



# Brairie Gazette



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LAKEWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
SUMMER 2012

## Tacoma Speedway 1912-1922

By Steve Dunkelberger

During its years of operation between 1912 and 1922, the Tacoma Speedway, located in Lakewood, hosted some of the big names of racing, rivaling the best in the world. The "Who's Who" of races -- "Terrible" Teddy Tetzlaff, Earl Cooper, Barney Oldfield, among others -- left rubber on that track. Others left their lives. The grandstands closed in 1922, and the site is now home to Clover Park Technical College.

### Lakewood's Claim to Fame

"It was the most nationally known thing to happen to Lakewood and now no one knows about it," said



**Dr. Wayne Herstad**

Speedway historian Dr. Wayne Herstad, who has collected items relating to Tacoma Speedway for the past 40 years for a book he is writing about the track's notable history. He has binders of photos

## A WALK INTO HISTORY AT THE TACOMA SPEEDWAY

SUN.  
JULY  
22  
2012



5:00  
TO  
9:00  
PM

**Marymount Event Center**

**Spanaway, WA ~ Home of the LeMay Family Collection**

Tickets: \$50 ea. Available at Lakewood History Museum,  
6211 Mt. Tacoma Dr SW or call 253-682-3480 or  
visit [lakewoodhistorical.org](http://lakewoodhistorical.org)

**Sponsored by Lakewood Historical Society**

and programs organized by year just waiting for someone to ask about his collection. "It was a great track. Everyone got into the act."

The track was built by a group of Tacoma businessmen led by Arthur Pitchard, president of the Tacoma Automobile Association. They collected backers and built a five-mile, all-dirt track, which opened in 1912. The track ran around what is now Lakeview Avenue, where the grandstands stood, to Steilacoom Boulevard to Gravelly Lake Drive to 112th Street. The first races were held on July 5 and 6, 1912.

The track changed quickly in those first few years. It shrunk to a 3.5-mile course in 1913, then in 1914 to a two-mile track. The shorter course was roughly what is now Steilacoom Boulevard and

Gravelly Lake Drive to 100th, then back to Lakeview.

The grandstand shifted to Steilacoom Boulevard in 1914. A split board track replaced the dirt in 1915. The two-by-four planking was placed end-to-end -- not flat on the ground -- and the gaps between each board were stuffed with gravel to save on lumber. The track used 15 tons of 20-penny nails and took two million board feet. Track corners were banked

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# President's Message

The last issue featured the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Seattle World's Fair. This issue highlights two other anniversaries, the centennial of the Tacoma Speedway and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lakewood Colonial Center. Be sure to read these special articles written by **Steve Dunkelberger** and **Nancy Covert**.

The Special Event Committee has been very busy coordinating our next fund raising event being held on July 22<sup>nd</sup> to celebrate the **Centennial of the Tacoma Speedway**. See the event details elsewhere in this issue. I know a number of you will not be able to attend the event, so we have several other activities planned that will give you an opportunity to learn more about this fascinating part of our local history. Also, the **Tacoma Speedway commemorative coin** is available for only \$10 each. Visit the Museum or call 253-682-3480 to get your coin today.



We are especially pleased with the Speedway poster designed and created by **Chuck Mathias**, a retired Pierce Transit marketing specialist who lives in Steilacoom. The black and white image in the newsletter doesn't do it justice. For it to be appreciated, you must see it in color. We have them displayed at the Museum and at various local businesses. We have extra posters and flyers that you

are welcome to pick up to distribute to places you frequent.

Another major accomplishment is the launching of our new website! Please take a few minutes to visit [www.lakewoodhistorical.org](http://www.lakewoodhistorical.org).

Even if you don't have a computer, it is worth asking a friend or relative to help you view it. We want your input on how we can improve it and make suggestions on content. This is our "front door" to the world that goes way beyond Lakewood and the Pacific Northwest.

I'd like to thank **Stephen Neufeld** for assisting us in getting this accomplished. I'd also like to thank **Adam Welch** and **Waymond Hampton** from **Hemisphere Design**, our webhosts who have been with us since 2006. The "new look" is a result of input from our Society board and others and we have attempted to create an appealing site that encourages visitors to stay longer. If they only have a few minutes, we have placed the pertinent features on the "home page" so they get the details for Events, Exhibits and News at a glance.

Another article in this issue I urge you to read is about the **9/11 Reflection Park** that West Pierce Fire and Rescue (formerly Lakewood Fire Department) is planning at their station in University Place. They were honored to receive an artifact from New York and the dedication of the park is scheduled for September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Yours Sincerely,

*Becky Huber*

### PRAIRIE GAZETTE

Prairie Gazette is the official publication of the Lakewood Historical Society. The newsletter is published four times a year. Distribution is directly to members and available at the Lakewood History Museum, 6211 Mt Tacoma Drive SW Lakewood, WA 98499. Phone: 253-682-3480

The staff of Prairie Gazette actively encourages input from the Society's members as well as the general public regarding story ideas or any other aspects of this newsletter, and the Lakewood Historical Society.

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### MEETINGS

The Lakewood Historical Society formed in 1998 to preserve and share Lakewood's rich history through programs, displays and publications. The Society offers frequent programs on topics of historical interest. Most programs are free and open to the public. Visit our website for information on events and activities:

[www.LakewoodHistorical.org](http://www.LakewoodHistorical.org)

Newsletter Editor: **Stephen Neufeld**

## History Museum News Recent Donations

The Collections Committee is pleased to have received several fascinating items donated from former Lakewood residents.



Edie Brewer's daughter, **Jan Taylor** (photo above), brought in a beautiful footstool made by Edie's great grandfather, Clinton DeWitt Davison, at his furniture factory on Chambers Creek. Edie, who died in February, 2012 at the age of 88, was a charter member of the Society and Little Church on the Prairie.

She also donated a complete set of William Bonney's History of Pierce County, Washington, a reprint of the 1927 edition, and plat maps of her family's home on Ponce de Leon Creek, near the Lakewood Towne Center on Gravelly Lake Drive.



**Johnnie C. Cawthon** (photo below left) donated his father's Fairmont motor. Johnnie A. Cawthon, who died in 2006 at the age of 82, was a member of the Early Day Gas Engine and Tractor Association, often won awards and receiving recognition from engines in his collection.



In June, Society members, **Mayo Marsh**, from San Carlos, CA and her brother **Tim Marsh** (photo above) from McMinnville, OR, visited the Museum. They had lived in the Lakewood area in the 50's-60's. They toured the area visiting their high schools and other locations.

Mayo, Class of '62, Clover Park High School and Tim, Class of '66 from Lakes High School, are the children of Dr Robert Marsh, who served as Chief Dental Officer at the American Lake VA Hospital. Tim has donated numerous items from his Lakes High School days, many of them were used in last year's Clover Park School District exhibit.

## West Pierce Fire and Rescue Plans "9/11 Reflection Park"

By Ken Sharp, Chief  
West Pierce Fire & Rescue

A few months ago, West Pierce Fire & Rescue was fortunate enough to acquire a rare artifact; a piece of the remains of the World Trade Center. They are now in the process of properly honoring and displaying this important piece of history in their 9/11 Reflection Park that will be built in front of

this fire station at 3631 Drexler Drive in University Place. An organized outreach program to civic groups, businesses, and other organizations is now underway, offering them an opportunity to be a part of this historic project.

Employees of West Pierce are playing a significant role in this project, including an opportunity to "sponsor" one or more of the 343 FDNY firefighters who perished in the twin towers. It's a personal connection between the West Pierce employees and those in the FDNY who sacrificed on 9/11. Once all the names are sponsored, these sponsorships will raise more than \$40,000.

As West Pierce Fire Chief Ken Sharp says, "This 9/11 Reflection Park offers a unique opportunity to build something meaningful, contribute something back to our community and to look back with our family and friends in the years to come at something that will forever commemorate and acknowledge our collective loss on 9/11."

A ceremonial groundbreaking of the park will occur on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Substantial completion of the park and a formal dedication ceremony will occur on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Please feel free to visit the park website:

[www.westpierce911park.org](http://www.westpierce911park.org)  
and give serious consideration to becoming a part of this meaningful project.

**Did you know?**

**The Lakewood History  
Museum is open  
Wednesday-Saturday  
Noon to 4 pm!**

**6211 Mt Tacoma Dr SW  
Lakewood, WA 98499  
253-682-3480**

