



Katherine Jones / The Idaho Statesman

Norvan Jensen has been living on the family farm on Lake Hazel Road near Five Mile Road since he was 6 years old. Rather than sell to developers — “Anything but developers,” he said — Jensen and his wife, Leona, sold the 66.22 acres to the city for use as a park. “People were coming around making offers,” Norvan Jensen joked. “We thought we should get rid of it before we took an offer.” Although the land was valued at \$665,000, the city paid just \$250,000. “Money’s not everything,” Jensen said. “They let us live here — that’s mainly what we’re after. It couldn’t be any better.”

Land sold to city for pearl of a park

Pearl Jensen Community Park will be one of Boise’s largest

By Shannon Lafferty
The Idaho Statesman 4/20/00

After 6-year-old Norvan Jensen rode into the Treasure Valley in a Model T in 1928, he and his parents farmed a rocky patch of land 10 dusty miles from Boise. Now, the Jensen family farm will be joining the city as one of its largest parks.

Norvan Jensen and his wife, Leona, have sold the city their 66.22-acre farm for \$250,000, donating \$415,000 of the property’s value. The land on Lake Hazel Road near Five Mile Road is valued at \$665,000.

The park will be named Pearl Jensen Community Park after Norvan Jensen’s mother.

“The park may become a pearl among the city’s jewels,” Mayor Brent Coles said when the City Council passed a resolution naming the future park this month.

The city is in the process of acquiring a neighboring 19.22 acres and will eventually develop the entire 85.44 acres, said

Mollie Holt, superintendent of administration for Boise Parks and Recreation.

Norvan Jensen, 77, said he didn’t want to see his childhood home and romping grounds carved up into subdivisions. So he and his wife decided to donate the property.

“We started having developers come out here and want to buy the place. We didn’t want that,” he said.

Leona Jensen said a wildlife park is really the perfect use for the land that has a small creek and is home to ducks, geese and foxes.

“I always felt I lived in a park. We had a nice picnic table and lots of pretty trees.”

Donating the farm as a park will preserve the land and will incorporate the family name into Boise history.

Norvan Jensen, his parents and his sister settled in Ada County in 1928 after spending time in Indiana and Alberta, Canada. The family made the trek across the continent in a Ford

Model T, traversing rough roads. “There were a lot of muddy roads and up and down,” Norvan Jensen said. “I remember we all got out and had to push the car up one hill.”

In Ada County, his father, Wilford Daniel Jensen, worked for other farmers in the first few years. In the 1930s, the family bought land from another farmer and later purchased additional land from the state for around \$600.

“In those days, a dollar was a dollar,” Norvan Jensen said.

The land was originally dry fields of sagebrush and rocks.

“Everybody stayed away from it because they didn’t think they could get irrigation water,” Norvan Jensen said.

But his father was able to use water from a nearby canal. The family raised dairy cows and grew alfalfa, grain and other crops, visiting the city just once or twice a week.

Norvan Jensen helped out on the farm milking cows. He took over the farm in 1939 when his father died, just days before crews strung power lines out to the land.

“What a relief to have an electric milking machine,” Nor-

van Jensen said. “I was left with 18 cows. That would have taken forever.”

Norvan Jensen has spent nearly all of his life on the farm. The couple will be able to remain in their farm house for the rest of their lives.

Pearl Jensen Community Park won’t be developed immediately, according to Parks and Recreation officials. A neighboring farmer is growing alfalfa on the land now.

The park site is currently outside the city limits, but in Boise’s area of impact, which is land the city expects to eventually annex.

Boise Parks and Recreation typically acquires recreation land years before the city develops it. The city owns 80 active and open space park sites that total 2,334 acres. Ten sites totaling 246 acres have not been “greened up” or developed.

Director Jim Hall said working in advance helps the department beat the curve in acquiring land. “By doing that, we’ve been ahead of developers buying land,” Hall said.

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Jefferson Elementary provides more th

Forgive my shameless boosterism, but let me tell you the story of Jefferson School, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Jefferson is the neighborhood school my kids attend. We’ll be there at 5 p.m. today for an Open House to mark the

out copies tonight. After poring over PTA scrapbooks, talking to principals, students, teachers and neighbors, I have a fresh appreciation for the central role education plays in our democracy. Jefferson is among thou-



Boise and Meridian. And, it is among a dozen Boise elementary schools with a self-contained special ed classroom for the mentally challenged. One of the former students I interviewed was Neil Hosford, the award-winning architect who designed the Washington

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