

Shenandoah Steps Up Efforts To Rebuild Veterans Stadium

By [Ted Hayes](#)

SHENANDOAH — The fire that destroyed Shenandoah's Veterans Memorial Stadium in 1987 put a hole in the town's facilities inventory and an even larger hole in the hearts of hundreds of Shenandoah residents who attended, or played in games, at the ballpark over a 30-year period.

The former stadium was home to the Valley Baseball League's Shenandoah Indians, among others.

Without the stadium in town, the current version of the Indians who play in the amateur Apple Valley Baseball League has had to play at Page County High School. Shenandoah Recreation League Cal Ripken baseball and Babe Ruth softball teams now play their games on two diamonds located at the site of the former ballpark.

But the fire, ruled an arson, did not erase memories of the old stadium, and these memories are now burning brighter than ever as the kids of the 1970s and 1980s, now adults, want a piece of their childhood returned.

Shenandoah Mayor Clinton O. Lucas Jr. is among them.

"As kids we enjoyed sitting in the bleachers along the first base fence," he has written on the "rebuild our stadium" Web site memory page at www.rebuildingourstadium.com. "The players would stop by and talk with the fans, and there was a concession stand with little-sized Coke bottles and hot dogs. Boy were they good!"

Delores Lackovitch also has warm memories.

"It was inspirational to be at a game," she said. "It would make anyone fall in love with the game of baseball to get a seat right behind the batter."

Two other Shenandoah residents, Amos Thomas and Kirk Comer, have the same warm memories of the old ballfield.

Comer plays and has helped organize the Apple Valley Baseball League Indians, who up until this year played for several seasons in the Rockingham County Baseball League.

Together Comer and Thomas began moving toward the seemingly impossible dream of replacing the old stadium with an all-new, modern structure. They began by putting in a request to James Madison University for the lights from the old Harrisonburg High School baseball field (also named Veterans Memorial Stadium) when JMU bought the whole high school campus. In August of 2008 the lights arrived. A small engineering study was done the next fall, as required by the county, to insure safe installation of poles for the lights, and then the project slowed.

Until this spring. Thomas, with help from local Internet instructor Gary Patterson, built a successful Web site for the



Amos Thomas looks at the monument to fallen soldiers located at the site of the former Veterans Memorial Stadium in Shenandoah. The site is now home to the town recreation league baseball and softball fields.

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project. Then on May 25, Comer and Thomas, after a flurry of discussions and emails between themselves and supporters, went to the Shenandoah Town Council and announced a new fundraising plan for the stadium, and loaned the council a blown-up picture of the old stadium and field, taken from an original owned by Dolores Lackovitch, herself a strong supporter of the new effort.

Knowing the town's budget, the pair did not ask for additional financial support — the town already makes an annual contribution to the Indians, which the team is saving for the project — but for personal and official support for the project, which the council granted with enthusiasm.

At 6 a.m. on Memorial Day, May 31, the new fund-raising drive began. A small detail of volunteers and Shenandoah Indians, including Thomas, Jackie Staples, Karen Comer, Constance Roach, Tim Hall, David Comer and Jesse Sampson, went door-to-door in town with door-hangers containing glossy two-fold brochures, refrigerator magnets and black and white photos showing the old stadium, and stamped return envelopes for contributions.

The brochure drives home the meaning of the words "veterans memorial" in the title of the old and planned new stadium.

"In 1945, after World War II was over, our troops finally returned home," it says. "Some came home to loving families and some came home after giving the supreme sacrifice."

The names of all those who died in wars are listed.

"The air (in Shenandoah) was never so sweet because it was the air of freedom," the brochure states.

What will it take to succeed in building a stadium whose ultimate cost will easily run into six figures?

"When the first stadium was built, all the civic organizations in town participated in helping it along. It was a real outpouring," Thomas said.

Lackovitch saw hope for the much-needed participation.

"There's still a lot of civic involvement in town," she said. "We need to see it come out again."

Lackovitch is optimistic because of her own feelings that she believes may spill over into other former stadium-goers.

"I'm sorry that my children missed having that hometown-game experience," she said. "It's worth working for future generations."

The brochure puts the idea succinctly.

"No more talking — now is the time for action," it declares.

Persons wishing additional information about the rebuilding project may call Amos Thomas at 652-6125 after 3:30 p.m.