

Community Leaders Remember Bill Dwyer

Community service giant leaves a great legacy.

By Tricia Pendergrast | June 15, 2011

Crystal Lake recently lost a gallant leader, a great mentor and a fierce friend. William "Bill" Dwyer passed away June 8 at the age of 83.

Moving to Crystal Lake in 1973, Dwyer filled various boards, committees and clubs with his love and laughter and infallible commitment to the community.

The list of organizations Dwyer participated in is extensive and impressive, including a membership in the Crystal Lake Chamber of Commerce and later service as the chamber ambassador.

Involvement in so many leadership positions would be daunting to anyone without his notorious "can-do" attitude that he applied to every project in which he partook. This positive attitude was never more important than when he served as President of the Raue Center's Board of Directors for two years.

"There would be no Raue Center without Bill Dwyer," explained Steve Duchrow, the center's former executive director. "He was fearless about difficult tasks ... not afraid to try something that other people thought wouldn't be possible."

Dwyer believed in the value and importance of arts in the community, specifically in the renovation and reopening of the Raue Center in downtown Crystal Lake. He knew that a community that respected all mediums of art was a worldly and full one and he was passionate about making the Raue Center a reality.

"He really impacted generations of kids and adults," explained Richard Kuranda, executive director of the Raue Center. "He believed that the arts lead a person to a better life and a better understanding of themselves and their community."

Dwyer worked incredibly hard to make the renovation of the Raue a huge success – the beautiful theater is now a local landmark.

He "had a vision for a performing arts center for Crystal Lake," remembered Crystal Lake Chamber Ambassador Kathryn Martens. "He had the passion to help the rest of us see it and make it a reality."

The Raue Center today is a testament to Dwyer's hard work and refusal to quit in the face of adversity. It is remembered as one of his more important projects in Crystal Lake. Other fine achievements include co-founding the Crystal Lake Gala, as well as leadership of the McHenry County Road Coalition, and his support in the development of Rakow Road.

Impressive accomplishments aside, the most wonderful thing about Dwyer was his mastery of creating significant relationships with all those around him. Where acquaintances and business contacts could have existed, there were friendships and lasting camaraderie.

"He always had a smile on his face," remembered Duchrow, his business associate and friend. "He had a great sense of humor and warmth about him that was infectious."

He also was a committed family man, “an incredibly devoted husband,” according to McHenry County Board member Donna Kurtz, who has known the former civic leader since age 10 and attended school with his two sons.

“His first wife was in a wheelchair and I used to see him every Sunday bringing her to church,” Kurtz remembered, growing emotional and nostalgic. “I would think how lucky his boys were to see such a devoted and loving husband.”

Not only was Dwyer a passionate friend and father, he was a passionate leader. He cared about making the community around Crystal Lake a more beautiful place and had an innate ability to rally people around his causes and current projects.

“Whenever Bill asked me to work on a new idea or project with him I always said yes,” said old friend and associate Bob Blazier. “We both had the same philosophy of wanting to make McHenry County the best it could be.”

“He was able to tap into the talents of those around him and offer them support to help them be better,” explained state Rep. Mike Tryon.

Dwyer was committed to every venture he worked on – no challenge was too great to overcome and no problem was too complicated to solve. Where other people had doubt, he saw opportunity.

“He could see a very big picture of what could possibly be,” explained Gary Reece, president of the Crystal Lake Chamber of Commerce. He did not dwell on risks or challenges, but focused on the positive and the possible.

Dwyer did not simply delegate to others and move on, according to Reece. “He would get involved in a project and would be involved until the completion of it,” or even past the completion.

Even after his term on the Raue Center’s Board of Directors he was “always there and available to answer a question,” especially for his successor, Paula Dorian-Gray.

“He was a joy to work with,” Dorian-Gray remembered.

One of the many projects he was involved with included collaboration with state Sen. Pamela Althoff and McHenry County Board Chairman Ken Koehler to fix transportation issues in McHenry County.

“He was a great guy to work with,” remembered Koehler. “He was really concerned about transportation issues in Crystal Lake and McHenry County as a whole.”

He was just as passionate about improving transportation in the county as he was the arts. He rallied people to their cause and often headed to Springfield to make a difference. Not only was the transportation project “very well-organized and extremely successful,” but Althoff remembers that it was “extremely fun,” because Dwyer knew working hard was just as important as enjoying what you were doing. Perhaps it was for this reason that Dwyer was not afraid to share his time and energy unconditionally with anyone who needed it.

“He never expected anything in return for his contribution to the community,” said Crystal Lake Mayor Aaron Shepley. “The feeling that he was making a difference in his community was enough.”

Many in the Crystal Lake area remember Dwyer as a mentor, father figure and teacher. He truly cared about making those around him the best they could be, and "he encouraged people to work as hard as he worked," explained Blazier. He created an encouraging atmosphere that brought the best out of everyone he worked with.

This positive attitude toward co-workers and associates shaped many of today's Crystal Lake civic leaders, government officials and dedicated volunteers. Reece, one such leader, speaks highly of Dwyer's qualities as a teacher and guide because he was instrumental in Reece's development through "the opportunities he gave (him), his coaching ... advice and example."

Diana Kenney, executive director of Downtown Crystal Lake, explained, "What a wonderful man. He was someone who just meant so much to this community. He did so many things to improve Crystal Lake."

The impression Dwyer has left will never fade. Not only did he motivate civic leaders, but he also "was a mentor to so many young people and helped them become involved in community and political projects," according to Tryon. He was a wonderful leader who set a precedent and tradition for never settling for less than the absolute best when it came to the community within and surrounding Crystal Lake. He lived an incredible life filled with love and vivacity to the very end.

"When I spoke to him a few days before his death I would have thought he was 35 years old and in perfect health," remembers Blazier.

Dwyer is survived by his loving wife of 30 years, Joyce (nee Grismer); children, Daniel Dwyer, Robert (Renee) Dwyer, Mary Krikorian, Maureen (Stephen) Regele, Thomas O'Connor and Daniel O'Connor; grandchildren Chris (Melissa) Dwyer, Blake (Meagan Fenwick, fiancée) Dwyer, Dylan Dwyer, Cameron Dwyer, Joseph Krikorian, Elyse Krikorian, Kelley Regele, Megan Regele, and Katherine Regele; and great-granddaughter Delanee Dwyer.

He was preceded in death by his first wife, Marjorie (nee Reedy) Dwyer; daughter-in-law Christine Owen; parents; and twin brother Robert Dwyer.

Not only did he serve his local community and was awarded the Crystal Lake Jaycees Lifetime Achievement and the Carl Wehde Community Service awards, but he also served his country – he was a Korean War veteran, stationed at Fort Meade, Md.

All who love Crystal Lake, just as Dwyer tirelessly did, will miss his presence. As we attempt to make our community a better place, we honor his memory. In this way, Bill Dwyer will never truly be gone, since we will continue to see the fruits of his labors for a long time to come.

For Dwyer's obituary, visit the [Davenport Family Funeral Home site](#).