



Hanson Family Bridges Past and Present

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It was a walk through Lincoln Memorial Garden that finally sparked an obvious answer to the family of the late Walter Hanson as to how to celebrate what would have been his 100th birthday in July 2016.

"We were deciding what we could do to honor Dad's 100th year," said Karen Pletsch, daughter of the founder of engineering firm Hanson Professional Services, Inc. "Dad had a particular affinity for the garden and always maintained his membership. Our family was walking the trails one day and came to this bridge that was closed. We began reading about its historical significance, and the idea started. Dad was an engineer with a passion for civil engineering and loved bridges."

This particular bridge at Lincoln Memorial Garden was a birthday gift for Myrtle Walgreen, wife of Walgreens drugstore founder Charles Walgreen, and over the decades, it had become unsafe for foot traffic. With the Hanson family's support, the bridge has been undergoing a renovation for the last year and is now nearing completion with plans for a dedication in July.

The bridge renovation project has been funded in part from the Hanson Family Fund, a donor-advised fund created in 2005 at the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln. Pletsch, former chairperson of the board of directors for the Community Foundation, is passionate about the foundation's work.

"When we started the Hanson Family Fund, I quickly became an advocate for the Community Foundation because of the tremendous benefits," she said. "One of the aspects I found so attractive was the opportunity to involve the younger generations in the family. With our family fund, we have been able to utilize the resources of the foundation, which provides information on area nonprofits and assists with due diligence in the monetary giving."

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With the Hanson Family Fund, the family has been able to support local causes “across the spectrum” and learn more about what various organizations are doing to support the needs of the community.

“It’s been touching to see the impact,” Pletsch said. “The Community Foundation passes along letters from the organizations as to how they use the money, and that becomes a personal connection to the group. You certainly don’t do it for the ‘thank-yous,’ but I love staying in contact with those groups and seeing how organizations are growing and making a difference; it’s almost like watching kids grow up.”

Pletsch and her family are especially thrilled with the latest gift from the fund toward Lincoln Memorial Garden’s newest bridge, memorializing the man they call Dad and “Bampa.” The bridge is a new construction, because a full restoration would not have been cost-effective, but visually fits within its original time period and offers less maintenance requirements.

Along with the Hanson Family Fund, Steve Read, former board chair of Lincoln Memorial Garden, was instrumental in bringing the project to completion, in addition to donations and efforts from local engineering and construction firms and many more.

Pletsch, her three children and her grandchildren said this project has brought tremendous joy as they recall Walt’s passion for engineering and his dedication to his work and family. Bringing together the work of the garden and the Community Foundation has been a special effort commemorating his legacy.

“It has particularly meant so much to me seeing how much this has meant to my three children,” Pletsch said. “This has been a collective family journey that’s been extraordinarily positive, especially thanks to the efforts of everyone at Lincoln Memorial Garden and the Community Foundation.”

— For more information about establishing a fund at the Community Foundation, visit CFL.org or contact 789-4431 or info@CFL.org