



1-800-HANSONS WINDOWS SIDING ROOFING GET IT DONE! WIN A \$50,000 HOME MAKEOVER! CLICK HERE

- HOME NEWS BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT TRAVEL LIVING FORUMS SHOP JOBS AUTOS REAL ESTATE CLASSIFIEDS

MLive.com - Booth Newspapers - Ann Arbor - Bay City - Flint - Grand Rapids - Jackson - Kalamazoo - Muskegon - Saginaw - Statewide

SEARCH: Enter Keyword(s) GO!



Michigan News

The Latest News, Updates, Photos, Videos and Opinions

INSIDE NEWS

- Michigan News Home
RSS | What's RSS?
Michigan AP Updates
NewsTalk Forum
Find Your Newspaper

Related Sections:

- Elections Coverage
Capital News Service
Michigan Business
Detroit Auto Show
Michigan Environment
Michigan Weather
Opinion & Columns
Michigan GovTV

More Resources:

- Photos | Your Pics!
Email Newsletters
Blogs & RSS Feeds
Paid Death Notices
Facebook us!

Browse by day posted:

Select a date GO

Browse by week posted:

Select a date GO

REAL-TIME UPDATES

Ann Arbor News

- Ann Arbor man struck and killed along I-96 near Detroit

MORE NEWS >>

Bay City Times

- Standish casino's profits amount to \$17 million in first three months

MORE TIMES >>

Flint Journal

- GM plant in Flint one of four to lose shift; General Motors says layoffs to start in July

MORE JOURNAL >>

Grand Rapids Press

- Gonzo's Top 5: Start weekend early with Art Around Town

MORE PRESS >>

'Play Ball!' First pitch in Little League opener a special event

by Tom Rademacher | The Grand Rapids Press
Saturday April 26, 2008, 5:10 PM



Press Photo/Emily Zoladz

Dave Schultheiss gives two thumbs up to a cheering Northern Little League crowd at Riverside Park Saturday morning. Despite his special needs, Schultheiss has become a staple on Grand Rapids' north side, mowing lawns and making friends.

How do you improve on an already perfect game like baseball?

You bring in the say-hey kid from the neighborhood, and let him toss out the ceremonial first pitch.

That's exactly what they do at Riverside Park, which Northern Little League calls home, and where lumbering David Schultheiss is the biggest fan.

David got the call a little after 9 a.m. Saturday, just like he did last year, and lobbed a perfect strike to the plate that helped kick off the season for a blue-collar ball league that's been around since at least 1960.

"Let's play ball!" David barked into the microphone, to the thunderous applause of several hundred people who braved frigid conditions Saturday as a stiff breeze swept off the Grand River.

And then he gave his trademark greeting -- two thumbs up and a crooked smile to melt bricks.

They could have invited the mayor to fire the first pitch, of course. Or a city commissioner or businessman. Some pillar.

Instead, they chose everybody's buddy, a special person who works the Little League crowd like a seasoned politician, but with only this as his agenda: Friendship.

"We first did this last year, and people had tears in their eyes," said Cheryl Johnson, 40, whose daughter and two sons play with Northern teams.

"I grew up down here, and David has been coming to this park every single night for years."

A thousand people will tell you the same story: How Dave makes his way from the home he keeps on Knapp Street NE to cheer on kids whose names he doesn't even know.

"He sat right there and watched our entire practice about four weeks ago,"

WEATHER

Lansing, MI



30° F
-1° C

- Other Cities, Radar, More ...
Change Location
Radar images | Weather alerts

WEATHER CENTRAL >>

THINK YOU HAVE PRO POWER? ENTER TO WIN A TRIP TO MEET THE PROS. mycokerewards GO POWERADE

MICHIGAN LOTTERY MEGA MILLIONS Current Jackpot: \$85 MILLION

FORUMS

NewsTalk

- free money for big oil by 94guy
If I find out by Dysted
devalue the dollar... by 94guy

Enter Forum >>

Business Forum

- Shy Enterprises, Inc Ann... by archery1
LG VX 8300 by hockeystar2
New Security Firm by reynoldsj05

Enter Forum >> | All Forums

My LASIK was GUARANTEED! What's holding you back? Cindy before LASIK: 20/400 after LASIK: 20/15 0% Interest for 12 Months! Call 616.575.6700 or CLICK HERE to schedule your free consultation. GRAND RAPIDS EYE INSTITUTE Dr. Brian Bearie

Jackson Cit Pat

- [Jackson's one-way streets could stay awhile](#)

[MORE CIT PAT »](#)

Kalamazoo Gazette

- [Gilmore Artist Ingrid Fliter shares her expertise](#)

[MORE GAZETTE »](#)

Muskegon Chronicle

- [Students at Ferrysburg charter school engaged in the arts](#)

[MORE CHRONICLE »](#)

Saginaw News

- [New Saginaw News area news section](#)

[MORE NEWS »](#)



AP NEWSFLASH

Michigan News

- [Daimler's 1st-quarter profit slips without one-time gains 4/29/2008, 8:16 a.m. EDT](#)
- [Homes facing foreclosure more than doubled in 1Q from 2007 4/29/2008, 5:39 a.m. EDT](#)
- [Retail chain's politicking causes investigation in Michigan 4/29/2008, 5:34 a.m. EDT](#)

[MORE MICHIGAN AP »](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

- [Grand Hotel, Mackinac Island, MI - See our special packages.](#)

CONTESTS

- [Contests & Games. Click here!](#)

MICHIGAN IN IRAQ

- [Support forum](#)
- [Casualties list](#)
- [Offer aid](#)
- [Latest stories](#)

RELATED LINKS

- [Newhouse News Service](#)
- [Religion News Service](#)
- [Business Finder](#)
- [Local Events & Listings](#)
- [Maps & Directions](#)

said Dean Marshall, who coaches a T-ball team sponsored by Coit Gravel. "I mean, the whole practice. And then he said he'd be back for the next one, and he was."

Added Joey Sutherlin, 37, as he shielded son Chase, 2, against the cold: "Every neighborhood kid knows Dave, from the time they're little. You can't go anywhere on the North Side -- not Northfield Lanes, Briggs Pool or this park -- that he's not there."

"Literally, he's an icon."

I first met David about 10 years ago, and was so touched by his sense of compassion that I followed him around the better part of a day as he cut neighbors' lawns.

He spent as much time cooing at flitting sparrows as he did with the mower. "They're so darn cute," he said time and again of the birds. "Lookit that, lookit that; they're not hardly afraid. So cute. So cute."

Because Dave can resemble the character Lennie in Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men," both in appearance and tone, it's important for newcomers to the North End to sometimes meet him via a third party, said Mike Helsel, Northern's president.

"Every year, we make sure to introduce him to new families who might be put off a bit by his exuberance," Helsel says. "We want everybody to feel comfortable with Dave."

Though 55, Dave generates all the innocence of a 10-year-old, giving high-fives to anyone who'll take them, and greeting people with hearty handshakes, earning him nicknames liked "Shakin' Dave" and "Howyadoin' Dave."

Until a couple of years ago, Dave lived with parents Fred and Faye. They've both since passed, and Dave tends the modest home with help from a nearby sister.

He's become expert at using the bus to get around town, but his favorite haunt is just steps away at the park, where baseball games run virtually every afternoon and evening, seven months a year.

On Saturday, teams like "Grand Rapids Auto Parts" and "Kay's Pharmacy" and "Kool Toyota" took to the fields and stood for opening ceremonies, which included the singing of the National Anthem by Aubrey Clark, 11.

Her great-grandfather, George LeMire, then asked God's blessing on the fields, and reminded everyone Our Lord's favorite sport is baseball -- if you just re-work the opening to the Book of Genesis to sound like "In the big inning..."

Then it was Dave's turn, and after setting down a plastic bag filled with sandwiches and V-8 Juice to sustain him throughout another long day at the park, he gripped the ball and let it fly.

He raised his arms in glee. "That was a strike, wasn't it?" he asked no one in particular.

And who would argue?

Right down the middle.

On a Saturday at the ball field, something perfect.



Press Photo/Emily Zoladz

Schultheiss throws the first pitch at Northern Little League's season opener Saturday.



Press Photo/Emily Zoladz

It's easy to see how Schultheiss comes by his nicknames "Shakin' Dave" and "Howyadoin' Dave." Here he greets Anna Geske, 11, of Grand Rapids.

[Send To A Friend](#) | [Print this](#) | [Permalink](#)

[Reddit](#) [Digg](#) [del.icio.us](#) [Google](#) [Yahoo](#) [Facebook](#)

COMMENTS (0) [Post a comment](#)

Username (Don't Have a Username? [Sign up here](#)):

Password: _____

Remember Me



[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Forums](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Autos](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Shopping](#)
[Complete Forecast](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [RSS Terms and Conditions](#) | [Site Index](#) | [About Us](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Help/Feedback](#)

[Ann Arbor News](#) | [Bay City Times](#) | [Flint Journal](#) | [Grand Rapids Press](#)
[Jackson Citizen Patriot](#) | [Kalamazoo Gazette](#) | [Muskegon Chronicle](#) | [Saginaw News](#)

© 2008 Michigan Live LLC. All Rights Reserved. Use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [Advertising Agreement](#), [User Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).