

Borse, the village's founding father

by Donna Farina

Following is an update of an interview with Anton and Florence Borse, which was conducted late last year for The Doings Christmas issue.

Anton (Tony) Borse turned his vision of a village arising from an unincorporated subdivision into a reality and then guided Willowbrook through its formative years.

In December 1959, Borse, president of the Ridgemoor Homeowners Association, and neighbor Stanley Ganek spent long nights convincing homeowners to donate funds for an incorporation referendum. The association was rushing to beat a state law that would eliminate the formation of small villages after Jan. 1.

"I told them we haven't got tomorrow. We need a commitment now, or it won't fly," Borse said. "Then, \$30 was a lot of money, but almost all of the 40 homeowners contributed."

The spark that ignited the referendum fire was lit by International Harvester's proposal to build 650 prefab houses on the Rogers Farm site north of Plainfield between Garfield and Madison. The association felt incorporation would protect Ridgemoor property values from minimum county housing codes and control development of surrounding farm land.

Christmas that year was a little tense in the Borse household as Tony and his wife, Florence, anxiously waited for the Dec. 31 DuPage County Court date on the referendum.

"We had the last judge, the last sitting and the last

hour. After that we would need 400 people to form a village, and we only had 168," he said.

When the case finally was called, there was a hitch because the petitions did not have a name for the proposed village. So, the association's attorney quickly called Borse. There is a slight family dispute over who actually chose Willowbrook. Tony remembers hanging on the phone, looking out his window and spotting willow trees and a creek, suggesting Willow Creek. Florence thinks she switched creek to brook, but son Gary claims the kids were yelling names and Willowbrook was one of their ideas.

On Jan. 16, 1960, formation of the Village of Willowbrook was endorsed by 67 of the 72 who voted on the referendum. On Jan. 18, the Dupage County Court officially approved the incorporation, and on Feb. 13, Anton Borse was elected its first president.

Although a sales tax ordinance was immediately passed, funds were so tight the first few years that special events like Santa's visit to the neighborhoods were covered by resident's donations, and the village newsletters were hand-delivered.

In fact, funds were so scarce that for five years the Village Board met in the Borse basement. Florence, who was expecting her sixth child at the time the village formed, pinch-hitted as assistant village clerk.

"It was such a closely knit community, that everyone would come to meetings, and we'd have coffee and cake. I had three different-colored phones for village, police and personal calls; and the first village plan was tacked to the wall," she said. "We had to

remodel the basement when the board finally moved out because the floor tile was full of burn marks, and walls were scuffed from chairs."

Tony Borse served as village president until 1969, when he decided not to seek re-election because Borse Plastics Products had opened in Willowbrook.

"I felt there would be a lot of heat about conflicting interests with a Willowbrook business and public office," he said.

Five children and a son-in-law are among the 200 employees at Borse Plastics, which is probably the village's largest establishment. Early this year, the Borses sold the privately held company to Kuhlman Corp. of Michigan. However, the family maintained ownership of the 15-acre site at 7400 S. Quincy and is involved in a \$4 million expansion program at the Willowbrook plant.

Tony and Florence Borse have a keen interest in community affairs. Tony received the Willowbrook Citizen of the Year Award last August for his early contributions as well as for service to the local Kiwanis and Chamber of Commerce. Florence is president of the Willowbrook/Burr Ridge Chamber of Commerce.

The walls of Tony's office are covered with awards, although the one he proudly points out is the framed certificate of his first election as village president.

"Everything has worked out exactly as we envisioned in 1960. The old-timers are proud, because the village hasn't deviated from the plans set in the critical formative years," he said.

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