

Mall makes a mark as village changes

COURIER

By Wendy Victoria
STAFF WRITER

11.20.95

West Dundee — Twenty years ago, roads in the Fox Valley unrolled slowly, two-lane invitations to open space.

Today, they are four-lane pipelines to more than a million square feet of shopping opportunities.

But Spring Hill Mall, which opened Oct. 1, 1980, brought more than bargains. It brought fast-food restaurants, strip malls, restaurants, a movie theater and a chain grocer. And all of that brought the creature called *Change* to the small community tucked along the western edge of the Fox River.

In the years before Spring Hill Mall, fewer than 3,500 people lived in West Dundee. The village also had a volunteer fire department, two stoplights, a thriving downtown area and little new development. And, some residents argue, fewer problems.

"It was, of course, much smaller, much less traffic, fewer police problems, fewer wrappers in my front yard from the fast-food joints," said Jack Wendt, a West Dundee resident for 60 years.

Today, West Dundee has nearly 5,000 residents, eight full-time firefighters, 10 stoplights, a less-bustling downtown and two new and growing subdivisions — Tartans Glen and The Hills of West Dundee — west of Spring Hill Mall. A third development is being built on newly annexed land south of the original village.

The mall was built on land formerly part of D. Hill Nursery, which favored evergreen trees. The nursery served as a green frontier, an inviting contrast to the rows of homes beginning their steady march westward.

"The minute you crossed (Illinois) 31, it was, 'Oh, there's some open space,'" recalled Wendt. "This wasn't a place you could go and hike, but it was refreshing."

The change begins

When the mall arrived, West Dundee became host to an eclectic mix of the old and the new.

Tombstones stand as sentinels to the past in the Dundee Cemetery, visible through the thick-paned windows of the Dundee Township Historical Society Museum. Beyond the stationary soldiers, cars pass each other steadily on Illinois 31.

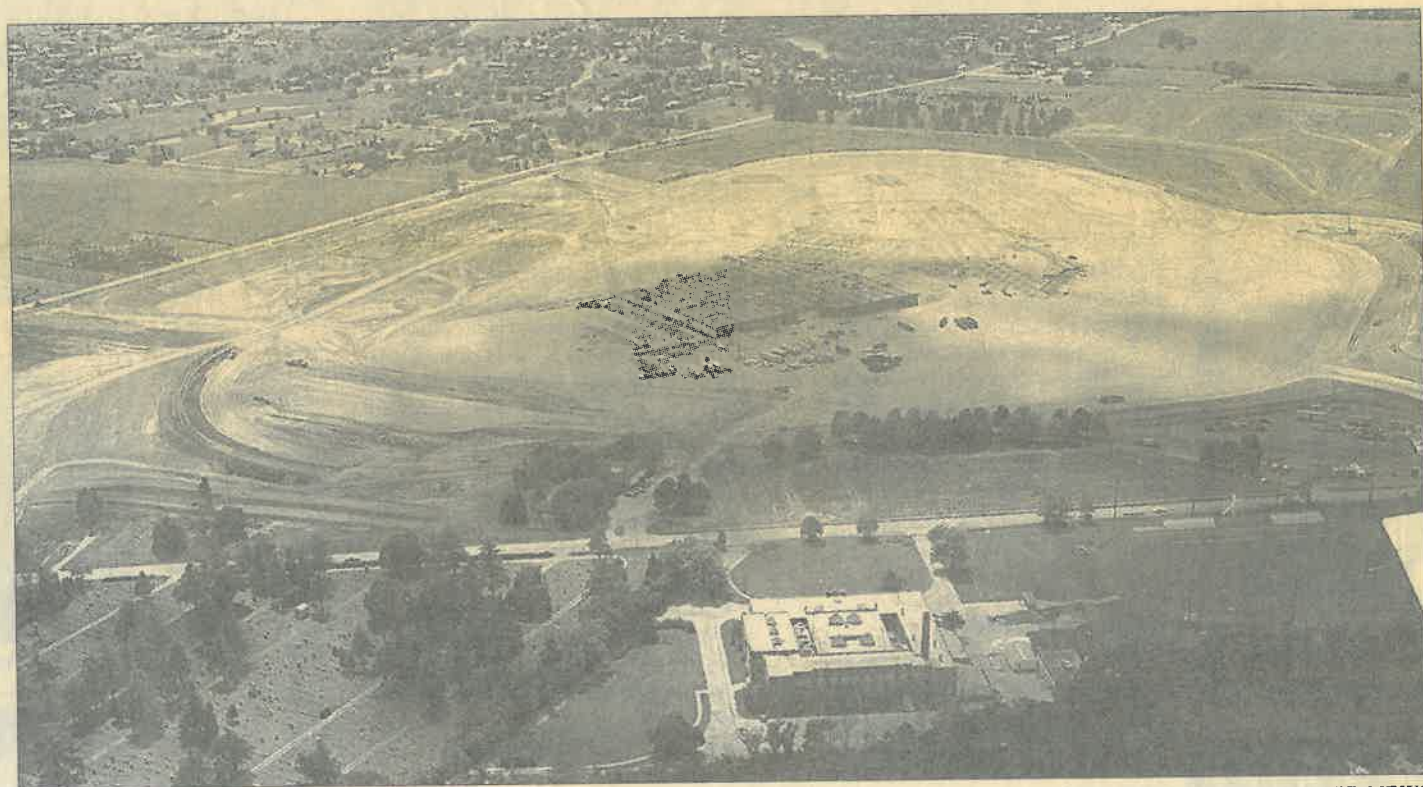
The three-story historical society building holds tales of settlers dating back to the 1830s, along with pieces of West Dundee residents' lives for the last 150 years.

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A view of Spring Hill Mall today (above), and what the site looked like during early construction (below).



FILE PHOTO / THE COURIER-NEWS

Residents watch progress in front-row seats

By Pati Nash
STAFF WRITER

West Dundee — Judy Goll's window view was once wheat fields and groves of trees. Now she sees progress.

Homes. Restaurants. Shopping centers.

Goll has lived along Illinois 72, just west of Spring Hill Mall, for 50 years. She knows her family likely will be the last residents of that house.

"I pull out pictures to see how it

looked," she reminisces. "It gets harder and harder to remember what it was like."

Goll is not alone.

Out John Andresen's window is the parking lot of the Chili's restaurant on Illinois 72 in West Dundee. His next-door neighbor is Best Buy. Across the street is Spring Hill Mall.

Andresen has lived in his home since 1949 and is buffered by a grove of evergreen trees — which he boasted cost a penny each. He said he does not pay

much attention to the constant movement of shoppers.

"They don't bother me anyway. I don't even know they're here," he said.

His wife's family owned the land at Illinois 72 and Locust Drive, which eventually was sold and developed into a Target, Best Buy and Chili's. They still own their house and three acres in Dundee Township.

Andresen recalled a time when his then

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Spring Hill Mall has left its mark, too.

In a basement storage room, a Spring Hill Mall Store Directory has been tucked away in a sleeve of plastic with its acquisition information carefully recorded in a corner.

Two Spring Hill Mall shopping bags also share space in the museum's collection with a box of lace-, fur- and feather-trimmed hats from Beatrice Dorsey's of Dundee, an elegant ladies apparel shop that closed in 1984.

But the mall did not introduce *Change* to the area, as some still believe. That mercurial creature already had arrived, swallowing up tradition, open space and Norman Rockwell ways of doing business.

In the 1950s, the village expanded to the south and west, annexing the land that now holds Dundee Highlands Elementary School and the former Chateau Louise resort, just west of 31.

The village annexed other, smaller pieces of land in the 1960s, and by the early '70s, West Dundee was home to two small strip malls.

Moving into high gear

But the arrival of the mall seemed to push *Change* into high gear. Nowhere is it more obvious than in the historical downtown area, a faint shadow of its once-robust self.

"All you have to do is drive there and take a look," Wendt said. "There used to be everything you needed in a small town — a hardware store, a bakery, a grocery store, a dime store."

The dime store. Everyone still talks about the dime store — a Ben Franklin owned by West Dundee Mayor Cal Grafelman.

The Ben Franklin, which stayed open until 1990, was a place to gather and find almost everything, including friendly and familiar faces.

"The little local Ben Franklin was the place to go," said West Dundee resident Colette McDonough, who moved here in 1978. "The 'Ben' as we called it, just couldn't survive. That store was the be-all and the end-all."

In the years after the mall's arrival, many of the downtown stores closed their doors. In the mid-1980s, the police and fire departments and the post office moved west to new facilities along Illinois 31.

Today, several popular restaurants, including The Village Squire, Gino's East and Pat's Deluxe Grill, seem to thrive in the quaint downtown area, as do some specialty shops. A movie theater, at 96 W. Main St. since 1910, draws crowds on weekends.

"Now we have lots of insurance agencies if anybody's interested in



Jack Wendt, a 60-year resident of West Dundee, looks out the window of the Dundee Township Historical Museum toward Spring Hill Mall Friday. Wendt has watched the village grow rapidly since Spring Hill Mall opened.

DAVE KENNEL / THE COURIER-NEWS

those, and we have some empty buildings," Wendt said.

The new downtown has not spawned another "Ben," and longtime residents mourn the loss of such familiar sights.

"I went to the mall yesterday, and I said to my son, 'I didn't know a person,'" said Dorothea Wahl, who was born and raised in West Dundee. "When I was raised, you all knew each other. You'd go downtown, you were kind of part of the town, you knew people."

"You met people (downtown) you probably wouldn't see otherwise," echoed Vangie Sharp, a 60-year resident of West Dundee. "Now, unless you meet someone at church or at a group meeting, you miss a lot of the friendliness."

Westward movement

As the downtown area lost substance and color, the "new" West Dundee along Illinois 31 began to expand. Dozens of restaurants and discount stores opened on the mall's fringe, luring more shoppers, more cars and more money into the community.

West Dundee Fire Chief Larry McManaman can remember the

days before bicycle riding became risky business on the town's main drags. Today, an estimated 20,000 cars a day travel on Illinois 72 and Illinois 31.

"You could probably close your eyes and ride your bike across Main Street and not get hit," he reminisced. "But I don't think you'd want to try that now."

For homeowners across from Spring Hill, the mall years have not all been boon years. Some feel *Change* has trespassed on their feelings of security and safety within their own homes.

"I'm just across the street from the mall," complained one widow, who declined to be named. "I get all the damn traffic."

"I knew what it would bring," she added. "We had a nice peaceful quiet town here till they brought that dumb thing in."

"I won't now go out and mow my lawn without locking my door," said Wahl, who can see the mall from her front yard. "You don't know the people anymore that are walking the streets."

But *Change* also brought improvements to the area, many of them economic.

The shoppers streaming through

the mall totting shopping bags are tallying up sales tax revenues with each purchase — dollars dropped into the coffers of West Dundee and Carpentersville.

'Still a homey place'

"We never thought West Dundee would grow," Wahl said. "We always thought it wouldn't develop because Hills Nursery had all the land, so we never really thought it would be a big town."

And, by the numbers, it is not.

West Dundee's population has nearly doubled in the last three decades, but it still is topping out at less than 5,000, according to a special census in 1994. Compared to its hungry northern neighbor, Algonquin, whose population doubled in just over a decade, West Dundee's *Change* has been slight, gradual and, some would say, deliberate.

The quiet, tree-lined streets and older homes of the original West Dundee still retain much of their pre-mall appearance. And most residents say the town still has that small-town flavor.

"I always found people so very friendly, and I think it still rings true," said McDonough. "In its own way, it's still a very homey place to live in."

Even the stretch along 31 with its neon lights and modern architecture preserves the village's standards for appearance, she said.

"It's a very different look, but it's a well-kept look," said Sharp. "Whatever they're building is attractive."

And though fewer faces are familiar, perhaps, some things about West Dundee have not changed.

West Dundee "is a quaint historical town with a friendly atmosphere where people are still concerned about their neighbor and their welfare," said McDonough.

ship.

Andresen recalled a time when his then

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Coming Tuesday:

■ The modern age of retailing did not come easily in West Dundee. A meeting in April 1978 officially ended five years of bitter debate on what then was a new phenomenon — the regional shopping mall.

■ Rumors are at least partly true that Elgin had a chance to woo Homart into purchasing land for a mall. Instead, the Sears division settled for a site to the north.

■ Initially, Carpentersville was picked to be site of Spring Hill Mall. But after years of bickering, the village was left with a much smaller slice of the pie.



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6-year-old son, now 45, set up a sweet corn stand in front of their home. He counted 26 cars all day.

"And probably some of those, he counted twice because they went to church and

came back," he said. "Cars just came by once in a while around here."

The 20,000 cars a day that now travel on Illinois 72 do not phase him, though he says he no longer attempts to back out of his driveway.

Like most things Andresen discusses, he takes the rapid development around him in stride. He does not get rattled when he finds cans on his property.

"It doesn't bother me," he said. "I recycle them anyway."

With all of her life spent here, Goll cannot be as hospitable.

Fifteen years ago the mall brought mixed emotions.

How she felt about the arrival of Target in 1994 was clearer. "I hated Target — refused to go in there," she said. "It was worse for me than the mall itself. It just

seemed too much."

She still is not used to the loss of privacy from the Tartans Glen homes built right behind her.

"I get sad looking out and seeing the homes," she said. "We don't have the privacy we had."

Still, she acknowledges development vastly has improved the market value of the family's eight acres, so she also has a bit of

mixed feelings.

Selling the property has been an option since before the mall opened, when Homart began making offers. They have not stopped since.

"I considered myself to be living in the country," she said.

"I feel like I didn't appreciate it as much as I should have, now that I don't have it anymore."