

January 1999

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Recommended Citation

Goepel, Sarah (1999) "Cleaning Jack Trice Stadium," *Ethos*: Vol. 1999 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol1999/iss1/3>

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CLEANING JACK TRICE STADIUM

by Sarah Goepel

Soggy peanut shells, gum wrappers, vomit, chewing tobacco and soiled tampons have a lot more in common than one might think. They are all items the college ministry group, The Salt Company, has picked up at Jack Trice Stadium after games and concerts. The task sounds unpleasant, but members of The Salt Company enjoy being around 100 or more of their friends for two to four hours to have fun and raise money for their ministry. After five years of cleaning up the stadium, members of The Salt Company have an endless number of stories to tell.

Jeff Dodge, full-time director of The Salt Company, said he recently bent down to pick up a napkin and found out it was more than a napkin. The napkin contained vomit in which Dodge couldn't help but stick his hand. To receive some sympathy and a few laughs, he picked up his walkie-talkie and told everyone about it.

Dodge said the group was contracted to clean the stadium full-time because of the large number of people involved with its ministry. He said there are approximately 600 people involved in The Salt Company, and anywhere from 80 to 120 people participate in the clean-up after every home game. All the people who help clean the stadium are volunteers, and the money goes to The Salt Company ministry.

The project is very thorough; they clean *everything* including bathrooms, concession stands, sky boxes and parking lots. Dodge calls the project a "well-oiled machine." To make the task more organized, faster and a little easier, the group is split into teams which are assigned to clean designated areas of the stadium.

There are usually eight or nine teams: two pick-up crews, two blower crews, two bathroom crews, a parking lot crew and a tower crew. Each crew has a captain with a walkie-talkie which is used to communicate the crew's location in the stadium, ask for more bags or tell the other teams if something interesting happens.

Dodge said everyone gathers on the south side of the stadium behind the bleachers before the work begins, and the captains and leaders use a megaphone to pray, give instructions and psych up everyone. Once all the bags are distributed and the pep talk is over, the workers dive into the monstrous pit they must make spotless.

The pick-up crews do just what their title says; they pick up anything "bigger than a gum wrapper," according to Ranel Wallace, full-time Salt Company coordinator and ISU alumna. That usually consists of peanut shells, napkins, cups, food and many other gross and disgusting things people leave behind.

"You have to psych yourself up every time because you just look at it and see people just trashing the place," Dodge said. "The fact that people are pigs allows us to

make money on it."

After picking up trash in every row, the blower crew uses "blowers" to move all the dust particles and smaller elements to the end of each row. The blowers' high-powered instruments are similar to leaf blowers one can find in a retail store. Kelly Connor, senior in accounting, mentioned using the ear plugs the blower crews wear for another purpose. "They fit really nicely in your nose," she said. "You try and blow them out."

A serious incident with the blowers involved a woman who got a detached retina after particles were blown into her eye. Dodge said the woman is all right, but members of the blower crew now are required to wear goggles and masks to prevent any future accidents.

On a positive note, volunteer Matt Van Sickle, a CyRide bus driver who helps The Salt Company, said he has found binoculars, a sweatshirt and recently discovered a nice sweater which he gave to his wife. He said after concerts like the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and Farm Aid, people leave behind far more interesting things.

Spewed chewing tobacco in cups, soiled tampons and slimy condoms are just a few of the items Van Sickle has found. Wallace said along with all the garbage people find, some have found money. She mentioned one woman who found \$100. Van Sickle said he remembers a guy who found a billfold with \$50 in it but gave it back.

Like many members, Van Sickle finds the clean-up to be a bonding experience with other people in The Salt Company. He said people "get crazy" and start "yelling and hollering." The group has found many ways to make its work interesting. "Funny things happen every week," Dodge said.

Van Sickle said there have been times when it rained all day, and people got muddy from diving into mud puddles and sliding down a hill. He mentioned people singing and joking to keep their minds off the gross garbage they have to collect. Dodge said one cold day while picking up garbage in the parking lot, two guys grabbed him and tried to push him in a large, icy puddle of water, but all three slipped and were completely submerged. They continued to clean in the cold despite being drenched.

Van Sickle said some people will joke, saying, "Hey, I have a half a package of M&M's, anybody want some?" or "Hey, I've got a crust of pizza here, anybody want the pizza bone?" Many people eat the food left in the stands, according to Connor. She said some workers will eat opened bags of M&M's and Skittles, and it "doesn't phase them that they could get some terrible disease."

Dodge said most people find cleaning up the stadium a blast and called it a "rallying point" for the group. "It's kind of a mind set with everybody that 'OK, this stinks, but we're going to have fun,'" Van Sickle said.