



August 17, 1999

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**Gyrolog**

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**President Gord** welcomed us to the meeting and reported that there were fourteen Gyros and Gyrettes who made the trek to Cranbrook for the District VIII Convention. One of the optional activities was a "walk" which turned out to be a major hike up a mountain. However, everyone made it and it is now reported to have been a great time. If there were casualties they were not mentioned.

At the beginning of the meeting two guests were introduced, **Past District VIII Governor Keith Bradley**, and **First Lieutenant Governor Don Greig**, were introduced Those were the two honoured guests and in addition there were 21 members of our club out to share a great August day.

**Mike Matei** announced that there are fifteen couples who have signed up for the bridge club this year and there is room for one more couple. If you are interested, let **Mike** know as soon as possible. This is a Gyro oriented bridge club with the emphasis on friendship, not expertise in bridge. So if you have a desire to demonstrate expertise in friendship, your expertise in bridge will eventually flower. Come out and give it a chance!

**John Plunkett** tells me that a traffic light is an apparatus that automatically turns red when your car approaches.

There was a special birthday celebration this time because our kingpin of the hockey pool, **Dave Duchak**, celebrated a birthday on August 18<sup>th</sup>. A hearty round of applause indicated the support of the club for the efforts that **Dave** puts in to make the hockey pool, and our benevolent fund, a success. Again, from all of us **Dave**, a much appreciated **THANK YOU**.

At this meeting we were once again fortunate enough to be able to celebrate one of the most rewarding aspects of **Gyro**, the installation of new members. The Edmonton

Club has experienced a drop in membership in the past few years because a number of our long-term members are no longer with us.

We were very fortunate to have **First Lieutenant Governor Don Greig** install two new members. **Ted Hagemann** and **Joe Ramsay** were told about the origins and the purpose of Gyro and were warmly welcomed by all the members in attendance. We are fortunate to have these two great people and their spouses as members of our club.

Once again we had a guest speaker who was a great speaker but not much of a guest. Our speaker was a valuable member of our club, **Peter Carter**. His mission was to help us understand the importance of the First Lights festival at Hawrelak Park and the commitment of the Chamber of Commerce in supporting the Edmonton School Lunch Program. It is hard to believe, but there are 42,000 children in Edmonton that go to school hungry every day. That fact significantly impacts their ability to learn and be successful when they are no loner in school, The Edmonton School Lunch Program is now established in 11 schools and is feeding 1500 children per day.

The Chamber of Commerce has a ten-year lease for the park. They are paying for the initial capital investment and are hoping to establish a significant endowment fund to support the school lunch program. Thank you to **Peter** for representing the Edmonton Gyro Club in a positive community endeavour.'

Enclosed is some information about the mixed meeting on September 7<sup>th</sup>, lets have a good turn out to see where the city decisions are made.

For the following meeting, John Stroppa has planned for the Gyro Club to attend the 20 Regions of Italy Extravaganza Weekend at Santa Maria Goretti Community Centre at 11050 90 Street. There are events from Friday evening September 24 to Sunday Lunch on September 26. See the enclosed information. There will likely be a decision to attend one of the events as a club activity.

As usual, **Past President Jack Ellis** won the draw for a free lunch. The rumour is that he now has this revenue source built into his budget and is planning an extension to his cabin that he now feels he can afford. This time he thanks **Peter Carter** for drawing his name.



# To seniors, Gyro isn't Greek, it's a name for summer fun

The Edmonton chapter of the once-famous service club became famous for building playing fields.

SCOTT McKEEN  
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

EDMONTON — To thousands of seniors here the word Gyro conjures up memories of idyllic summer days spent in such playful pursuits as sack races and pick-up baseball.

Gyro? Mention the word today and you're likely to get a funny look.

But before the Second World War and for years after the Gyro Club of Edmonton was synonymous with summer fun.

The local chapter of the once well-known international service club became famous for its efforts in building a number of fenced playgrounds, or "joy gardens" as they were described.

"Hundreds of city children whose playgrounds might have been streets, where traffic threatens life and limb, today

## TRUE WEST

A brief historical guide to events that have shaped Western Canada

play on Gyro playgrounds," said one newspaper account from the 1920s when the Gyro club was a household name.

The Gyros were originally formed by three college friends in Ohio in 1912 with the idea of promoting friendship. Chapters sprang up around North America and the Edmonton local was formed in 1921 by young men who saw a fresh alternative to groups like the Shriners.

In 1922, they unveiled their first project, Patricia Gyro Playground, which remains today in the heart of Edmonton's Little Italy, but is now called Giovanni Caboto Park.

The park was unique because the Gyros hired supervisors, usually university students, to organize activities. There were lending libraries, wood-working, model-building, carving projects and sand-



LARRY WONG/Special to The Sun

**REMINDER:** A plaque at Tipton Gyro Park in Edmonton is a reminder of the service club's efforts to build playgrounds.

castle contests. Skits were put on by neighbourhood kids and marathon "chinning" contests held to see who could do 1,200 chin-ups on the monkey bars

by the end of summer.

In two years after the club formed, there were three Gyro parks in Edmonton. Over the next 25 years, six more were constructed. To raise funds, the Gyros put on an annual carnival downtown, as well as concerts and field days in the park.

Gyro wives, or Gyrettes, knitted and rolled bandages for the war effort and were known to take treats to kids in hospital.

So what happened to the Gyros? For one thing, in the late 1940s, the parks were handed over to the city. While the Gyros helped with maintenance for a while, their role and public profile diminished.

The club continued to give out student scholarships and recently quietly donated money to charitable causes, like the Ezio Faraone Park in Edmonton, built by the city to honour a police officer killed on duty.

Four clubs in the area still meet and reportedly have over 100 members. But activities now focus on socializing and

that original goal of promoting friendship.

Some say clubs like the Gyros lost popularity because they failed to modernize.

Perhaps the explanation for that failure is found in club literature. It says the club was named after a gyroscope, "which allows an object to maintain its original course, no matter what happens around it."

Still, in 1996 the club celebrated its 75th anniversary and some 500 members came here for an international convention.

Unfortunately, perhaps, the last major mention of the local Gyro Club came with the city's move to dismantle the old equipment in Tipton Park, built in 1924, and one of the last remaining Gyro legacies.

Tipton was one of the parks once heralded as the safest place for kids to play. But modern parks officials said kids were risking injury — and the city a lawsuit — because some equipment was considered unsafe by current standards.