

Ceremony to honor historic significance of pool is June 1

Official unveiling of National Register plaque and Historic Preservation Award at Decorah Municipal Pool

The Decorah Historic Preservation Commission and Parks and Recreation Department are hosting a joint celebration recognizing the listing of the Decorah Municipal Bathhouse and Swimming Pool on the National Register of Historic Places.

It is Saturday, June 1, at 10 a.m. at the pool building. The observance will include the unveiling of a bronze plaque on the building denoting its status on the National Register. Andy Nimrod, the new director of Decorah Parks and Recreation will join Kyril Henderson, chair of the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission, in hosting the observance.

The event also will include the presentation of the annual Decorah Historic Preservation Award to Dominique and Michael Bockman

of Decorah for their historically sensitive restoration of their building on Water Street in Decorah.

The Bockmans recently opened the second floor of T-Bock's after completing an extensive renovation and remodeling project. David Wadsworth of Decorah rebuilt the windows on the front of the building, a historically significant part of the renovation. Wadsworth studied historical window renovation and restoration at The Campbell Center for Historic Preservation Studies in Mount Carroll, Ill.

Bathhouse, pool

The Decorah Municipal Bathhouse/Swimming Pool was officially listed on National Register Jan. 30, 2012.

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The Decorah Municipal Pool and Bathhouse were officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places Jan. 30, 2012. A special ceremony unveiling a plaque recognizing that honor will take place at 10 a.m. Saturday, June 1, at the pool. Below, the pool shown under construction during the summer of 1937. (Submitted photos)



This listing is the culmination of a long process that began with a report issued by the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission in January of 2009 of the historic significance of the building. Henderson then wrote an application for a Certified Local Government Grant from the State Historic Preservation Office to fund writing and submission of an application for the National Register. After the grant was approved, Henderson managed the grant from the hiring of consultant, Robert Vogel and his company Pathfinder CRM of Spring Grove, Minn., through the presentation of the application to the state committee. That presentation took place on June 10, 2011, in Des Moines.

Among the goals of securing this National Register listing, according to Henderson, was to help support local preservation activities in a number of ways:

- Recognition of the national, state and local importance of a property which may be taken for granted by the local citizens by virtue of its daily use and perception of it being part of every day life in the community.
- Encourage heightened recognition of the historical significance of local properties
- Recognition and acceptance of local supporters of historic preservation
- Encourage other citizens to participate in historic preservation

Misconception

A common misconception is a National Register listing comes with protections or special requirements imposed on property owners by the federal government, Henderson said.

"A listing by itself does not add any preservation requirements, restrictions or protections. It is recognition that a building or site is worthy of national recognition and preservation," he said. "The only time a National Register designation adds requirements for property owners is if the property owner has accepted and used federal funding to improve or renovate the property. Then the owner must go through a process to show cause should they wish to significantly alter or demolish the building/site.

"We are grateful that this building has been recognized by the National Register designation. It's a real gem," Henderson said. "We would like to thank Robert Vogel

and his fine team of researchers and specialists, and Dr. Paula Mohr, head of the State Historic Preservation Office, without whom we could never have received this listing. We are most thankful that this building is getting the recognition it deserves on behalf of the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission, the Park-Rec Department, the mayor, the city and all of the people of the area who continue to enjoy the pool and building every summer. And we think it's a particularly appropriate way to recognize Andy Nimrod's recent appointment as the new Director of Decorah Parks."

Rare

The Decorah Municipal Pool Building is a rarity, not only because it survived the surge of replacing old buildings in the Midwest that began in the middle of the 20th century, but also because it has been in continuous use since it opened in the spring of 1937.

The pool building was designed by Edward Novak, who worked at the well-known Charles Atholistic architectural firm in Decorah. Novak studied at the Cranbrook Academy in Michigan during the tenure of Eliel Saarinen, one of the pioneers of the modern International Style.

His son, Eero Saarinen (designer of the St. Louis Arch, among other iconic structures in the U.S.) and Charles Eames were among his other students in that same era. Alth-

ough himself was influenced by this architectural style, which can be seen in his designs for several of his other Decorah buildings, including the ~~the~~ **Swim Building**, Velden Hall of Science and the original Centennial Union, all on the Luther College campus and several of public buildings: Decorah Lutheran Church, Decorah City Hall and the U.S. Post Office, in addition to several private residences in the city. The pool building represents both Art Moderne and International styles of architecture.

"Not only is the Pool Building design an architectural specimen of an advanced contemporary style of its day, it has additional importance in local history," Henderson said.

Constructing the Decorah Swimming Pool was a partnership project between the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) and city government during the Great Depression. The property where it stands was sold by Luther College to the city. Carlson Construction acted as the supervisor of this project, and local unemployed men were hired as laborers.

"Interestingly, the Pool Building has significance on a state level, as it is the only remaining building from WPA projects of its style and significance in Iowa. The building is considered by historic architects to be in "very good" physical condition today. It has borne generations of swimming lessons, summer fun and youth employment," Hen-

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deron said.

Fortunate

Officials from the State Historic Preservation Office said Decorah is fortunate to have retained the building, because it has not been significantly altered and has been well maintained.

"In recognizing it and continuing to use it, Decorah is regarded as a community that leads the state using our historic structures," Henderson said.

"Many other communities, regardless of size, find themselves lacking even the information about their historic architecture, let alone enjoying the wealth of structures and information available in Decorah. This kind of recognition demonstrates leadership in community-minded projects that combine art, history and recreation and speaks to awareness of and commitment to making decisions that support a position of a sustainable future, making use of architectural heritage while keeping more materials out of landfills."

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect America's historic and archeological resources.

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