

Smoke Dreams & Remembering

by Edwin Wollenberg, Retired Supt.

However you may feel about it, I guess there are sound reasons for not burning leaves. Their smoke adds to the smog and air pollution, their smoldering flames create a fire hazard, and unburned leaves make good mulch and compost. Burning them is both wasteful and hazardous, so nowadays enlightened people compost autumn leaves or let the trash men haul them away, to an already overfilled landfill while waiting for the approval of a new and controversial site.

But now and then somebody forgets all these good reasons for not burning, or ignores them, and rakes a pile of leaves into some safe place and burns them, for his own good reason. When he does, other nostalgic people sniff the evening air and remember forgotten autumns when leaf raking was the incense of October evenings. Leisurely, uncrowded evenings, uninterrupted by television and unhurried by the false belief of lengthening daylight saving time.

It isn't only the leaf smoke, pungent as it is. It is all the other remembered fragrances of this season. The spiced aroma from the pickling kettle in my mother's kitchen, the acrid scent of black walnut hulls, the smell of roasting chestnuts or toasted marshmallows, the beady tang of apple cider, the savory simmer of mincemeat in the making, and the tantalizing smell of pumpkin pie in the oven.

It's frost mornings, and Indian Summer days, and the smell of wood smoke curling from an evening chimney.

It is wasteful, unwise, and in some places illegal to burn leaves. And yet it is October, autumn evenings and remembered

years. If you are middle-aged, or further along in years like I am, don't allow yourself to smell it or you will wonder as I do, and ask, "What happened to those memorable years"?



Group of Chicagoland Superintendents on a tour of Wrigley Field in early August.



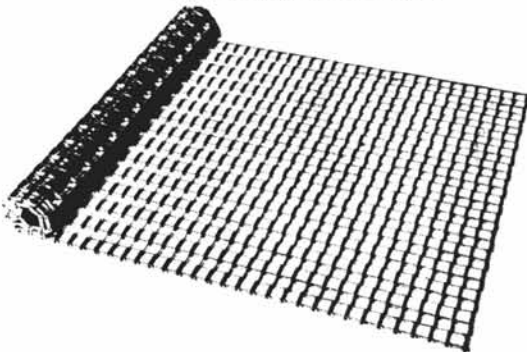
Left to right: Ed Fisher, Fred Opperman, Carl Hoppfan, Mr. & Mrs. Mark Kowalczyk, Dennis Wilson and Verlyn Strellner.

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