

## The Night Disco Died



AP FILE PHOTO/Fred Jewell

Disco Demolition — a radio station stunt to blow up disco records on the field between games of a White Sox double header in 1979 — is the subject of an interactive summer exhibit opening at the Elmhurst History Museum.

### Elmhurst exhibit looks at what happened at 1979's Disco Demolition

BY PATRICE ROCHE  
Elmhurst History Museum

The date July 12, 1979, may not immediately ring a bell for every Chicagoan, but for those who spent that summer wearing black band T-shirts, listening to rock music on FM radio, and sporting long, shaggy hairstyles, it stands out as a memorable moment from the scrapbook of their young adult lives — it was the night disco died.

More than a few area residents were at Comiskey Park that night — possibly to see a baseball double header — but more than likely to attend Teen Night. The event was envisioned as a hook to fill empty stadium seats in the middle of a dismal White Sox season and promote WLUP-FM's new deejay, Steve Dahl. Dahl was fostering an anti-disco campaign on Chicago airwaves after being fired from a local radio station that switched to a disco format. Fueled by a 98-cent ticket price for fans who brought disco records to blow up between games of the doubleheader, the event quickly careened out of control after more than 50,000 attendees packed the park and its environs.

In the wake of the explosion, unruly fans took over the field causing baseball fans to shake their heads in dismay and the White Sox to eventually forfeit the second game to the Detroit Tigers. After the smoke cleared, it is said that disco met its demise and Disco Demolition (as it eventually became known) remains one of Chicago's most infamous baseball history moments.

The verdict is still out on how and why the promotion affected Chicago's baseball and music history, but one thing's for sure: it's

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Lance Tawzer,  
Elmhurst History Museum



COURTESY OF PAUL NATKIN

In an event now known as Disco Demolition, radio DJ Steve Dahl packed Comiskey Park with rock fans ready to burn disco records between games of a White Sox double header. Music, baseball and history fans can learn more this summer at the Elmhurst History Museum.

2017, and people are still talking about it.

The Elmhurst History Museum presents a new exhibit that examines the story of that July night entitled "Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died." The exhibit — open Friday, June 9, through Sunday, Oct. 8 — was inspired by a book with the same

title by Dahl and journalist Dave Hoekstra with photos by Paul Natkin. The exhibit content is written by Hoekstra.

Through video footage, eclectic artifacts, interviews, memorabilia and Natkin's photographs, "Disco Demolition" explores the

to new heights and propelled disco down the drain. The exhibit's media sponsor is The Loop radio station WLUP-FM 97.9, which is celebrating the station's 40th anniversary this year.

Lance Tawzer, Elmhurst History Museum's curator of exhibits, worked with Hoekstra and Natkin on a prior exhibit of Natkin's iconic rock photographs. The publication of their book in 2016 reignited his curiosity about Disco Demolition.

"I've heard a lot of discussion over the years about Disco Demolition, and the book resurrected a lot of the lore and personal accounts about the subject," Tawzer said. "It made me wonder, what is it about this story that still has people talking about it 38 years later? Digging a little deeper into the details got my wheels turning."

Tawzer added that working with Hoekstra and Natkin again was appealing.

"Dave has a thought-provoking,

cultural and social context, the music and the promotion that launched Dahl's career

#### If you go

**What:** Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died

**When:** 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday and Tuesday through Friday, 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday, Friday, June 9 to Sunday, Oct. 8

**Where:** Elmhurst History Museum, 120 E. Park Ave., Elmhurst

**Cost:** Free

**Info:** www.elmhursthistorry.org or (630) 833-1457

# Discover, adventure and sports camps in Bensenville

BY GRI JOHNSON

*Bensenville Park District*

Kids can journey back in time and make discoveries to see what the past was like at the newest camp on Bensenville Park District's summer camp roster.

For the second year, the district is offering a two-week Discover Camp for ages 6 to 10 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays from July 10 to 21 at Fischer Farm, 16W680 Grand Ave., Bensenville.

The camp program is

intended to help kids appreciate their natural surroundings as well as to give them hands-on experiences of what it was like to grow up on a farm. Kids will be able to play games, enjoy themed activities, go on hikes to view native plants and learn about animals this summer at Fischer Farm, one of the oldest remaining homesteads in DuPage County.

The campers also will go on field trips to Volkening Heritage Farm in Schaumburg and to the Churchville

Schoolhouse in Bensenville. Knowing the summer heat will undoubtedly tag along, all of the Bensenville Park District campers have the opportunity to swim at the Bensenville Water Park and Splash Pad.

The park district also offers summerlong camps for 6- to 10-year-olds including themed camps, adventure and sports camps. All offer an opportunity for children to make new friends, try new things, and have fun while being supervised in a safe and

enriching environment.

Adventure Camp offers a little of everything. Campers will make crafts, play games, go on field trips, swim and visit the library. Sports Camp helps kids improve skills and develop sportsmanship in a variety of sports; kids of all skill levels are welcome.

A Teen Leadership Camp for 11- to 15-year-olds includes swimming, field trips, games and crafts, and an opportunity to lead the younger camps.

Summerlong camps are

available Monday, June 12, through Friday, Aug. 18, and can be reserved per day, per week or per session.

For parents who have a demanding work schedule, the program offers before- and after-camp child care in addition to a free health lunch courtesy of the Illinois Food Bank. Campers meet at the park district's Deer Grove Leisure Center, 1000 W. Wood St., Bensenville.

For information, visit [bensenvilleparkdistrict.org](http://bensenvilleparkdistrict.org) or call (630) 766-7015.

## Exhibit: Why are people still talking about it?

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down-to-earth, and humorous way of telling a story, and I think his writing style resonates with today's audiences," Tawzer said. "I was well aware of Natkin's extensive photo archive, too, as he was one of just a few photographers at Comiskey that night. It got me thinking that this could make a compelling exhibit, add more detail to the story by incorporating artifacts and memorabilia, and maybe put some of the lingering controversy to rest."

Tawzer said there has been much misinformation about Disco Demolition over the years and the story takes on different hues depending on who is telling it.

"There have been numerous articles, a documentary, books, and even a 'Drunk History' program on the subject. Dahl himself admits to being tired of discussing the subject," Tawzer said. "But what I thought we could accomplish was to fill in some of the gaps and put aside some of the misconceptions through the exhibit. And most of all, to tell an engaging, modern history story that Chicagoans would want to experience."

The exhibit's highlights include the Natkin photos and some intriguing loaned artifacts to illustrate the storyline, including:

- A letter of apology from White Sox owner Bill Veeck to a disappointed baseball fan and a Comiskey seat signed by

Veeck;

- Personal items from Dahl including his trademark Hawaiian shirt, "Do You Think I'm Disco" record, Insane Coho Lips fan club membership card, and other memorabilia;

- A one-of-a-kind Hamer guitar on loan from Cheap Trick's lead guitarist and songwriter Rick Nielsen; and

- The game jersey worn by White Sox catcher Mike Colborn on Disco Demolition Night.

These items and many others will be incorporated into the exhibit experience, which has been designed to be interactive and engaging. Planned features include a blow-by-blow timeline of the event, a music trivia quiz, disco vs.

## Disco Demolition programs

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sound. Professor and film historian Peter Hawley of Tribeca Flashpoint College and Fandango's New York film critic Erik Davis will introduce the film that brought disco out of the clubs and to the masses. The showing will be followed

by a brief question-and-answer session. Tickets: \$6.50, available at theater box office.

In addition, monthly family programs explore exhibit-related themes through learning and craft activities for ages 5 to 12 with a caregiver. For information, visit [elmhursthistory.org](http://elmhursthistory.org).

rock culture vignettes showcasing clothing from the era, a collection of rock concert T-shirts, and video kiosks with footage from the "Disco Demolition" documentary.

A number of programs related to the exhibit are planned. Exhibit hours are 1 to

5 p.m. Sundays and Tuesdays through Fridays, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays at 120 E. Park Ave., Elmhurst. General admission is free, and limited free parking is available. For information, visit [elmhursthistory.org](http://elmhursthistory.org) or call (630) 833-1457.