

Bicentennial Park commemorates yearlong celebration

By KRISTI SCHWEITZER T-G Staff Writer Published: July 29, 2016 4:00 AM



T-G photo | Larry Paxton and Bill Strine unveil one of the markers at the Bicentennial Park dedication on the 201st anniversary of the founding of Uniontown (Ashland), Thursday, July 28.

Spirits were high Thursday morning as community members gathered around the newly renovated lot next to Dairy Queen to engage in the final piece of last year's Bicentennial Celebration.

At the 201st anniversary of the city's founding, Ashland Bicentennial Park was officially opened to the public during a dedication ceremony to celebrate another part of the city's history.

"The Bicentennial Park is a reminder that our city has a great past and an even better future as we look forward to the next generation," city finance director Larry Paxton said, speaking on behalf of Mayor Glen Stewart. "Congratulations to the Bicentennial Committee, Ashland Main Street and Ashland County Historical Society for the park and permanent reminder of the bicentennial. Thank you to our many sponsors, donors and volunteers that have made this possible."

A theme of remembrance and community involvement carried throughout the ceremony. "As we stand here, my hope is that my grandchildren and my grandchildren's grandchildren and on down the line come here and that they remember about the 200th celebration of Ashland," Bicentennial Committee co-chair Rick Spreng said.

Several other community members shared their thoughts on the city, park and the community spirit, including Ashland Main Street executive director Sandra Tunnell, former mayor Bill Strine speaking on behalf of the Ashland County Historical Society, donor Damon Hitchcock of Donley Auto Group, chair of Ashland Main Street Scott Young and Ashland City School's superintendent Doug Marrah.

Gene Haberman and Ralph Tomassi were recognized for their initial plans to develop the park. We need to thank Gene and Ralph," Spreng said. "They were the ones who had the vision of this park. They're the ones that said this needs to happen."

Paxton and Strine unveiled the bicentennial stone, memorializing the yearlong celebration. Hitchcock, Rick Spreng and committee co-chair Kim Spreng unveiled the bicentennial stand that represents the many sponsors of the bicentennial festivities.

Ashland Monument provided the park's stone and Town and County Co-Op donated the bronze plaque. Ashland City Schools Board of Education member Rick Ewing and his family, along with VFW Post 1067, raised the flag on the former Montgomery school flagpole donated by the district.

Out of the \$535,000 raised by the Bicentennial Committee for 2015 celebrations, \$25,000 was designated to the park. Another \$7,500 was given through local donations, and materials were donated for some of the construction. Dairy Queen provided bike racks and the city provided the lot and soon-to-be-installed trash containers. A walkway, named in honor of Home Hardware owners Gaylord and Beulah Miller, was donated by their son, Mark Miller.

Additionally, \$75,000 raised by the Bicentennial Committee has been put into an endowment fund through **Ashland County Community Foundation** for future events and celebrations for the community.

Kristi Schweitzer can be reached at 419-281-0581, ext. 237, or at kschweitzer@times-gazette.com. Follow her on Twitter @krschweitzer.