

# Former Anderson park board member lives to serve

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(Photo: Sheila Vilvens/The Community Press)

Dale Bartholomew is not a man comfortable in the spotlight.

He is, however, adept at turning any conversation into an opportunity to celebrate others.

For 18-plus years Bartholomew served as a commissioner on the Anderson Township Park Board, helping to shape the park system that residents enjoy today. The completely voluntary position is possible only through an appointment by the Anderson Township Board of Trustees. Bartholomew's appointment ended in February when the trustees appointed someone new to the board.

Being told his service was no longer needed on the park board was a bitter pill to swallow for Bartholomew.

"I was told that I should resign and go out on a high note so that they didn't have to do what they did," he said.

Serving on the park board was a joy for Bartholomew.

"I've only had three bad days in Anderson Park District," he said. One was the day he was not reappointed to the board. The others were the Marcus Fiesel incident and losing Beech Acres Parenting Center land for a park.

In 2006, 3-year-old Marcus Fiesel was reported missing while playing in Juilfs Park. Hundreds from the community showed up to help search for him. Later, authorities said the child was killed by his foster parents, Liz and David Carroll.

"I was proud to see what our staff did," he said. "I was exceptionally proud of what our community did; coming up here and wanting to do something about it. The police, the fire department, everybody just started doing jobs that needed to be done."

In the fall of 2014 the park district entered negotiations with the Beech Acres Parenting Center to buy land and the RecPlex along Beechmont Avenue. A purchase agreement was reached and a vote taken by the park board to place the issue before voters. When an alternative plan was presented that, among other things, would bring a new Anderson High School to the site the park board stepped aside, reassigning its purchase agreement.

Ultimately, the alternative plan was deemed not viable, but the opportunity to buy the land was gone.

Bartholomew remains disappointed that things didn't work out as hoped for the parks.

"We've always let the community decide, not just three people," he said referencing the township trustees. "That's the way I look at that part of it."

While Bartholomew can easily enumerate the top three greatest challenges during his years on the park board, narrowing down the top improvements/accomplishments is difficult. There were many, he said.

His favorite park event is Anderson Days.

"It's a lot of hard work, but to see the community come together...a long-term resident it's like a class reunion," he said.

Current Park Board President Nadine Gelter said that her friend has served the community through the park district for half of the park district's life giving of his money, time and heart.

"Dale was a hands-on commissioner. He never hesitated to step in and help with whatever needed doing," she said in a Facebook post and in a recent park district publication.

"Dale has a servant's heart for causes he believes in and he truly believed in Anderson Parks," she wrote. "He was always the first one to open his wallet when funds were needed."

Duffy Beischel served on the park board for 19 years. It was there that he and Bartholomew met and became friends. The friendship included family outings and vacations. The men could get into big arguments over differences of opinion on the park board, Beischel said, and then leave the meetings and dine together at Pelican's Reef.

A lot of people might not know, but Bartholomew was active many years with the Kiwanis Club. In the 1980s, parents of a child in the community with special needs needed a van to transport the child, Beischel said. In conjunction with Kiwanis, Bartholomew put together and ran a Beanie Babies auction to raise money to buy a van.

“He did a lot of volunteer work around Kiwanis and for the community,” Beischel said. “He was very active in the Kiwanis basketball association.”

He’s also active in his church. Bartholomew and his wife, Louann, live modestly in a small Cape Cod-style home, he said. Yet, Bartholomew does well in his business.

“Dale is a true Christian in the sense that he lives modestly and gives of himself and money,” Beischel said. His contributions are usually private, however, not wanting to call attention to himself.

Bartholomew’s generosity is not limited to his community. He has gone on many mission trips in the United States. Recently he returned from his first mission trip abroad which took him to Columbia.

“I was a plumber for 10-days working on a church camp. It was enjoyable,” he said. “It was eye-opening what we take for granted.”

Bartholomew grew up in Anderson Township, attending Maddux Elementary School and Anderson High School then Great Oaks. He and Louann have been married nearly 34 years. They have one daughter, Christine, who was a Christmas baby. He owns a company that installs commercial kitchen equipment and does construction management.

The Cape Cod in which he lives is the same house he’s lived in since the age of 4. Bartholomew even has the same phone number. His parents always emphasized the importance of giving back.

“We were raised to be servants,” he said. “Whether it be to our church or community.” Bartholomew said he doesn’t see this as much with today’s generation, which concerns him.

His list of volunteer efforts over the years is extensive. Along with serving his church, park board and Kiwanis Club, Bartholomew served on the township advisory committee for zoning (which no longer exists), served on Governor Bob Taft’s small business advisory council, was instrumental in fundraising for the township’s Firemen’s Memorial at Beech Acres Park and was involved in efforts for the Veterans Memorial project at Anderson Center.

It’s easy to see how Bartholomew is among the list of a select few individuals honored as Anderson Area Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year.

Looking ahead, Bartholomew said he’s not certain in what community service activity or project he will be involved next. He’s keeping his options open.

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