

Geneva Lake Guardian



GENEVA LAKE ASSOCIATION

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The Association is dedicated to Conservation, Ecological Preservation and Education, and the General Welfare of the Geneva Lake Area.

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UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CHANGES ITS TUNE ON WHAT TO DO WITH YERKES

On Tuesday evening, January 2, 2007, representatives from the University of Chicago appeared at a regular meeting of the Williams Bay Village Board. This appearance by **Henry Webber**, Vice President of the University of Chicago for Community and Government Affairs, was done with little fanfare and no advance publicity. Joining him were **Richard Kron**, a Professor of Astronomy at the U of C and a part-time resident of Williams Bay, and **Jim Gee**, General Manager of the Yerkes Property. (Jim Gee is also a First Vice President of the Geneva Lake Association).

Chris Schultz, a Reporter for the "Janesville Gazette Newspaper" was at the meeting and wrote an excellent summary of what was said. The article was published in the next day's edition of the Gazette. With permission from **Sidney Bliss**, Publisher (and lakeshore resident of Fontana), this article is being reprinted in this GLA Newsletter for information purposes.

New Plan Sought for Yerkes

University approaches
Williams Bay for help

By Chris Schultz
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WILLIAMS BAY

The University of Chicago wants to start over in seeking a new owner and new use for its aging Yerkes Observatory.

"I'm here to ask for help," Henry S. Webber, the university's vice president for community and government affairs, told the

Williams Bay Village Board on Tuesday.

The university wants to work with the board and Williams Bay residents to find a new, suitable use for the landmark observatory, Webber said.

"I propose we work together to develop a plan for Yerkes to keep it in operation for the next 50 years or century as it has for the past century," he said.

"I can't speak for the board, but I'm gratified to hear that," Village President Don Weyhrauch said.

A written plan for cooperation between the village and the university will be ready by the end of this week, Webber said.

With Webber were Jim Gee, observatory manager, and Richard Kron, a university faculty member, Williams Bay resident and former Yerkes director.

Kron said the university and village should work quickly to get a plan together, and he suggested weekly meetings of a special committee that would include Williams Bay residents, trustees, university representatives and Yerkes staff members.

Everyone agrees that Yerkes should be preserved, said Webber, who believes the center would best be used as a science education center.

The plan must address the needs of the century-old institution, how it will fit in with the community and how it will be financed, Webber said.

After the meeting, Kron, who teaches graduate and undergraduate astronomy students, said he was interested in turning Yerkes—once a leading astronomy research facility—into a center for science education.



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“What the job is about now is how to make it into an asset for the entire community,” Kron said.

First opened in 1896, Yerkes Observatory has become outdated as a leading center for astronomy research. However, the building’s architecture is unique; its 40-inch refractor is the largest in the world, and its grounds are considered a landscaping masterpiece.

With maintenance costs in the hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, the university is trying to find a graceful way to retire Yerkes while preserving it and keeping it useful.

In early 2006, the university announced plans to sell the observatory and land to Mirbeau Resort & Spa of New York.

Mirbeau owner Gary Dower proposed building a 100-room resort and 72-home subdivision on the property. Taxes from the resort and subdivision were expected to support an education center at Yerkes run by an independent board.

However, three public meetings last summer made it clear that the Mirbeau plan did not have the needed support. Mirbeau has never submitted a formal development plan to the village.

In July, Chicago financier and Williams Bay landowner, Richard Driehaus sent a letter to the village board saying he would commission three architects to develop alternative plans for the Yerkes property. The plans were presented to the public in November, and they remain options.

Asked about Mirbeau, Webber would only say the New York company was still interested in the Geneva Lake area but not necessarily in the Yerkes property.

A similar article appeared in the “Chicago Tribune” on Thursday, January 4, 2007, written by **Greg Burns**, a Tribune Senior Correspondent. We are printing it here also for the news value on the Yerkes dilemma.

Yerkes plan changes focus

U. of C. won’t make
historic site into luxury resort

By Greg Burns

Tribune senior correspondent

The University of Chicago is backing off a plan to turn part of its historic Yerkes Observatory into a luxury resort and housing development, responding to pressure from neighbors of the parklike site along Geneva Lake in southern Wisconsin.

A deal in June with New York developer Mirbeau Cos. generated resistance from the lakefront village of Williams Bay, Wis., whose residents were asked to establish a

special exposition district to take over the century-old stargazing center.

After a series of overwhelmingly negative public hearings, the university realized its plan “was not viable without at least substantial revisions, and perhaps not at all,” said Hank Webber, vice president for community government affairs for the school. “This is a moment to take a step back.”

Now the fate of the obsolete astronomy research hub returns to the drawing board, as the university works with the village to develop a comprehensive plan over the next three months, Webber said. Adler Planetarium and Aurora University, which owns the adjacent George Williams College campus and had previously bid for the Yerkes property, will be invited to participate, he said.

Williams Bay controls the future of the site through its zoning authority, and its trustees await the university’s next move, said Donald Weyhrauch, village president. “The village certainly did not want to see what Mirbeau was proposing,” he said. “Everybody’s just waiting now to see what the plan’s going to be.”

Opponents doubt the Yerkes site ever will provide a substantial windfall to the University of Chicago, as envisioned in the proposed sale to Mirbeau. “The question they should have asked a long time ago is not how much money they can get out of it but how much they will need to put into it to preserve the building,” said Larry Larkin, who leads a citizens’ group that opposed the development. “It’s going to cost them less if they have the support and participation of the community.”

Webber said the university still needs to sell Yerkes to redirect resources into teaching and cutting-edge research using state-of-the-art telescopes far from population centers. Yerkes’ famed 40-inch refracting telescope dates from the late Victorian age, and its use is hampered by the relatively cloudy and light-polluted skies over southern Wisconsin. At the same time, the university always stayed committed to preserving the historic, castle-like building and grounds, Webber said. “Our goals remain the same.”

Mirbeau, which planned to build a 100-room spa and 72 new homes, hasn’t ruled out the 79-acre Yerkes property but is looking at three or four other sites in the area that might be available, according to owner Gary Dower. “We’ve been asked to stand to the side,” Dower said. “We obviously are disappointed because we thought the opportunity we presented with the university was a good opportunity.”

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This meeting, held at the Williams Bay Board on January 2, 2007, followed two sets of meetings on the subject of what to do about Yerkes.

The most recent of those two sets of meetings was held

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on Saturday, December 2, 2006, and featured an appearance by three architects that were sponsored by The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation.

Prior to the above meeting with the Architects, there was a series of three meetings where the proposed buyer of the Yerkes Observatory and grounds, the Mirbeau Company from New York State, appeared in a well-publicized meeting before 300-400 citizens. The last of the three meetings was held on Thursday, August 24, 2006, and was the first where the public could ask questions of the Mirbeau people and the University of Chicago representative, Henry Webber. When a show of hands was asked if they opposed the project, nearly everyone present showed their opposition. Since then, the public has not

heard from the Mirbeau Group.

Today, January 25, 2007, as this Newsletter is being written, this writer asked Jim Gee whether he had heard of any action by the various parties involved. His answer was "no."

Jim did report that 430 children and young people came to the Yerkes Observatory this past Saturday, January 20, 2007, as part of the education program made possible by an \$800,000 grant awarded to Yerkes and other education institutions by the National Science Foundation. This gathering was the beginning of the "Yerkes Astrophysics Academy for Young Scientists."

THEODORE W. (TED) PETERS AN UNSUNG TREASURE IN THE GENEVA LAKE WATERSHED

The Geneva Lake Association is pleased to have the resources made available in the Geneva Lake area by our local scientist, **Ted Peters**. He is truly an asset to the five local communities that he serves in his capacity as Director of the Geneva Lake Environmental Agency. He has been a part of the GLEA almost from its founding in 1972. A native of Milwaukee and Wauwatosa, Ted received his degree from the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point with a major in Water Resource Management in 1973. Shortly after, he came to the Geneva Lake area where he started as a volunteer with the Geneva Lake Environmental Agency. At the time, the Agency was run by **Phil Fogle**, a long-time resident of Williams Bay. When Mr. Fogle retired in 1981, he was succeeded by Ted, who became the full-time Director.

In the 25 years since he became Director, he has written numerous publications, conducted numerous studies, and has been a wonderful source of information on our 5,500 acre lake and its 12,800 acre watershed. As a scientist and manager, he is knowledgeable on matters relating to the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of water and water quality, lake and land use, protective measures, and recreation and resource problems. His goals and those of the Agency are to protect our valuable water resource, improve living and recreation conditions relating to the lake and to foster legislation to accomplish these recommendations.

Over the years, Ted and the Agency have been involved in numerous lake and watershed studies, including ground water quality, atmospheric depositions, bacterial beach quality, aquatic plants surveys, monitoring invasive species and continuous lake monitoring. During the 1990's, with the help of additional funding and several state and federal grants, the Agency undertook a comprehensive Diagnostic-Feasibility Study, one of the most extensive studies ever conducted on Geneva Lake. This three-year study looked at the lake in greater detail than ever before. A new Lake

Management Plan is expected out within the next couple of months. This new plan will set the direction of Geneva Lake's management for the next 20 years.

The Agency is supported financially by budgeted funds from each of the communities it serves. In addition, it receives individual donations from local citizens who believe in the importance of its goals. The Geneva Lake Association, itself, makes an annual contribution to the Agency.

Now back to Ted Peters and a brief biographical sketch of him and the family he is so proud of. His wife of 28 years, the former **Pam Rossmiller**, of Fontana, is a science teacher at Burlington High School. Their oldest son, **Ted**, is working on his PhD in molecular biology at the University of Colorado Health and Life-Science College. He and his wife live in Denver while Ted completes his degree.

Their second son is a student of History at UW-Whitewater and is in the US Marine Reserve. He has already served one tour of duty in Iraq. The youngest child of Ted and Pam is their daughter, **Cora**, who is a sophomore at UW-Stevens Point, majoring in Art.

Ted has been active in Boy Scouts for over 20 years, from a time when his sons were Cub Scouts. Both are now Eagle Scouts, and Ted still works with Lake Geneva Troop 235.

Finally, Ted Peters is active in numerous Geneva Lake institutions, including the Geneva Lake Association Environmental Education Foundation, the Geneva Lake Use Committee and the Geneva Lake Level Corporation Board of Directors.

In interviewing Ted Peters, he made the following statement: *"I find comfort and value in my life from my faith, better understanding of our natural world, from working with youth to help them better appreciate the wonders of this world and what we all can do to make it a better place."*

THE GENEVA LAKE ASSOCIATION

HOW AND WHEN DID IT ALL START?

At the time this writer took over the duties as Director of Field Operations for the Geneva Lake Association, I received a two-drawer metal filing cabinet and a box containing several very heavy, bound books. These volumes contain the Minutes of every Member Annual Meeting, every Director's Meeting, and every Executive Committee Meeting, from its founding in 1935 to 1990. If one is a history buff, these books make fascinating reading and a social study of Who's Who around the lake. At every meeting, the names of the attendees were listed. Many of these early names are still known around the lake in third and fourth generations.

As many of us know, the Geneva Lake Association was founded in 1935 with the name "Geneva Lake Home Owners' Protective Association." In 1939, it dropped the word "Protective" and changed "Homeowners" to "Property Owners." In 1954, it changed its name to "Geneva Lake Civic Association." Finally, in 1980, the name was changed to its current form, "Geneva Lake Association," and in 1997, it became a tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization, making member contributions tax deductible.

The first meeting of "Gentlemen Interested in Lake Geneva" was held at the University Club in the City of Chicago on Wednesday, May 22, 1935, at 12:30 PM. The Minutes state that **Arthur W. Wakeley** would act as Temporary Chairman, and **Ernst C. Schmidt** would act as Temporary Secretary at this meeting. It was decided to call this association "Owners' Protective Association of Geneva Lake, Wisconsin." Those present at the meeting were:

B. B. Bell
Col. Davidson
A. L. Godfrey
George Hotton
Arthur W. Wakeley
Ernst C. Schmidt

John W. Walker
A. F. Madlener
Henry Bartholomay
Daniel Peterkin
W. H. Emery

At 2:00 PM, it was moved, seconded and carried that the meeting adjourn.

Two months later, on July 13, 1935, "A Meeting of the Temporary Committee for the Purpose of Forming a Protective Association for Geneva Lake" was held Saturday noon, July 13, 1935, at the Big Foot Country Club. The name

decided upon for this organization is "GENEVA LAKE HOME OWNERS PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION."

It was decided that there should be a board of fifteen (15) directors, eight (8) of whom should own his own lakeshore property, or represent lake shore residents who own their own property, in fee simple.

There shall be two (2) classes of membership, regular members for \$5.00, and associate memberships for \$2.00.

It was suggested at this meeting that this temporary committee be composed of:

Arthur W. Wakeley, as Chairman
B. B. Bell
Lawrence H. Whiting
George Hotton
Ernst C. Schmidt

And that **A. L. Godfrey**, as attorney, should proceed with this incorporation of this organization and that as soon as the organization is duly qualified to act, a meeting shall be called, at which every property owner around the lake shall be invited and informed of the aims of this committee. On Saturday, August 17, 1935, the FIRST MEETING of the Geneva Lake Homeowners Protective Association was held at the Northwestern Military and Naval Academy. At this meeting, the By-Laws and the Articles of Incorporation were adopted.

NOW WHY WAS THIS ORGANIZATION CREATED? To the best of our knowledge, this group of Homeowners was concerned about the fire and police protection for their properties around the lake. The Depression was on full force, and there was a certain amount of vandalism taking place, and there was not enough "protection." Geneva Lake was a premier real estate location, even in the middle of a Depression, so the quality of water and availability of public facilities was a concern.

Thus, the Organization that we know today as the Geneva Lake Association was started. Today, we have over 800 names on our database and a loyal group of supporters and contributors. We have 27 Directors, one-third of whom are elected each year for a three-year term. Our thanks to our Members, our Directors and Officers!

