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Optimists sponsor soap-box derby

News

By BETTY JO BELTON STRATFORD-PERTH ARCHIVES

Posted 3 months ago

Here you have the winners of the three classes in the soap box derby sponsored by the Stratford Optimist Club on Monday, May 21, 1962.

From left, they are Larry Sangster, winner in the crate class, Jim Delafranier, winner of the official wheels class and Paul Tuer, winner of the unofficial wheels class.

Delafranier won the Optimist trophy and cash prizes were presented to the top three competitors in each class. All participants were given a silver dollar at the start of their races.

The Optimist and Opti-Mrs clubs of Stratford were celebrating their 25th anniversary in 1962. An article published in The Beacon Herald on Nov. 10, 1962 reported that "there are tens of thousands of children who have whiled away many happy hours at the Optimist playground (at Front, Brunswick and Albert Sts.) and on the outdoor skating rinks which were one of the club's first projects."

The outdoor rinks opened in 1937 and were located "on Downie Street" and at the agricultural fairgrounds. The playground opened in 1939. It was eventually named the Crehan Memorial playground in honour of Dr. William Henry K. Crehan, club president from 1938-39. A very public-minded citizen, he collapsed at a board of education meeting and died a few days later in 1940. Crehan had given generously of his time and talents for the betterment of the city and its youth.

In August 1941, a count was made of the number of children who had used the Optimist's playground over the summer. In 44 days, over 9,000 visitors enjoyed the park. By the 1960s, the playground had a merry-go-round, swings, teeter-totters, trapeze bars, slide, sand box and a ball diamond with a backstop. There was also a cement block building with washrooms and a room for craft classes. Paid instructors watched over the activities held there. At the end of each summer a picnic was sponsored with games, races and treats for the children.

This photograph of the soap box derby winners is from the Optimist club's scrapbook for 1962-63. The book was presented to club president Jim Benedict on behalf of the members on June 22, 1963. Scrapbook editor was Laverne Waters. The book was generously donated to the archives a number of years ago by Benedict's daughter, Elaine Cook.

The Stratford-Perth Archives is located at 24 St. Andrew St. We are open from 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday. You can reach the archives at 519-271-0531, ext. 259, or by e-mail at sparchives@perthcounty.ca. For more information including hours at the Mitchell and Listowel branches, call the Stratford office or visit us on the Perth County website at www.perthcounty.ca.

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