

Chicago Tribune
A+E
 ARTS+ENTERTAINMENT



A display tips its cap to radio's role in the event.



A ticket to the July 12 Sox game helps set the stage.



Mike Colbern's Sox jersey gives a feel for 1979.



JAMES C. SVEHLA/PHOTOS FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Lance Tawzer, curator of the new Disco Demolition exhibit at the Elmhurst History Museum, has assembled an engaging look at the legendary 1979 event at Comiskey Park.

Inside Disco Demolition

Exhibit dissects '79 Comiskey promo stunt gone wildly awry — and straight into Chicago lore

BY STEVE JOHNSON
 Chicago Tribune

Almost four decades ago, a struggling major league baseball team, a young deejay and a musical genre collided to create a small burst of anarchy in center field at Comiskey Park.

Originally billed as "Teen Night," the events of July 12, 1979, have entered Chicago lore as Disco Demolition, and they have survived in history when other promotional stunts gone awry have not.

"What's most astounding to me is on the spot I was villainized. It was not a

universally loved promotion," Mike Veeck, then a young White Sox promotions guy (and the son of team owner Bill), said this week. "Now I've become the grandfather, not quite avuncular but kind of, of an interesting moment in time that everyone celebrates except the White Sox."

"The Tribune sells the shirts!" said Lance Tawzer, curator of a new exhibit about Disco Demolition, pointing to an Elmhurst History Museum wall and a vintage-looking shirt (\$22) commemorating the event with name, date and a drawing of Comiskey Park, albeit with a peaceful outfield scene. "You guys sell

those shirts. I bought that from your store."

The event has entered T-shirt territory in part because the deejay, Steve Dahl, is still around, now the afternoon guy on WLS-AM 890, the flagship station of the Chicago White Sox, and one of the most prominent Sox fans in town. The military-style helmet he wore on the field that day is on loan to the Baseball Hall of Fame, Tawzer said.

It's lived on because it was such a compelling collision of cultures: the tribalism of sports, the tribalism of music and the big businesses, a baseball team and a radio station, trying to harness those powers for profit.

And it continues to resonate because new generations interpret it with fresh eyes. Most recently Disco Demolition

has been painted as mainstream culture (rock music) trying to quash the dance music (disco) first championed in African-American, Latino and gay clubs.

Dahl, in an interview this week, rejected that line of interpretation, that the event was "racist and homophobic. That's revisionist identity politics," he said. But more on that later.

The latest example of the evening's life after death is "Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died," the engaging small exhibition newly opened at the Elmhurst museum that's earned a reputation for taking on big topics in Chicago culture: beer-making, the Cubs-Sox rivalry, the Popeil infomer-

Turn to Demolition, Page 6