

# Geneva Lake Guardian

GENEVA LAKE ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 412  
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## Winter 2008

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF GENEVA LAKE ASSOCIATION, INC. • PROTECTING GENEVA LAKE SINCE 1935

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## WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN!

### TORNADOES JUST MISS LAKE GENEVA

On Monday morning, January 7, 2008, the Weather Service reported that potential tornado-like storms were sweeping across Northern Illinois and heading toward Wisconsin. It then reported that these storms were approaching Harvard, Illinois, which is just five miles south of the west end of Geneva Lake. Heading in a northeast direction, the eye of the storm was heading directly toward the southeast corner of Geneva Lake and to the City of Lake Geneva itself. Then by a miracle, the storm center turned toward a more easterly direction and bypassed the city. Within minutes, a tornado had crossed into Wheatland Township, destroying many homes in the process, touching down both on the south side of Hwy. 50 and the north side of Hwy. 50. By another miracle, it tore into houses just west of the large local grade school, which was still full of children. The time was about 3:30-4:00PM. The tornado raced on to the City of Kenosha and touched down one more time at its western edge. Another miracle . . . no one was killed, or injured, and no children in a school full of them were hurt in any way, as the school authorities kept them in the building. Tornado warning whistles were filling the air from Fontana and Walworth at the western edge of Geneva Lake, and on through the City of Lake Geneva and Wheatland Township.

This writer and his wife, **Betty**, had arrived home having been in the City of Lake Geneva just a short time before, and with the skies black and the rain pelting down, we turned on our TV set in our lower level to Milwaukee Channel 4, where the news of the location of the storm was broadcast full-time for the next hour and a half. Staff TV reporters were trying to locate where the storm had actually touched down

and destroyed a number of homes in different locations. Gradually the pattern and direction of the storm was made clear, but by then it had already moved on to the City of Kenosha and finally on to Lake Michigan itself.

Harvard, Illinois, located five miles south of the State Line, came close to being right in the eye of the storm. Local merchants that we spoke with in Harvard this Thursday said they observed the storm sweeping across the north and northeast corner of the city. A large semi-trailer truck heading north on Hwy. 14 was blown over by the wind and blocked traffic for a considerable period of time. At the other end of the tornado route, a motorcyclist on Hwy. 50 was thrown off his bike but without serious injury.

The storm was over almost as fast as it had arrived. The residents started coming out of their homes to view the damage. The Police and medical care people soon arrived. The City of Lake Geneva Police Chief, **Richard Meinel**, arrived on the scene in Wheatland Township and was quoted in the "Lake Geneva Regional News" as saying, "I can't believe how lucky we were!" The article noted that the residents were already cleaning up after the Monday afternoon tornado destroyed homes, uprooted trees, and tossed debris everywhere. The TV Channel told of three homes, located side by side and facing the same direction, with only the center one being destroyed, and the other two untouched. In all, there were about 30 homes damaged or destroyed, some on each side of Hwy. 50 and near Hwy. 0, a location just about seven miles east of the City of Lake Geneva.

The "Regional News" reported that "The tornado threats were not just a rare

*continued on page 2*



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# WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN HEAVY FOG CREATES MULTIPLE AUTO ACCIDENTS IN SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

On Sunday Morning, January 6, 2008, on our way to church in Lake Geneva via Hwy. 50, we suddenly encountered heavy, heavy fog, with cars ahead of us disappearing in the mist. We were not traveling very fast, nor was there very much traffic, so fortunately, so far as we know, there were no injuries nor accidents created as a result.

Sixty miles northwest of Geneva Lake at about 2:00PM on the same day afternoon on a major expressway leaving Madison, a sudden deadly fog enveloped the highway. As a result, an enormous backup of more than 100 vehicles created dozens of accidents, dozens of injured, and two people killed. Traffic was backed up for hours on both the north and south lanes of the Hwy. 90/39. At least 50 injured people, including three with life-threatening injuries, were taken to hospitals in nearby Stoughton and Madison. One driver said he pulled off the highway at about 2:00PM because people were slamming on their brakes in the heavy fog. Traffic had been going about 60mph prior to the accident . . . he said. "People didn't slow down and just started to slam into everything."

The Wisconsin State Patrol said some cars were traveling over 70 miles per hour into the fog when the crashes began. Within minutes, squad cars, ambulances, and fire engines rushed to the scene and discovered a five-mile swath of smashed cars and jackknifed semitrailer trucks. At least two dozen emergency vehicles and 75-100 rescue workers were on the scene.

(The above was reported in a headline article in the "Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel" by **John Dobberstein** and **Patrick Marley** on Monday morning, January 7, 2008. It continued to quote many by name who were personally involved. The following quotations are from that article.)

"So far, State Troopers know this: About 2:25PM, thick fog caused heavy breaking in the southbound lanes of I-90/39, just south of Hwy. 12/18. A semi came through the area and plowed through quite a few vehicles. One person was killed in that accident. Fifteen to thirty minutes later, a mile north of Hwy. N in the northbound lane of I-90/39, another traffic pileup occurred, and another person was killed in the wreck."

**Jay Selvo**, Assistant Fire Chief for Blooming Grove Fire Department, was one of the first to respond to the accident south of Hwy. 12/18. He said the fog was so thick that he couldn't see an ambulance with its lights flashing from 150 feet away. The fog, which limited visibility in the Madison area to less than a 10th of a mile at times, formed as warm southerly air swept over colder, snow-packed ground. This statement credited to **Chris Franks**, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service Office in Sullivan.

As drivers, we are all aware of the danger of running into heavy fog, whether daytime or nighttime. Many of us have experienced the terror in suddenly running into fog or black ice. The above is simply a reminder to all of us to use utmost caution and reduced speed when suddenly approaching any kind of foggy road conditions. The Geneva Lake area is surrounded by excellent four-lane, high-speed expressways which can become death traps when fog (or black ice) are encountered!

**There are some things we cannot avoid, but super care and thoughtfulness will save many serious injuries and lost lives. The Geneva Lake Association has many members who drive back and forth to their summer homes. We don't want to lose any of you.**

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## TORNADOES JUST MISS LAKE GENEVA . . . *continued from page 1*

occurrence for the City of Lake Geneva, it is just the second time in Wisconsin History that tornadoes have touched down in the month of January. The other time was in 1967, according to Police Chief Richard Meinel.

Even the "New York Times" printed an article on the tornado. In the Wednesday, January 9, issue, it said "Damage in Wisconsin centered on Wheatland, 35 miles south of Milwaukee, where a tornado with winds of about 150 miles per hour left a 200-yard-wide path of destruction 11 miles long, the National Weather Service said. The article quoted **Alan Kaddatz**, Chief of the Volunteer Fire Department, as saying, "The twister demolished about 25 houses and damaged about 100 on Monday afternoon." The Chief said that he and his Team were at a car accident when they looked to see violently swirling debris not far away.

Betty and I visited the scene in and around Wheatland Township Wednesday afternoon, and already the local roads

were filled with pickup trucks, panel trucks and large dump trucks, as subcontractors and utility workers were already helping to save what was possible and removing the torn members from destroyed homes.

The "Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel" reporter, **Tom Weld**, in an extensive article noted "The tornadoes in Wisconsin were spawned by an unusually large, upper level trough that funneled warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico and created thunderstorms passing over the snow cover and cold ground," said National Weather Service meteorologist, **Bob McMahon**. On Monday afternoon, some of those thunderstorms rotated and touched down."

We feel very sorry for those who suffered and are suffering loss from this storm.

We are fortunate it missed Lake Geneva. What might have been – if it had hit here.

# THE MIRBEAU-HUMMEL PLAN TO GO TO REFERENDUM ON APRIL 1, 2008

Over two months ago, the Plan Commission of the City of Lake Geneva held a second public hearing on the Mirbeau-Hummel proposed development plan. The meeting lasted well into the evening, until the Commission Members were told they had to exit the Badger High School Building in ten minutes for safety purposes. At that point, a vote was suddenly held which ended in a 4-3 vote in favor of the Mirbeau-Hummel Plan. It was a tie vote, with the Mayor voting in favor of the proposal, thus resulting in a 4 to 3 final vote. This favorable vote would be in the form of a recommendation to the Lake Geneva City Council.

On Monday, December 10, 2007, at the regular City Council Meeting, a long discussion resulted in a vote to hold a referendum on the issue, the date to be April 1, 2008, the same date as the election of City Officers and Council Members. The local "Lake Geneva Regional News" quoted several of the City Council Members in favor of and against a referendum, but the result was a unanimous vote in favor of holding a referendum on the issue where the citizens of the City of Lake Geneva would have a chance to give their input directly on this issue.

On Monday afternoon, January 7, 2008, the City of Lake Geneva received a three-page letter from Attorney **Robert Leibsle**, representing Mirbeau-Hummel, calling the City Council's decision to go to a referendum an "illegal delegation of the power and duties of the Common Council." The "Lake Geneva Regional News", in quoting from the letter, noted that Attorney Robert Leibsle also said that Aldermen agreeing to base their votes on the results of the referendum are violations of due process under Federal and State Law and also are violations of the City's zoning regulations.

The letter arrived a short time before the Committee of the Whole meeting on Monday evening, January 7. Only brief mention of it was made by the Council Members. The Council can reconsider the decision to go to referendum at its January 14, 2008 meeting, and if they do want to reconsider, the item

would be on the Council Agenda for the meeting on January 28, 2008.

In a further statement from Attorney Leibsle's letter, he quoted, "The action of the Common Council on December 10, 2007, delegating the rezone decision on to the public in the referendum is in total disregard of the Plan Commission's recommendation, the legal advice from the City Attorney, the effort of those who worked diligently and very intensely on bringing out the true facts and information regarding the rezone request and the sworn duty of the Common Council Members."

By the time this Geneva Lake Association Newsletter is printed and mailed to you members, the above issue may have been addressed several times. We encourage our readers to be apprised of what is happening. A good source is the "Lake Geneva Regional News" which continues to cover the issue extensively.

Another good source of local news is "The Janesville Gazette", a daily newspaper which also offers news via its website: [gazettextra.com](http://gazettextra.com) The website is updated frequently during the day and is a good source of Geneva Lake News.

As an example, in the Thursday, December 20, 2007 issue of the "Lake Geneva Regional News", which comes out on Wednesday morning, there was printed a headline article entitled "Group Wants to Purchase 710 Acres." The article notes: "A coalition of local land owners going by the name "Lower Density Development LLC" is interested in purchasing the 710 acres of the property owned by Robert Hummel. They made their intention clear last week when an "Offer to Negotiate Letter" was sent to Mr. Hummel on behalf of the landowner group. According to attorneys representing the landowner group, it has not yet heard back from Mr. Hummel regarding the offer to negotiate a purchase of the land. Included in the letter was a proof of assets from Northern Trust Bank (of Chicago) stating that the group has funds in the amount of \$10,000,000.

**MORE NEWS ON THE REFERENDUM.** On Monday evening, January 14, 2008, at the City of Lake Geneva Council Meeting, on the Agenda was the matter relating to the Mirbeau-Hummel Advisory Referendum and its exact wording. There was virtually no discussion on the matter, and by a vote of 7 to 1, it was approved. According to the City, the question will appear on the ballot as follows:

"Shall the Common Council for the City of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin be advised to approve the Zoning Code Amendment and the General Development Plan of the Mirbeau-Hummel Group?"

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation:

A "Yes" vote is in favor of advising the Common Council to approve the application of Mirbeau-Hummel Group and authorize the Group to commence activities in furtherance of the application for a Zoning Code Amendment and General Development Plan.

A "No" vote is to advise the Common Council to refuse to approve the Zoning Code Amendment and the General Development Plan proposed by the Mirbeau-Hummel Group.

The Document giving "Notice of Advisory Referendum" states: "Notice is hereby given that an election is to be held in the City of Lake Geneva on April 1, 2008 (and) the above Advisory Question will be submitted to the vote of the people."

## GLA PIER NUMBER LIST PROVIDED TO LOCAL DISPATCHERS

Last fall, as the season was ending on Geneva Lake, the GLA, at the direction of **Jim Hanny**, President, published and distributed a master list of pier numbers on Geneva Lake that associated a street address with each pier number. This list of 900 pier numbers, with street addresses attached, was then given to 15 fire, police and water rescue units for their exclusive use. These units included the Walworth County Sheriff's Department, the Lake Geneva, Williams Bay, Fontana, Town of Linn, and the Village of Walworth Police and Fire Units. A Master-List Copy was also provided to the Geneva Lake Law Enforcement Agency, and the Water Safety Patrol.

The purpose of these lists is to provide rescue units with a street address when someone on the lake has been injured and is awaiting help on a lake pier. In an instance such as this, a Police or Fire Dispatcher can look at the list and immediately send an ambulance or other emergency equipment to the street address associated to that pier number.

There have been times in the past when a call for help from some boater pulling up to a pier knew only the pier number and could not relate to a location on the land. A Dispatcher receiving such a call could use the list and immediately send a rescue unit to the correct location on land.

This does not take away from the services by the Water Safety Patrol. They are often the first safety/rescue boat to arrive at an accident scene, and using their communication system, can take the best action immediately, including taking an injured person to a public pier where an ambulance could be waiting.

To our GLA Members, please know that this list of pier numbers with associated street addresses contains no names of homeowners nor any other information from our computer data base. The GLA takes pride in keeping our Member Database completely private. It is not sold nor given to any organization or individual.

## THE CITY OF LAKE GENEVA FIRE DEPARTMENT POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF FIRE BOAT

The City of Lake Geneva Fire Department has contacted **Jim Hanny**, President of the Geneva Lake Association, and asked him to inform our members that the Fire Department is investigating the funding and acquisition of a new Fire Boat that would serve the entire Geneva Lake Area and shoreline. The boat would have high-speed capability to get anywhere on the lake in a short amount of time, and would incorporate high-capacity pumps for fire suppression on the water. The boat would provide high-pressure water hoses and lines to fires on and near the lakeshore. It would provide an

extraordinary advantage to many homes on and near the lake that are served by long narrow roads and driveways where there are no fire hydrants.

The estimated cost of a new Fire Boat would be approximately \$225,000. The Lake Geneva Fire Department is in the process of contacting prospective donors and is requesting support from property owners and local organizations. Members of the Fire Department have said they would be glad to make a presentation (including video) to any interested parties.

## GLA TO FUND SUMMER INTERNS

At a recent GLA Board Meeting, the Directors agreed to fund two summer interns for work at the Kishwaukee Nature Conservancy and at the Geneva Lake Environmental

Agency. Each intern will receive \$5,000 in the form of a grant. The interns will be chosen by the management of the respective Geneva Lake organization.

## GLA DEVELOPS WEBSITE

[www.genevalakeassoc.org](http://www.genevalakeassoc.org)

The Geneva Lake Association now has its own website, and we invite you to use it.

From it, you can also connect to many other organizations and government offices around the lake.