



BIRCHWOOD VILLAGE NEWS



City of Birchwood Village, MN

SUMMER 2020

Welcome new residents: Tyler McCormick 300 Wildwood, Zoie Secord 306 Wildwood, Tyler Theno 3980 E Co Line, Amy Hulett 608 Wildwood

Our condolences to:

Judy Aines and Bernie Kruse. Judy's mother Peggy passed away in March.
Steve Dean, whose brother John passed away.
Cindy and Vicky Nicholson, whose mother and long-time Birchwoodite Betty passed away at 101 years young.
Ralph Ebbott's family. He passed the end of May.

Our thanks to:

- **All our neighbors** who have cleared snow away from water hydrants.
- **Mary and Mark Cahill** and **Mary Wingfield** who picked up litter in the ponds and along Hall Avenue. We collected about 5 garbage bags full!
- **Luke and Hope Monette** who donated the wood for the latest barn quilt at city hall, **Mary Wingfield** did the "Falling Leaves" design and work, and **John Lund** who assisted in the installation.
- **Lewis Creagh, Steve Dean and Mary Wingfield** who cleaned up the wood debris in Polly's Park and Jay Path.
- **Chris Sorenson** who cleaned up Ash Beach.

Things that added a Bright Light to our lives:



A new idea for Little Free Libraries—TP dispensers!
Thanks to the Rollinger Family on Jay Street.

CONSUMER CONFIDENCE REPORT

Here is the link for our public water supply report. The analysis shows we are within the range of safety for all measured elements. Call 651-426-3403 for paper copies.

https://www.cityofbirchwood.com/vertical/sites/%7BAA5D0154-C9CB-4BB6-8A70-7C86B8410F8A%7D/uploads/CCR_Report_PWS_1820003_2019.pdf

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

- Volunteer gardeners needed to occasionally weed the village hall garden.
- Volunteers to help with plantings along Jay Path. (Plantings are provided courtesy of a Mahtomedi Garden Club grant!)
- We need a sign for POLLY'S PARK. The city will provide the lumber. We need someone who can router the sign like our other signature parks. If you are that person, please contact city hall.

WILDWOOD AV SLOW DOWN ZONE

More kids staying home means more kids playing in the streets. One area where the problem is more evident due to hills and curves is the 100 block of Wildwood Avenue. The city council has been looking into ways to reduce traffic speed without the problems associated with stop signs and speed bumps (rapid deceleration and then immediate acceleration, sometimes punctuated with squealing rubber.)

One of the solutions is installing bollards or traffic barriers (summer only) reducing the driving lanes to single entry/one-at-a-time passage. The issue will be discussed at the June 9th city council meeting. Please reach out by phone or email to our council members or mayor to give us input prior to the meeting.

TIGHE-SCHMITZ RINK UPDATE:

With the recent stay-at-home rule and more people out enjoying our resources, now seems like a good time to continue work on upgrading Tighe-Schmitz Park. (Last year we improved the drainage between Lake Av and the ice rink and installed new LED lights at the rink.)

The council has already obtained a number of grants to make the area multi-functional. Various plans have been researched to provide for all-season use. The best solution appears to be pouring a concrete pad for the pleasure rink allowing it to be used in the summer for rollerblading, pickleball, four-square and chalk art. This also improves an area that did not drain well and was unmowable much of the summer. In addition, we will be working on rink upgrades by whitewashing the boards and squaring up the basketball posts, as well as installing a new basketball board. The council will hear public input at it June 9, 2020 city council meeting.

CITY TREE INSPECTIONS NOTICE

If you want to be notified when our city tree inspector is out looking for diseased trees on your property, please contact the city administrator so you can be updated when the inspector will be in your neighborhood.

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KAYAK/CANOE RACK INFORMATION

We now have kayak racks at Kay Beach. If you would like to transfer your boat to this site, please contact the city clerk. You must register your boat and obtain a permit sticker before selecting a spot on a rack and storing your boat. All boats must be registered or they will be removed. Fee is \$30 per boat.

FLUSH NOT

All that claims to be flushable is not. Only toilet paper is tolerated by our sewer system. Any other non-biological product has the nasty ability to clog our pumps and cause expensive repairs. Please help us (and the fellows that have to retrieve these bad bits down the sewer shaft) by using the trash bin for *everything* else. Thank you!

LAKE LINKS UPDATE

The Cities of Mahtomedi and Birchwood came to a mutual agreement to provide a safe bicycle/pedestrian transition between the two cities at our eastern border. Blinking crosswalk signs like the ones near 4 Seasons Restaurant, will be installed. In addition, the entire width of the pavement at the border will be stripped to warn drivers of the transition. We appreciate Mahtomedi's willingness to address our concerns and come up with a workable solution.

BIRCHWOOD DOCK INFO:

- Remember the docks are for all residents to use and enjoy, but please maintain your social distance when using the docks.
- The city dock fee portion is used exclusively for park improvements. Last year the city used the dock fees to pay for new LED lights at the hockey rink. This year the city is now reviewing plans at Tighe-Schmitz for further improvements. (Additional info in this newsletter p. 1.)
- Contact the Birchwood Dock Assoc. (651-399-1436) for any questions or contact the city to be added to the boat slip wait list.

EVENTS AND COVID UPDATES

You know the problem. You know why. Let's hope things get better in due time...

- **4th of July "Un-Parade"**. See Mayor's Notes for details.
- **Music in the Park-cancelled**
- **City Hall Yoga-cancelled**
- **Community Club Dues-suspended**
- **City wide Garage Sale-Discontinued**
- **Plant Exchanges-Discontinued**

WATER SYSTEM NOTES

- The city has been working toward new meters that can be read remotely. We need to move to new meters because the reader system is no longer supported and functionally obsolete. The city has been collecting monies via a surcharge on your water bill to make these improvements. A final decision on which company will provide this service will be made soon. Actual installation of the new meters will not occur until it is safe for workers to enter homes to complete the transition, i.e. at least not until 2021.

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- There were three watermain breaks this past winter. That is above the number we budget for and has triggered the watermain break surcharge of \$17 for the next three quarters.
- Randy LaFoy and Mary Wingfield "met" with White Bear Lake staff regarding how their water rates are set. There are still issues, but WBL has agreed to reduce their rates by 18% since we were paying for some services that were provided solely to their residents. However, this benefit will be short-lived as we also were told that the WBL system is in need of major repairs and those costs will be apportioned to all users. We'll keep you posted.

THANKS WASHINGTON COUNTY!

Our County Commissioner Stan Karwoski worked with the county public works department to assume the responsibility of the final overlay of pavement on South Shore Blvd left over from the Birchwood Lane liftstation removal project. They are wrapping the repair in with the East County Line Rd reconstruction project this summer. This reduces the overall project cost by 10%. We appreciate Stan's leadership in making this happen.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Our Centennial is just a year away. Part of our celebration is getting videos of interviews of those in town who have stories to share. Work has temporarily stopped, but we hope to resume when it is safer to do so. A number of interviews have been conducted already. If you have something to share and want to be a part of this living history, please contact Mary Wingfield.

MORE UPDATES

- *Crime Alert:* brazen theft occurred in Birchwood. https://www.cityofbirchwood.com/index.asp?SEC=0C89F484-4312-4C64-BFEE-7625F0F5EE7D&DE=45B2964C-D87E-48FF-AFF4-D995AC23B2E4&Type=B_BASIC
- In our spring cleaning at city hall, we came across the journals from the Writers' Club. If you know who should take responsibility for this compilation of works, please contact city hall. It needs to get back to its owners.
- The Northeast Family Youth Services offers assistance with mental health needs and chore services for seniors. This is a service to our community. Please take advantage of it. (<https://www.nyfs.org/>)
- The City of White Bear Lake is again offering rebates for those who are upgrading to an efficient toilet (1.28 gal or less). You qualify for the rebate if your utility bill includes a charge for water. (<https://www.whitebearlake.org/administration/rebate>)
- Be sure, be safe. Vote by mail. Here is the link to the Secretary of State to apply for a ballot now. <https://mnvotes.sos.state.mn.us/ABRegistration/ABRegistrationStep1.aspx>
- Photos of Birchwood - shared by Mike Evangelist: <https://lightroom.adobe.com/shares/c35a7e7a21364883a014b04ed4075d81>

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GET THE LATEST EMAIL POSTS

It's free! This is a great opportunity to add your name to the list where you will be sent city updates, important notices, and some cool photography around town. Sign up and don't miss a week by contacting us at info@CityofBirchwood.com. You will also get notice of upcoming concerns such as hydrant flushing, leaf pick up dates, and road repairs. Fear not, this list is for internal city use only and will not be sold or provided to others.

SAVE \$2 ON YOUR UTILITY BILL

Sign up for Direct Withdrawal (made on the last day payment is due) by filling out the ACH form ([https://www.cityofbirchwood.com/vertical/sites/%7BAA5D0154-C9CB-4BB6-8A70-7C86B8410F8A%7D/uploads/ACH Form.pdf](https://www.cityofbirchwood.com/vertical/sites/%7BAA5D0154-C9CB-4BB6-8A70-7C86B8410F8A%7D/uploads/ACH%20Form.pdf)) and sending a voided check along with your utility payment. Your \$2 savings will start with the following utility billing. And you will continue to receive your statement and Village Newsletter by mail.

HELP STOP LAKE POLLUTION

The City of Birchwood Village asks your help to stop the discharge of illicit liquids and materials from entering the City's storm sewer system. Illicit discharges are generally any discharge not composed entirely of storm water; such as oil, paint, fertilizer, pet waste, car wash chemicals, and grass clippings. Storm sewer systems are not designed to handle anything other than storm water; everything dumped down the storm sewer eventually drains into lakes and streams. Illicit liquids and materials can kill important plants and animals and negatively impact the water quality.

Please take measures to keep the storm sewer system free from illicit discharge. If you see any unusual liquids or materials draining into a storm drain, ditch, stream, or lake, please call City Hall at 651-426-3403 or email info@cityofbirchwood.com. If it is after hours or on the weekend please call the Washington County Sheriff's department at 651-439-9381 or the 911 non-emergency hotline."

In addition to keeping our water safe, the city is always looking for ways to improve our natural resources. The city of Maplewood posted the following information to its residents to help in this endeavor. Here are some of their ideas. We think you might be interested in doing the same:

1. Protect a storm drain. Keep leaves, grass, and debris from getting into the drains by keeping them on your property and off the streets.
2. Mulch or compost your Grass. This reduces the need to fertilize.
3. Use zero-phosphate fertilizer – the soil does not need it and the runoff creates more algae in the lake.
4. Reduce storm-water runoff – direct down-spouts into your lawn, use rain barrels or create rain gardens.
5. Use native plants. They have deeper root systems and help with water infiltration.
6. Properly dispose of all hazardous waste.

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MAYOR'S NOTES -"PARADE IN PLACE"

Reality hit home last month when it became obvious that we cannot hold our beloved Fourth of July parade this year. This is our 68th straight year. A torrential downpour two years ago could not break the streak, but the pandemic is no match for us.

Other communities continue to find ways to be together and enjoy life. Folks weighed in last month and there are a number of good ideas. So rather than be stymied by this virus, let's pivot to a new opportunity. Based on recent council discussions, we are limited to things that don't encourage social interaction. So let's do our patriotic duty while keeping safe. Ginny Altman will sing the National Anthem at the flag pole at 10:30 AM. Open your doors and listen. Or come and join her with a face mask on staying six feet apart. Bring a pot and spoon, drum or other noise maker and we will parade around the park...two times if we are really ambitious. And decorate the town. Decorate your yard, your mailbox, your windows, your house. Check them out, take some pictures, chat with your neighbors (at a responsible distance). And smile. We are community. Then let me know what tickled your fancy. Awards will be given for the most creative, funny, well-done, and any other "most" that is cool. We'll post pictures on the city web page.

BTW, some things will not change- flags will still be hung proudly along Hall/Cedar and Wildwood Ave. Have a very safe summer. m

CONTACT INFORMATION:

CITY HALL: 207 Birchwood Avenue, Birchwood MN;
tel.: 651-426-3403; email: info@CityofBirchwood.com

Mayor Wingfield: 651-653-1022; wingfield.mary@gmail.com

Al Bloomquist, The Man Behind the Name of Bloomquist Park by Scott Freeberg, Village Historian

One of Birchwood's City Parks is named Bloomquist Park and is located on the corner of Cedar Street and Birchwood Avenue, across from City Hall. It is the park with the tennis courts. This article will touch on the man for whom Bloomquist Park is named after. For this article I have solicited memories and stories from a longtime Birchwood resident and some of those Birchwood kids who knew Al personally and interacted with him regularly as the Village Constable, school bus driver, and longtime Village resident.

In the 1950's and 1960's Birchwood had their own police constable to keep the peace, and the Birchwood kids in line. The Village Constable or Marshall was Alfred Bloomquist, a long-time village resident and a man the kids playfully nicknamed "Alfie". It was Al's job to police the city, corral the speeders, and drive the school bus. Here is a photo of Al in uniform either directing the start of the July 4th Birchwood Parade or keeping an eye on the Witthaus or Butler brothers. The back of the picture says the photo is taken at the intersection of County Line Road and Birchwood Avenue on the 4th of July.

Here is a sweet story written by longtime Birchwood resident and City Clerk Nanette Mellgren. She was writing about the life of Al Bloomquist, a dear Birchwood resident, Birchwood

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Village Constable, Birchwood school bus driver. Mrs. Mellgren's letter is included in its entirety.

"The end of an era. Al Bloomquist, who passed away on Friday September 27, 1974, was a legend in Birchwood, a living, loving, helping person, a man who once knew all the kids by their first names and all the dogs by their last name. We've lost more than a friend. We've lost a guardian, a champion of our rights, a teacher of our kids.

Al Bloomquist was a living symbol of the "good ole days in Birchwood". Those of us who have been around a while remember when Al drove the school bus. If he took a small child to school, and for some reason that child didn't return on the bus, the parent had a phone call at the end of his run to make sure the child had gotten home. Al wasn't above parking the bus out front while he took a teen aged behavior problem to the front door.

Al believed in training and teaching kids. He wasn't long on the punitive, legal angle. He respected the kids and they respected him. Sometimes a little shouting went on but this was only an indication of how much Al cared. He was ahead of his time in that he wanted the kids to be straightened out at home rather than turned over to the authorities. Al knew everyone and where they lived. If you left town for a few days, he expected you to let him know so he could watch your house.

Over the years Nettie and Al supplied Christmas trees for the Hall. Al himself donated and passed candy at the Christmas Party. At Halloween, the kids for miles around came to their house for Crackerjacks. Al loved the Village. He rarely took a vacation himself to go fishing but if he did, he was back in a day or two as he started worrying about "his family". As time took its toll and the Village expanded, Al retired from driving the school bus and being the Village policeman, but he never really retired from serving the Village. He was in charge of the Water Department most recently and many knew him in that capacity. Shortly before he died, his concern was about get the water bills out. Al was an honest and good man. He was a dependable person. He saw things that needed to be done in the Village and did them without expecting recognition or compensation. Al's Iris, Peony, Gladiolus, and Mum patch was a bright spot for those who entered the Village on Cedar. Kids, dogs, flowers, he loved them all. We lost a great man. One whose influence will never be forgotten by those he touched." Written by Nanette Mellgren in 1974.

For extra fun, here are some personal stories from the Birchwood kids who remember Al:

From Craig Witthaus: *In the 1950s and 1960s, there was Alfie the Birchwood Constable, a master gardener, and the bus driver from younger Bwood kids. What we did know was that Alfie drove us to school each morning at Bellaire Elementary, and back again after school. Also, if we were in trouble it would be Alfie who would be explaining to our parents what their little darlings had been up to. Things happened... even in Birchwood. What I didn't know was if there was a Mrs. Alfie? I knew that there was but I never met her...never got that close. I liked Alfie the bus driver, liked the huge plot full of flowers in front of his house on East County line, but as Alphonse Bloomquist, Village Constable, I was pretty certain I didn't want him to even know I existed! There were lots of kids and larger families in Birchwood at the time, lots of kids, lots of activity winter and summer.*

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From Charlie Butler: *It definitely took a village constable to help raise all the boomers of Birchwood. As the driver of school bus number 5 which he named Claribell, he got to know each of us by name. Anyone out of line was seated on the floor in the well next to his floor shift. By our*

teens he could recognize each one from the back in the dark and could interrogate you as you got on the bus in the morning.

From Bill Butler: *Alfie was successful in almost everything. Once I gave him too big a challenge. I had a Volkswagen Bug. It was hard starting in the winter. To keep it warm. I placed a lightbulb on the engine and closed the lid. It got too hot and burst into flame. I called Alfie and used his fire extinguisher but to no avail. We had to call the fire department.*

From Ben Butler: *Many sides to him: Village Constable, Birchwood school bus driver, dressed up as Santa Claus at the Birchwood Village Hall Christmas party. Little known fact: He also raised gladiolas which he sold commercially. Single handedly was able to pull off the good cop / bad cop routine.*

From Peggy Vacha Witthaus: *It was May 1960, and the Vacha family was moving from Birchwood to Mahtomedi. Things were a bit hectic for my parents with 4 kids underfoot, packing and organizing the move. The youngest, Phyllis, was 2 and half years old. She was apparently feeling neglected and decided to take a walk without telling any of us. It took about 30 minutes to realize she was gone – and the search was on! We were frantic and Mom called the Constable to assist in finding her. Soon, Constable Alfie Bloomquist came slowly up the road in his station wagon with the round red light on top. I think that the car may have been green and white, but can't be sure. There was Phyllis sitting next to him in the front seat quite proud to have been the subject of a police search. Constable Bloomquist was always so kind and friendly that she had no qualms about taking a ride in the police car with him. He would stop to chat with adults and children and really personified the small town policeman.*

From Anne Butler Vail: *We all remember "Alfie" with great fondness. I will pass along this request to my older brothers who interactions with Mr. Bloomquist were a little more colorful than mine. Al drove the kindergarten bus route for years. He named his bus Lula Belle. Sometimes Lula Belle was in the shop for repairs so then he drove a second bus that I think he named Mrs. Magillicutty. We would walk what seemed like miles to go to the Bloomquists' house on Halloween because the Bloomquists always gave out boxes of Cracker Jacks. Al always showed up at the Village Hall Christmas party and handed out treats there too. Maybe big candy canes or more cracker jacks.*