

# THE HISTORY MAKER AND THE HISTORIAN



THE LIFE AND TIMES  
OF HAROLD AND MARCETTA LUTZ

PHIL SMITH

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# THE LUTZ FAMILY

## Francis and Patience Lutz

Harold – Jan. 27, 1920-July 29, 2007  
Elizabeth, Robert, Don, Darlene, Charles (Chuck),  
Jean, Jane, Margie

## Mark and Esther Rhoads

Marcetta – July 10, 1920-Dec. 9, 2008  
Milton, Chuck, Ann

## Harold and Marcetta Lutz

Mark – Feb. 1, 1948  
Joe – June 9, 1949  
David – Nov. 9, 1950  
Steve – April 14, 1954  
Jon – June 9, 1956

## Mark Lutz and Lynda

Demian

## Demian Flanagan

Demi

## Mark Lutz and Ana

Stephen

## Ryan and Ashriel Lutz

Scarlett, Harlowe

## Mark and Gayle Lutz

Jennifer, Nathaniel

## Lindsay and Daniel Lee

Lauren, Lilly, Lila

## Joe and Silva Lutz

Natalie, Chandler, Dwight

## Stephen and Brenda Lutz

Hailey, Kaydence

## David Lutz and Polly

Ryan, Lindsay, Toby, Tyler

## Shawn and Jarntip Lutz

## Toby and Taylor Lutz

Cohen

## Steve Lutz and Chris

Shawn

## Tyler and Brittany Lutz

Lennon

## Steve and Cathy Lutz



# INTRODUCTION

## The Harold D. Lutz Sports Complex

On the night of Dec. 3, 1981, hundreds of people gathered in a meeting room at the Ramada Inn just south of Interstate 70 on Kipling Boulevard in Wheat Ridge, Colo.

It was a packed house for a momentous occasion: the 25th anniversary of the founding of Colorado's first recreation district, the North Jeffco Recreation and Park District, based in the northwestern Denver suburb of Arvada.

At the end of the gala dinner, North Jeffco officials unveiled a sign that would mark the district's newest facility: the Harold D. Lutz Sports Complex, for which construction would soon begin. The complex would comprise seven softball fields and one baseball diamond at the southwest corner of Kipling and 58th Street in Arvada, just a little bit west of Olde Town Arvada and almost within spitting distance of Harold Lutz's law office.

See, the event wasn't only to commemorate an anniversary. It was to honor the man who, more than anybody else, was responsible for the district – and for two other recreation districts in the Denver area, and if truth be known, responsible as much as anybody else for an entire area of Colorado law.

Harold Lutz was the man being honored.

Now you have to understand this: Harold was what would later be referred to as an alpha male. Tall, physically imposing, barrel-chested and with a booming baritone voice, he dominated any room he was in – and that included courtrooms, where he could intimidate judges and bend juries to his will. He was the unquestioned head of his household and his family.

But on this night, the tables were turned. Hundreds of family members, friends, business associates and civic leaders were present to hear Harold roasted Hollywood style with jokes and slightly embarrassing stories – just as though he were Dean Martin or Frank Sinatra.

Among the guests were the love of Harold's life, his wife of 38 years, Marcetta, and four of their five sons: Joe, David, Steve and Jon. The oldest son, Mark, was working out of state and unable to make it back for the ceremony.

All had been deeply affected by Harold, not only through his public activities over more than three decades but through his leadership, guidance and generosity as they were growing up, the love of sports he imparted to them, and the values he lived by and taught his sons.

One of the sons, the middle boy, David, served as master of ceremonies for the roast, which featured more than a dozen speakers. While most of the tales told that night have been lost to time, Harold and Marcetta's second son, Joe, remembers that one of his dad's favorite adages was repeated.

"My dad used to say that 'A' students make professors, 'B' students make judges and 'C' students make all the money," Joe recalled. The story reveals a lot about Harold's outlook on life. He himself had been a Jefferson County judge three decades earlier, and forever after was known as Judge Lutz.

"My dad used to say it's hell being rich," said Joe, who knew that his dad had grown up dirt-poor during the Great Depression as the oldest of nine children.

"Even though he wasn't a rich man, he did what he wanted to do. It wasn't so much about the money."

Actually, way back in 1956, it was about the children. At the time there wasn't a single public swimming pool in all of Jefferson County. Several kids had drowned in private pools.

"Dad's whole thing was helping kids," said Jon, his youngest son. "Dad couldn't swim at all and he was concerned with the number of drownings that had occurred in the county, and he wanted to do something about it. He was not going to deprive any child from learning the joys and safety of swimming."

At the time, there was no such thing as a recreation district, or any other kind of special district, in the state. But Harold, then serving as the attorney for the Jefferson County School District, knew there had to be a way. He helped write a new law, which became Title 32 of the Colorado Code, allowing for the formation of special districts that could levy taxes and fund facilities and activities. He lobbied for passage of the law in the Statehouse and he campaigned for the creation of the district in northern Jefferson County.

Getting people to part with their money was the hard part, Harold said in an article in *Arvada Profiles*.

“To get the people to vote for taxes to pay for it, that was the toughest battle,” he said. “The time we organized the district was a conservative era. People didn’t want any more taxes. We had to put on quite a campaign.”

When the measure passed, he became the attorney for North Jeffco, and later for the newly established South Jeffco and Evergreen recreation districts.

“It’s an area of law a lot of states don’t even have,” said Owen Oliver, Lutz’s longtime law partner who now works in the same office west of Olde Town Arvada that Harold bought and remodeled in the early 1970s. “He became known around Colorado as one of the premier special district lawyers. A lot of attorneys and other people came to him for advice.”

Harold was instrumental in the creation of three suburban public golf courses: Indian Tree, Foothills and The Meadows.

Nowadays you can’t turn around in Colorado without running into a special district: recreational districts, fire districts, library districts, water districts, the RTD District in the Denver-Boulder area for transit, the districts that funded the building of Coors Field where the Colorado Rockies play, and Invesco Field at Mile High, where the Denver Broncos play.

In Harold’s obituary in the Aug. 2, 2007, edition of the *Denver Post*, his best friend, Gail “Doc” Gilbert, laid it all at Harold’s feet.

“But for Harold Lutz, the recreation district never would have existed,” Gilbert said. “The citizens voted for it, but they didn’t vote any money to get it started.”

Jeff Condon, who audited the North Jeffco district for many years, called Harold “the guru for all parks and recreation districts.”

Harold, of course, campaigned hard to get the special district approved. Once the voters approved the concept, he personally picked up the phone bill.

Even more startlingly, he funded the construction of the county's first public pool – unwilling to wait for tax money to start rolling in. Undoubtedly he was paid back, but imagine the commitment and dedication it took for Harold – not a rich man, as his son Joe has said – to put his own wealth on the line to provide a safe place for kids to swim. (Oddly enough, as noted earlier, Harold himself never learned to swim.)

When the district's crown jewel, the Apex Center at West 72nd Avenue and Ward Road, opened, it was the largest recreation center in the country. Its amenities include two NHL-size ice rinks, 23,000 square feet of swimming pools and other water facilities, family hot tubs, a natural rock climbing wall, three full-sized gyms, an indoor playground for young children, a wellness studio, an elevated running and walking track, and an area for cardiovascular and weight training and physical conditioning.

Today the district – now known as the Apex Park and Recreation District – has more than a dozen facilities, including four indoor or outdoor pools, Indian Tree Golf Course, a racquetball and fitness center, the Arvada Tennis Center, the Stenger Soccer Complex, and of course the Harold D. Lutz Sports Complex.

The district offers competition and/or lessons for youth and adults in swimming, golf, hockey, ice skating, racquetball, tennis, soccer, baseball and softball.

Hundreds of thousands of people take advantage of the district's facilities and recreational programs every year.

The recreation district concept, obviously, was a smashing success. And so was the Harold Lutz roast on Dec. 3, 1981.

David Lutz was the master of ceremonies. Some of the other roasters, all close associates of Harold, were:

- “Doc” Gilbert, Harold's lifelong friend and political ally and adversary. (Gilbert was a Republican, Harold a Democrat, but that didn't stop Harold from serving as Gilbert's campaign manager in various runs for office.)
- Jimmy Gilbert, Doc's son and a onetime law associate of Harold.
- Jack Hoerner, along with Harold one of 10 members of the Metropolitan Research & Development group, which bought, sold and developed real estate for many years.
- Al Meiklejohn, a 20-year state senator and member of the Jefferson County School Board when Harold was the school district's attorney.

- Robert Frei, two-term Arvada mayor and longtime City Council member.
- Tony Vollack, state senator and later the Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court.

Harold loved it.

“He was all laughs,” David said. “He was maybe a little embarrassed, but that’s how roasts are supposed to be.”

Harold was proud of having his name on that sign at the softball and baseball fields at 58th and Kipling. But his real satisfaction was in what the sign represented.

“He thought it was a nice honor and everything,” said his oldest son, Mark, “but what he really thought was good was for the community to have all this sports stuff.”

The Lutz Sports Complex commemorates Harold’s most public contribution to his community – but by no means his only contribution. He was one of Arvada’s foremost attorneys for 47 years, served as the lawyer for the Jefferson County School District, handled every kind of legal business for thousands – often at no charge – and mentored young lawyers who went on to become successes in their own right.

“You just respected the guy so much,” David said. “He gave us an underlying feeling of the truthfulness of life.”

Marcetta, while not in the public eye to the extent that Harold was, was an outstanding contributor to her community as well. Her love of history resulted in the preservation of hundreds of thousands of historical documents from Arvada and Jefferson County. She was instrumental in the founding of the Arvada Historical Society, and the organization’s headquarters now house the Marcetta Lutz Archives.

She’s remembered by her children and grandchildren as a kind person who rarely had a harsh word for anybody.

“My grandmother was an inspiration to me with her caring and the way she always made sure people felt comfortable,” said Shawn, Steve’s son. “She was a person who was always smiling. I never saw her in sadness or in sorrow. The only time she would be crying is because she was happy for somebody. She was the sweetest person, and whenever I think about things that upset me, I know there are things in her I can learn from. I just think about it and treat it the same way she would, and things will move on and get better.”

Harold and Marcetta Lutz were one of Colorado’s most remarkable couples.

This is their story.



**Members of the Lutz family at the sign marking the Lutz Sports Complex.**



**At the dedication of the Lutz Sports Complex: L-R, Chuck, Cathy, Shawn, Steve, David, Jon and Joe.**