

Gem Lake News

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Chuck Watson Will Be Missed

Former City Council Member Chuck Watson died suddenly at home in Gem Lake on Tuesday, August 13.

Chuck served for seven years on the council and acted as the Neighborhood Watch captain. He resigned from his city leadership roles in January of 2010 due to increasing job demands and a hectic travel schedule.

"We lost a great guy," said his neighbor and friend Hutch Schilling, who also served on the Gem Lake City Council. "He will be missed."

In honor of the time and energy Chuck devoted to his community, we are reprinting a profile written about him in the February, 2009 edition of this newsletter. **Please see page 2 for that profile.** The Gem Lake City council and many friends in the community extend their heartfelt sympathies to the family of Chuck Watson, who leaves behind wife Holly and three children.

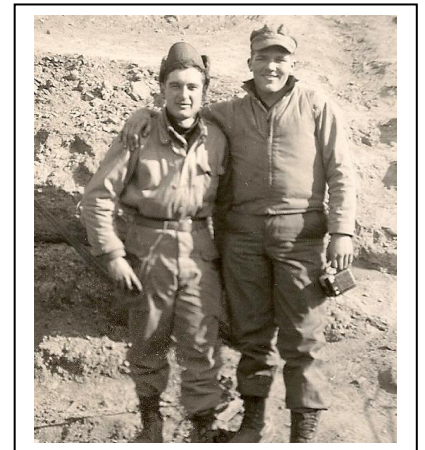


Vern Grundhofer : Another Gem Lake Treasure Gone

A long term resident, beloved family man, and congenial neighbor recently left us. Vern Grundhofer died on August 5 after living many years in Gem Lake. A Korean War Veteran, he was profiled in our newsletter about five years ago as part of a Veteran's Day celebration. Vern married and raised five children in Gem Lake after escaping death many times during the war.

The following story in reprinted in his honor from the November, 2008 edition of Gem Lake News.

When Vern Grundhofer thinks of the Korean War, he remembers the sound of bullets whizzing by his ear. As a marine, he fought one battle after another in what essentially became a trench war. The sights and sounds of war have stayed with him and are as clear today as they were more than 50 years ago.



Chuck Watson Serves Gem Lake (continued from page one)

Editor's Note: This story is reprinted from the February, 2009 Gem Lake News to honor Chuck Watson's remarkable life and public service. He died on August 13 in Gem Lake.

From an economically challenged upbringing, a stint in the military during the Vietnam War era and a job that now involves quite a bit of travel, Chuck Watson has faced many challenges in his life.

Raised near the Capitol Building in St. Paul by a single parent, Chuck learned early to value the opportunities that a great education could provide for him. He excelled at St. Agnes's High School to the point that he was nominated for a prestigious spot in the Air Force Academy when he was 18 years old. Only two spots per year are allotted to Minnesota citizens by their senators. For Chuck this meant a life changing one-on-one meeting with then senator Hubert H. Humphrey, who he says was the "nicest man in the world."

Although Chuck did not end up attending the Academy, he did learn from the experience to set goals and then work to achieve them, no matter how much effort this entailed.

After his three year stint in the military, during which time he worked in the military police, Chuck got started in a career in the construction and tool distribution business. He has now worked in that industry for over 30 years. Currently, Chuck is a Regional Account Manager for DeWalt, which sells power tools to distributors such as Menards. (In 2013 he was the national manager.) Chuck has been married for 28 years. (Now 32 years.) He and his wife Holly have three children.

He and Holly stumbled onto a great piece of property in Gem Lake in 1989. "We didn't even know there was such a place as Gem Lake," says Chuck.

Their first home in Arden Hills had become too small due to their expanding family. The couple began exploring neighborhoods in the Northeastern regions of the Twin Cities and happened down LaBore Road one afternoon. Holly spotted a small hand painted sign on a tree, indicating land for sale. The property was

fairly large and had a distinct rural feeling to it. "This was before Target, Wal-mart and the nearby hotels were here," says Chuck.

Over the years, the Watsons planted a line of evergreen trees, built their current house and have tried to do landscaping appropriate to their semi-rural setting. In the beginning Chuck mowed almost the entire three acre lot, but gradually he began to let about half of his yard grow more naturally. He planted huge sections of wild flowers and natural grass, which cuts down on maintenance and water requirements.

Chuck has been on the Gem Lake City Council for 6 years. In addition to working on such projects as the Comprehensive Plan, Chuck was heavily involved in County Road E/LaBore Road traffic improvements with the City of Vadnais Heights. This involved bringing traffic lights to the intersection and re-orienting the lane configuration.

In the years ahead, Chuck has three main goals. He would like to see the city maintain current levels of service, while trying to stay within in current budget range.

He would also like to see responsible development that could keep taxes manageable for everyone. This would include well-planned commercial and residential development that takes into account the needs of nearby neighbors and doesn't get too crazy with the budget.

Chuck's third goal would be to continue to work on communication through the newsletter and web-site and work to get more people involved in the city government.

When Chuck had to resign in 2010 due to his schedule he said the following: "I am also really proud of the fact that I never lost track of who I was working for on the council, none of us did. It was never a personal agenda. I always tried hard to remember that we represented the betterment of the community."

Gem Lake Resident Vern Grundhofer Served in Korea

His service began with a draft notice. He was 22 years old and standing in an enlistment line. He was grabbed by the marines, who really were looking for a few good men. The encounter probably increased his chances of coming home safely. His training was superior. When he got to Korea, it also became clear that the marines were often better equipped than their counterparts in the U.S. Army.

The fighting took place over hilly terrain and the objective was simply to take one hill after another, or prevent the enemy from gaining the high ground. Each hilltop represented a potential artillery placement for one side or another. To do the job, his company had Browning Automatic Rifles, which fired off 450 rounds per minute. When a hot-spot was located, the generals always "called in the marines." As a result, his squad moved around a lot and often engaged in long combat situations.

In the Marines, men were then organized into squads of 12. Within a squad, there were three "fire teams." Within a fire team, one marine served as a scout, one served as the BAR man, (for Browning Automatic Rifle), one served as assistant rifle-man and one served as the fire team leader. Vern's fire team leader became a good friend. His name was Richard Bustle of Indianapolis. Sadly, Richard was killed July 25, 1953, only three days before the Korean War Truce was signed. Vern was on his way home when Richard died and heard the news when he landed in San Francisco. At 22, Vern was older than many of the marines he served with. They called him "Pops" and "Old Man." Age and experience made him more cautious than some of the 18 year olds he served with. "Some of them who felt more invincible than I did," says Vern.

Vern was assigned to the main line of resistance in Korea. In marine lingo, this is always referred to as the "MLR." The strategic nature of the area increased the ferocity of the fighting. One fire fight in particular stands out from all the many others. His squad and some reinforcements (27 men in all) were defending an area called Outpost Dagmar.



The Chinese shelled the outpost relentlessly until 2 a.m. one morning. In the end, four were killed, 17 were wounded, and Vern was only one of seven left to defend the hill. The result was that the marines held on. "The Browning Automatic Rifle is the only reason I am able to talk to you about this today." During the fighting, he carried a wounded marine about 800 yards through a "no-man's land" in order to get him medical aid.

With this battle over, Vern bedded down right on the main line of resistance and slept. In the morning, Vern's squad had to load the back of a flat bed truck with the bodies of dead enemy soldiers. He realized that he had recently faced them in battle. The memory remains chilling. After discharge, Vern went on to college on the GI Bill. He studied aircraft mechanics in Los Angeles.

When he came back to Minnesota to live, he married Mary Ann Tessier, whose family lived in Gem Lake. They had five children.

Each Veterans Day, Vern thinks about the guys who died in Korea. "They never had a chance to come home and get married and have children and grandchildren. They gave all of that up for us."

Vern was a real treasure and will be missed by friend and family, which includes seven grandchildren.

City News Page

MS-4 Report Gets Public Hearing

A state mandated report on storm water management, called the MS-4 Report has been completed by council member Jim Lindner and submitted to the State of Minnesota. It was also the subject of a public hearing on August 20 during the monthly city council meeting.

Jim reviewed all sections of the report, including educational efforts the city has engaged on the subject of storm water run off. Jim spent countless volunteer hours trudging all over Gem Lake to document and photograph inflows and outflows in our city, as required by the report. The document is now on display at Heritage Hall for anyone who wants to read it.

Our thanks to Jim Lindner for taking on the task of completing this very detailed report.

Now Open!! Black Sea Restaurant

Stop in at our newest Gem Lake business! The Black Sea Restaurant is now open on County Road E near Enterprise Rental Car. The popular Turkish restaurant named the Black Sea recently open its second branch in our city.

The restaurant has been a fixture for many years at 737 N. Snelling Avenue in St. Paul. That site opened in the year 2000 as a family run business.

Due to the quality of the food, the Black Sea developed a loyal customer base, according to owner and manager, Tolga Ata. Mr. Ata has run the Snelling Avenue restaurant for four years, which was originally run by his Uncle.

According to their web-site, Black Sea is the first and only Turkish restaurant in Minnesota, with an array of authentic fare. (They say they have the best spinach pie in town.) Check it out!

The small but cozy place serves authentic Turkish food such as falafel, kebabs, hummus and other Mediterranean fare. The Gem Lake restaurant is located at 1581 E. County Road E, next to Vera Auto Sales.

Preliminary Budget Passed for 2014.

A preliminary 2013 budget for the City of Gem Lake was passed by the Gem Lake City Council at the council meeting on August 20.

The 2013 General Fund Budget is set at \$343,336, which includes a General Tax Levy of \$289,439, a tax levy of \$60,000 and a debt levy of \$50,000. The preliminary budget figures are very similar to last year's estimated amounts.

By law, preliminary budgets must be submitted to the Ramsey County in September for the following year so that estimated tax information can be sent out to property owners. Final budget figures are due to the county in several months. These final figures cannot exceed preliminary budgets numbers, so it is very common for early budget estimates to be high. For the past three years, the final budget for Gem Lake has been significantly lower than preliminary estimates.

Swale Will Reduce Gem Lake Pollution

The Vadnais Lakes Area Watershed Management Organization will be putting a swale in the business district of Gem Lake, specifically on the northeast corner of Highway 61 and County Road E. A swale is a form of "hard scaping" the land to insure proper drainage of storm water and to help as much water as possible to seep into the ground where it falls, rather than running into a lake or other water body. The run off being diverted now flows under the Barnett Chrysler parking lot to the drainage culvert under Highway 61. The reason for the project is to reduce the amount of pollution that runs into the water body of Gem Lake by improving the ground along Highway 61 between where the water comes out and before it goes under the highway and on its way to becoming a problem. Gem Lake is now considered an impaired lake by the State of Minnesota. The project is scheduled to take place sometime this year. We aren't getting billed anything for this project.

Sewer Repairs Postponed On Hoffman Road

Repairs to the sewer system on Hoffman Road in Gem Lake's business district were discussed at several recent city council meetings.

City Engineer Justin Gese from SEH Engineering presented a report listing various options for relining the sewer pipes to insure years of additional service.

The relining of the sewer would be paid for out of money that currently exist in Gem Lake's Sewer Fund. A portion of all sewer charges that Gem Lake residents pay go into a restricted fund to be used for future repairs. At the July city council meeting, the council gave Gese the go ahead to obtain bids for the repairs.

Due to the short time frame allowed for the repairs to be done, bids came in higher than expected. With this information in mind, the council has elected to postpone the start of the project until 2014. With an entire construction season to complete the work, it is thought that bidders would be able to fit the project in between other larger jobs, thus hopefully lowering the price tag.



County Commissioner to Attend September Meeting

Ramsey County Commissioner Blake Huffman will be attending the September Gem Lake City Council Meeting on September 10.

Residents are invited to attend and take advantage of the opportunity to meet Mr. Huffman, who was elected to the Commission in 2012.

Traffic volumes and speed, especially on Goose Lake Road will be one of the subjects discussed, as well as other county/city related matters.

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We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.gemlakemn.org

Meetings: September & October 2013

The following Gem Lake Meetings will be held at Heritage Hall for the next few months:

September 3, 2013

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

September 10, 2013

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

October 1, 2013

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

October 14, 2013

City Council Workshop

CANCELLED

October 15, 2013

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Your Gem Lake City Council

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For more information on meetings, city ordinances, recent events, permit procedures, etc. please consult the Gem Lake web-site. The address is www.gemlakemn.org

Each Gem Lake Newsletter is also posted on the web-site under the

news section.

Please email your ideas, comments and suggestions. See box at left for detailed contact information.

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