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**Street brawl led to forming of local Boys & Girls Clubs**

By *LEAH WEATHERSBY*

**The winter of 1943** was a turbulent time all over the country. Images of American soldiers fighting abroad during the Second World War- and men and women back home going to work in factories to support the war effort - leap to mind.

But one thing left out of those pictures is children, many of whom got little time with mom and dad as parents turned their attention to pressing war time matters.

**As the saying goes, boys will be boys and one cold, January night, a fight in the Greenwood neighborhood that erupted into a riot. It is estimated that 100-300 kids participated in the fray.**

This was not the only riot during that time in Greenwood. Turf brawls between Greenwood youths and their peers from Wallingford, Fremont and Ballard were not uncommon - especially when interlopers from the south tried to date Greenwood girls.

But idleness was named the official demon - causing the boys' destructive behavior. Several years later, the incident was portrayed in a documentary film about the founding of the Boys Clubs called "Nowhere to Go."

"We just ain't got no place to go," echoed one boy in the celluloid reenactment. And thus, the idea for the first Pacific Northwest Boys Club, to be located in Greenwood, was born.

The man credited with founding the Greenwood club was Joe Woelfert, a deputy in the King County Sheriff's office. Woelfert already had a reputation among local toughs as a good guy one could talk to, but with the Boys Club, he proved he could do more than listen.

Although Woelfert and his boss, Sheriff Harlan S. Callahan, had been talking for months about starting a boys club, finding space wasn't easy. In "Nowhere to Go," landlords say "no" to Woelfert (playing himself), reminding him "space is a premium, you know."

Fortunately, Charles Johnson, who owned an old honky-tonk called the Canton Club at 8537 Greenwood Ave N., eventually stepped forward and offered the Boys Club free rent for a year along with a \$50 cash donation and a telephone. By Sept. 10, 1943, 85 new club members were enjoying ping-pong tables, basketball hoops, a free jukebox, library, radio-phonograph and candy and coke machines in their new clubhouse. The opening night fete featured ice cream and a freckle contest - both much more wholesome distractions than fighting over the fillies. By all accounts, the Greenwood Boy's Club was a rousing success. Other clubs soon followed in many Seattle neighborhoods including Ballard, Wallingford and Lake City.

In May, 1945 an article appeared in a publication called Northwest Peace Officer which stated the following: "Today, but 14 months later, juvenile crime and juvenile delinquency in certain areas of King Co. are virtually extinct. Sheriff Callahan's Boys' clubs are the cause."

As the clubs grew, Woelfert left his post at the Sheriff's office to run them full time. He received many civic honors for his work including the Seattle Junior Chamber of Commerce's Distinguished Service Award for 1947 and the title of Young Seattle Man of the Year in 1946. Woelfert was born in New Westminster, British Columbia, in 1912, but his family moved to Seattle when he was just a baby. He attended school on Queen Anne Hill.

It seemed that no matter what job Woelfert was doing, he found a way to help others. One newspaper clipping published in the 1940s told the story of Woelfert as a manager at the old Dog House Restaurant (now the Hurricane Cafe) during the early days of the war, when young men came to Seattle between jobs, looking for work in the factories. Woelfert always found odd jobs for them around the restaurant, thereby saving their pride and helping them keep body and soul together.

After leaving the Boys Club, Woelfert went on to work for other county agencies including the Humane Society (not his most fondly-remembered post) and later the Prosecutor's Office where he helped track down deadbeat dads. Woelfert passed away in 1980, leaving his wife, Evelyn, two sons, and a legacy than can perhaps be best summed up in his own words to Seattle Post-Intelligencer columnist Walter Evans in 1975: "I guess I just like helping people."

The Boys Clubs organization expanded to include girls in 1991. (A parallel girls had formed in the late 1800s). The Boys & Girls Clubs of King County currently have 11 member clubs as well as many other local programs. The Boys & Girls Club in Greenwood (known as the North Seattle Boys & Girls Club) is now located at 8635 Fremont Ave. N - a stone's throw from its original location.