



Lindsay Niegelberg ■ Daily Times

A wrought-iron sign designates the Minford Little League fields as Robert B. Vallandingham Memorial Park on Saturday. Vallandingham was a Southern Ohio Correctional Facility corrections officer who was killed during the 1993 riots.

PARK NAMED FOR DECEASED SOCF GUARD

By FRANK LEWIS

PDT Staff Writer

Family and friends say that on any given Saturday in the spring and summer, you could have found Robert B. "Bobby" Vallandingham at a baseball diamond in the Minford area.

It was the general consensus of those present at the dedication of a new youth sports complex at Minford Saturday, Vallandingham would have been deeply involved in the huge facility, but Vallandingham was murdered during the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility riot of Easter Sunday 1993. Vallandingham was the only corrections officer killed in the riot.

Saturday morning, hundreds of parents, children and citizens of the Minford area walked through a

"Sports was always a big part of Bob's life," said Vallandingham's widow, Peggy Vallandingham. "And to have this field dedicated to him, to his memory, is just phenomenal. We couldn't have asked for anything that pleased us more."

Vallandingham's son, Robert B. II, sat in the dugout of one of the fields as the announcer introduced the players, coaches and managers of each baseball, T-ball and softball team.

"I think this is great, to have dad's name on this, I think he would be ecstatic," Bobby Vallandingham II said. "I'm sure he's all smiles right now."

Bobby Vallandingham II said he had fond memories of sharing sports events with his father: "Minor league, little league, senior league, I always looked forward to summertime playing ball."



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Clockwise from top left, Robert B. Vallandingham's grandson, Robert III; brother, Michael; widow, Peggy; son, Robert II; sister, Shirley Osborn; and granddaughter, Morgan, 11, stand around third base.

Park

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Jake Hackworth is a board member and was one of the people who has seen the project come to fruition.

"Here in the Minford area we have our youth soccer program, pee wee football program, and our Little League baseball program," he said. "We have five diamonds, for football we have a practice field and a playing field, on our soccer fields we play U-sixes, all the way up to U-12's here, and then the U-15's play at the high school facility.

He said the league had a grant of just more than \$200,000 dollars when it bought the property.

"So to come up with a total cost of what we took in as donations, and the money we made, I'd say there's a good \$300,000 here already," he said.

Hackworth said the decision to put Vallandingham's name on the complex took place right after the riot.

"They had a memorial fund for the Little League because Mr. Vallandingham was involved with Little League," he said. "He loved it and we felt at that time that we were going to do this, it

has just taken to now to get it over with. But it was an easy decision, since he was involved with the Little League, and then his service, it was a 'no brainer.'"

Frank Grasso is president of the league and spent the day introducing the teams to the cheering fans.

"The ceremony was held in two parts. We had the dedication of our field to Robert Vallandingham, who lost his life in the 1993 prison riots, and the park was dedicated to him. Keith Melvin and Brett McGraw were behind making the actual wrought-iron sign that's in our entrance-way," Grasso said.

"The second part of the ceremony is introducing the new baseball season, and it's important to this community, because it brings us together. A lot of people work on the fields. It's a team effort, and it gives us a chance to lead by example to the children."

The late Vallandingham's sister attended the dedication.

"It brings back a lot of memories of Bob's past," said Shirley Osborn. "He would be very, very proud of this. Mom and dad would be ecstatic. Bob was always a sports fanatic. It's been a sad day, but it's been a happy day."