

Thanks for an Awesome G125 Celebration

by Helen D. Gunderson, Gilbert Gazette Editor and member of the G125 Group

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The Passage of Time

As I stood on the deck of my apartment, following the thunderstorm two nights ago, and viewed the grand lightening show in the eastern night sky toward Nevada, I couldn't help but recall the excellent fireworks display nearly a month ago in Gilbert for the town's 125th celebration.

Also, the lyrics, "It is a long, long time from June to September" have been wafting through my mind. With the opening of school and the start of other fall activities, it would be easy to forget the grand nature of our celebration. Indeed, it has been a long time since 2002 when it dawned on some of us that Gilbert celebrated its centennial in 1979 and the town's 125th anniversary would be in 2004.

The planning committee, simply known as the G125 Group, held its first planning session on March 6, 2003. It has been an amorphous organization with somewhere around 24 people who attended at least one of the many meetings since that time.

The Work behind the G125 Celebration

Visitors to the celebration will never know all the work that went into making the weekend a success. And even those people engaged in the planning process don't realize all the effort that other group members and volunteers invested in the occasion. That makes it nearly impossible to create an exhaustive list of the workers. However, it does seem wise — before the autumn leaves begin to fall — to thank as many people as possible. I encourage other members of the G125 Group, or for that matter, anyone who is interested, to write a letter to the editor describing their perspective of the celebration and adding their two cents worth of thanks. In that way, perhaps most, if not all, of the people who helped make the event a success will be honored. Also, those perspectives will become part of the historical record about what happened.

The G125 Group

Gilbert's quasiquicentennial celebration on July 30–31 was indeed a grand event. Cindy Wirth was one of the people who attended all of the G125 meetings. She served as chairperson of the group since September 2003. Gilbert could not have had a successful celebration without someone willing to be in that difficult position, especially when push came to shove and some of us were testy with each other. Thanks Cindy.

I also thank the G125 members who sat through various meetings. It's important for the quiet members to know that their presence and listening were as important as the contributions of those who were loquacious. And thanks to all of those persons who kept the celebration in mind even when you weren't able or willing to attend meetings. It was nice to be able to network with you and get ideas. Also, thanks to Mary Dodds, Margot Eness, and Gwen Thompson who represented the Gilbert High School alumni committee at the early gatherings of the G125 Group and scheduled the GHS all-class reunion on the same weekend as the G125 celebration.

A Litany of Thanks

In addition, my litany of thanks is for all the following who helped the G125 celebration be as grand as it was:

- The businesses, groups, individuals, and institutions who contributed money, materials, facility use, time, or other in-kind contributions.
- The many persons who put dollar bills and loose change in jars at local businesses for a total of over \$500 to help pay for the fireworks show.
- Kurt Jensen, Jake Kraehling, and Greg and Cindy Wirth who approached businesses and other prospective donors in an effort to raise funds. Also, Kurt was the G125 treasurer, and Jake was the secretary. Bob Jaquis was the vice-president and arranged for the articles of incorporation, event insurance, fireworks show, garbage service, and kyboes.
- Photographer Jacquelyn Olson who reproduced historic Gilbert photographs, created souvenir posters, and prepared an exhibit for the Open Flame Steakhouse.
- The souvenir button makers.
- Artwork by Jo Myers-Walker.
- Postmaster Sheila Ludwikowski who made arrangements for a Gilbert postmark.
- Joy Leister, who provided the G125 slogan, "Knowing the past, growing the future" and suggested the idea for the residents to grow a zillion zinnias idea. She also coined the phrase "a billion bunnies versus the zillion zinnias." And she organized a G125 coloring contest and the hospitality center at city hall.
- Earl May Nursery and Garden Center and Holub Garden and Greenhouses, who provided zinnia seeds and plants. Anita Fincham and Wilma Lesan, who provided zinnia-growing advice.
- The many zinnia growers and the youth who entered the coloring contest.
- Edith Anderson, Anita Fincham, Joy Leister, Penny Mindemann, Paul Nienkamp, Mille Rice, and Ruth Shickell for each taking a turn as host of the hospitality center.
- Joy Leister and Lisa Sporrer who co-chaired the arts and culture committee and members of their group.
- Volunteers who delivered G125 promotional flyers door-to-door to all the homes in Gilbert.
- City staff with Carolyn Main and John Lloyd fielding questions, making referrals, and providing a sounding board in the weeks ahead of the event as well as John joining Gary Steel to spruce up the town. The City of Gilbert for providing space for a hospitality center and Judy Fitz for cleaning up city hall after the festivities.
- Food coordinator Marlo Mesenbrink and the many food vendors. Alliant Energy and Greg Wirth for providing the vendors with electrical hookups.
- The beverage companies, including Coca-Cola, Budweiser, and Miller who did big favors to help some of the local businesses entertain the public.
- Scouts, Pack 157 who sold food and served as the color guard for the parade.
- The Lion's Club who whipped up a pancake breakfast for 512 people and helped direct traffic.
- Centenarian Bessie Gildersleeve of rural Gilbert, who agreed to be parade marshal, and her neighbor farmer Gene Upstill who drove his 1949 Buick Riviera Roadmaster to escort Bessie.
- Andy North and her crew, who organized the parade, taking entries up to the last minute with a total of close to 70 units — perhaps the largest parade in Gilbert history.
- People who drove cars and tractors, entered floats, rode horses, walked, or otherwise participated in the parade and those persons who gathered to watch the parade.
- Steve Vannoy and his crew, who developed a traffic strategy for the weekend, set up barricades, and posted signs.
- The officers from the Story County Sheriff's Department for their quiet but reassuring presence.

- The Gilbert Fire Department that showed off its historical hose cart and modern trucks in the parade, hosted an open house, demonstrated their vehicle extrication equipment, administered tickets and ID's at the street dance at the Open Flame, and provided First Aid assistance.
- Nancy Peterson and the school history club for the cemetery walks, tours to the archeological dig at Zenorsville, a history treasure hunt, and exhibits. Thanks also to the script-writers and actors for the cemetery walk. The events added great depth to the weekend.
- Members of the Gilbert Evangelical Free Church, Gilbert Lutheran Church, and Saints Peter and Paul Parish, who made pie and other dessert for visitors to the cemetery walk.
- Eric and Dianne Brown and their sons Sam, Will, and Zachary from Zearing and their draft horses that transported people to the cemetery walk. Dick Sternberg who drove the school bus for the Zenorsville tour.
- Bob Gibson, Larry Hameister, Kent Sisson, and Cindy Wirth, who recruited participants for the antique car and tractor show.
- Kenny Arnold, Chris Haywood, Matt Hill, Joe Red Bear, and their friends and family members who presented a pre-1840s rendezvous reenactment. It was an important reminder of the Native American heritage of the area.
- Beta Sigma Phi who hosted the colorful, nostalgia-producing quilt show and those persons who provided quilts. Also, the Gilbert Lutheran Church for providing space for the show.
- Everyone who provided photos and told stories about Gilbert's history.
- Bob Jaquis, Gary Selof, and Cindy and Greg Wirth and their helpers who set up the inflatable playground equipment, supervised youth activities, and made sno cones and cotton candy.
- Silly Sally, the clown, who entertained children and made balloon sculptures for them.
- The Bookmobile from the Ames Public Library.
- The vendors at the art fair.
- The chaperones for the youth dance on Saturday night.
- The many musicians from the Barn Owl Band to the Ed Kaizer Trio, Holy Ground, Reggie Greenlaw, and Standing Hampton for their gigs during the celebration. Also, vocalists David Cox and Danielle Kraehling for their cameo performances as a prelude to the fireworks show. Next time, we will make sure the public address system is working when Danielle steps up to the microphone. And the flutist at the cemetery walk.
- The Consignment Gallery owned by Miles and Nancy Moore, Daisychains and Laughs coffeebar and gift shop owned by Lisa Sporrer, and Left Bank Studio owned by Jo Myers-Walker that were places on Main Street where the G125 committee could hold meetings, drop items off, pick things up, or for planners to collaborate in the months prior to the celebration. It was also great how the new life created by these businesses on Main Street added to the spirit of the G125 festivities.
- Principal Jim Quarnstrom and the Gilbert schools for providing facilities for various festivities, including the Barn Owl concert, historical exhibits, pancake feed, and youth dance.
- Michelle and Randy Thompson and their crew at the Open Flame who made the north end of Main Street the hopping place to be with a street dance on Friday night and more live music on Saturday night.
- The Iowa Cattlemen's Association who grilled meat at the Open Flame.
- Mike Adams, Ben and Gregg Durbin, and Erik Anderson who set up bleachers and picnic tables for the Barn Owl concert. Of course, there are many other people who were on set up and clean up crews.
- Chitty Garbage Service for the extra dumpsters and garbage containers. Joe Battles and his son, Joseph Battles, Bob Jaquis, Kent and Kim Porter, and Phil Sporrer who escorted the garbage containers to key sites, fetched them later, and hauled the garbage to the dumpsters.
- The courtesy bus from the Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency and the rickshaw rides provided by Jim Gregory of Bikes at Work.

- The news media for coverage about Gilbert and promoting the celebration.
- B.J. Schaben of KASI Radio for scheduling double-header baseball games for the Gilbert Sandgnats in Gilbert on Saturday of the G125 festivities.
- My videographer friend, Denny Goodrich of Ames, who contributed hours of his time to gather video images of the celebration.
- Gilbert resident Randy Page and his crew who contributed their expertise to produce the fireworks show. When the G125 group was planning for the celebration, and someone suggested having a fireworks show, I thought it would be an extravagance that we didn't need. However, I realized on Friday night of the G125 festivities, while watching the beautiful and booming display, how important the show was as a way of saying, "Gilbert, you're an important town, too."

I'm relatively new to the community, being here just 11 years. However, working with others to organize the G125 celebration has given me the opportunity to meet a whole range of Gilbert people and to feel more at home in the community. I am grateful for those feelings of connection and thankful to people who have extended their friendship, hospitality, and other support.

Part of the goal of the G125 Group was to honor the town's heritage and have the largest and most festive celebration that the community had known since its centennial in 1979 and the Gilbert Days tradition that included an annual rodeo and ended in the mid-1980s.

The group also hoped the celebration would foster a greater sense of Gilbert identity and community spirit and leave a legacy for future generations. As the G125 fund-raising brochure said, "We want memories of it to live long and fondly in the hearts and minds of people of all ages."

With autumn arriving and the festivities fading into history, many thanks to everyone who helped the Gilbert community meet those expectations. We can proudly proclaim, "We did it. The party was awesome."

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