

Friends, family dedicate Brookfield park bench in late woman’s memory

Janice Beaton spent her life helping others

By Karen Pilarski
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BROOKFIELD — A New Berlin woman spent her lifetime helping others and building friendships. Now her husband, family and friends are honoring the memory of her through a bench bearing her name in Brookfield’s Wirth Park, 2585 Pilgrim Road.

The playground in Wirth Park was recently remodeled to be an inclusive playground. The existing equipment was removed and, in its place, equipment that can be used by people of different physical abilities and all ages was installed. Previously, renderings submitted by Lee Recreation show different kinds of swings, several slides, wheelchair-accessible playground equipment, and benches for sitting in Wirth Park.

Thomas Beaton’s wife, Janice Beaton, 70, died on July 17 after a two-year bout with colon cancer.

“Throughout her illness and after her passing, I have been so touched by the support and love shown by many of her good friends. A large group of her tennis friends had a memorial bench constructed at Wirth Park in Brookfield,” Thomas said.

On Oct. 18, a dedication ceremony was held for the bench honoring Jan.

“The price for love is grief, but good friends heal the pain and leave wonderful memories,” Thomas said.

Thomas described his wife spending her lifetime helping others and cultivating everlasting friendships. Thomas thanked Jan’s friends during the dedication who looked after them and raised her spirits through greeting cards and goodies.

“You wouldn’t let her despair or feel sorry for herself. Jan was amazed with how past acquaintances became close friends and how close friends became angels who walked amongst us,” he said.

Thomas said his wife’s greatest purchase was the couple’s Ford Mustang. When he asked her what her greatest asset was, she replied “her friends.”



Courtesy of Thomas Beaton

Thomas Beaton’s wife, Janice Beaton, 70, died on July 17 after a two-year bout with colon cancer. On Oct. 18 a bench dedication ceremony was held at Wirth Park, 2585 Pilgrim Road, Brookfield. Pictured is Thomas Beaton sitting on the bench with his wife’s name on it.

Jan was employed as a clinical audiologist for 42 years. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in communicative disorders from Marquette University in 1974, a Master of Science in Audiology from Purdue University in 1976 and a Doctor of Audiology Degree from A.T.

She worked for Aurora Health Care at the Aurora Summit Hospital in Oconomowoc.

“Janice had a genuine passion for helping the poor, the elderly and the disabled. Twelve years of her professional career were devoted to volunteering free part-time audiology service to Aurora Walkers Point, plus an added

three years following her retirement until April 2024,” Jan’s obituary said.

During her retirement she volunteered as a reader for the blind at LibriVox up until this past June. Jan was a hospice volunteer at Badger Hospice in Brookfield.

“Jan made many close friends with other avid tennis players and taught mahjong. Jan loved traveling to all 50 states and many trips abroad,” the obituary said.

Thomas said during the dedication, “May this bench serve as a sanctuary for positive memories to overcome the negative and hopelessness of her loss.”

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Is Brookfield planning a referendum?

Ask is among options as city eyes financial future

By Brian Huber
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BROOKFIELD — Will the residents of Brookfield be asked sometime soon to vote on a referendum for the city to increase its tax levy? The short answer is maybe. Mayor Steve Ponto said last month that the city, specifically its Finance Committee, is looking at a number of alternatives given the restrictions the city is working with under state revenue limits. While it's possible to go to the voters on a referendum on that issue, Ponto stressed that, "We haven't made any decisions on that yet, it's just one possibility we are looking at."

"The council has not voted on that. But the Finance Committee has pulled together a lot of information which I have read through, and I think it will be before the council soon," Ponto said. "We're also trying to position ourselves as well as possible so if there is a referendum it can be as reasonable as possible."

What that potential referendum would look like, and what some of the other options are, are being explored by the city's Finance Committee, the mayor said. Ponto said state law caps the increase in municipal tax levy in a formula connected to the amount of new construction. For communities that were built out they couldn't raise their levy at all, and Brookfield had been going through a period of very substantial net new construction, but it is getting to be largely built out so the city instead is looking at redevelopment, Ponto said.

It's related to the same reasons the county is seeking to impose a 0.5% sales tax starting next year, which the county has said is meant to plug a budget gap, and will provide property tax relief as well. A fifth of the revenues raised would

go to shared revenue to be divided among county municipalities based on population. Ponto said he supports the county's proposal, saying it makes a lot of sense and would be a "substantial help" to Brookfield.

Such an arrangement might mean about \$1.2 million for Brookfield in shared revenue, if sales tax projections are realized.

When asked if Brookfield is facing a budget shortfall, Ponto said, "It's a very complicated issue, but I will tell you we cannot maintain the level of services we have unless we get additional revenue and that's true of almost every municipality in Waukesha County, it's true of the county."

The revenue limits were compounded by inflation that worsened over the last 3.5 years, "the formula hasn't changed so it's a situation

where it will become increasingly a bigger problem unless it's dealt with."

Ponto said the city is facing a shortfall of about \$2 million in 2025. Brookfield has very substantial reserves that could cover that gap, but Ponto said the city is looking beyond then, as that shortfall may continue to grow, he said.

It also is too early to tell what other options the city has besides simply making cuts. That's something the city is loath to do, considering resident surveys have indicated a high level of satisfaction with city services. That is among the things that helped Brookfield come in at No. 2 in terms of quality of life among 1,300 U.S. cities between 25,000 and 100,000 in population, Ponto said.


SCENES FROM THE PAST

Model citizens

The Sept. 30, 1958, edition of the Freeman covered how the U.S. Army honored the Brookfield Kiwanis Club for its efforts at beautifying the Nike Missile site on Davidson Road east of Waukesha. "Flowers blooming in front of the barracks. Murals and a planter for the day room. Drapes in the mess hall. The army was never like this!" reporter Ivan Kaste wrote. "A special effort has been made to make the grounds, the living, eating and working quarters pleasing to the eye." Kaste reported the members of the Brookfield Kiwanis Club donated their skills, materials and labor to "make the place more livable." Their efforts got the attention of Maj. Gen. Palmer Edwards, deputy commander of the U.S. air defense command in Colorado Springs, Colo., who traveled to the site a day earlier and unveiled a 17-foot model of the then-new Nike Hercules missile, which was capable of carrying an atomic warhead. The model was created by Dale Kluge and Bill Bogatin, partners in a sheet metal shop on Brookfield Road.

From the Freeman negatives at the Waukesha County Museum





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Photo courtesy of Mayor Steve Ponto
Christopher Cass, left, is sworn in as the new Brookfield fire chief by City Clerk Michelle Luedtke.

Cass named Brookfield fire chief

BROOKFIELD — The city of Brookfield has a new fire chief, but he certainly isn't new to the department.

Christopher Cass of Oconomowoc started his career with the Brookfield Fire Department as a firefighter and paramedic in 2000. He remained in that role until being named lieutenant of training in 2013. In 2017, Cass became deputy chief of training, then deputy chief of operations and most recently he was assistant chief from January 2024 until being named chief.

Cass replaces Dave Mason, who retired. Mason joined the department in 1995 and served as fire chief since 2021.

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L I N C O L N

NEWSMAKER Q&A: Steve Ponto

City of Brookfield Mayor Ponto discusses the city’s future

Community will focus more on redevelopment

BROOKFIELD — **Steve Ponto**, City of Brookfield mayor, is in his fourth consecutive term as mayor and has seen the city’s landscape change over the years. Brookfield is largely developed and the future will be geared toward re-development.

As mayor he does his best to be well-informed and open to other ideas from constituents and colleagues. The city recently celebrated the completion of the Wirth Park Playground Renovation Project. The playground has inclusive features allowing all ages and abilities the opportunity to play and socialize together.

In 2022, he ran for reelection and reflected on the previous three terms he served as mayor. Ponto cited the city previously adding more than \$1 billion of quality new construction to its tax base and added many amenities (e.g. parks, trails, Conference Center, LifeTime Fitness).

“I want to continue leading and helping to ensure Brookfield remains the community of choice,” Ponto said in 2022.

During Ponto’s reelection campaign, he described himself as a reasonable, fair decision-maker which helped him develop a broad base of citizen and city staff support.

“I know this job. I have extensive private-sector experience as a corporate attorney. I have served as a Brookfield alderman for 12 years and now as mayor. As mayor, I have

worked effectively with the Common Council and the department heads,” Ponto previously said in 2022.

The Freeman recently asked Ponto questions about life for a mayor. The following are his responses:

The FREEMAN: What inspired you to go into local government?

Steve Ponto: I have long had an interest in government and running for alderman was a good way to get involved without interfering with my primary job.

FREEMAN:How has the City of Brookfield changed?

Ponto: Brookfield is largely developed. The emphasis in the future will be more on redevelopment.

FREEMAN: Describe your typical day as mayor.

Ponto: Each day brings a variety of tasks. Preparing for and participating in meetings; writing letters, speeches, proclamations, etc.; talking and meeting with constituents and officials of local, county and state government; reading publications to keep on top of municipal matters; meeting with department heads on issues in their department; talking and corresponding with constituents.

FREEMAN: What is the most rewarding part of being in this type of work?

Ponto: Knowing I have had a



Submitted photo

Brookfield Mayor Steve Ponto

significant impact for the good in Brookfield. I feel gratified when a Brookfield resident comes up to me and thanks me for my service and says keep up the good work.

FREEMAN: Describe yourself as a leader.

Ponto: I try to be well-informed, reasonable, open to ideas of others, work on a collaborative basis

FREEMAN: Best advice ever received?

Ponto: Do your best and then don’t worry about it.

Biography

Who: Steven V. Ponto
Title: Brookfield mayor
Age: 77
Work experience: Worked for law firms and in the law department of corporations
Education: Lawrence University, Appleton, B.A. (Economics), Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. (Master in Public Affairs), University of Wisconsin Law School (Juris Doctor)
Family: Wife: Mary Ponto married 42 years. Daughter Stephanie, daughter Elizabeth (Bizzy) married to Tony Smith. Granddaughters Hazel (6); Olive (4); Ivy (2)

Get to know Steve Ponto

My greatest achievement is: my family.
My favorite TV show is: “The Journal Report” (weekly Wall Street Journal news show).
My favorite movie is: “Grease.”
My favorite actor is: John Travolta.
My favorite actress is: Olivia Newton-John.
My favorite childhood memory is: the excitement of Christmas.
The person I most admire is: my father, who grew up in the Depression, served in the Navy during World War II, came home, finished college, married, worked at Kimberly-Clark Corporation for his entire career, raised 6 children.
Three words people describe me are: friendly, capable, dedicated.
The worst job I had as a teenager: a newspaper route on a busy street.
The food I like best is: popcorn.
My favorite hobby is: photography.
My favorite music group is: The Seekers (Australian group).
My pets are: Cavalier King Charles spaniels.
My favorite vacation place is: Waupaca.
My favorite childhood toy was: a camera.

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