

The Story of Melvin Park

By Katherine Pettit

During its first summer, Melvin Park, Chapin's newest recreation facility was humming with activity. The baseball fields were busy, tennis courts full, children were playing on the splash pad, and a family birthday party was in full swing at the pavilion. Throughout the fall, the park stayed busy, with football games, family gatherings, and until the very last minute, a splash pad that was filled with fun and laughter.

Clearly, Melvin Park is a welcome addition to services provided by the Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission in the Chapin area. Moreover, it's the realization of a vision by a number of community leaders who share a passion for Chapin and its children.



It all began with W. Brinkley Melvin, an entrepreneur who raised his family in Chapin when it was much smaller. "I coached my three boys, Parker, Mark and Michael, in sports for 18 years," he said. "My wife, Robin, and I, and our children, loved it when Crooked Creek Park opened, but soon, as it became increasingly difficult to schedule practice fields, we realized that this valuable resource was going to need more room to accomplish its goals. In the early 90s, I went to my good friend, real estate broker Gerald Steele, and we agreed that Chapin was going to run out of places for kids to play sports. We began to talk about another park, and now, finally, it's become a reality."



At the request of the extended Melvin family, the park is named to honor Brinkley's parents, Henry and Harriett Melvin, who taught their offspring to love sports and to always champion underdogs. Henry passed away in 2004, but Harriett was able to attend the grand opening of the park. "My father taught me always to give back," Brinkley shared. "He helped me understand that some are more blessed than others, but all of us can contribute to the common good." He explained that development of the park allowed him to help create something good for the community, and dedicate that creation to beloved family.

Brinkley says the project had many champions in addition to his financial and personal commitment, among those are estate broker Gerald Steele and former ICRC executive director, Elizabeth Taylor. Elizabeth has long been a champion of the value of public private partnerships and Melvin Park was a perfect example. Gerald helped in putting together the tracts of land needed near Chapin Middle School and Crooked Creek Park. "People trust Gerald and know that he is always looking for a way to benefit everyone," Brinkley said, adding, "He manages to connect old and new Chapin in a positive way."

"I remember meeting Elizabeth and planting the seed that we needed a new park," Brinkley laughed. "She was so enthusiastic about what it could do for the community, and the idea was perfectly aligned with the Commission ten-year master plan. In fact, a Citizen's Task Force established by the Commission in 2008 envisioned a park that would include a Splash Pad, soccer fields and tennis courts which may be the most popular place in Chapin in the summer."

Melvin Park features eight asphalt tennis courts, baseball and soccer fields, concessions, a pavilion available for rentals, and the splash pad. There is room for more growth, and it's very close to schools and Crooked Creek Park.

"Chapin was a very special place to raise a family," Brinkley shared. "Developing character in our children is important to our small community and we don't ever want to lose that. We all knew growth was coming, and this core group of people wanted to provide a park that could help keep the community spirit and friendliness a part of a larger Chapin."



Indeed, the \$7 million project has grown beyond anyone's initial expectations. Since opening, there've been 50,000+ visitors for tournaments, youth sports, tennis and the splash pad. "Part of our enthusiasm has come from knowing what a fantastic organization Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission is," he said. "We've seen what they have accomplished in Irmo and Chapin, and if our gift has helped create a place for families and children to play together, we are delighted. It will continue to evolve into the kind of park that will attract large events such as youth baseball tournaments and that's a plus for Chapin."

He smiled. "There are many hands and hearts that love Chapin."

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