

Wayne-White Member Funds New Kids Playground

By Randy Olson

Jerry Sloan could easily be considered as the most famous customer/member of Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative. As head coach of the NBA's Utah Jazz, Sloan has a high profile career that jets him to about 22 different U.S. cities each year coaching the Jazz. While he could certainly live anywhere, Sloan spends a lot of time in the off-season in Hamilton County Illinois.

"This is really home to me, it's where I grew up and I really like the people and the lifestyle," said Sloan. "I have a lot of life-long friends that live here." He also appreciates the co-op employees and their hard work. "Thanks for keeping the lights on and doing what you do each day," said Sloan.

With the NBA season over, Sloan was recently home in McLeansboro for the ribbon cutting and dedication of "Kids Kingdom Playground," a project that was funded by the Bobbye and Jerry Sloan Hand-in-Hand Foundation. Over 500 citizen volunteers from McLeansboro and Hamilton County worked 8,372 man-hours to build the playground. It is located in Kiwanis Park, directly behind the swimming pool in McLeansboro.

The foundation was formed after Bobbye Sloan, Jerry's wife, lost her battle with pancreatic cancer in June 2004. The Sloan's children, Kathy, Brian and Holly, wanted to establish the foundation as an active tribute to their mother. Bobbye was well known for her caring demeanor and contributions to a variety of causes.

Kathy (Sloan) Wood is the Vice-President of the foundation and credits Mayor Dick Deitz of McLeansboro for orchestrating the massive volunteer effort

to build the playground. "I told the Mayor that Brian, Holly and I had decided that we really wanted to build a park playground. I gave him the check and told him goodbye," said Wood. "It was really his baby. Dick took over from there, got the ball rolling and mobilized a steering committee and a volunteer effort that has really brought this community together."

While grateful for the trust and confidence given to him by Wood, Deitz was quick to give credit to the Sloan family. "We are talking about a legacy here in southern Illinois," said Deitz. "The Sloan family has always been about making a difference in people's lives, particularly the children."

While Jerry and Bobbye were both very active in charitable work, the full scope of some of Bobbye's generosity was not completely understood by Jerry until after her death.



Jerry and Bobbye always enjoyed walking together at Dolan Lake. "I still take walks there just about every morning," said Sloan. "It's always been a special place to our family." Last year the Sloan Foundation was able to raise over \$300,000

through a variety of events including a 5K run and 1-mile fun walk on the grounds surrounding Dolan Lake.

This year's event takes place on Saturday, August 5. In addition to the walk/run, events will also include an auction with a variety of items donated by southern Illinois businesses, as well as sports memorabilia, including a basketball autographed by Shaquille O'Neal and Dwayne Wade of the Miami Heat.

Another former NBA player and coach will assist the effort. "Doug Collins is the honorary chairperson this year," said Sloan. "We are grateful for the support shown by so many people." If you wish to contribute or participate in the Hand-in-Hand Foundation activities at Dolan Lake on August 5, go to www.bobbyeandjerrysloan.org

Other benefactors of the Bobbye and Jerry Sloan Hand-in-Hand Foundation have been the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, various humane societies, as well as two college scholarships to Hamilton County students. I asked Jerry to sum up the impact of the playground construction and dedication. "It reminds me of 1984 when people lined the streets in McLeansboro after the boys won the state basketball tournament...I know that Bobbye would be very proud of this too," said Sloan. During final preparations for the dedication, Wood noticed a Cardinal bird perched on the fence overlooking the playground. "The Cardinal was always Mom's favorite bird," said Wood, "I feel that she is here with us watching this dedication event."



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