

Fields of dreams

On a recent Friday night, soccer coach and artist Matthew Slaats invited people onto the field at Breese Stevens for an interactive art event. As kids from the Madison 56ers youth clubs practiced, patrons wandered the sidelines listening to radio transmissions about Breese's history, the esthetics of soccer, and Slaats' own memories of playing at Breese in high school.

"The main interest is to get people to revisit a space that is usually empty," remarks Slaats. And most of the people holding transistor radios to their ears had never considered Breese's stone walls and ivy-covered fence from the field itself. One of Slaats' points was the contrast between open space on the field and the intimate feel from the stands.

Slaats' exhibit reminded me of stories about the annual picnic held by the Chicago Cubs for residents of the Wrigleyville neighborhood on the grass of Wrigley Field. Reports from the picnic are typically giddy and accompanied by photos of picnickers posing against the ivy walls or sliding into second base. The Cubs, no wonder, are beloved by their neighbors on Chicago's north side.