brother, John Garner, show Jayson, 12, Leila, 6, and John Joseph, 2, a picture of their grandfather John (of course) on the Green Machine baseball team that played in Green Valley.



A steady line steps up to purchase Green Valley T-shirts at the reopening of Jennie Dean Park & Playground on Saturday, May 21.



Crazy D, Vice President of Crossroad Riders Harley Club in Bowie, is sporting the club colors. He says he has been riding since he had a little dirt bike.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

Gang Negro League semi-pro and professional baseball teams who played in the park. By 1950 the park featured softball and baseball diamonds, grandstands, basketball and horseshoe courts, an outdoor

fireplace, picnic tables and a drinking fountain.

Brittany Garner and her brother, John, stop in front of a board full of baseball pictures to point out their grandfather with his baseball team to twelve-year-old Jayson, six-year-old Leila and two-year-old John Joseph. "I don't know when this was



Henry Earl's BBQ operated by Brandon Dunbar and his brother Owen just started their business and have their first event today at Jennie Dean Park.

but I know he played for the Green Monsters. His name, of course, was John."

Attendees at the event crowd into patches of shade or sit in chairs under the awning, adjusting their sun hats and wondering about the temperature. Tacos, BBQ chicken and ribs and lots of bottles of water sit in tubs of ice around the park.

Brandon Dunbar and his brother Owen have just started Henry Earl's BBQ and are at their first event to-

day. As if it wasn't hot enough already, they have a large smoking grill with slabs of ribs, chicken quarters and hot dogs back in the corner. Owen sprinkles on the spices, "my own invention with a lot of brown sugar, onion and garlic powder and a lot of love." Brandon sticks a meat thermometer into a drumstick. "Only 128 degrees, not quite ready," he informs an impatient customer.

The afternoon included a per-

formance by JoGo Project, a basketball game, a ribbon cutting and dedication of Robert Winkler Field and Ernest Johnson Field.

In the mid-late 1800s emancipated African Americans settled in Green Valley. In the late 1800s John D. Nauck bought and subdivided 69 acres of land that became known as Nauck or Green Valley. In the 1930s African American residents James and Nettie Peyton owned Peyton's field, a part of which became Green

Valley Ball park.

In 1944 the park was named after a formerly enslaved woman Jennie Serepta Dean. During the park's history it has had a dance hall, served as a baptizing site along Four-Mile-Run, a motorcycle race track, with Negro League ball teams playing in the park. In 1944 Arlington County purchased and redeveloped Peyton's Field.

Through fits and starts including a pool, bath house and field

house that were never built, Arlington County adopted a master plan for Jennie Dean Park in 2018 which led to the renovation and expansion of the park which was celebrated with the reopening on May 22. Today the park has made the journey from "the county's sole recreation for colored citizens" in 1942 to the reenvisioned park with the message "that it is officially open and available for all to use."



Portia Clark, President of the Green Valley Civic Association, tries to stay cool in record May temperatures. She says she is elated. "We've waited so long."



County Board Chair Katie Cristol and former Board member John Vihstadt.



The Young Divas open the festivities at Jennie Dean on Saturday afternoon followed by the Crossroad Riders from Bowie Maryland on their Harleys.