

Getting creative with economic development

Anyone who regularly drives along 183rd Street in Homewood might be forgiven if they have given up hope of ever seeing something happen with the former Brunswick Zone bowling alley at 3043 W. 183rd St. or with the former Citgo gas station at 2124 183rd St.

The bowling alley abruptly closed in January 2015. The Citgo station has been closed for years, too. Big warehouse buildings and former gas stations must be among the toughest redevelopment projects.

What might provide some hope is the village's history with difficult projects. In what will probably be my last interview with former Homewood Village Manager Jim Marino, he pointed out that some of the biggest projects he worked on in recent years took years — and more years — to get done.

For example, the Illinois Gaming Board voted on Dec. 8 to find Wind Creek's casino proposal as preliminarily suitable for receiving the south suburban casino license. The village began working on attracting a casino in 2012. Nine years.

The village first approached Josephine Triumph in 2014 about selling her building at the corner of Ridge Road and Martin Avenue. On Dec. 16, the village and developers held a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Hartford Building. Seven years.

Still, there haven't been any nibbles by developers interested in tackling Brunswick Zone or Citgo. The village has not been idle, though. It purchased the Citgo station earlier this year, and Economic Development Director Angela Mesaros said work is proceeding on environmental assessment and clean-up of the site.

Brunswick Zone is part of the new Kedzie Gateway TIF district, which Mesaros said will help attract a developer to create a new use at the site. She said the village has also applied for acquisition of the property through the Cook County No Cash Bid Program.

But what use might work there is another question. I remember in 2018, Maggie Gosselin's two boys, Ethan and Austin, who were 7 at the time, went to village hall to pitch an idea to Mayor Rich Hofeld. They wanted to see the site become an entertainment



Chronicle file photo

Barb Creal, right, with Repeat Boutique volunteers, from left, Maureen Guger, Eileen Anderson, Trudy Wallerstedt and Rosita Baruela. Creal, who died Nov. 24, founded and managed the resale shop on Dixie Highway in Homewood that provides support for Grand Prairie Services, a nonprofit behavioral healthcare organization.

center for kids, maybe a trampoline park.

I saw another interesting idea the other day. Cook County announced its Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) program was helping acquire \$2.47 million in funding for Wilder Fields to develop an indoor vertical farm of a former Calumet City Target store.

Trampolines or turnips, either one would be fine, as long as something comes to the site that helps turn a vacant hulk into a productive business.

Chronicle projects for 2022: What do you want to know?

The State of Golf in the Chicago Southland web documentary we released on Nov. 11 was impossible.

The Chronicle did not have the equipment or experience to vividly capture the terrain, the history and the stories of golf's impact on our area. But we felt the story had to be told, so we partnered with Bionic Content, led by Marcellus Marsh of Flossmoor. He had the skill and tools to bring the State of Golf to life.

But then we faced another problem. The project was too expensive for our budget. We looked to our community to help make it work. The Homewood Rotary Club pitched in. The village of Flossmoor agreed to be a sponsor. We were still short. So we asked our readers, and you came through.

That got us thinking about how to tackle bigger reporting projects in the coming year. We hate passing on an important story because we lack the money to do it right. But if we ask readers to pitch in, we can do stories readers want and will support.

What big projects would you like to

see us do in 2022? Send suggestions to: editor@hfchronicle.com.

Also, if you haven't watched both episodes of State of Golf, please visit hfchronicle.com/stateofgolf and let us know what you think.

Losses

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed mental health to the forefront as a national challenge, but it was always the mission of Barbara J. Creal to support mental health services.

She died on Nov. 24 at 90 after spending much of her life working for and raising money for Grand Prairie Services, a nonprofit mental health organization with offices in Flossmoor, Chicago Heights, South Holland, Tinley Park and Steger.

She founded and managed Repeat Boutique, a resale shop on Dixie Highway in Homewood. The shop's proceeds helped Grand Prairie improve its services to those with mental health needs. For more information about her work and the shop, see our December 2019 story at bit.ly/3F1fnRd.

Roger Bovenkerk died on Dec. 7. He was the former owner of Bovenkerk's Men's Wear in Roseland and Homewood and served the Homewood community for years as president of the Homewood Rotary Club and Homewood Chamber of Commerce. He also served as a vice-president at the Bank of Homewood. He was 86.

Bob Haderlein served on the Homewood-Flossmoor Park District Board of Commissioners for 12 years, and was president for nine of those years. He also was an active board member, president and coach of Homewood Baseball and Softball. He died Dec. 3 at age 68.

HOMWOOD-FLOSSMOOR CHRONICLE

About us:

The Homewood-Flossmoor Chronicle was launched in July 2014 by Homewood resident Eric Crump, former editor of the Marshall (Mo.) Democrat-News, who was soon joined by former Times reporter Marilyn Thomas of Homewood and longtime Star editor and columnist Tom Houlihan of Flossmoor, who retired from the Chronicle at the end of 2020.

While our staffing has changed, our mission has not. The editors, with help from a number of community members, are volunteering their time and talents to bring the latest news to residents of Homewood and Flossmoor daily in an online newspaper and monthly in print.

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editor@hfchronicle.com

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Editors:

Eric Crump
ewcrump@hfchronicle.com

Marilyn Thomas
mthomas@hfchronicle.com
Randall Weissman
rfweissman@hfchronicle.com

Advertising:

Lisa Campbell
lmcampbell@hfchronicle.com

Community Liaison:

Jadey Ryndak
jryndak@hfchronicle.com

Copy Editor:

Dan Riney
driney@hfchronicle.com

Designer:

Bruce Swart
bswart@hfchronicle.com

News Clerk:

Alicia Florence
alicia.florence@hfchronicle.com

Correspondents:

Quiton R. Arthur, Katie Arvia, Angela Denk, David P. Funk, Noah Johnson, Bill Jones, Carole Sharwarko, Carrie Steinweg, Nick Ulanowski,

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