

Seats Fill For PGE Park Season Opener

Monday about 20,000 fans took to the seats to welcome the return of Triple A baseball and the Portland Beavers. It was the first event for a newly renovated stadium.

"It's the great meeting place in Portland," says Bob Higgins, a retired government auditor who's now the self-styled curator of the stadium.

In 1957, Elvis Presley played a concert on the infield, riding into the stadium on a white convertible Cadillac and wearing his famous gold lame suit, to the shrieks of teen-age girls.

Sports have always had the run of the place, however. Jack Dempsey fought an exhibition at Multnomah Stadium, and Pele played his last professional soccer game there. Now, new memories are about to be made with the return of the Portland Beavers. The Triple-A farm team of the San Diego Padres will christen the newly renovated PGE Park on Monday night.

To make way for the Beavers, the stadium has undergone a \$38.5 million renovation. Modern amenities have been added, like luxury suites, and a new artificial surface called NexTurf—the same material used at Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia—has replaced Civic's worn-out rug.

But the best additions were made with the past in mind: A hand-operated scoreboard, with a huge clock and red "PGE Park" letters on top, looms in left field. Ivy has been planted on the gray wall out in center, and the rows of bleacher—made from 1920s Douglas fir—have been painted forest green.

Concourses, restrooms and concession areas have been completely rebuilt, and such throwback fixtures as newsstands, an organ and shoeshine vendors will heighten the game-day experience for fans. "Nostalgia is in," says Marshall Glickman, chief executive officer of Portland Family Entertainment, which owns the Beavers and struck a deal with the city to run the stadium if the city paid for most of the overhaul. The team is trying to capitalize on the popularity the "Lucky Beavers" enjoyed before the NBA's Trail Blazers arrived in 1970.



A \$38 million renovation transforms Portland's downtown stadium into a magnificent ballpark with a new state-of-the-art turf, luxury seats and amenities such as the Widmer Café. The stadium's revamped concourse adds many new concessions and restrooms. Spectators also get a free look from the sidewalk where barriers once hindered the view along the left field bleachers.

(PHOTOS BY DAVID GIEZYNG/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER)

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