

These Boys of Summer are Takin' Care of Business

By Patty-Pat Kozlowski

In 1973, Randy Bachman penned the working man's anthem sufficiently titled, "Taking Care of Business". And 39 years later, Bachman's blue collar, "get the job done right" lyrics could be the theme song for a crew of four skilled tradesmen working in Parks & Recreation's Northern Division.

Deep in the belly and innards of the 36 swimming pools that make up the Northern District, you'll find Mike Finn, Donald Bear, Joe Rainis and Jeff Bass who we're nicknaming "The Boys of Summer". This foursome is working above and beyond the call of duty to get pools operational for the 2012 Summer Pool Season.

Something Smells Rotten In Feltonville

On any given summer day, the pool at Feltonville Recreation Center, 231 Wyoming Avenue, is full of splashing swimmers and the shrill siren of the lifeguard's whistle fits right in with the sound of the City. But Feltonville's summer 2012 season was in jeopardy a few weeks ago when the underground high rate sand filter tanks were found to be completely rotted out.

"See that manhole cover?" asked Bobby McDowell, Northern Division's Building Maintenance Supervisor, pointing to a heavy metal cover just off the Feltonville Rec Center pool deck. "We removed that and the entire filter system was rotted out. We needed a brand new pool pump and motor for starters."

Such a big job could easily qualify as a Capital Program project that would be subcontracted out to private contractors bidding for City of Philadelphia projects. A job like this was looking to cost in the ballpark of \$30-\$35,000, and the Feltonville pool would still not be open for the summer given the timeline it takes for funding to be approved and to then put the job out for bid.

Right about now you should be hearing the lyrics to that '70s song "Taking Care of Business".

That's when the crew of Mike Finn, Donald Beam, Joe Rainis and Jeff Bass came up to the plate and told McDowell they could totally do this job in-house while saving the City time and money but most importantly, have the pool open for the kids this summer.

Over the course of one weekend, the four guys gutted the rotted pool filter system at Feltonville, replacing it with a brand new pool pump and motor that PPR had in its warehouse inventory. They filled the filter tank (equivalent in size to a Volkswagen Beetle) with seventy-three (73) 50-pound bags of sand and twenty-eight (28) 50-pound bags of gravel. Now, Feltonville Pool is ready for bellyflops, games of Marco Polo and swim meets.

“These guys all have the mentality of just getting in there and getting the job done right,” said McDowell. “They’re not going to just throw a band-aid on the problem because in the long run, it’s these guys who are going to have to come back and fix it, so they do it right the first time.”

McDowell couldn’t say enough about his crew who, at the time of this interview, were doing what they do best--getting the pools ready for the 2012 Summer Season. The team of Beam and Rainis were down in the filter room of Lawncrest Rec Center trying to get a dinosaur of a pool filter to breath another summer while over at Hunting Park Pool, Finn and Bass were grinding and soldering a pool motor full of rust that was frozen and wouldn’t kick on. This crew was literally in the belly of the beast, working against the clock trying to get water out of a rock. “We work with what we got and we do our best with that,” said Finn who has the reputation as the workhorse leader. “Sometimes we don’t have what we need but we always try to get it done as best we can.”

“We knew we could get that job done ourselves and get it done right,” said Beam, standing knee deep in a filter room pit at Lawncrest. His co-worker Rainis was performing surgery on a pool motor that seemed to flat line over the winter but quipped, “We don’t mind work. The public thinks City workers are bums, but that’s not us.”

“These guys probably worked on 10-12 pool filter systems that were almost impossible to repair but they dug in there and got it done,” said McDowell, who added that this crew of workers would rather tackle these jobs in-house than bid them out to subcontractors. “Nobody really knows what it takes to get the pools ready in the city; it’s not just throwing a hose in the pool and filling it up. These guys are the ones who really make it happen and they know their trade to perfection.”

Thanks to this foursome who thought outside the box, or in this case filter room, a few more City pools will be open and operational this summer.

“Just taking care of business, anyway. Taking care of business, everyday.”