



Hammond's Very Own Jean Shepherd

The Hammond Historical Society Pays Tribute To Jean Shepherd



*A Christmas Story • My Summer Story • Jean Shepherd's America
In God We Trust All Others Pay Cash • The Ferrari In The Bedroom
Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories and Other Disasters
A Fistful of Fig Newtons • Ollie Hopnoodle's Haven of Bliss*

Well friends and neighbors it's almost time for the much awaited grand opening of the new multi-million dollar Jean Shepherd Community Center here in Hammond. After several construction delays the "Shep Center" is set to open for a VIP crowd on Friday, March 14, 2003 and a public display the following day on Saturday, March 15, 2003.

Who remembers when in the planning stages and even into the early construction stages the new Jean Shepherd Community Center was referred to as the Intergenerational Community Center? Were pretty sure that "Shep" had his share of "working titles" in the many stories and books that he wrote. It wasn't until just a little over a year ago, that a Commissioner of the Hammond Park Board wrote an editorial commentary to the local newspaper about the naming of the new Dowling Park Community Center.

There was talk at one time of having a contest allowing Hammond School children to come up with a name for the new Community Center, however one park board member who was a avid Jean Shepherd fan was very persistent in having the new Community Center named to honor Jean Shepherd.

Jean Shepherd grew up not to far from where the new Community Center is built. On Cleveland Street for which he made ever so famous in the stories he wrote. It seemed only fitting.

Well sticking to his guns or should we say sticking to his "Red Ryder BB Gun" the park board agreed with him in full to name the new Community Center in honor of Jean Shepherd.

Some residents were believe it or not a little apprehensive about naming the new Community Center after Jean Shepherd. They stated that they didn't think that it was such a good idea. After all he made fun of Hammond. Well if we can't laugh a little at ourselves then what's the sense of being. Maybe if you stop and think about it, there are a lot of funny things here anyway.

Just think we could have gave the naming rights to a corporate sponsor. Just how that would have turned out one can only imagine. Maybe that wouldn't have been so bad if we would have kept to the Jean Shepherd theme. How about the "Ovaltine Community Center" or the "Red Ryder Community Center". "Shep" would have really joked about that.

Even though Jean Shepherd made a living writing his whimsical and unbelievably humorous stories poking fun at Hammond or should we say Hohman as it was in his writings. He was always thrilled when he was invited back to speak or accept an award bestowed upon him. "Shep" had returned for many speaking engagements and award ceremonies not only in Hammond but in Northwest Indiana as well.

We have listed a just a few of "Shep" most famous works at the beginning of this article and couldn't begin to list his complete works.

One of the most notable things that a community can do to preserve and honor the memory of those important and influential citizens is to name a street, park or building after them. Maybe "Shep" is up there thinking —Hammond— that's not such a bad place after all.

We are sure that the new Jean Shepherd Community Center at Dowling Park will serve not just the Hessville Community, but all of Hammond well throughout the many years and years to come.

—————Excelsior

YOU'RE INVITED TO ATTEND:
The Grand Opening of the Jean Shepherd Community Center
When: On Saturday, March 15, 2003 at 7:00 a.m.
Where: 3031 Mahoney Drive Dowling Park — Hammond, Indiana
Phone: 554-0155 For More Information
Numerous Activities and Events are Planned Throughout The Day

