



WESTERN SPRINGS

Historical Society

Fall/Winter 2024



A NEIGHBORHOOD CENTENNIAL

FOREST HILLS

Designed to attract upper middle-class families, Forest Hills, the neighborhood south of 47th Street and west of Wolf Road, was born in the Roaring Twenties. It survived the 1930s Great Depression and a seasonally flooding creek, and later thrived during the post-war boom of the late 1940s and 1950s.

BY ROB GRAF & CLARISSE BECKER

One hundred years ago, realtor and developer George Bruckert sought to make his dreams of a vibrant community — filled with large homes and upper middle class families — a reality. In 1924, after purchasing land south of 47th Street and west of Wolf Road, Bruckert planned to fill the empty plots of land with rows upon rows of extravagant, relatively expensive homes (a minimum of \$8,000 per home) and line the streets with beautiful Elm trees. However, for Bruckert and his eventual collaborators, there were quite a few obstacles to overcome in order to bring what we now know as Forest Hills to life.

Aerial view of Forest Hills, circa 1938



Though Bruckert obviously had the ambition, he still needed some serious financial aid to secure the desired land. At least 19 other investors signed off on the "Forest Hills" Plat of Subdivision filed in Cook County on March 14, 1924, including Henry Einfeld, Alexander Hugo Vavra, and of course George Bruckert himself. However, now a new challenge was presented to Bruckert's group: what should their newly purchased land be named? Bruckert and Einfeld decided to leave it to the people and hold a contest to name the new subdivision, promising a \$50 prize for first place and \$10 for five runners-up. Initially, they had almost decided on the name "Fair Elms", a combination of the two popular entries "Fair View Gardens" and "Elms", however the developers ultimately chose to go with the name "Forest Hills" based on the chic and popular town in Long Island, New York. The name Fair Elms would eventually be reused for an avenue within the development. Ironically enough, the original landscape of Forest Hills was mostly prairieland, severely lacking in both the titular hills and forests. As one early resident recalled during his time there as a boy: "there were no 'hills' and the only 'forest' consisted of two weeping willows near Flagg Creek".

Bruckert and the others began work on development of the land soon after the purchase. They laid out the streets and by 1929, north-south avenues (Lawn, Grand, Woodland, and Central) were paved with concrete including curbs and sidewalks installed down to 49th Street. In addition, village employees planted thousands of elm seedlings every 30 feet throughout the neighborhood and down the parkways of soon-to-be-built streets.

Despite all their efforts to create an attractive community for the upper middle class, the first five years of development were less than ideal. Only 42 homes were developed and occupied during that time, presumably as a result of too few east-west streets being paved, the growing issue of street flooding due to a lacking sewer system and less vacant land to properly absorb stormwater overflow from Flagg Creek. The frequent flooding issues also prevented homes from being built beyond Central Avenue. Over the years, residents, especially those living near the southern end of Forest Hills, lobbied for new streets and sewers though they faced some pushback due to the cost of the required special assessment.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Season's Greetings!

As the year draws to a close, we want to take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of you who have supported and engaged in our mission to preserve the rich history of Western Springs. As a non-profit organization, we rely 100% on the generosity of our members.

We also want to extend a special thanks to the many people who made the 2024 House Walk possible — including the seven homeowners who so graciously opened their homes to us, the sponsors, and the more than 250 House Walk volunteers.

As we approach the holiday season, we encourage you to connect with the history of our Village by visiting the Tower Museum and the Ek Dahl House, or by stopping by

the Archives. We are always looking for volunteers as well, so please send us an email at info@westernspringshistory.org if you are interested. Whether you like history, architecture, or just getting to know your neighbors, helping out at the Historical Society is a great way to contribute your valuable talents to the Village while making new friends.

From all of us at the WSHS, we wish you and your loved ones a joyous holiday season and a new year filled with peace, prosperity, and moments of history that inspire you. Thank you for your ongoing support — we're excited to see what the future holds as we continue to honor the past.

Michael Scodro
President, WSHS

A Successful Walk

On May 19, we held our first House Walk in five years, and the day was a tremendous success! The weather was phenomenal, each house offered something extraordinary and unique, and a record number of attendees joined us for the event.

Of course, none of it would have been possible without the homeowners who generously agreed to share their homes with us, the florists, tablescapes designers and more than 250 volunteers. Led by event co-chairs Julie Kemnitz and Carolyn Tobin, these volunteers worked tirelessly to publicize this event, research and present historical information on the featured homes, organize the trolley system and staff the locations.



We are also extremely grateful to the many sponsors and advertisers for their support.

The proceeds from the House Walk allow us to maintain the Tower Museum and Ek Dahl House, offer programming, and collect and catalogue documents and other items to preserve the history of Western Springs.

Volunteer of the Year

The 2024 Volunteer of the Year Award has been presented to Kelly Carlson. Kelly has only lived in Western Springs for a year, but over these past twelve months she has already made a significant difference at the WSHS with her volunteering. Kelly was the 2024 House Walk Program Book Chairperson and has just joined the 2025 Preservation Awards Committee. Kelly is also a regular member of the Archive staff and was recently elected to the Board as our newest Trustee. Thank you, Kelly, for all you do!



Photo: Ferreira Photos & Films

WSHS Scholarship Winners



Congratulations to our 2024 LTHS Scholarship recipients! In June, WSHS President Michael Scodro (*above center*) and Bill Lipinski presented the awards. Ryan Simpson (*left*) received the RoseMarie Lipinski Scholarship, and Ashlin Kwon (*right*) was the Carol Young Scholarship winner.

The RoseMarie Lipinski Scholarship, graciously funded by Bill Lipinski in honor of his late wife RoseMarie, and the Carol Young Scholarship will be available to Western Springs LTHS seniors in 2025. Detailed requirements for each scholarship will be included in the LTHS Scholarship Package provided by the school in February.

Ryan is currently a freshman at the University of Illinois and Ashlin is attending Cornell University. The WSHS wishes them luck in their educational journeys!

FOREST HILLS CENTENNIAL



The flooding issues would eventually be fixed in 1958 with the Tollway Commission which completed the necessary improvements along the entire length of Flagg Creek, finally allowing the streets south of 49th to be paved and new curbs and gutters and storm sewers to be installed.

Any development woes in the early years of Forest Hills were only exacerbated by the arrival of the 1930s and with it the Great Depression. Most of the vacant lots became tax delinquent and some of the new houses defaulted on their mortgages. Many tried their best to survive during these difficult times, such as local residents Tim Murphy and Herbert Rhoads who, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, started a sweet corn growing operation on a large section of undeveloped Forest Hills' southwestern lands.

In February 1931, a group of residents concerned with how the hard economic times would impact their neighborhood formed The Forest Hills Association. Proclaiming their desire to ensure social cohesion for the common good of the community, The Forest Hills Association coordinated clean-up and mowing of weeds on vacant areas, mosquito and fly treatment, dredging and debris removal in Flagg Creek, and keeping new homes up to a desirable standard. The Association also set up "Block Captains" who acted as watchdogs and local facilitators of neighborhood activities. The group lobbied for improved traffic control on 47th Street and a new grade school. Before Forest Hills Elementary School was built in 1953, the neighborhood children attended Grand

Avenue school in Old Town. In 1929, the children began attending Franklin Ave. School (renamed Clark School in 1974) located in Ridge Acres.

In the 1950s, during America's post-WWII economic boom, local businessmen decided to purchase lots that were lost by original owners during the depression. They partnered with local general contractors to continue the house build-outs of Forest Hills including streets and sidewalks south of 49th Street.



As the economy continued to prosper, and the automobile established itself as the main method of transportation for many Americans, a Tri-State Tollway was proposed that would run along the western boundary of Western Springs. A group of locals hired an attorney to block construction of the tollway near the village, but their attempt ended in failure and construction began in 1958. Village residents did succeed in convincing the planning engineers to build their proposed tollway oasis south of 55th Street instead of within the boundaries of Western Springs. The subdivision of Ridgewood (adjacent to the Oasis) would not become part of Western Springs until 1974.

During its construction, the Tollway engineers widened Flagg Creek and lowered the creek grade considerably. As a result, historic flooding in the Forest Hills area was reduced and land values along the highway frontage increased. The original 1958 Tollway was 250 feet wide and resulted in 25 Western Springs homes being isolated. After much debate, in 1966 Hinsdale and Western Springs agreed to make the Tollway the new boundary between the Villages.

As Forest Hills gradually grew into what we know it as today, the style of its homes grew and evolved as well. The original neighborhood was designed to emphasize wide, deep front lawns, and large backyards. Pre-war housing were mostly two-story distinctive designs like Tudor Revival, Georgian, Colonial Revival, Dutch Colonial Revival, French Eclectic, and Cape Cod styles. After the War, when the original \$8,000 minimum cost in land deeds was no longer relevant, new homes especially south of 51st Street were simpler Ranch styles and later Split-Level types. Since the 1990s, large lots occupied by less expensive ranch homes and bi-levels were targeted by developers for "tear downs" in order to build new large two- to three-story homes. To date, complete existing home demolitions amount to over one third of the total 780 residential properties.

So as we reach the 100 year anniversary of Forest Hills' inception, we should also take the time to acknowledge and celebrate the many efforts its developers and residents made over the years to help the community not only survive but thrive in the current day.



BIENNIAL PRESERVATION AWARDS

PRESERVING TRADITIONS



The Historical Society will present three awards for building preservation in the spring of 2025. The awards, which were first granted in 1996, recognize owners for the thoughtful restoration or preservation of a structure in the Village (residential or commercial). Judges use criteria that have been established by the US Department of the Interior and are recommended by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Only the building's exterior is considered in determining the awards.

The Historical Society appreciates the efforts by all homeowners to maintain their homes. A resident's commitment to preserving their home or adding to it in a period appropriate manner contributes to the charm and historic character of our Village.

The three categories are: Preservation/Exterior Rehabilitation, Compatible Addition, and Good Neighbor. For the Preservation/Exterior Rehabilitation and Compatible Addition Awards the building must be at least 50 years old. The Good Neighbor Award is for a structure, either residential or commercial, that fits the scale and historic style of Western Springs and the building may be of any age.

Many of the homes that have received awards over the years have been nominated by proud owners; however, anyone may nominate a building for an award. To nominate a property, please complete the attached form. The completed form may be mailed, dropped off at the WSHS Archives or emailed (see *form for info*). Additional copies of the Nomination Form may be downloaded by visiting www.westernspringshistory.org. Nominations must be received by February 28, 2025.

THE WESTERN SPRINGS PRESERVATION AWARDS

2025 Nomination Form



Address of Property _____

Name of Owner (if known) _____

Information (age of house, architectural style) _____

Why do you think that this structure deserves a preservation award? _____

If available, please submit copies of any before/after photos or documents you think support the merit of your nomination. These really help our judges to evaluate each entry. Documents will not be returned.

Award Categories (please circle one)

1. Preservation/Exterior Rehabilitation includes the maintenance, protection, repair and replacement of the structure so that it retains its original exterior historic character OR returning a significant part of the structure to the original design and condition by repairing or replacing the original material and architectural detail and by painting with historically appropriate colors.

2. Compatible Addition is for an addition that recognizes and respects the existing architectural and environmental characteristics of the subject property. These characteristics include the general size, shape and scale of the addition and the use of compatible materials, colors and textures. The addition should respect general site characteristics and it should not alter, change, obscure, damage, or destroy any significant features of the original property.

3. Good Neighbor is for a residential or commercial structure of any age that compliments the architectural and environmental characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood. These characteristics include the general size/scale, architectural style and choice of materials for the new structure vs. surrounding properties.

Submit Nomination Form

Mail:
Preservation Awards/WSHS
P.O. Box 139
Western Springs, IL 60558

Drop off:
WSHS Archives
Grand Avenue Community Center
2nd Floor, West

Email:
Info@WesternSpringsHistory.org

★ **Nominations must be received by February 28, 2025. Winners will be announced in May 2025.**

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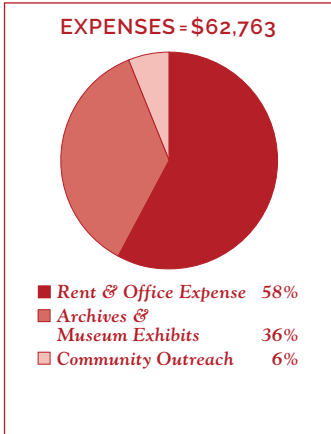
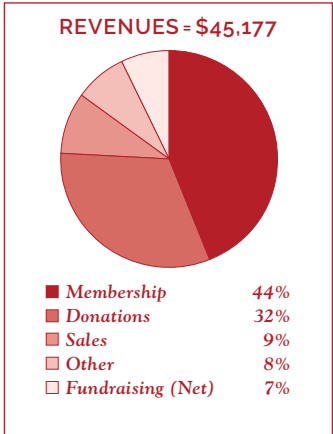
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WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!

As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, we rely 100% on the generosity of our members. Your financial support through membership dues, donations, fundraising events and memorial bequests helps us to continue our mission of preserving and presenting Western Springs' history. Thank you for supporting the Western Springs Historical Society!

Combined Financial Report



The Western Springs Historical Society is an independent all-volunteer, non-profit organization that does not receive any federal, state or local government funding.

As such, it relies on the generous support of concerned residents like you, combined with careful management of its financial resources, to ensure that the Society remains a viable organization, able to plan and implement programs and services for the community.

The pie charts shown at left summarize the revenue and expenses for the WSHS, which includes data for both 2022 and 2023 (the most recent two year period for which complete data are available). The cancellation of the 2021 House Walk and its subsequent rescheduling until 2024 (due to Covid) kept our revenues low for the time period 2022-2023, while continued capital expenditures to Ekdahl House and Archive updating contributed to higher than normal expenses. With the return of the House Walk in May 2024, this significant boost to our budget will be reflected in next year's report.

THE SEASON OF GIVING

Celebrating True Value

This year, Village True Value Hardware celebrated its 70th Anniversary with an amazing three-day event which included a fundraiser for the WSHS. For a five dollar donation, customer received a five gallon bucket and got 20% off whatever they could fit in the bucket. It was a great success. Photos of the store and its staff over the last 70 years were displayed throughout the store. We are grateful to owner Linda Johnson for her ongoing support of the WSHS and love of our community's history.

Trustee Pete Caris with Village True Value owner Linda Johnson.



Shopped and Shared

Clever Girl has been a Western Springs destination for a unique mix of fashion, gifts, and décor since 2008. Shop owner and Western Springs resident Katie McMillan has been a long time supporter of the Western Springs Historical Society—including sponsoring our House Walks. This fall, Katie hosted a Shop and Share event in which she donated 10% of her sales to the WSHS. Thank you Katie, for everything you do for us!

Make a Difference

In 1967, the Western Springs Historical Society was founded as an all-volunteer organization for the purpose of preserving and displaying evidence of the lifestyles of families in the area. For over 55 years, we have served the community by exhibiting museum collections, presenting educational programs, providing archival services and hosting special events.

The donations we receive from our members help us continue our mission to instill an appreciation of the past while promoting the preservation of our Village's cultural, economic and aesthetic heritage.

As we approach the end of 2024, please consider supporting the WSHS. Become a member, renew your membership, gift a membership and/or make a tax-deductible donation to honor someone who loves, or loved, Western Springs. Payments can be made by sending a check in the enclosed envelope or via PayPal on our website. Thank you for your support!



Use the camera app on your smartphone to scan this QR code and pay online!

EKDAHL HOUSE PRESERVATION

BECOME A PART OF HISTORY

Did you know you can help support the ongoing preservation of Ekdahl House through the WSHS Buy-a-Brick program? The bricks are available in two sizes, 4"x 8" (\$100) or 8"x 8" (\$200), and are installed in the walkway to the house. Each brick can be engraved with your family name(s) or a short statement of your choice. The bricks make a memorable gift, provide a remembrance of a family member, or act as a permanent thank you to a dear friend. The completed form may be mailed, dropped off at the WSHS Archives or emailed (see form for info).



THE WESTERN SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Buy-a-Brick Order Form



Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Brick Size (please circle): 4x8 inches (\$100) 8x8 inches (\$200)

Engraving: Bricks can accommodate 13 characters per line. 4x8 bricks get three lines of text, 8x8 bricks get six lines of text. All engraving will be filled with epoxy.

Engraving Request
 (Fill out the first three lines only for the 4x8 brick):

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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Submit Form

Mail:
 WSHS/Buy-a-Brick Program
 P.O. Box 139
 Western Springs, IL 60558

Drop off:
 WSHS Archives
 Grand Avenue Community Center
 2nd Floor, West

Email:
Info@WesternSpringsHistory.org

Note
 Please make checks payable to *The Western Springs Historical Society*. Your donation is tax deductible. You will receive a letter of acknowledgement and receipt of purchase. Thank you for your support.



WESTERN SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 139
Western Springs
708-246-9230
WesternSpringsHistory.org

THE TOWER MUSEUM & CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

are housed in the historic Water Tower

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Closed on major holiday weekends

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Call 708-246-9230

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Grand Avenue Community Center, Second Floor

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Mary Rintz

WESTERN SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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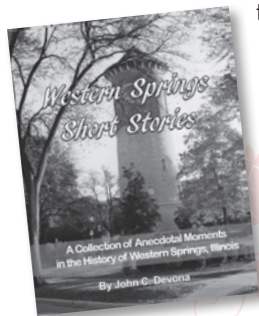


*No check? No problem!
Just use the camera app on
your smartphone to scan this
QR code and pay online!*

Our Storied Past

Western Springs resident, and past WSHS Trustee, John Devona is the author of *Western Springs Short Stories*, his collection of anecdotal moments on the history of our beloved Village. The book's 514 pages feature 220 short stories and many photos. It is a must-read for any resident past or present, young or old, and makes a great holiday gift!

Books can be purchased for \$30 at the Tower Museum on Saturdays, 10am to noon or at the following Western Springs stores: Clever Girl, the Fruit Store, The Uptown Shop and Village True Value. You can also download the order form online at westernspringshistory.org/get-involved/shop. All book profits support the Western Springs Historical Society!



Tower Museum Holiday Shop

Looking for that perfect gift? Stop in and shop at the Tower Museum, open Saturdays 10am to noon. We carry notecard sets, notepads, vintage records, historical maps and books.

Holiday Hours

The Tower Museum/Children's Museum will be closed on Saturday, December 28. We will reopen on January 4, 2024.