

## Thank You Letter From Alyson Challis Gurganus and the Family of Don Challis 4/16/12

What a wonderful honor for our dad's name. On behalf of the Don Challis Family we'd like to thank Mayor Buckley, the city council, Mr. Ed Marks, the Park Board, Mr. Buddy Templin for getting the ball rolling on this 2 years ago, Mr. Tom Hannan, all of the supporters we've encountered along the way, and most importantly—the citizens of Beech Grove-past, present, and future. We can't express how honored we are to have South Grove Park renamed Don Challis Park for our dad. He worked diligently for 29 years to make the parks in Beech Grove a wonderful place for children and adults to enjoy.

Our Dad was a school teacher because he loved kids and teaching them. He had 6 of his own, and in order to make ends meet he had to secure another job, since a teacher's salary didn't quite pay the bills with a growing family. He supplemented his income by coaching but it still wasn't quite enough. Dad began his love affair with the BG Parks Department on May 15, 1963. He loved his job and loved making kids happy. He was a master at knowing what needed to be done to keep the park in the best, cleanest, and safest condition it could be. That park now known as Sarah T. Bolton Park was the apple of his eye, and of course with his love of baseball –it contained the best diamond in the area which was used for years as the county sectional field. When he taught 6<sup>th</sup> grade, one of the special privileges for his students was for them to rake the field smooth—and yes back then they actually thought that was a privilege. Many of those same kids later worked for him at the park. He became the head baseball coach at BG High School in 1966 which even made that field a higher priority.

In January 1968 the construction of another Park toward the south end of BG was approved and with Dad's vision was planned. Construction started around 1970. I was older then and can remember him overseeing the construction of the shelter, restrooms, and park equipment like it was yesterday. I remember when he and my grandfather-Fred Challis built the shelter house, and when he put the park equipment in, because I got to unpack some of the boxes. I remember when those rocking animals were removed from the truck and set up. In fact Leslie and I got the first ride on them even though we were told we were too big. The South Grove Park was completed about 1973 when the sandbox, and basketball courts were installed. The basketball courts and horseshoe pits were on the back side of South Grove Elementary along with a huge open space used for soccer, baseball practices and kite flying. His vision of connecting that access road to 4th St. was the only thing that never came to fruition. The building of this park was a labor of love.

My dad was a perfectionist when it came to giving kids a place to play. He sacrificed a lot from his family for other kids on a daily basis. It was not that he didn't care about us, but more because he LOVED what he did and he wanted to make Beech Grove- which was his hometown- the best, and he did involve us in many of his activities. Over the years, I

have never heard a bad comment about him--only how people miss him, what a great guy he was, how much he taught them, and what he did for the park and other entities in BG. I'm not sure anyone in this day and age could compare to him actually. He never did any of it for fame or for this future honor. My sister Dayna remembers how all the kids of Beech Grove thought that Dad owned the park, because he was always down there, which is rather cute and innocent and gave her much pride.

It was an honor when Mayor Elton Geshwiler, a very wise cherished and loved man, honored my father by proclaiming May 4th 1990 "Don Challis Day" for all of his tireless work and devotion he gave to the City of Beech Grove. For years he was paid a part time salary, not for the countless hours he put in, but for the duty, and just about every waking hour he was not at his full time job with either BGHS or Lawrence Central HS he was at one of those parks or the softball diamonds.

He brought many activities to the BG park system throughout this second career including day camps and kids activities, summer concerts, shows and skits in conjunction with an Indy Parks series, the Halloween parade and costume contest, and started a little girls softball league at the north end of Sarah T. Bolton Park. He also created the softball league for adults and older girls at the middle school and took care of those diamonds. He started the old tradition at Beech Grove to again have a Fourth of July (actually 3rd of July) celebration including food, entertainment, and fireworks along with the Promoters Club, which had been stopped in the early 60's after a tragic accident. This celebration is still a thriving part of BG life. He was the instigator of the BGHS Alumni Golf Tournament, which was later named the Don Challis Alumni Golf Tournament after his death. And for years he and Fred also made some of the best floats for the Fall Festival parade to keep it exciting and fun, along with helping the Promoters Club in other ways. He retired from the park on January 8, 1992.

Personally I can tell you that I in no way will ever regret sharing my dad with the youth and people of Beech Grove. I am overwhelmed that he could be such a good teacher, coach, boss, friend, and mentor to so many, and wish I could somehow contribute just half the amount he did . Having this park renamed for him means that many more can share in his spirit. We are so proud of our dad, and certainly this honor will keep his legacy alive in Beech Grove. Thank you again—from the bottom of our hearts—we could not be prouder.