

Comments Today on the Previous 1997 “Benefactors” Article

By Bob Dewel – 2012

(or: Are We Doing as Well Today?)

Fall, 2011

The previous article was written in 1997, and surfaced recently. I was still feeling my way into authorship of a column then, and writing for the Baraboo Sun. Unknown to our small but eager staff was the knowledge that the paper was about to expire, it's "Rising Sun" extinguished by sale to its competitor's owner.

Happily for me, my column was picked up by the News-Republic, and is still going strong some 450 articles later. While with the Sun I had put together some little booklets, one of which was found recently. It was dedicated to the importance of benefactors of the community, past, present, and future. We placed booklets in every bank and attorney's office for persons considering their Will. The previous article was part of that booklet.

I was recently was astonished to reread it and to note how many important community institutions had been started or completed by benefactors by 1997. I decided to include the old article in this "Best of Bob" publication. In the Lange remarks, I drew a correlation between beneficial giving and the idea of leaving the local "woodpile" a little higher. I hoped it would inspire future donations to city and county institutions.

This got me to wondering if our current generation 14 years later has done as well for our city and county, where so many have prospered so well.

So, how are We Doing?

Looking at the list of donors of that earlier era is a little daunting—who among us will do an Alma Waite surprise gift, or a John and Murrell Lange blockbuster donation? Well, who back then even suspected the size of the Waite or Lange holdings, and their generosity? Like back then, there are probably community citizens now, city and county, in a position to perform similar acts of progress, large or small, once suitable provisions have been made for their heirs.

Anonymous gifts are private information to which we are not often privy, nor should we be. Some are known to have been made by local persons still living, as well as from those who passed on but gave through their Wills. We will not generally give names if we even know them, unless already published. But let's try to remember what has been done since 1997, both by private donation and governmental bodies---and in no particular order of importance:

Note: The music building was added to the UW Baraboo-Sauk County by Kate Hill. (Kate also had paid off the mortgage on the purchase of the Al. Ringling Theatre back in 1990.)

1. Frequent additions to the private hospital, St. Clare, with and without public solicitation.
2. The History Center, currently approaching completion. The former Woolen Mill headquarters building will make one of the best county historical society buildings in the state. Both the City and County gave significant aid to start this project. Additional personal aid is needed now to complete the project.
3. The Community Foundation, hardly getting started in 1997 but now administering 2.1 million plus ownership and management. There are 47 active beneficial funds at the present time, and growing.
4. The Scholarship Corporation, active in 1997 but now administering significant scholarship funds totaling into seven figures.
5. The Riverwalk, now close to three miles long, with two short gaps. A joint project of the Kiwanis Club, the City, and the DNR.
6. Significant and costly restorations at the Al. Ringling Theatre, incorporating the neighboring building as a ticket and refreshment area, with other amenities. Progress continues, when funded, including quality restorations of the foyer and inner lobby, dressing rooms, and ladies lounge. Dedicated donors can provide for careful restoration of other areas of this internationally known European style palatial playhouse.
7. Active public and private funding of groups such as the Boys and Girls Club, Hope House, Food Pantry, Salvation Army, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, Kids Ranch, etc..
8. New Parks: Statz Park, City View Park, Kiwanis Park, Children's Pocket Park, Skateboard Park, and significant remodeling of the swimming pool.
9. Enhanced Ambulance Service, and a commodious City Services Building.
10. Enlarged and enhanced Crane Foundation, Leopold Center, Circus World, Mid-Continent Railroad center at Rock Springs, and great work by Friends of Devils Lake.
11. Many groups or projects which your scribe has failed to remember!

This is a busy community. I'm sure this writer's memory has not called up all of the changes. It must be a good place to live—we now have surged past the 12,000 population level.

But let's not be complacent. Consider, for example, that the University Center needs housing and a modern science facility. The area library needs to be expanded up to the standard of our neighbors. Highways within the city need rebuilding, some school facilities must be brought up to standard, and the airport requires protection and expansion. How about the History Center on Second Avenue at the bridge? The Ringling Theatre? These are great opportunities for donors to share their good fortune!

That is how things get done in small cities. Today's Alma Waite's and Lange's, and others with lesser (or greater) means can make things happen, publicly or anonymously. And

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you can do it in your lifetime, so as to enjoy seeing others appreciate your gifts, even if anonymous! Philanthropy is rewarding to all.

My 1997 article did not anticipate the gifting of the succeeding 14 years. We know of no impending gifts in the near future, but have a feeling that many will come, enhancing the life and fortunes of the citizens of this great community and area we call Baraboo, Sauk County.



A little over a mile from the city limits, Devils Lake State Park compliments the many amenities of the City and County. The “Friends of Devils Lake” group provides additional financial and sweat equity for its maintenance.