

Mayor's Column for the June 4, 2013 Edition of the Evansville Review

During my service as mayor, there have been a few times when my emotions have gotten the best of me. It happened recently at the rededication of our local Civil War monument, the newly repaired cannon that will soon be located again on the front lawn at City Hall.

I had completed my address at the ceremony and was called upon to rededicate the cannon, a memorial to Evansville Civil War veterans. I found myself suddenly teary-eyed and with a trembling voice managed to speak the short sentences of rededication. It was readily apparent that ceremony participants and attendees were also moved.

The successful effort to restore the 150 year-old Navy cannon, gifted to us by the Grand Army of the Republic in 1900, was a true collaboration. There were contributions from organizations like the Blackhawk Questors and Evansville Grove Society, businesses such as Baker Manufacturing and Allen Custom Flatwork, the City of Evansville, and individuals including Carol and Gene Prudhon and Ardis and Steve Zwicky. (The complete list of project donors can be found elsewhere in this Review edition.) With monetary and in-kind contributions, the restoration exceeded \$25,000.

At last year's annual Veteran's Day commemoration at the high school, Evansville veterans who had participated in the Badger Honor Flight to Washington D.C. were special guests. Recognition of these local heroes at the ceremony was similarly a very moving experience for me. Again, our community had worked collaboratively, citizens and businesses, to raise dollars for the Badger Honor Flight program. A second group of Evansville veterans just returned from a Badger Honor Flight last month.

I recall presenting a key to the city to Vince and Esther Drendel in 2009 for their long-time involvement in soybean production in the Evansville area. The presentation was part of a ceremony to dedicate a display of the importance of soybean production in the Evansville area, located in the lower level of the Eager Economy Building on East Main Street. Wearing my heart on my sleeve, I was honored to recognize the Drendels for their efforts. The display was one of a number of collaborative efforts by the Wisconsin Soybean Association, local businesses, Evansville School District, and residents such as Marsha and Larry Dobbs to showcase the importance of local bean production.

I am so proud of how our community rolls up its sleeves to accomplish tasks important to us. I am humbled to honor those in Evansville who represent our character. Dozens and dozens of unsung heroes also work daily to better Evansville with no special recognition. A local businessman told me that I have a passion for Evansville. You betcha!

City Administrator Dan Wietecha recently wrote about an article entitled "The Distinctive City." It was reprinted in the Municipality, a monthly publication of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. It discusses the unique qualities and character of a community and how successful planning can accomplish community change "... while

maintaining or enhancing the things they value the most.” Connectedness and sense of place makes a distinctive community, where people want to visit and live.

People often tell me Evansville is a bedroom community. I rail at that description of my hometown. It diminishes us. It suggests a collection of subdivisions with no character or connectedness. It implies that we are merely an extension of Madison or Janesville.

Next year Evansville celebrates the 175th anniversary of the establishment of “The Grove.” Next month we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the railroad in Evansville.

Our city has been host to amazing living history programs. The Civil War School Day and weekend encampment at Leonard Leota Park make the Park shine. The Park setting actually becomes living scenery for a historical play. The twilight living history theater and memorial at Maple Hill Cemetery is a truly special experience. This month our city will come alive during the Theodore Robinson Plein Air Painting Competition, a celebration of art, history, and community. The iconic ice cream social, hosted annually by the Friends of Eager Free Library on the Library lawn, is a step back in time. Our signature 4th of July celebration has occurred annually at least since the early 1960s.

A dozen years ago, to recognize and address our growing pains, Evansville formed an organization, Evansville Community Partnership, specifically to foster community connectedness and inclusiveness. ECP continues its community mission today.

We encourage volunteerism in our youth. For twelve years, Evansville third grade students have participated in a spring Main Street clean up. The school district has instituted a community service requirement for high school students. Local scout troops regularly engage in service projects to improve the Evansville area.

Recent community-wide efforts resulted in the restoration of Lake Leota, revitalization of Main Street, successful award of a five-year federal Drug Free America grant to Build A Safer Evansville, and the construction of Creekside Place, a vibrant community gathering place. Citizen groups are exploring recreational enhancements. These examples just scratch the surface in describing the fabric and vitality of our community.

Over the years we have changed. We are bigger. We are a commuter community; the majority of us work in Dane County daily. But we are no bedroom community. We are strongly connected. We ooze small town charm and character.

Evansville is a great example of a distinctive city.

Community Announcements

Curbside yard waste pick up for June is this week, June 3 through June 7.

Veterans Memorial Aquatic Center in Leonard-Leota Park opens this Saturday, June 8, at 1:00 p.m. For hours and events, check the city website at www.ci.evansville.wi.gov.

“The Four Monotheistic Religions in the Holy Land” will be presented by Dennis Jenkyns on Tuesday, June 11 at 7:00 p.m. at Creekside Place, 102 Maple Street. The event is free and open to the public.

The second annual Theodore Robinson Plein Air Painting Competition will be held from June 14 through June 23. The artist registration form can be found at www.evansville-wi.net.

The Artful Gourmet and Creekside Place will host a Wine Tasting on Wednesday, June 19 at 7:00 p.m. at Creekside Place. Additional information can be found at www.creeksideplace.org.

Community Thanks

Evansville thanks our industrious third grade students for the recent Main Street clean up project. Nancy Greve-Shannon has coordinated this spring volunteer activity for twelve years. Small hands also make impacts in our community. We value their effort!