

PLAY BALL

By Eliot Metzger

One of my favorite scenes in that old movie, [Field of Dreams](#), is where James Earl Jones—in his deep, booming voice—tells Kevin Costner [Ray Kinsella]:

The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It has been erased like a blackboard, rebuilt, and erased again. But baseball has marked the time.

It's true—and it's how I've come to mark the time. The same can be said for Lake Oswego.

There is an old picture that to this day hangs in the Lake Oswego Library. I first saw it 35 years ago, in 2015. I was there looking for a book (the library was still full of books back then) and I had my youngest son with me. He was just a toddler and had recently graduated from walking to running, so when the elevator reached the second floor and the doors opened, he bolted.

I eventually chased him down. As I gathered the books he had strewn about, I mouthed "Sorry!" to the librarian and received a warm, understanding smile in return.

Then I looked down to the end of the shelves, where my toddler was still 'helping' me find my book. On the wall behind him was a large, black-and-white photograph of the [Lake Oswego baseball team](#). It was from the early 1900s. When I scooped up my son, he looked at the picture, pointed, smiled and said, "Bay Baa." I smiled too.

Plenty has changed in Lake Oswego since that picture was taken. Gone are the short-brimmed hats, and those heavy, wool uniforms. That's a good thing, because by the 1990s our summers were getting hotter. The summer of 1998 broke all records, but that record fell in 2005, again in 2010, and again in 2014, 2015, and so on.

By the 2020s, heat waves were cancelling baseball games around the country—even in Lake Oswego—due to extreme temperatures. I had to explain to my boys that it was so hot, and the air was so dirty, that it would be unhealthy to go outside and play baseball on those days. There were of course, other, bigger problems in the world at that time, but telling them they could not go out and play ball ranks as one of the more disappointing moments I've had as a father.

Fortunately, baseball has always been bipartisan. The impact on America's pastime helped move the country beyond politically-driven debates and into conversations about solutions.

It was a much prouder moment for me as a dad when I could show my boys that Lake Oswego was leading many of those conversations. It wasn't anything extreme, but there were gradual and noticeable changes. The boys had always liked construction sites, and by the time they were teenagers they were pointing to homes or buildings being renovated and they'd say, "Hey, check it out, that one has those new power-generating windows!" or "I bet that family won't pay a dime on their energy bill!" (I raised them, as my father raised me, to keep energy bills low.)



Lake Oswego was also one of the first cities to show what sustainable suburban transportation could look like. We made national headlines in 2030 as the city with highest concentration of both telecommuters and electric vehicles (EVs). That was thanks to a high-speed fiber network that enabled HD video conferencing hubs throughout the city and a first-of-its-kind community EV purchase. More than 150 households had pooled their funds to buy Tesla vehicles at a bulk discount.

That summer, my two older sons got quite a surprise when they came home from college and I picked them up at the airport driving an old 2015 Tesla Model X. They knew I had wanted one for a long time, but they thought it was ridiculous that I was driving it myself. "Stop fooling around, old man," they said. "Just put it in autodrive and turn on the ballgame. We want to watch our Mariners beat your Giants."

They're Mariners fans mainly because it became so much easier to get back and forth to Seattle while they were growing up. Trains, planes, and automobiles have come a long way. City-to-city transport is faster, cheaper, and cleaner than I ever could have imagined. From our house to seats in the bleachers in Seattle, it takes less than two hours. That would have been crazy to suggest 35 years ago.

Perhaps most impressive of all, though, have been the bikes. At one point, only the most dedicated bikers would brave the routes from Lake Oswego to Portland. Now you can borrow bikes (including electric bikes) from racks around the city. You can get anywhere in Lake Oswego in a matter of minutes or reach downtown Portland in about a half hour. My sons, who are now settled here with families of their own, even get together every so often for a ride out to Hillsboro to catch a minor league ballgame.

They often borrow bikes from the Lake Oswego library. That's also where they go for other shared resources, including power tools and 3D printing materials (and books, of course). They, along with other parents, used those tools to upgrade all Lake Oswego baseball fields with solar dugouts. The dugouts supply energy for the cold water and cool mist fans that help keep players and their cheering sections comfortable during games. Summer heat waves are still much hotter and more frequent than the early 1900s, but fortunately they are not happening every other week and the air is cleaner. My boys won't ever have to tell my grandkids it's too hot and unhealthy outside to play ball.

Eliot Metzger moved to Lake Oswego with his wife Ashley, and their three young boys, in 2015. He is a member of the city's Sustainability Advisory Board