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Friends for the Preservation of
Historic Landa Park
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Photo: 122

Caption: E.P. "Pete" Nowotny (1905-1992)

organized the Jr. Chamber of Commerce in New Braunfels, Courtesy of Beth Nowotny

Title: Nowotny inspires formation of Jaycees in New Braunfels

The local Jr. Chamber of Commerce, or Jaycees, was founded in New Braunfels in the later part of 1933. In today's column we plan to share with you information about the young businessman who started the local Jaycees. In the next column we will review that organization's important role in saving Landa Park for the community.

Our story begins in 1935 with Harry Landa driving past the 12-foot high fence that enclosed his former beloved Landa Park. Harry Landa could only feel sadness. Landa Industries, including Landa Park, had been sold in 1925 to J.E. Jarratt Investment Co. of San Antonio. Although Harry had moved with his wife, Hannah, to their newly constructed Italian-style villa overlooking San Antonio in 1929, he continued to care deeply about New Braunfels and the park that he helped to design, develop, and nurture. The present condition of the park was most depressing. The idyllic spot that had brought much happiness and wholesome entertainment to many people had become neglected, eerie, and overgrown rather than the "Oasis of Texas" it had been a short time before.

It was Harry's nature to be optimistic. He learned that a new group had organized, made up of New Braunfels' young business and professional men — a Junior Chamber of Commerce, who also had a strong interest in the future of the Park. Harry remembered Pete Nowotny, the young businessman credited with starting this group. As a student at New Braunfels High School, Pete worked the boat concession on Landa Lake. Harry recalled that Pete rescued a small child who had fallen into the lake between two boats on a very busy Sunday. Pete pulled the little fellow out of the water, gave him artificial respiration, and saved the child's life. Harry would not forget the swift thinking and actions of young Pete Nowotny and would be forever grateful.

Erhardt Peter "Pete" Nowotny, was born in Sattler, Texas, February 28, 1905. Pete was named for his father and grandfather, Peter Jr. and Sr., both Comal County Sheriffs. He was the oldest child of his father's second marriage. His two younger brothers were George and Bert. His older siblings were half-sisters, Wanda (Streuer) and Edna (Voigt), and half-brother, Hilmar Nowotny. The family moved to New Braunfels on South Street when Pete was 3 years old.

A graduate of New Braunfels High School in 1922 and Texas A&M in 1926, Pete was a natural leader. While in high school, he began the Lone Scout Group, a form of Boy Scouts. At Texas A&M, he began the Comal County Club and served as its president for two years. After graduation, he went to work for Purina Seed Company and quickly became their top traveling salesman. In 1928, he formed

the Texas A&M Ex-Students Club in Yoakum, Texas and a similar group the following year in Victoria, Texas. In 1929-1930 he served as Scout Master at Yoakum Baptist Church. In 1930 he worked for Red Chain Superior Feeds and the following year he began Nowotny-Marion Insurance Agency in Yoakum.

During his time in Yoakum, he met a dark-haired gracious beauty from Waco, Frances Dial. Frances was a graduate of the College of Industrial Arts (CIA), the forerunner of Texas Woman's University. When she met Pete, she was teaching speech and social studies in Yoakum. They married in August, 1930. Their first child, Hilda Elizabeth "Beth," was born in September, 1931. A few weeks later, the little family came to New Braunfels for Pete's father's funeral. Fortunately for New Braunfels they decided to stay.

Pete began both Nowotny Real Estate Agency and Nowotny Insurance Agency in 1932. The previous year he became a real estate appraiser. On January 5, 1933, Frances and Pete had a second daughter, Frances Louise. Even though the country was in the midst of the Great Depression, life was good for Pete and his family.

In 1933, J.E. Jarratt Investment Company fell victim to the Depression. The company holdings of Landa Roller Mills and Landa Park were repossessed by Trinity Universal Insurance Company of Dallas. The park continued to operate — for a while. The question in everyone's mind was how this takeover would impact the park.

That year was Erwin Scholl's twenty-fourth as manager of Landa Park. Even though the park's ownership changed, Scholl organized the usual Grand Easter opening of Landa Park with swimming, boating, dancing, and many picnics. The Venetian gondolas on Landa Lake during the Labor Day celebration were as beautiful as ever.

To assist with traffic, Park Manager Scholl designated three entrances to the park: The main entrance off North Seguin Street, known today as Landa Street; an entrance at the foot of Klappenbach Hill, known today as Fredericksburg Road; plus an additional entrance near the swimming pool that was approached by driving through the newly developed Landa Estates in Comaltown.

Although most things appeared normal with the park, rumors were afloat that there were individuals who wished to purchase the park in order to subdivide it. This place of immense natural beauty held joyous memories for everyone in the community plus countless visitors. Something had to be done.

On December 15, 1933, Pete Nowotny invited 30 young business and professional men from the community to join him for a meeting at the Comal County Courthouse to address this and other concerns. That gathering became the first meeting of the New Braunfels Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees). The overall objective was to generate interest in the progress of the city and county. Along with Pete those attending were H.A. Triesch, Roland Welsch, Norman Henne, Arnold Richter, Alfredo Stein, A.B. Koch, W.J. Stubblefield, Albert Timmerman, George Nowotny, Homuth Weidner, Reinhold Haas, A.J. Lockett, Percy Richter, Hilmar Schriewer, James Street, Bruno Borchardt, Egmont Mittman, Fred Eikel, Dick Weller, Marcus Adams, W.F. Hingst, Clarence Rice, Franz Altgelt, Clarence Nowotny, Al Leissner, Edmund Timmermann, Herman Feltner, Percy Schriewer, and Benno Neuse.

Pete realized that beginning a group like the Jaycees was no small undertaking. He invited a senior community leader, Edwin Staats (1890-1978), to join their meeting for words of encouragement. Pete could not have found anyone better, Edwin Staats was a member of the Chamber of Commerce, a successful businessman, and was a charter member of the initial Rotary Club in New Braunfels and its second president. He served as president and secretary of the Comal County Fair Association and his leadership brought important growth to the Comal County Fair. During his younger years he played on the first New Braunfels Tigers team that played at the baseball diamond in Landa Park. The evening of the meeting at Comal County Courthouse it was his delight to encourage the younger men gathered there to start a Jaycee group. His was definitely an enthusiastic “pep talk”.

Pete became president of the newly formed New Braunfels Junior Chamber of Commerce and remained in that office through 1934.

In 1934, there were 15,000 people in Landa Park to celebrate July 4th and to watch the fireworks. As the year progressed, the situation for Landa Park got worse. There was no Easter opening of Landa Park in 1935. Instead a 12 foot high barbed-wire fence surrounded the beloved park.

The challenges were many, but the story is not over. Our next column will highlight for readers how each challenge was overcome by the Jaycees in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce and an alerted community.

This column is based on the book *New Braunfels' Historic Landa Park, Its Springs and Its People* by Rosemarie Leissner Gregory and Arlene Krueger Seales. For more information visit www.friendsforlandapark.org and Facebook. To obtain a book, call Jo Heideman at 830.625.3186.