

Good morning, and welcome again to the rededication ceremony for our park.

My name is Ann Olson and I am one member of the NAG board who worked tirelessly on the park project.

Prior to this park renovation, I always knew the statue, guarding the entrance to this park, was known as the “Doughboy,” but I never knew why it was given that name.

After a little research, I found out a couple of explanations for the nickname but the most accepted explanation for “Doughboy” dates from the Mexican-American War in 1846. It was a name given to members of the American infantry because their uniforms were covered with adobe dust and dirt, which made them look like they were covered in flour. They were called “adobies” then “dobies,” and eventually “doughboys.”

When Americans landed in France during WWI, the French people attached nicknames to all the foreigners. Several names were given to the Americans, but one stuck, Doughboy. These men, that were identified as Doughboys, were the frontline infantry during the war.

Today, there are about 100 doughboy statues in parks and memorials nationwide. Most of those statues, which were mass produced in the 1920's, show the doughboy in a position with the right arm extended and the right leg bent back. This version is called "The Spirit of America." The designer chose this pose, so from the profile, the statue resembled the stance of the Statue of Liberty.

Our Doughboy is in a different pose, called "Order Arms," which, in my opinion, makes him more unique than the others. One possible explanation

for the difference, is, our statue was made before the “The Spirit of America” statue was in mass production.

In 1919, the Doughboy was a gift to the Elkhart American Legion, after WWI, from returning vets, to honor those who didn’t make it back home after the war. The base was engraved with the 76 names of those veterans. Since then, plaques have been added to the statue with the names of Village veterans from WWII, the Korean War, and all veterans killed in action from Elkhart during past wars.

The statue was originally put in the intersection of Gillette and Bogardus streets in downtown Elkhart where carriages, and later cars, drove around it. (point to that intersection)

Ten years later, it was moved to Elkhart High School at its opening in 1924, at which time it was referred to as “The Soldier’s Memorial.”

In 1975, when the school closed, the Doughboy was moved to the park uptown. It remained there until vandals chipped away at some of his features.

At that point, the statue was stored in the Legion Hall until 1986. Susan Green donated money to “spruce up” the statue.

Afterward, the Doughboy was returned to Veterans’ Park and placed near the sidewalk and opening to the park.

In 1994, vandals did heavy damage to the statue. He was beheaded: his nose was missing, ear was chipped, skid marks across the right side of his face, and the brim of his hat chiseled away. In addition, his right hand, and gun, were knocked off and broken into pieces. At that time, Legion members didn’t have the money to fix the statue and doubted it would be resurrected. Their main concern was finding the

culprits, *then* seeing if the community would fund a statue restoration project. Again, thanks to Susan Green, the statue was restored.

Veterans' Park was created in 1977 by Susan Keays Green, to honor all veterans, on behalf of her sister Elizabeth Drake. The site of the park was a dilapidated commercial building, Taylor's Grocery, on Governor Oglesby Street, that was razed to provide the downtown location for the park.

In the spring of 1996, the floor of the Veterans' Park was beginning to crumble since it had been laid over the top of the demolished grocery store. With money from the Village, and labor from the Legion and Auxiliary, the new brick floor was installed.

In 2004, the Village of Elkhart became the official owners of the park.

NAG was created in 1984, another vision of Susan Green. NAG stands for “Needs and Goals” of Elkhart. At that time, they became the “caretakers of the park” and over the years have been responsible for planting flowers, keeping it weeded, and other cosmetic touches.

NAG has also made some improvements to the park which included installation of the white fence behind me.

In August of 2015, NAG was looking for a project and approached the village about renovating Veterans’ Park. By October, we had a tentative plan and started our fundraising efforts.

Now, over three years later, our vision has finally been realized. The project included ensuring the park was handicap accessible with a safe, stable floor surface; updating the US

flag depository, which was donated by Ethan Graue of Lincoln as his Eagle Scout project; landscaping; a reflective sitting wall with benches around the perimeter; installing electricity, water, and lighting, and of course, cleaning and stabilizing our Doughboy.

Our goal for this project was to improve the existing park to honor veterans, have a public space for congregation, improve the aesthetics of Gov. Oglesby Street, and to attract pedestrian traffic to historical sites and local business in Elkhart.

Please take time to look at the “before” pictures on the easel and I think you’ll agree, NAG has achieved its goal.

Thank you.