

Horicon's Sword Field Opens with Community Celebration

Special guest speakers and surprises highlight the Aug. 19 ceremony



A setting sun shown brightly on the grand opening ceremony for the School District of Horicon's new athletic complex last Friday, Aug. 19. Named the Horicon Marshmen SWORD Field Athletic Complex, the site will be home to future Horicon sporting events and Husticon football games. The first contest there will be this Friday, Aug. 26, as Husticon hosts Mayville.

MITCHELL B. KELLER PHOTO

CLARICE CASE
JOURNALIST

MITCHELL BRADLEY KELLER
EDITOR

The dedicated plaque reads:

"Sword Field is named for its major donor, Fred Schwertfeger (HHS 1961) and is supported by Sword Financial Corporation, established as the parent company of Horicon Bank by his

father (HHS 1929), a Horicon attorney and decorated WWII hero. The family name means sword-maker and embraces Fred's grandfather, who pastored in Horicon for forty years. May Sword Field be a blessing to young athletes in the spirit of 2 Timothy 2:5. 'Anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.'"

Schwertfeger, decked out in orange-and-black, was one of several major donors in attendance last Friday evening as the school district's brand new athletic complex and football field were unveiled during a special ceremony open to the public.

School District of Horicon administrators, faculty, past and present

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Early Ad/News Deadline for DCP's September 8 Edition

Due to the upcoming Labor Day holiday on Monday, Sept. 5, the deadline to submit advertisements and news stories to be published in the September 8 edition of the *Dodge County Pionier* will be at noon, on Friday, Sept. 2.

Please note that our offices will be closed on Labor Day. We wish our readers a safe and restful holiday!



Miss Fond du Lac 2022 Zoé Leu, on left, poses with 2022 Dodge County Fairest of the Fair Leah Weninger. The pair explored the Dodge County Fair together on Friday, Aug. 19.

MITCHELL B. KELLER PHOTO



HORICON

Public Safety Updates

Horicon's Lake Street Task Force and the Public Safety Committee held meetings earlier this month and discussed road safety, school openings and grant funding.

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LOMIRA

Lions Defeat Husticon

The Lomira Lions football team defeated Husticon at home in the season opener last week Thursday. More from that game in this edition.

See Page 18

MAYVILLE

Sweet Revenge, Cards Defeat Rockets

After losing to Cedar Grove-Belgium to open last season, the Mayville Cardinals football team got revenge this season by defeating the Rockets at home, 28-7, last Friday.

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HORICON AREA

SWORD FIELD *from page 1*

alumni and city residents joined together to celebrate the occasion with guest speakers, refreshments and a tour of the state-of-the-art facilities.

Schwertfeger donated \$1.5 million to the project in April of 2021 and received the naming rights for the complex, which is officially known as: Horicon Marshmen SWORD Field Athletic Complex.

The rest of the fundraising campaign was aided by donations from the community and funding from the school district. All told, the construction of the plaza, stands, football field, track and still-in-progress throwers' pits and parking lots cost just less than \$4 million.

"I am fortunate to be in a position of responsibility to make a lead gift to construct this impressive athletic field," said Schwertfeger during his speech last week.

Joining Schwertfeger with a naming-rights donation was Mike Splinter, a former Marshmen quarterback and Horicon High School (HHS) grad of 1968. He donated \$100,000 and earned the right to name the press box.

How it all Started

The road to opening night of Sword Field started more than six years ago.

In 2015, the school districts of Mayville and Horicon considered consolidating. The discussion was met with

sourness from members of both communities and, ultimately, a path forward together never materialized.

Seeing a need for community support of the school district, a citizen committee came together in Horicon with the intent of raising money for an on-campus sporting facility for the high school. In particular, this group had hoped to raise enough money to build a football field in the former "bowl." This area is now the school district's parking lot.

Prior to the 2016-17 school year, the school board hired current District Administrator Rich Appel to take over for the retiring Gary Berger. When Appel heard about a dedicated group of citizens trying to raise money for athletics, he wondered if there was an appetite to, first, improve the education facilities.

"I went out into the community, set up a table at restaurants and just answered people's questions," said Appel in an interview with Pioneer staff in 2018.

From those conversations, Appel determined that the community would support a referendum to upgrade the junior-high school building and erect a new elementary/middle school. Two referendum questions on the spring ballots in 2018, which asked Horicon taxpayers if they were willing to support a \$26 million project, passed with



Lead donor Fred Schwertfeger called Sword Field a "field of dreams," and it looks the part in this photo. **CLARICE CASE PHOTO**

more than 60% approval.

Fast-forward to last Friday and Horicon's single-campus concept now houses students of all ages up through high school seniors. Sword Field and the athletic complex became the final move to fully consolidate Horicon's own education system and programs into a single property.

Surprise!

As mentioned, there were some well-planned twists on opening night.

Prior to the ceremony, the plaza's naming rights had not been announced. A secret was kept from Appel until last Friday, at which point Horicon Board of Education President Meredith Strieff announced the new name: Appel Plaza.

"His passion and vision for the district and the community is unmatched," said Strieff before unveiling the



Roger Meyer, seated on left, and his wife Merry Ann, seated on right, receive a standing ovation from the crowd. Emcee and HHS grad Gabe Neitzel referred to the couple as being vital to Horicon's history. **CLARICE CASE PHOTO**

The night's emcee, Gabe Neitzel – 2005 Horicon High School grad and former three-sport athlete – is a current ESPN Radio host on both local and national broadcasts. He expressed his excitement for the future generations of Marshladies and Marshmen that will benefit from the upgrades.

"This is such a state-of-the-art, top-line facility," he said. "The possibilities are endless, here. It is unbelievable what they are going to be able to do."

Neitzel reminisced about his experiences playing football at the city's Discher Park and for former Marshmen football Head Coach Roger Meyer, who was in attendance with his wife, Merry Ann.

Neitzel said of Meyer: "[He] is such a special individual in the history of Horicon. 202 career wins, seven conference titles, and that is just in football. He was inducted into the Wisconsin Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2008. He spent 37 years here as the Horicon High School football coach. He also was the track coach, and in 25 of the 29 years as the coach of the track team his teams were represented at state. He is such a monumental part of the history of Horicon."

He also gave credit to Merry Ann, who he said worked tirelessly in support of Roger's passion.

"Thank you," said Neitzel

to Merry Ann, as the couple received a standing ovation from the assembled crowd of several hundred people.

The Future

The scene was certainly positive last Friday, as it seems past and present generations will be grateful for a new school and now athletic complex that will be enjoyed by the future residents and students for years to come.

"This is truly a gift that we can use to grow Horicon together," Mayor Josh Maas said during his speech.

Near the end of the evening, the community came down onto the new track and field and took their first laps to conclude the ceremony.

While the public will have access to the space for various city programs, as well, Schwertfeger said it best during his address, while also reminding everyone who and what this project was really for: the kids and the life lessons they can learn.

"My challenge to you, young Horicon athletes," he said, "is to play many games on this fabulous field, but always compete according to the rules and strive for victory."

This Friday, Aug. 26, the inaugural sporting event at Horicon Marshmen SWORD Field Athletic Complex will take place as Husticon hosts the Mayville Cardinals football team. Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.



With all the evening's dignitaries in attendance, Fred F. Schwertfeger, left, cuts the ceremonial ribbon with Rich Appel, right, during the grand opening of Sword Field. **CLARICE CASE PHOTO**



The stands were packed for Sword Field's grand opening ceremony last week Friday, Aug. 19. **CLARICE CASE PHOTO**

sign. "Rich's vision, devotion to future Marshmen and passion cannot be measured."

Appel was not only appreciative of the honor, but also to everyone who helped make his "field of dreams" (as Schwertfeger put it) possible. He offered thanks to everyone involved in the project during his time at the podium.

Marshmen Greats

Of course, there were plenty of Marshmen and Marshlady legends on hand for the special event.