

Mayor's Column for October 14, 2009 Review

The last two weeks have been busy. There is much to share.

I was touched to be asked by our high school students to be the grand marshal of the homecoming parade. EHS is special to me and the parade was a great time. I thank our students for the special honor.

While the weather for the Harvest Windmill Festival was awful, some wonderful things occurred throughout the weekend. The long-awaited dedication ceremony for the Baker Office Building was well-attended. The book signing event by Ruth Ann Montgomery and Dave Fellows was very successful. The living cemetery tour was terrific and the music by various Rock County groups was great. While the attendance at the Festival tent was light, traffic through the city on Saturday and Sunday was amazing. Many downtown businesses were exceptionally busy, and there were many out-of-town visitors. I believe the community marketing efforts were successful and can be built upon.

The display of the student-produced tabletop windmill art was fantastic. If you didn't see it, you missed something special. The windmill art auction was great fun. Not only did the auction raise nearly \$11,000, but there have been out-of-state inquiries about art-decorated windmills. Plans are already underway for another auction next year.

And yes, John and I were the successful bidders on the windmill with the wonderful Evansville buildings and scenes. It is currently on display in the window of the Baker Office Building for the enjoyment of all.

Last week John and I attended the Local History and Historic Preservation Conference in Wausau. I was asked to be a speaker by the Wisconsin Historical Society. Mayor Larry MacDonald of Bayfield, retired Mayor Jeannette Bell of West Allis, and I spoke on preservation activities in our communities. I showed a PowerPoint presentation and spoke about preservation projects in Evansville in the past 5-6 years. What has happened in our community in a short period of time is remarkable. Projects include: 1,3, and 5 West Main Street (Rock' N Rollz/Village Square), 2 East Main Street (UB&T), Main Street Reconstruction including brick street restoration, Eager Economy Building, Badger Coach, Pete's Inn, Allen Creek Gallery (Matthias James Pottery), Eager-Fuchs Building (Deja Vu), Lake Leota, Baker Office Building, Allen Creek stone wall restoration, 14 East Main Street (Farnsworth Ceramics/Star Printing), 17 East Main Street (Mosher Insurance), 1 East Main Street (Century 21), and historical books by Ruth Ann Montgomery and Dave Fellows. Some of the projects have been recognized as award winners.

Both Mayor MacDonald and Mayor Bell have been in Evansville. Mayor MacDonald attended the Energy Fair last April and according to him, "stole ideas for a fair in Bayfield". Mayor Bell has enjoyed "great sandwiches at the coffee shop with the wonderful books" as she travels to visit her family living in the New Glarus area.

Following the presentation, I was asked by a seminar attendee how the businesses dealt with the Main Street reconstruction. I talked about the Chamber reconstruction task force and community marketing efforts.

A woman from Sauk City asked about building community understanding of the value of preserving history and developing a sense of place. A portion of the community's downtown along the Wisconsin River is at risk. Being discussed is demolition of an entire block of storefronts next to the River with replacement by a five-story mixed use complex. I spoke about the continuous Evansville focus on local history, including Ruth Ann's weekly articles in the Review, history-focused events like house walks, and activities like the Friends of the Library Ice Cream Social.

A Door County resident explained that because of high County land values many charming historic structures are being leveled for higher income-producing or development use. The County is developing away its beauty and charm, the very reason it is a popular tourism destination.

We learned that the Wisconsin Association of Historic Preservation Commissions is holding their spring 2010 conference in Oregon (it was held in Evansville in 2007). I suggested the Cobblestone Inn and Suites as the primary hotel option since Oregon has no hotel. There are possibilities for providing pre- and post-conference events in Evansville to make a full weekend of regional activities.

John and I attended fourteen different sessions, from historic window restoration and on-line marketing communications, to the 12,000 year history of deer hunting. The presenter of the deer hunting program, wildlife biologist Bob Willging, referred to the white-tail deer as a "supermarket on four legs: hide for clothing, meat for food, and tools and implements from bone". I never thought of deer hunting as a shopping experience.

Prior to leaving Wausau, we traveled to Wausau East High School to view a recently installed Northwind 100 wind turbine. Construction of a Northwind 100 is planned for the wastewater treatment plant upgrade in Evansville. I was frankly surprised by its size. I expected it to be much bigger. A nearby cell tower in Wausau was much taller than the turbine. The turbine is located about 300 feet from the school and will be used to teach students about renewable energy.

Third grade students have been visiting the mayor at City Hall the past couple of weeks. Nine classes have toured City Hall and participated in a question/answer session with me. Among the many questions, I was asked how old I am. When I truthfully answered I was 57, the students responded with oohs and aahs. Doggone it. To our youth, I am old.

One group was fascinated with whether there are ghosts in Evansville. The mayor has heard such rumors, but has not seen one.

Other groups were interested in my travels. Have I been to China? No. Have I been to Hawaii? Yes. Have I been to Cody, Wyoming? Wyoming, yes. Cody, no. Have I been to Alaska? Four times. Have I been to Disneyworld with my family? Yes.

My favorite question this year was from a young lady in the last group of visiting students. She asked if only girls could be mayors. It reminded me of our daughter at a similar age asking if only men could be judges. I replied that Evansville is a special place because there have been four women mayors (Mayor Ida Conroy, Mayor Pam Wilson, Mayor Janis Ringhand, and me) and that most communities have men mayors. I also told students that 3 of 8 current Common Council members are women, as are 3 of 7 Plan Commission members.

I have subsequently learned that in 2007 there were 21 women mayors in Wisconsin, approximately 10% of Wisconsin's mayors. Thank you, Evansville. Our youth are asking the better question because of Evansville's governmental history. The next step for us will be when gender becomes irrelevant and the questions from our children are about qualifications and hard work.

Does this really matter? Three days after the young student's question I was approached by a woman following my Wausau preservation presentation. She was from a community in Wisconsin approximately our size. She congratulated me on the revitalization activities in Evansville and thanked me for providing effective community leadership. She told me she was a one-term mayor who chose not to run again. She was elected by 3 votes in a four candidate race and was the only woman candidate. The council in her community chose not to have a primary election, so the new mayor did not have majority citizen support. Following her election, opposition coalesced around her gender. She felt that all of her leadership efforts were attacked on that basis. The political environment was ugly and she was disillusioned by her inability to accomplish any of her goals. She decided that in the best interest of her community she would not seek re-election.

I am proud of Evansville's progressive stance on government leadership. To those of you who know Evansville history, Vie Campbell is smiling.

Occasionally, an event happens that shows us how closely knit we are as a community. Last week my father and I attended the funeral of LaVerne Seeman. A long-time family friend, he was a groomsman in my parents' wedding and one of my baptism sponsors. I was greatly surprised to find out the morning of his funeral that a member of our City Hall staff was his granddaughter. I will be digging through our family photos to share wedding and baptism pictures with Keri. LaVerne's giggle will be missed by many.

Energy Saving Tip

Fall is a great time for a furnace inspection. An annual tune-up can reduce your heating cost by up to five percent.

Community Announcements

Trick or Treat is scheduled for 5-7:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 31. Please see that your children are dressed safely, with masks that do not restrict vision and costumes that do not cause choking or tripping. Proper supervision will assure that our youth stay safe.

Annual leaf pick-up began this week. Only leaves, no sticks or other plant materials, may be raked into the gutter for collection.

Signs will be posted in municipal buildings regarding H1N1 flu procedures. If you enter a city building while you are ill, you may be asked to leave for the safety of employees and other citizens. Our goal is to provide optimal service to the community and minimize the spread of illness.

The Police Department is scheduled to move to their new location next to City Hall on Church Street in early November. Community service workers will assist with the departmental move.

Community Thanks

Evansville extends a heartfelt thanks to Jim and Jean Kopecky of Piggly Wiggly for their generosity. The Kopeckys purchased complimentary tickets to the Fire District spaghetti dinner for use by citizens that needed financial help.