

# Our Family News Letter

Issue 10

Greendale, Wisconsin

September, 1995

## Robert G. Heck 1909 - 1995

On August 17, 1995, my mother and father were involved in an automobile accident in the city of Racine, Wisconsin. Mom sustained serious injuries from which she is making a good recovery. Her strength and faith in God and encouragement and love from her family and many friends have been instrumental in her recovery. Unfortunately, my dad didn't survive the crash.

This news letter was a favorite of his and he often gave me words of encouragement to continue publishing it. Dad had read most of the words contained in this issue since they were taken from a biography that I had written about him a few years ago. The biography was intended for a book on our family history.

This issue of **Our Family News Letter** is respectfully dedicated to him.

Robert J. Heck - Editor  
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Robert Gerald Heck was born on May 9, 1909, in the city of Racine, Wisconsin. He was the third son of Robert Steven Heck and Margaret Frederica Henningfeld. The Heck family consisted of eight children, five boys and three girls. The oldest was Clarence, born January 27, 1905, died February 24, 1955; followed by Harold born August 25, 1907, died September 2, 1908; Robert was next; Alvin born February 2, 1911; twin sisters Rose and Lily born July 31, 1915, and died April 12, 1917 and March 19, 1916 respectively; Edward born July 4, 1916, and died October 8, 1931; and Bernice born June 29, 1919, died March 25, 1993.

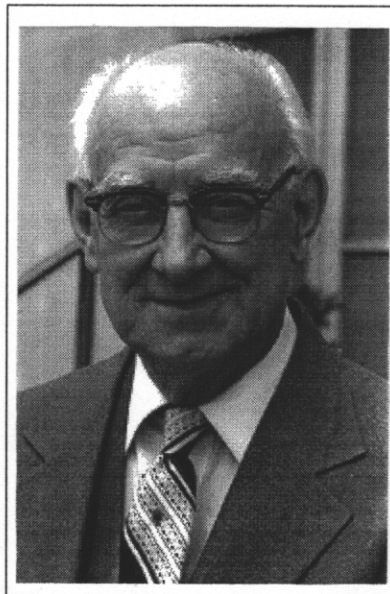
Robert, known to his friends as "BOB," attended St. Patrick and St. Joseph Grade Schools graduating from the latter in 1921. He attended St. Catherine's High School but dropped out after his father died in 1923 in order to support the family.

He started working at odd jobs selling soap, toothbrushes, and neckties from door-

to-door. The soap sold for twenty-five cents and the brushes for \$1.00. The profit on each was 50%.

Finally, in 1925 at the age of 16, he found a job at the Shaw Shoe Factory in Racine and worked there for two years. His starting job was that of a floor sweeper at the rate of \$1.40 per day. The factory was moved to Coldwater, Michigan and he moved with them. Robert rode in the back of a truck with the machinery and was back at work the following day.

He worked in Michigan for four months and returned to Racine when his brother Clarence found a better job for him at the Walker Manufacturing Company. He started working at Walker's on February 20, 1928, and remained there for over 43 years. He was active in the labor union for eleven years after which he moved into the management ranks as a line supervisor. He earned a reputation of being a fair and honest supervisor and treated people as he would want to be treated.



*Robert G. Heck in 1983*

He prided himself in that he never ordered anyone to do a job for him, but always asked with a "Please."

Robert retired as a supervisor on September 1, 1971, and started an active community service life which brought him recognition and honors from City and State officials. The ultimate honor was given to him with the dedication of the Robert G. Heck Park on November 1, 1986.

During an interview on December 4, 1982 Robert recalled some of his earliest memories which give an excellent idea of what life was like in the early 1900's.

"I guess my earliest memories would probably be one of Christmas. Our parents would wake us up and we would gather around the tree. We would have a nice Christmas tree and it would have candles that were lit by a match. The whole tree would be lit up by small candles on a clip. The clip would go onto the branches. We would then have to go to bed, and the first thing in the morning we would want to play with our toys. Each child got a toy, one or two at the most, and then the rest were either socks, gloves, mittens or hats. Sometimes we would get a sled or a wagon.

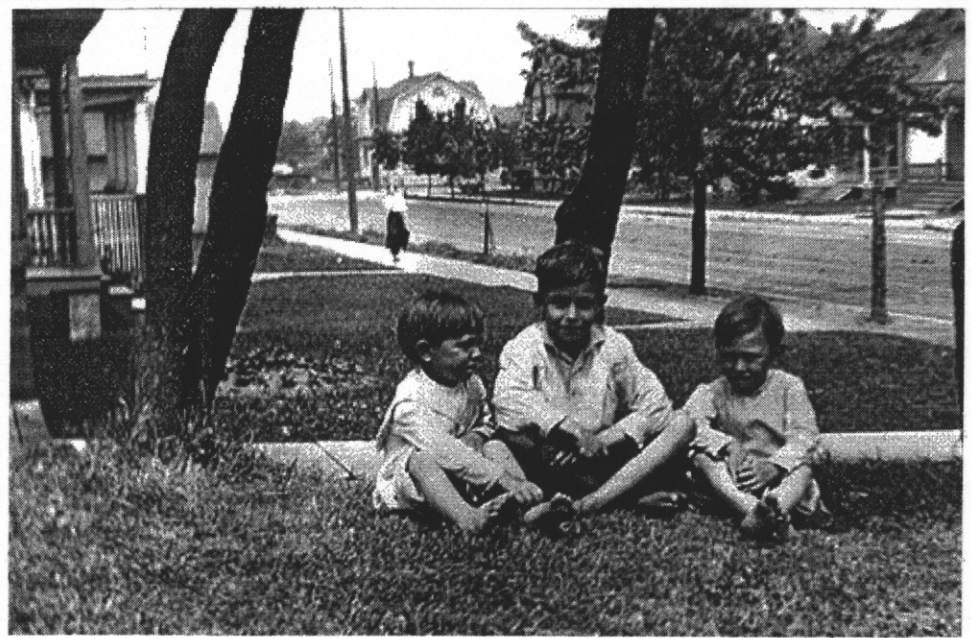
Our home was at 1110 Marquette Street in Racine. Our parents bought that house, and as times were tough then, they eventually lost the home. We had a very, very large front yard and we had two cherry trees on the lot line next to Ritter's. In the back we raised chickens, and we had an old red barn there.

I also recall when the ice man came we would jump on the back of the ice wagon and got small pieces of ice that we would put in our mouths. We looked forward to it. In those days we used ice, instead of refrigerators we had iceboxes. You would put a sign in your window, 25, 50, or 75

pounds, and then the iceman would stop and you would get the ice."

In 1932, on a warm Saturday night in August, Robert met Mary Ann Mikel at a dance pavilion called The Rainbow Gardens. It was a favorite hang out for teenagers at that time, and was located on Lake Michigan. Summer walks were also a favorite after the dance during those depression years.

He loved to dance and used some of the profits



L-R: Alvin, Clarence & Robert Heck about 1913 at 1110 Marquette St.

from his door-to-door sales to buy his ticket to the dance. That particular August evening he saw her and he recalled that she was wearing a pink dress. In an interview fifty years later he recalled the events as if they occurred a week earlier.

"I watched her dance, and she waltzed pretty good. I walked over and asked her to dance, and she said 'Yes'. That was how we started going out. She was working as a beauty operator at Racine Dry Goods. I would meet her at night and we would go dancing on weekends, walk around, or just go watch ballgames. Those days we didn't have the money. The Douglas Theater had ten cent night on Thursdays and I would meet her there. She would pay her dime and I would pay mine."

Mom's version was similar but with some slight variations and a great deal more credibility.

She was attending the dance with a girl friend and was just sitting there after a hard days work, tired, and not feeling much like dancing. She recalled the events fifty years later with equal accuracy.

"This young fellow walked up to me and asked me to dance. It was a waltz and so I danced with him. He danced very nicely and I enjoyed it. He asked if he could walk me home, and I said 'Yes'. We walked along the lake and we were looking for the big dipper. After he walked me home he said 'I don't have a job, but after I get one can I take you out?' I said 'Oh sure. After you get a job, call me up.' He didn't like that because he used to tell that to all of his girl friends and they usually told him that he didn't need a job to date them."

On June 29, 1935, Robert and Mary Ann Mikel were married at St. John Nepomuk Catholic church in Racine. The following announcement appeared in the Racine Journal Times the day of the wedding:

**60 OUT OF TOWN GUESTS HERE FOR MARRIAGE TODAY. MARY ANN MIKEL BECOMES BRIDE. RECEPTION HELD FOR 250.**

*Palms and peonies decorated St. John's Nepomuk church for the ceremony at 9 o'clock this morning at which the Rev. A. G. Weiler officiated, uniting in marriage Mary Ann Mikel, Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Mikel, 1212 Hagerer Street, and Robert Gerald Heck, son of Mrs. Margaret Heck, 1827 LaSalle Street. A large group of relatives and friends witnessed the service.*

*White satin, princess style, fashioned the bride's gown, and her veil, edged with three rows of pintucks, had an off-the-face cap with the brim appliquéd with lace and pearls. She was given in marriage by her father.*

**BRIDE'S ATTENDANTS**



**Robert G. Heck about 1920**

*Miss Mary Hrubos, the maid of honor, wore green organdies with accessories and carried tea roses and baby's breath. The bridesmaids, Miss Ann Palansky and Miss Erma Kristof, wore pink and yellow organdies respectively, with accessories in blue, and carried pink and yellow roses and baby's breath. Marjorie Heck, the flower girl, wore blue organdies and pink accessories. She had a basket of roses.*

*Best man was Clarence Heck, brother of the bridegroom; other attendants were Donald Henningfeld of Milwaukee and Herbert Heck of Burlington, cousins of the bridegroom; and the ushers, Alvin Heck, brother of the groom,*

*and George Henningfeld, cousin of the groom. Jerome Kriva, in white satin, completed the bridal party as ring bearer.*

*A wedding breakfast at the home of the bridegroom followed the services, and luncheon and dinner for 100 were served at the bride's home. At Winters' hall later, a reception for 250 guests preceded the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Heck on a week's wedding trip to St. Louis, Mo., and southern Illinois. After July 15, they will be at home at 1212 1/2 Hagerer street.*

**OUT OF TOWN GUESTS.**

*Out of town guests at the ceremony follow: Miss Mary Siska, John Siska, Lillian Siska, William Siska, all of St. Louis, Mo.; Mr. and Mrs. John Elias, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Zeis, Mr. and Mrs. J. Kovarik, George Kovarik, Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Barbara, all of Chicago; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Heinrichs, Carl Heinrichs of Wausau, Wis.; Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester Henningfeld, Donald Henningfeld, Mrs. Gillmeister, Mrs. C. Bratt, Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Henningfeld Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Henningfeld Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Brahm, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Boutell, Miss Eva Heck, Lawrence Heck, all of Milwaukee.*

*James Heck, Herbert Heck, Joseph Heck, Alice Heck, Miss Anna Hugenin, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Heck, all of Burlington; Mr. and Mrs. John Heck, Mr. and Mrs. Emil Heck, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Voss, Mrs. Mary Groustark, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Plucker, Virginia Plucker, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Plucker, all of Waterford; Mr. and Mrs. Andrew DeGrave of Wind Lake; Mr. and Mrs. Al Wuttke of Lyons; Mr. and Mrs. Fred Henningfeld of Plainfield, Wis.; Mr. and Mrs. Roland Henningfeld of Kenosha; Mr. and Mrs. Mike Zabanick of Coldwater, Mich.*



*The wedding of Robert Gerald Heck and Mary Ann Mikel on June 29, 1935.*

Dad told me about his honeymoon trip. He told me that they took a trip to St. Louis to visit some of mom's relatives. Since dad didn't own a car at that time he had to borrow his in-laws car. That doesn't sound too unreasonable, however my grand parents, John and Anna Mikel, insisted that they accompany mom and dad on their honeymoon.

When they arrived in St. Louis the temperature was well over 100 degrees. Dad said that it was so hot that you could fry an egg on the sidewalk. There was no such thing as air conditioning back then.

To make matters worse, the home of the relatives was very small and consisted of one large room, a kitchen and a bathroom. Mom, dad, grandma and grandpa, and several of the St. Louis relatives all slept in the same large room. (This explains why my brother Gary wasn't born until 1938.)

In 1955 Robert began his political career by winning the Seventh Aldermanic District race by campaigning door-to-door throughout the district. His name was well known in the district and the

fact that the neighborhood was also heavily Bohemian no doubt contributed to his election. He set a new record for terms in office and in 1987 won what he claimed to be his last election. That would allow him to have served for 33 years and eighteen terms as a lawmaker for the city of Racine.

On April 8, 1981, the State Legislature of the State of Wisconsin honored him with the following citation:

*THE STATE OF WISCONSIN  
CITATION by the LEGISLATURE*

*Know you by these presents:*

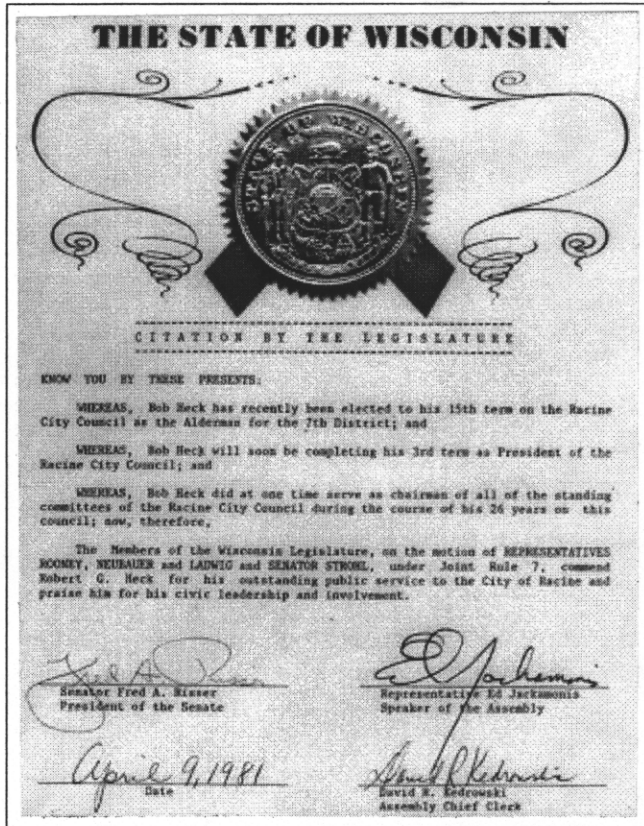
*Whereas, Bob Heck has recently been elected to his 15th term on the Racine City Council as Alderman for the 7th District; and*

*Whereas, Bob Heck will soon be completing his 3rd term as President of the Racine City Council; and Whereas, Bob Heck did at one time serve as chairman of all of the standing committees of the Racine City Council during the course of his 26 years on this council; now therefore,*

*The members of the Wisconsin Legislature, on the motion of Representatives Rooney, Neubauer and Ladwig and Senator Strohl, under joint rule 7, commend Robert G. Heck for his outstanding*

public service to the City of Racine and praise him for his civic leadership and involvement.

Signed by: Senator Fred A. Risser, President of the Senate; Representative Ed Jackamonis, Speaker of the Assembly; and David R. Kedrowski, Assembly Chief Clerk.



**Citation By The Legislature Of The State Of Wisconsin, April 9, 1981.**

Robert had been active in athletics all his life as an outstanding softball player with the Racine Moose Lodge where he played and managed for 22 years. He also played and managed softball teams for the Walker Manufacturing Company for an equal number of years. He pitched for nine years for the Alderman and Supervisor benefit games for Toys For Tots. He closed out his playing career at the age of 70 getting two singles to right field. In his younger years those hits would have been doubles or triples.

His compassion for youth surfaced in his younger years when he put together youth softball, baseball and basketball teams for the benefit of underprivileged youngsters. He attained support for

his teams by holding raffles for donated watches and other products for three chances for a quarter.

His service to recreation did not stop with playing and coaching. He also served as President of the Old Timers' Athletic Club for six years, two years as Vice President, seventeen years as a director and charter member in the support of youth athletics. He also served as President of the Old Timers' Sunday Softball League for eighteen years. In addition to his contribution to local softball and baseball programs, he served as President of the Wisconsin State Baseball League for three years.

Robert served as Acting Mayor from April 13th through April 17th, 1981 during "Robert G. Heck Week." During his tenure in office he served as President of the Common Council in 1962, 1975 and 1980. He also served on the Common Council Finance Committee for 14 years of which 6 were as Chairman. He served on the Recreation Commission for eight years, and was chairman of the City Council Public Safety and Buildings Committee.

Robert served on the Mayor's Executive Committee, was Vice Chairman of the Transit and Parking Commission, Community Development Committee, Citizens Technical Advisory Committee on Transit, and Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for the restoration of passenger rail service for Racine.

Over the years he served on the following: Commission on Human Rights, Wisconsin State Study on Aged, Chairman of the Mayor's Committee on book review on pornography, Chairman on the Citizen's Committee on revising the minimum housing code, Chairman of the area wide study Committee on Health, Mass Transit Technical Advisory Committee, President of the Racine Board of Health, Chairman of the Common Council Redistricting Committee, Senior Citizen Commission of the City of Racine, Systems Agency Management Affairs Committee of Milwaukee, Physical Health Committee of the Comprehensive Health Planning Agency of Southeastern Wisconsin.

Governmental and recreational pursuits were not the only places where Robert devoted his time in helping to improve the quality of life for the citizens of the Racine area. He was a member of the St. John Nepomuk Church where he served as an

usher and a member of the Senior Citizens' Club. He also served as a member of the finance committee and Parish Council of St. John's. He was also a member of the Jolly Times Club and a representative of the Senior Citizens' Council.

Robert was a life member of Moose Lodge 437 of Racine where he served as Governor for two years. The Moose Lodge conferred on him the Fellowship Degree and the Pilgrim Degree, the highest degree that the National Order of the Loyal Order of Moose can bestow on a member. He was also a member of the Legion of Moose. He also served as Vice President of the 2nd District of the Wisconsin State Moose Association.

Robert had served his community via a number of other organizations including the Racine County Planning Council for six years where he served as Chairman of the Nominating Committee, Legislative Commission and Budget Committee as well as serving on the Finance Committee. He was the Director and a volunteer for the Tex Reynolds' Toys For Tots program. Robert was also a member of the Northside Revitalization Committee, American Association of Retired Persons, Racine Zoological Society, Citizens against Crime, Northside Businessmen Association and the Racine Yacht Club.

As was mentioned earlier in this news letter, the ultimate honor bestowed on dad was the dedication of the Robert G. Heck Park in 1986. There were many dignitaries present on that cold November day, and each of them had a lot of nice things to say about dad. When it came time for dad to speak, he walked up to the podium and his opening remark was, "You noticed today I didn't wear a hat, and in a way I'm kind of glad, because I don't think the darn thing would fit today after all this."

The following was quoted from the dedication booklet used at the dedication of the Robert G. Heck Park:

*"Indeed Robert G. Heck is an outstanding citizen of Racine who has served his community and mankind well in every task he has undertaken. This park that we are dedicating today is here today because of his interest in the youth of Racine. It is here because of his desire to help serve the citizens of this neighborhood in having a quality of life that all justly deserves. Thank you, Mr. Heck as we gather here today to dedicate this park site in your honor for eternity and to serve as a role model for those who follow in your footsteps."*



**Robert G. Heck at the dedication of a park named in his honor in 1986.**

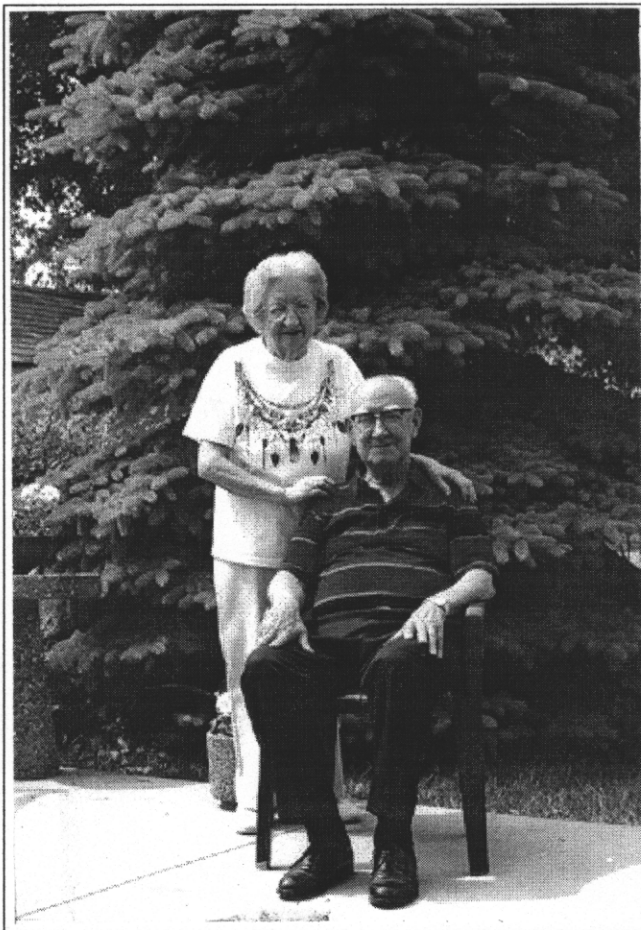
Dad was very proud of that little park near the airport. Anytime he and mom had visitors, somehow or other they always made sure that their friends got to see the park. Usually mom would take pictures while dad stood behind the sign with their guests.

My brothers and I always told dad that he should have held out for them to rename Douglas Park after him. After all, it was a lot closer to home and he wouldn't have to drive so far to show it. We were all very proud of him even though "his park" was just a little park.

On June 29, 1985, mom and dad celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a Mass in their honor at St. John Nepomuk Church with a large reception following at Roma Lodge. Guests came in from around the country, Canada and from West Germany.

Ten years later on June 29, 1995, they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary again with a Mass at St. John's and a smaller reception at the Spinning Wheel restaurant. They were surprised when their "German daughter", Marianne, walked into their living room with 60 long stem red roses that she had hand carried from Germany.

## From the photo album...



*Mary and Robert Heck posing for a picture for their 60th wedding anniversary in June, 1995.*

Mary & Robert traveled to all 50 States, Canada and throughout Europe during their 60 years together. They have three sons: Gary (Carol), Bob

(Gloria), and Don (Sharon). They have eight grandchildren: Cindy (Dennis), Lee, David, Bill (Tracy), Steve, Amy, Traci, and Jodi. They also have three great-grandchildren: John, PJ, and Laina.



*Robert G. Heck as a young coach in the 1930's.*



*L-R: Robert Heck, Robert Heck, Robert Heck, Robert Heck, and Robert Heck. Taken July, 1995, at the Heck Picnic.*

## A CLASS ACT

# Bob Heck's light shone on the council, on the diamond

Robert Heck, who died at age 86 Thursday in an auto accident here, held the record for the longest recorded service on the Racine City Council.

He served 34 years, and in that time, both his constituents and his colleagues on the council came to respect both his common sense and his tenacity.

Heck was president of the Racine City Council three times during those years and served at one time or another on just about every committee and commission the city had. He was a member of

the Finance Committee for 14 years and chaired the panel for six years.

Heck was a friendly sort, but when he got his teeth into an issue, he rarely let go until there was no other alternative. And he won more than he lost, which probably is one reason he was re-elected so often.

Winning more than losing was a commonplace to Bob Heck, whether in city hall or on a softball diamond. He may hold the unofficial record for most softball pitches by one person. Heck, an avid baseball and softball player, stayed active in the game as both player and manager with the Racine Moose Lodge until he was 70, when he slowed his pace, perhaps in order to give younger players a chance.

He served as president of the Old



**Robert Heck**  
we need more like him

Timers Sunday Softball League for 18 years and as president of the Wisconsin State Baseball League for three years.

Young athletes were one of his interests in his years as an official of the Old Timers Athletic Club and that interest may explain why no matter what his age, Bob Heck didn't grow old like a lot of the rest of us. Rather than dwelling on yesterday, which would have been easy for a lifelong Racine resident, he always was interested in today, and looking ahead to tomorrow.

His interest in the young, coupled with his position on the city council, made it possible for Heck to lobby successfully for creation of a park near the Batten Field airport. The park was acquired in 1972, and originally called Airport Park. But in 1986, the city rededicated the park, naming it Robert G. Heck Park in recognition both of his service to the city and his efforts on behalf of the park itself.

Expanding his interest in youth, Heck also was active in Toys for Tots, which he served as both director and volunteer.

Heck's services to the community were many, but perhaps his most endearing qualities were his sense of humor, his optimism and his good will, all of which made the rest of his accomplishments possible.

We need more like Bob Heck.