

# Sheridan School playground reunion draws 200 in Town of Tonawanda

By ANTHONY CARDINALE

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Who ever heard of a playground reunion?

That's what they held Sunday for nearly 200 of the kids who used to hang around the playground outside the former Philip Sheridan School in the Town of Tonawanda.

The organizer, Sammy Violante, put his sales and marketing skills to work but had only five people signed up by mid-August. But last week, 138 had sent in their \$20 checks, and many more who got the word showed up for the picnic at the Noco Pavilion on East Park Drive, not far from the old playground.

"This group has not been together for 30 to 40 years," said Violante, now 51 and living in Amherst.

Violante's target baby boomers were going through their playground years from 1959 to 1974, and that was the glue that held them together — whether they attended Philip Sheridan, St. Andrew's or some other nearby school.

Nothing all that extraordinary happened on that playground during those years — nothing to write a book or make a "Big Chill" movie about.

But if they'd had a future film producer in their midst, the time for his cameras to roll was Sunday, when the crowd saw a replay of the "Mark 'n' Mike" show.

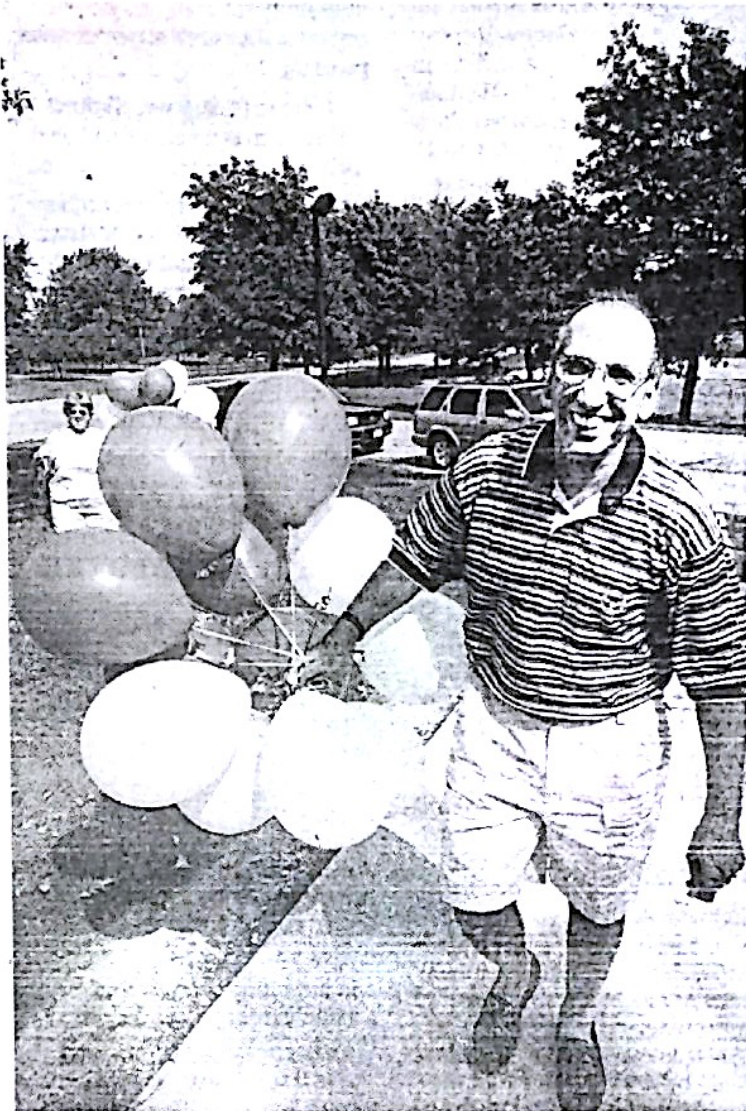
Without any warning, Mike Myer of Kenmore sneaked up on Mark Angelo of Kenmore and grabbed him from behind. Angelo turned, then stumbled backwards for about seven steps before hitting the ground. He didn't get up right away, either.

"The three of us were inseparable," explained Greg Shanor, their closest buddy, "but those two were always pushing and shoving. When we were 10, we used to bounce right back. But now Mark's gone for an X-ray, just to be safe. Mark feels kind of bad about it."

"Yeah," said Mark Angelo. "Last time, Mike pulled my shirt over my head." Then he thought about what had just happened. "That was a real nice, slow fall."

Chris Lillico Miner, of Amherst, said the neighborhood girls also hung out at the playground.

Didn't the boys gang up on the



James P. McCoy/Buffalo News

**Sammy Violante comes bearing balloons to Sunday's festive reunion of Philip Sheridan School playground compatriots.**

girls?

"Not at all," she said. "We were a neighborhood. It was a great time to grow up."

"The playground was our safe haven," added her sister, Marsha Phillips of Kenmore.

Many of the homes on Coventry Road and Ermann Drive and Oakridge Avenue are still occupied by the same families. Pete Colosi is one of the parents who was in his 30s in those days, living on Coventry, across the street from the playground.

"My kids played there too,"

said Colosi, 74. "When the neighborhood kids got thirsty, they'd come to my yard for a drink from my garden hose. My wife put a cup on the faucet for them."

Jim Nydahl still lives in the house on Ermann that he grew up in. And every day he looks out at the old playground.

"Kids just don't come out to play anymore," he said. "They've got their TV and their video games. . . ."

*e-mail: acardinale@buffnews.com*