

URBANDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Summer 2024



We held a reception on Sunday, June 9 to honor two long serving members of our Society and the Urbandale Community, Virginia Gee and Bob Simon. Mayor Bob Andeweg was present to provide a proclamation recognizing their contributions for making Urbandale a great place to live.

Virginia Gee

Virginia came from Ottumwa in 1969 when her new husband Don was assigned to the Polk County office of the Iowa State University Extension Service. They chose a home in Urbandale on 64th St. across from the Jensen School playground.

Daughter Lorrie (Lorraine) and son Steven attended Jensen school. Virginia helped organize the Jensen Parent Teacher Organization and worked with other volunteers on the landscape project for the school grounds.

During their children's high school years, Virginia helped other parents on the traditional magazine sales for the Band Boosters and, helped to organize the Performing Arts Booster Club.

She worked for several years in the school administration office to co-ordinate the publication of the School District newsletter. With the Parks and Recreation Department, she helped organize the first Adult Education program.

In 1978 Virginia joined the staff of the Urbandale Public



Library, when it was located on Aurora Ave. She held a variety of positions before retiring after 25 years [2003].

At the library she met Hazel Demerjean and Mae Nelson and shared their interest in founding the Urbandale Historical Society, which first met at the library and then at the Olmsted school.

Virginia and Don became active members when the Historical Society purchased the Urban property and work began on what was to become the **Olmsted-Urban House**.

As a Board member, Virginia was involved with fundraising, restoration and acquisition, program planning and presentations of local history. She served several terms as Secretary and wrote articles for the newsletters. In recent years she also contributed articles of local history to the Urbandale Living Magazine.

For the community, Virginia was active with Aldersgate Church, President of the Urbandale Garden Society, named Lioness of the Year and was a representative to the Urbandale Centennial Planning Committee. In 2018 she was named by the Urbandale Chamber of Commerce to the Urbandale Hall of Fame.

Bob Simon

Bob Simon was born in Minden IA and graduated from Shelby High School, then attended Iowa St. Univ and Simpson College. Bob was a US Navy veteran and

during his time in the service also played as an extra in several movies in California.

Bob married his high school sweetheart, Verda and moved to Urbandale in 1955. Here they raised three children, Debbie, Scott and Holly. Bob worked at Western Mutual, later Continental Western Insurance for his entire career retiring in the late 1990s.

Bob and Verda were founding members of the Aldersgate Church, volunteered with many community organizations including Boy Scouts troop 96, the Urbandale Downtown Neighborhood Association (DUNA), various coin clubs across Iowa, the Iowa Sesquicentennial committee, the Urbandale Centennial committee and coordinated the sale of the Urbandale Centennial commemorative medallions.

Bob and Verda were early members of the Urbandale Historical Society, playing an active role with the Fundraising Committee, planning programs and bus trips to various places in Iowa. He worked with Wayne Robbins on the first homemade Ice Cream Social events and organized the sale of the bricks for the Memorial Walk of History.

Ice Cream Social

Mark your calendars for Sunday, June 30, 2-4 pm. This



will mark the beginning of the greatest celebration of our Nation's Independence in the world.

Urbandale special events for the 4th of July begin with the Historical Society's

Annual Ice Cream Social. It will be even greater this year as we will feature the Urbandale Citizens Band and a special dedication of the Original flag pole from the old Urbandale High School which was on the roof of the building.

We will have the traditional ice cream, pies, brownies and lots of fun. Come and enjoy the food and time with friends. The House will be open for tours.

Programs

This past year we had a variety of programs to entertain and enlighten us. Since our roundup of programs in the Spring Newsletter we have had talks by: Retired Fire Chief Jerry Holt on the history of the Urbandale Fire Department, Mr. Will Page about architecture and design of homes and Staci Stanton on the Urbandale

Library.

Our 2024-25 Program series looks to be as fun as last years. We are still finalizing the schedule but topics will include: Iowa Oddities with author Megan Bannister, History of Urbandale Athletics and Activities with Tim Carver, History of the Urbandale Schools with Dr. Daca and Dean Hatch, McDivitt Grove Cemetery with Mary Polson and Ann Ulm, Preserving Family History with the Iowa Genealogy Society and Coal Mines in Urbandale.

The Historical Society Program series presentations are held the second Sunday of the month at the *Urbandale Public Library from 2-4 pm*. If there is a particular topic you would like us to explore, please let us know.

News of the Urbandale Historical Society

When you come to the Olmsted-Urban house for the Ice Cream Social be sure to walk around the grounds and notice the new trees and shrubs. These were planted last Fall with the help of the Urbandale Uplift program and our newest Board member, Luke Miller. He has an interest and expertise in trees and growing things. He has been keeping an eye on our gardens and keeping the grounds looking good.

We have been looking at the Memorial Brick Walk program and are considering bring it to a close. We will be using a different, sturdier brick to fill out the current orders. We have a backlog of orders for bricks at the present time and need to complete them. We also need to replace some of the existing broken bricks. We will be announcing a final date for the Memorial Brick orders soon. Please watch for something in upcoming newsletters, our website and Facebook page.

We held our First (actually second but last year's was rained out) May Market on May 4. It was a nice day and we had 15 vendors respond. In addition to the vendor booths displaying their wares, the Lions Club made their world-famous pancakes and sausage. We made over \$1200 from the event and even were able to sell some old surplus items from our collections. There were a number of visitors. Plans are being made to hold the event again next Spring.

We will also be holding our Fall happening in October, hopefully with the Lions Club again serving their pancakes and other activities. Watch the website and Facebook for more details.

Take Pride in Urbandale

As we begin to celebrate our nation's birth and look at the unveiling of a new city flag to represent our community, we could recall a piece written by our own

Virginia Gee.

Like a giant tapestry ... URBANDALE is woven from many threads.

Small beginnings in muted hues ... a few farms and acreages, homes, a store,

later even a coal mine, linked to Des Moines by the black cord of the trolley car.

1917 ... individuals gather together to establish a city ... a pattern evolves.

More families move in, adding unique colors and designs.

Some leave for other places, but each life has added something to the weave.

An occasional fault in the design is later corrected and improved, and is now hardly distinguishable.

As URBANDALE grows, brighter patterns and new designs are held together

by the basic warp and woof of the values of the past.

This is a lasting creation to which we all contribute. Let us take pride in our workmanship.

Urbandale City Flag

As of this writing, Urbandale is in the process of selecting an official City Flag. The city has brought together a committee of community members to shepherd the process soliciting and designing a new flag to represent Urbandale. It has been an extensive and community-wide endeavor. Over 800 submissions were received and reviewed. These were then reviewed and, in some cases, refined by vexillological designers. These are people who are interested in the design, history, symbolism and usage of flags. The new Urbandale City flag will be revealed on Thursday, June 27 by Mayor Bob Andeweg at his State of the City Address at the Urbandale Public Library at 5:00 pm. Be there if you can to see the new flag and hear about the plans for Urbandale in the coming year.



News of the Urbandale Alumni Association

The Urbandale Alumni Association plans a busy summer with multiple events. The Alumni Association will be present at the **Ice Cream Social** in the front yard of the Olmsted-Urban House starting the kickoff for their

latest fundraiser. At 2:30pm we will have a dedication ceremony for the original flagpole that was used at the K-12 building at 70th and Douglas. Mayor Bob Andeweg will be present for the dedication. During the Ice Cream Social from 2:00pm to 4:00pm the Alumni Association will be selling bricks to go around the flagpole. You can purchase a 4x8 brick with 3 lines and 20 characters per line for \$35 and/or an 8x8 brick with 6 lines and 20 characters per line. Some people will purchase bricks with their name and year they graduated. Others will purchase the 8x8 brick for \$50 and do families on it. Alumni Board members will be onsite to help you with your brick. The flagpole and plaza around it are being dedicated to **Audrey DeCarlo** from the Class of 1964. Audrey was working on this project when she sadly passed and the Alumni Board decided to dedicate it in her memory.



On **July 6th** the **Urbandale Alumni Association** and the **Urbandale Schools and Alumni Foundation** will be hosting their **5th Annual U-Fest** event at the **Urbandale Senior Recreation Center** from 4:30pm to 9:00pm. This year we are merging our **Alumnus of the Year** event with **U-Fest**. In addition, we will be recognizing a retired teacher, two businesses that have supported the Alumni Association, and the **Urbandale Historical Society** for their support from the beginning of our founding the Alumni Association in 2013. This is a fundraiser for student scholarships and teacher grants. It is \$10 to come to the event with the money going for the scholarships and teacher grants. On site will be the band, "Run Wilson" which is made up of Urbandale graduates. We will also have Hy-Vee there grilling up hamburgers and hotdogs along with slices of pizza and chips. Your Private Bar will be there selling both soft and alcoholic drinks. In addition, there will be auctions and raffles going on. Bring a lawn chair and spend the evening at the Urbandale Senior Recreation Center enjoying music, food, and drinks while raising money for our students!!

A Timeline of the Urbandale Historical Society (1975-1985)

The following was prepared by Virginia Gee and it gives us a sense of the activities of the Historical Society over the years. We will run other years in later newsletters.

1975

Urbandale Historical Group organized March 25, 1975

- Larry and Olivia Hindert – Enabler
- Leonard and Harriett Phelps
- Ed and Doris Spiller
- Anna Hoskins Dunn

- Laird Jones
- Les Hamilton
- Hazel Demirjean
- Mae Nelson – Secretary
- April 18, 1975: Special Recognition Day at the Urbandale Library
- Meeting: Marge Wittenbaugh

1976

Ed Spiller: Enabler

- Ruby Hartsock attended
- Met Monthly and shared information, acquired pictures and articles for Urbandale History file. Would Urbandale property be available?
- Decided to charter organization; Marge Wittenbaugh prepared By-Laws
- Officers elected:
 - Ed Spiller - President
 - Cameron Spiller – Vice President
 - Mae Nelson – Secretary
 - Marjorie Wittenbaugh – Treasurer
 - Louise Lamb – Historian & Reporter
 - Hazel Demirjean – Trustee
 - Helen Peterson – Trustee
 - Frank Gibson – Trustee

1977

Ed Spiller: President

- Dues: \$5.00 / person, \$7.50 / Family
- Membership: 19
- Planned Urbandale's 60th Birthday party, held at Lion's Park Shelter house (April 17). Sent 80 invitations
- Membership table at the 4th of July celebration. By July 19, membership = 45
- Planning for next event
- Provided 2 3x4 Christmas decorations for the city painted by Mae Nelson
- Christmas party at Wittenbaugh's
- Gifts for Karen Acres nursing home

1978

Ed Spiller: President

- Planned birthday celebration.
 - Display of old items at the Urbandale Library, April 15
 - Over 100 people came to view materials and share memories at Lions Park Shelter house on April 16.
 - Committee: Ed Spiller, Doris Cameran Spiller, Mary Sherer, Robert and Louise Lamb, Mae Nelson, Dale and Bernard Milligan, Hazel Demerjean, Helen and Maynard Petersen, Harriett and Leonard Phelps, Marge Witenbaugh.
 - Urbandale Lioness furnished cookies.
- Discussed possibility of an Urbandale History Book
- Participated in the Urbandale July 4th parade

- Membership table
- Picnic at Living History Farm
- Tried to obtain information about early families and city officials

1979

Ed Spiller: President

- Membership: 39
- Group sought ideas for locating Historical Society materials
- Planned April event
 - Display at Hartsook's Hardware store
 - Historical exhibit at Lions Park Shelter house, April 28. Attendance: 28
- Dave Brush completed inventory of McDivitt Grove Cemetery
- Display in Olmsted room during July 4th celebration
- Picnic at Living History Farms
- Pope John Paul II came to Urbandale, Living History Farms
- Gathered more printed materials and old kitchen utensils
- Looking to city for finding storage space

1980

Ed Spiller: President

- Planned April event
 - Display at Hartsook's Hardware store
 - Display at Lions Park shelter house, April 19 (9-4, 7 tables). Attendance: 29
- Display in Olmsted room during July 4th celebration
- Helped sponsor 4 8th graders who participated in the History Day Project
- Encouraged members to participate in the Urbandale events at Living History Farms
- Participated in the 10th Anniversary of Des Moines Savings and Loan

1981

Robert Lamb: President

- Robert Simon helped plan programs for some meetings
- Planned for Urbandale 64th Birthday party – April 25
 - "Urbandale: Yesterday and Today" display and communication items
 - Elementary students made posters
 - 76 people signed guest book
 - Program:
 - Sr. Citizens sang
 - Speakers: Gene Laverrenz, Erma Timmons, Mugs Olmsted, Mayor E. J. Giovannetti, Mark Nagel
 - Olmsted students sang
- 4th of July float: "Liberated from ..."
- Display case at Brenton Bank, exhibits changed
- Display at Urbandale Day at Living History Farms, Sept. 6

1982

Robert Lamb: President

- Planning for Urbandale's 65th Birthday
 - Display at Lions Park Shelter, April 17
 - Sr. Citizens sing
 - 40 persons attended
- More discussion about trying to find a location to store items
- Scheduled changes to displays at Brenton Bank
- Membership down, try to make more contacts with folks interested in local history
- Had \$526 in treasury

1983

Robert Lamb: President

- Continued changing items in display case at Brenton Bank (Mrs. Karl Urban – old valentines)
- April 30, 20 folks gathered to view old films, home movies, related to Urbandale families
- Display at Urbandale Day, Sept. 4, at Living History Farms
- History of Urbandale's street names

1984

Robert Lamb: President

- Continued search for place to store materials; Living History Farms, Blackhurst school, Urbandale Library, ...
- Potluck supper at Marge Wittenbaugh's
 - New members – sharing ideas and goals
- Purchased four 4-drawer filing cabinets stored in Marge's basement
- Display in the window at the Library in April
- Decided to start fund drive for permanent site. Goal: \$30,000, certificates to be sold for \$10 or more
- Float in the 4th of July parade
- Display booth at the Urbandale Days event (Living History Farms)

1985

Robert Lamb: President

- Model of first Urbandale school was constructed by Ken Demerjean – displayed at various meetings and sites to help raise money
- Bob Simon ordered 'appreciation coins'
- Madeline Kaloides helped collect materials and plan a brochure
- Has a float and booth for July 4th
- Rented space in Olmsted school, moved filing cabinets and display case
- Open house at Heritage Room, Sept. 9. Visitors: 50
- Received funds from the city Hotel-Motel tax
- Discussed different city sites on which to build

Acknowledgement of Supporters



Urbandale Historical Society
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