

'The Vet' entering its final days Philadelphia stadium nearing spring implosion

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PHILADELPHIA - The turf has been taken up, the statues taken down, and thousands of seats removed and sold to fanatical fans.

Veterans Stadium, the concrete bowl that the Phillies and Eagles called home for more than a quarter-century, is undergoing preparations for its implosion in the spring.

Workers have been stripping the stadium of its interior constructs to reduce the amount of dust when the building is ultimately demolished. Another goal, officials say, is to minimize vibrations in the vicinity of the stadium, the Phillies' home since 1971.

The Eagles opened their new stadium, Lincoln Financial Field, this season and the Phillies begin their season in April at the nearby Citizens Bank Park.

Phillies officials are moving out of their offices this week, and they met with a group of neighborhood residents several days ago to discuss the implosion process and allay health concerns and fears of property damage.

"It was civil," said Mark Dunscomb, a professional geologist and associate at Schnabel Engineering, a firm hired to act on behalf on residents' concerns. "No one threw anything, or anything like that. There's been less heated discussions and more heated discussions."

Shawn Jalosinski, executive director of the **Sports Complex Special Services District**, which promotes quality-of-life issues for the stadium's neighbors, said the meeting was one of several planned.

"We're just trying to minimize risk throughout this process and get the community to a comfort level,"

Jalosinski said, whose organization hired Schnabel.

Phillies spokesman Larry Shenk said a subcontractor has also been hired to inspect neighboring homes before and after the stadium is demolished.

Prior to the actual implosion, the Vet will be stripped of internal, dust-generating structures, officials said, leaving behind what Shenk called a "concrete shell of pillars." The reason is simple, Dunscomb said: "the less stuff that falls, the less stuff there is to create dust."

The exact date of the implosion has not been determined.

Officials said the implosion has been timed to last approximately 58 seconds. Experts said a slower implosion can ease the impact of the demolition because not all of the structure hits the ground at once.

That means Phillies and Eagles fans will have roughly one minute to watch their three-decade-old stadium collapse. The dust will hold memories of upper-deck brawls, huge rats that roamed the building, loudish fan behavior — and even a World Series championship.

Some of the stadium's finer memories have resurfaced with the recent deaths of Paul Owens, general manager of the Phillies' 1980 World Series team, and reliever Tug McGraw, who closed out the final game that year and coined the phrase "You Gotta Believe!"

"It's a bittersweet feeling. I've only been here three years and I can feel it," said Michael Stiles, the Phillies' vice president for operations and administration.

"While everybody is very excited about getting into Citizens Bank Park, it's bittersweet because people feel, you know, emotional about leaving this place," he said.

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