

tower Topics

V I L L A G E *o f* W E S T E R N S P R I N G S

125th Legacy Gift Campaign-Community Support Needed

By Janet Dahl, Legacy Committee

Tower History

In January 1892, Western Springs received a gift that has continued to enrich the lives of its residents. The Collins family deeded over Block A to Village officials. It was to be used for the Village's water tower, with a prohibition against other structures. The surrounding area was to be a Village Green, for gathering.

The ink was barely dry on the plat of dedication before Benezette Williams, a resident and civil engineer, contracted with an engineering firm to construct what we still enjoy today as the iconic center of our Village.

The tower held water until 1991, when a lightning induced fire caused extensive damage to the structure. In its 120 years, the building has also served as Village Hall, the police station, jail, a magistrate's court, a childrens' museum and most recently, as the home of the Western Springs Historical Society. It has been used continuously by the Village, and has stood in stately beauty for 121 years. It is the landmark symbol of Western Springs.

Perhaps its most important use is symbolic: Its sturdy walls represent the strength of this community. The green surrounding the tower provides the Village a setting to celebrate with our families and neighbors, or to simply pause and watch the world go by. Block A maintains the vision of the Village's founders.

An enduring motto for the Village is *Pride in the Past, Faith in the Future*. In the spirit of *pride in the past*, the Water Tower has been added to the National Register of Historic Places. In the spirit of *faith in the future*, the Village has repurposed the tower after the tanks failed and restored it after a fire. Over the years, the Village has tuck-pointed, re-roofed, re-wired and cared for a building whose purpose is largely inspirational. They have partnered with the 125th Legacy Gift Committee in the stairway restoration, and will be replacing

the doorway, and incrementally replacing its very expensive curved windows. Like most old buildings, the tower requires a unique dedication, and a tremendous financial commitment. The budget for these repairs is often competing with the first tier of Village responsibility, safety and infrastructure.

Volunteer Spirit

In 2011, the Village celebrated its 125th birthday, the Quasquicentennial of Western Springs. Helming this celebration was Jim Tilden, the embodiment of what it means to live in Western Springs. He grew up here, returned to the Village after college, taught at McClure, served on every conceivable committee, was a Citizen of the Year, and a Village trustee. He spearheaded the effort to allow alcohol in the Village with the vision that good food deserved a celebratory beverage, and that restaurants would attract young residents and visitors who would fall in love with his town. His love of all things, **Western Springs**, fueled our year-long party.

Jim's wish was that there be a Quasquicentennial gift to the community and thus a Legacy Committee was established. The Committee worked with residents and the Village to dedicate a "face lift" for the tower. The deteriorating stairs were replaced with beautiful curved stairs, and seating benches were added. Phase 1 was completed in December 2012, and the improvement is beyond expectation.



(Continued on Page Two)



(Legacy Gift continued)

Jim planned to “get the band together” and have Phase 2 of the makeover ready for the tower before its own Q celebration in 2017.

These improvements would add more benches, a brick walk of fame, lighting, planters and historical markers. He joked that he would reign as the “King of the Green” at a Tower Ball, where all the citizens would celebrate the 125th birthday of our seminal park.

It was not meant to be. Jim died October 3, 2012, just as the safety fencing was installed for Phase 1 of the project.

The void of his leadership and enthusiasm should not create a vacuum for his dream. The most precious resource in Western Springs is its committed, creative citizenry. Some members of the 125th Legacy Gift Committee are willing to continue Jim’s work, but we are in need of fresh ideas and new visions for funding. Please consider adding your energy to the task of preserving and improving this touchstone of our community. We need grass roots support from all of our community members, clubs, societies, businesses and school associations to go forward.

After the New Year, the Legacy Committee will hold informational discussions regarding the role of the Tower Green in the Village’s long-term downtown plan. Please join us to refine our goals, and help us plan to make them happen. If you have never volunteered here in the Village, it is an excellent way to meet people, exchange ideas, and put down roots.

Please contact Janet Dahl at janet@dahl.com, if you have ideas or are interested in joining us. We will be relentlessly pursuing community leaders to add their energy to our efforts. Please consider shouldering the volunteer spirit of Jim Tilden, and so many others who devote countless hours to Western Springs. Bring a friend! Together we will make a difference. We will improve today’s Village, and touch future generations.

Visit the Village’s web site, www.wsprings.com, for more information on the 125th Legacy Gift Campaign, which includes conceptual drawings, the April 2012 Tower Topics and a list of donors who kick started this process. The Legacy Committee recognizes and thanks Timothy and Jennifer Tomasik for their recent donation of \$100. If you have not yet made a donation to the legacy fund, donations may be sent to Quasquicentennial Legacy Fund, 740 Hillgrove Avenue, Western Springs, IL 60558.