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The Batavia Republican

Thursday, December 10, 1992

Citizen of the Year: Ruth Burnham

Residents chose new shining star

by Karri E. Christiansen

Dedication to serving the people of Batavia is what led to her to become the 35th Citizen of the Year, and even though she has been asked to slow down, it is doubtful that she will.

Ruth Burnham was recognized as Batavia's newest shining star during the 35th Annual Batavia Chamber of Commerce Awards Dinner Friday evening; she was selected from a long list of residents who have made outstanding contributions to the city.

"Talk about being overwhelmed, I am so overwhelmed," Burnham said after receiving the award, adding "I would rather volunteer 24 hours a day, seven days a week than speak."

Burnham is active in several local organizations and has worked for many years to help citizens of all ages and areas of life. She has been chairman of the Council on Aging and still is a member of the council's board.

In her efforts to help senior citizens lead happy, strong lives, Burnham was instrumental in establishing the River-rain Apartments on Island Avenue, which offers affordable housing to Batavia's older residents.

According to information provided by the Chamber of Commerce, Burnham also was instrumental in the formation of the Retired Senior Volunteer-Program (RSVP), and remains active on the RSVP board.

As a volunteer, Burnham delivers meals to about 16 Batavia families as part of the city's Meals on Wheels program and also furnishes transportation to home-bound seniors who need to go to doctor's appointments and make other essential trips.



Citizen of the Year Ruth Burnham is congratulated by friends and family after receiving the award during Friday's 35th Annual Chamber of Commerce Christmas Awards Dinner.
Republican photo by Tim Unzicker

■ Winners of the Chamber's coveted Ole Award announced. Page 14.

Although working to help senior citizens is one of Burnham's biggest priorities, it also is important to her that the youth of Batavia have excellent educational opportunities. Burnham is an active member of the Batavia Foundation for Educational Excellence, a non-profit organization that is devoted to implementing programs and activities that go beyond the funding ability of School District 101.

Since moving to Batavia more than 30 years ago, Burnham also has become an active member of the Batavia Historical Society, contributing to the recording and preservation of Batavia history. In 1973 she became a member of a committee appointed by the Park

Board to oversee the restoration work on the Depot Museum and also was charged with documenting the history of that building which was moved from Van Buren Street to the Depot Pond.

Burnham's love for Batavia history is strengthened through her work as a member of the Heritage Committee of ACCESS, where she helps with the publication of historical brochures and staging public events commemorating Batavia's history.

In 1985, Burnham was chairperson of the Sesquicentennial Committee of the Congregational Church and directed the publication of the church's history from 1835 to 1985. The history of the church often has been considered to be

parallel to the history of Batavia, and volumes of historical material is now available in the archives of the Depot Museum, much to the thanks of Burnham, according to Chamber of Commerce officials.

Burnham said Friday that "divine guidance brought me to Batavia." She said when she and her husband Joseph, who died about 15 years ago, were looking for a new home, they were convinced that the Fox River Valley was the place to live. But they had never even heard of Batavia at the time, and were hoping to find a nice dark-colored brick home in St. Charles or Geneva.

But after a realtor friend showed them several homes in the St. Charles-Geneva area that did not spark their interest, he showed them a beautiful, white wood home in Batavia. Burnham said that she and Joe bought the house the day after they saw it and things have never been the same.

"Batavia has given me the opportunity to do all the things I want to do best," Burnham said.

Burnham is mother to five children, three of whom live close by and make it a point to visit with her frequently. Her daughter Ann is a third grade teacher at H.C. Storm School; son Stephen owns the Paper Merchant in Geneva; and her son Bruce is an antiques dealer in Lake Forest.

The remaining two live far enough away to make travel exciting. Burnham's sons Philip and Gregory are both freelance writers, with Phillip living in Washington, D.C. and Gregory living on the other side of the country in Vashon Island, Wash.

Council re-approves parking deck plan

by Walt Bieschke
and Karri E. Christiansen

Despite renewed concerns by at least one downtown business owner, the Batavia City Council Monday approved the creation of a Special Service Area for a two-tiered parking deck on River Street.

In a 6-3 motion, the council approved the SSA after holding a second public hearing to discuss the parking deck. The council had approved the SSA and parking deck project only a few months ago, but because of some problems with the legal description of the property City Attorney William McGrath urged the council to hold a new hearing.

Business owner Ed Dewell, of Dewell and Dewell Auctioneers at 115 State St., questioned the project for several reasons, including cost, boundaries of the SSA and available number of spaces.

Total cost of the project has been estimated at \$420,000, and McGrath said that the city will issue bonds in the amount of \$170,000 to pay for a SSA tax and the City of Batavia will fund the remaining \$250,000. The parking deck, which would be

"I desire to have a good, practical solution to the parking problem."

—downtown business owner Ed Dewell

located on River Street, would have between 80 and 85 spaces, McGrath said. Currently, there are about 60 spaces in the area.

Several downtown business owners proposed the parking deck in an effort to eliminate parking hassles on River and Wilson Streets.

City officials proposed that the SSA include all properties that front on River Street, as well as several properties already included in the downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District, McGrath said.

However, Dewell suggested that it would be more fair to require all businesses on Wilson Street that are already included in the TIF District to join the SSA. Including those properties would ensure that the cost of the project was balanced more equally.

Dewell said he is not opposed to the parking deck itself; he is opposed to the way it has been handled and that Wilson

Street property owners are not being included in the SSA when it is likely their businesses will also benefit from the project.

"I desire to have a good, practical solution to the parking problem," Dewell said. "I am in favor of it being equitable, reasonably priced and well constructed."

Dewell also questioned why the council decided to build only two levels instead of three, since the project as proposed really only provides about 20 additional parking spaces. But city officials said it is possible a third level could be constructed in the future if needed.

Dewell said if a parking deck is built on the premise of alleviating parking problems, then the city should build three levels now rather than two, which he said could save the city and tax payers money in the long run.

"I don't understand why the whole thing isn't done at once," Dewell said.

McGrath said the council will discuss the project in more detail during future meetings. The city might begin reviewing bids for the project sometime next month, said Second Ward Alderman Charles Beckman.

In other business, the council approved the 1992 Tax Levy ordinance and the 1993 budget. Fifth Ward Alderman Normann Hagemann, who is chairman of the city's Administrative Services Committee, said the entire council was involved in budget discussions and worked diligently to create a balanced budget. "We have to keep our goals in restraint," he said.

The budget shows about \$5.9 million in revenues and \$6 million in expenses, but officials have said the city holds between \$400,000 and \$500,000 in surplus funds for emergencies.

Council members also approved a revised tax levy rate of 72 cents per \$100 equalized assessed valuation, which is the same as last year's levy.

City officials said that the owner of a \$150,000 home would pay about \$361 in taxes to the city in 1993.