

St. Charles neighborhood pulled together to spruce up median



The Fox Chase Boulevard Median Foundation volunteers have cleaned up and maintained the neighborhood's entry median for the past seven years. (*Rick West | Staff Photographer*)



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Updated 10/19/2018 7:15 AM

Many subdivisions have landscaped median strips that nearby residents volunteer to take care of during the course of the year. But the Fox Chase Boulevard median on the east side of St. Charles presents a challenge because it's about a half-mile long.

The Aintree Community Association took care of that strip from the time the area was built out in 1974 to about 2008. After that point, it was easy to see the appearance of the median was deteriorating.

"It became too much for the association to care for, and no one else who had built in the area was required to care for it," said Bob Walters, who along with other residents created the Fox Chase Boulevard Median Foundation.

Walters serves as president of what is now a three-person group with vice president Lynne Hepler and secretary/treasurer Todd Henning.

It's been seven years since this grass-roots effort entered an agreement with the city of St. Charles to care for the median with donations from surrounding homeowners.

When the foundation formed, the once-beautiful, winding median was overrun with weeds, ugly shrubs and dying trees.

But the city replaced several dying trees with new ones purchased by the foundation through the city's 50/50 Parkway Tree program. The city also provided mulch for the beds and put in plants at the Dunham Road entrance.

For its part, the foundation helped with other plantings as well as weed and tree removal. Most importantly, it developed a long-range plan with a landscaper to keep the median in great shape for years to come.

"A lot of the heavy lifting has been done, so now it's just a matter of working with contractors and doing fundraising each year to solicit funds," Walters said of the foundation's mission. "Maintenance costs are between \$6,000 and \$7,000 a year."

Nearly 200 people have contributed to the foundation cause, a gesture that allows the nonprofit group to feel it embraced a worthy cause.

"We feel good about the contributions," Walters said. "People are happy with what we are doing."

Midwest Groundcover and, currently, Stiarz Landscaping have maintained the median in support of the volunteers.

And, in what amounts to music to the ears of all involved, the city continues to mow the grass and replace trees as needed along the median.

Shemp's platter:

I had plenty of comments from readers and friends about my Three Stooges collection, which I wrote about last week in anticipation of the Sunday, Oct. 21, shows at the Arcada Theatre.

But Kay Catlin of St. Charles went even further, passing along information and sending me a photo regarding a silver Farber Shlevin serving tray she has hanging in the powder room of her home.

She purchased it five years ago online after learning it was once owned by Shemp Howard and his wife and used often when they were hosting parties at their California home.

So, there is a reason visitors come out of that bathroom laughing.

Shemp, of course, was an original Stooge with Moe and Larry in their vaudeville act, and later joined them again in the studio after Curly suffered a stroke and could no longer be part of the act.

"I was looking for something different or artsy for the wall in my bathroom, and I found this tray and discovered its history," said Catlin, who has the tray hanging on the wall along with a framed letter from Jill Howard, the granddaughter of Shemp, thanking her for purchasing it.

"At minimum, I thought it would be a good conversation piece," Catlin said, "And it has been."

Wait for Quick Mart over:

It took quite some time, apparently because of building a kitchen area into the location, but Gordy's Quick Mart finally opened about two weeks ago next to the Arcada Theatre in downtown St. Charles.