

Park district tradesman recognized for 41 years of service

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When asked what it was like leaving the Glenview Park District, Polo Suarez said, "It was amazing. They were amazing. ... But now I am leaving."

After 41 years serving the district, tradesman Polo Suarez retired this year. Suarez was a mentor and ambassador for many, and he was recognized by the Park Board for his leadership and dedication.

Although ending his career as a tradesman specializing in plumbing, Suarez started at the park district as a seasonal maintenance worker servicing parks at night in the winter of 1976 after immigrating from Mexico.

"It was new for me because in my country, there was no ice and no snow," Suarez said. "There were so many different things here. I liked working the nights because I could hear the crack of the ice as I worked."

After five months of working as a seasonal employee, Suarez was officially hired as a full-time maintenance worker. For the next five years, Suarez mostly worked landscaping jobs with smaller projects making up the rest of his routine.

"One day, while I was a landscaper, I came in to help the plumber," Suarez said. "I was working with him for a few years. Once he quit, the supervisors came up to me and said, 'You're the new plumber.'"

"This is my life: plumber."

While Suarez was the park district plumber, he witnessed the changing landscape of Glenview from a hands-on perspective. Suarez helped devel-



Suarez milks a cow statue at Wagner Farm.

op the park system during the past few years of major renovation.

"It was way more responsibility when the changes came," said Tammy Saltouros, Suarez's wife and a customer service representative at the park district. "Polo saw when The Glen went from the naval base to the town center and helped when those changes needed to come.

"Many of the parks were also nothing. So Polo helped develop the parks and facilitate the changes over those many years. He basically brought the parks from 0 to one hundred."

Despite Suarez's personal accomplishments, he often took the most pride in his co-workers.

Having so much experience with the park district, Suarez was often the man new employees would look toward to learn about the job.

"Whenever there were new parks or new jobs, I would teach my co-workers," Suarez said. "I always try to explain the job, wherever I have the skills to do so."

Suarez spoke especially fondly of the time he spent mentoring his co-worker and friend, Javier Saavedra. Although Saavedra was technically his employee, Suarez treated him as an equal and made sure that Saavedra would be respected and prepared while at the park district.

"[Polo] has, for the past 12 years, worked with and taught Saavedra," Saltou-



Polo Suarez, who retired from the Glenview Park District after 41 years as a tradesman, plays soccer against colleagues. PHOTOS SUBMITTED



Suarez enjoys a game of golf at the park district.

ros said. "They had a real camaraderie. They were a real team."

"Javier is a good man," Suarez said.

When he was officially commended by the park district for his dedication and time, Suarez was overjoyed. To Suarez, his commendation represent-

ed all his hard work and commitment these past 40 years.

"Most of his life was here," Saltouros said. "It's almost like he came to this country and grew up in the park district. He developed his life here, so when he was recognized it was an amazing moment."

Now that he is officially retired, Suarez and Saltouros plan on traveling the world and taking time for themselves. They have a trip to Dubai and South Africa already prepared. In between trips, Suarez plans on being a chauffeur for his granddaughter.