

Memorial Park to honor owner of Dime Store

Bob Arfsten was piece of Brookside

By MATT CAMPBELL
The Kansas City Star

The contributions come in steady and small increments, which is fitting for a fund to honor the beloved proprietor of a dime store.

Just about every week the Kansas City parks department logs another round of \$10, \$25 or \$50 contributions to the "Friends of Bob Arfsten" fund. It has been that way since an effort began in 2004 to create a memorial to Arfsten in a small park at the southeast corner of 63rd Street and Brookside Boulevard.

"It's amazing," said deputy park director Steve Lampone of the depth of support the project has within the Brookside neighborhood. "It's gratifying to see a project embraced by so many different people in a tangible way."

When Arfsten died at age 72 in November 2002 it struck Brookside hard. For nearly five decades he worked at and then owned the Dime Store on 63rd Street. He befriended everyone.

"He was a quiet little man who became the center point of Brookside," said Tom Tupper, a tireless champion of the memorial project.

When Arfsten died people flocked to the Dime Store to remember him. More than 1,000 people attended his service.

The memorial to Arfsten is planned for the shady corner called Brookside Court that is within view of the Dime Store. It would be

First glance

Contributions to the "Friends of Bob Arfsten" fund may be sent to the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department, Finance Division, 4600 E. 63rd St., Kansas City MO 64130

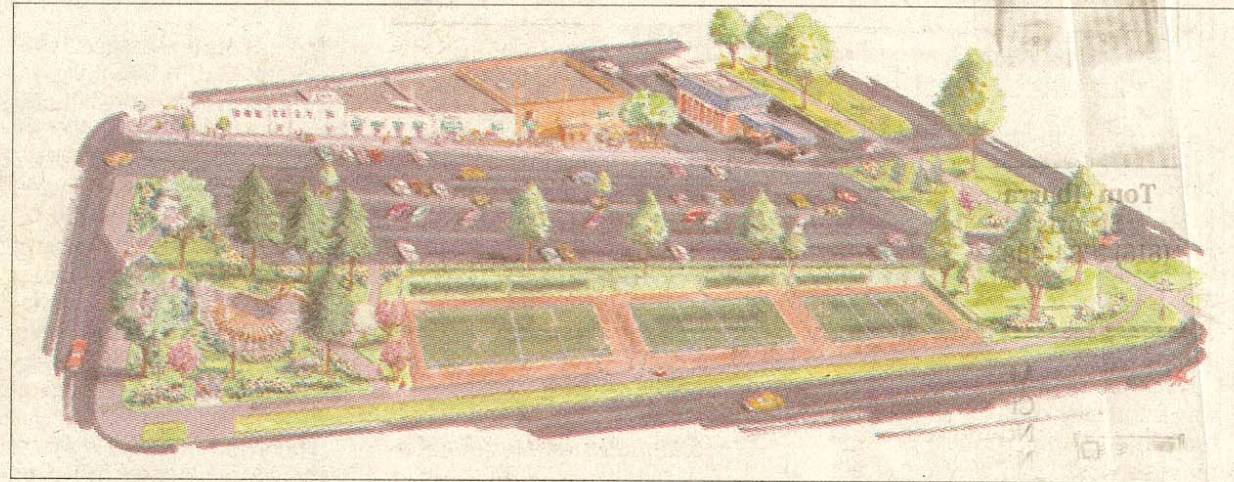
beautified with landscaping and a small fountain.

The park department already has resurfaced the tennis courts to the south of the park and has installed new sidewalks. Repairs to the fence around the courts are planned this spring and the department will approach the Kansas City Power & Light Co. about removing some of the overhead lines that border the park, Lampone said.

In addition, the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority has approved a plan to resurface the parking lot behind the park that stretches the entire block to Meyer Boulevard. The Brookside Community Improvement District will do the job and the cost will be deducted from the rent it pays to the ATA for use of the lot.

"It's going to be a home run for Brookside," Tupper said of all the improvements. "This area has been shabby for a long time so this will be a very nice thing."

The memorial itself will probably cost in excess of \$200,000. A little more than \$100,000 has been raised so far. Of that, \$75,000 is from city sales tax dollars secured by Fourth



Artist's rendering by Bob Holloway

District Councilman Jim Glover and former councilman Jim Rowland.

The rest has come from scores of individual donors.

There is also a collection jar on the counter at the Dime Store. The store sells Bob Arfsten T-shirts for \$13 and donates \$5 to the memorial project. The funky store next door, called Stuff, also donates a portion of the sales from Brookside sweat-shirts to the cause.

Tupper recruited local artist Bob Holloway to create renderings of the park and memorial, which he hopes will interest large donors to help cap the fund-raising drive so work can begin soon.

The Dime Store was inherited by a niece of Arfsten who lives out of state. It is under new management now but retains the quaintness of its uneven and creaky wooden floors, unpretentious inventory and friendly atmosphere.

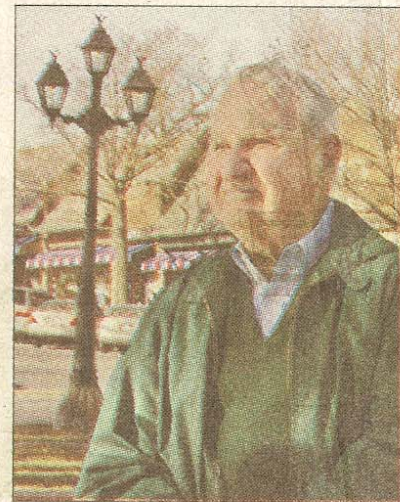
Helen Nees, who has ridden the bus from her home in the old Northeast to her job at the store for nearly 50 years, is still behind the counter.

On a recent afternoon, a woman came in to return two spools of crochet thread that didn't suit her. Employee Donnie Gregg, who has worked at the store since 1982, opened the till without hesitation to return the woman's \$5.45. She left satisfied and will, no doubt, be back.

Even as the drive continues for the Bob Arfsten memorial, in a way the Dime Store itself is also a monument to him.

"Everybody knows this place," Tupper said. "If they changed it there would be an uproar."

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JENNIFER HACK/The Kansas City Star

Tom Tupper is the driving force behind the creation of a memorial park remembering Bob Arfsten, longtime owner of the Dime Store.