

Was Donn Eisele Park originally a swimming pool?

We recently received the above inquiry. We've also been asked "who was Donn Eisele; and why was a park named after him?". For the answers, we'll begin in the mid-late 1950s—when developers Robert G. Lubbers and John Hoffman (Lubb-Hoff, Inc.) imagined something ambitious: two new subdivisions in far-northwest Wilton Manors; totaling 243 homes. They would be dubbed **Jenada Villas** and **Jenada Isle**. [The origin of the "Jenada" name remains unclear.]



A 1957 Fort Lauderdale News article promoted the Jenada subdivisions as far more than a place to live—they were billed as "*a complete lifestyle*" featuring "*Fort Lauderdale's only resident-owned recreation park.*" The park would have an impressive array of amenities: a parking area, playground, small and large swimming pools, picnic grounds, a tennis court, a shuffleboard court, and even a designated space for boat docking. This was at a time when public pools were a rarity and backyard pools a high-end luxury. [An interesting sidenote: Al Hagen donated a section of his park to be used specifically for a swimming pool—but ultimately it was never built.]

Other ads for the subdivisions repeatedly emphasized terms such as "*semi-private enclave*" and "*highly restricted*". We've not actually seen the restrictions, but have been told they ranged from specifying construction materials, paint and roof colors; to only allowing fold-up, umbrella-style clotheslines.

The recreation park opened **December 1957** under the ownership of the **Jenada Villas Recreation and Social Club**. It included versions of the previously described amenities; but for the tennis court becoming a basketball court. Families paid an annual membership fee to use the facility. At its prime, there was even a full-time lifeguard.

Throughout the **1960s and 1970s**, the Club thrived. Longtime residents recall birthday parties, swim races, holiday gatherings, and even neighborhood holiday parades leading to the pool. But as private pools became more common in the **1980s** and City parks expanded, the Club's popularity declined, membership dwindled and it eventually closed and was abandoned.

In **1997**, the City of Wilton Manors purchased the property for \$50,000 for its valuable river access. It was later restored as a natural park—**Donn Eisele Park**; named for the Apollo 7 astronaut, Jenada Isle resident, and former City Commissioner.

For more Jenada-related newspaper clippings and photos look for the link under **RECENT ADDITIONS** at wmhistory.org