

OSCAR RENNEBOHM & HILLFARMS NEIGHBORHOOD

The history of Oscar Rennebohm is very interesting reading, but especially intriguing is Oscar Rennebohm's very close ties with our Hillfarms community. The Hillfarms Board of Directors heard David Cronon speak at the Annual Meeting about some of the highlights of Oscar Rennebohm's career and how this directly influenced the Hillfarms Neighborhood we now enjoy. Thanks to David Cronon, I would like to share some pieces of the past:

Oscar Rennebohm succeeded to the Governor's chair in 1947, and continued until 1952. One of Oscar's reforms as Governor was reorganizing the procedures by which the State handled its money, providing expeditious investment of all idle funds and keeping the daily balance just large enough to cover anticipated expenditures. This single reform saved the State millions of dollars over the next several years.

Perhaps Oscar's outstanding contribution as a Regent was his management of the sale of the University farms on University avenue in Madison. Although many fellow regents wanted to sell the property to a private developer for \$1 million, Oscar felt that if plotted and carefully laid out it would bring much more than that. With the aid of a professional or two, utilizing local real estate developers, and after reserving land for parks and State office buildings, lots were sold and realized more than \$5 million. The area now known as Hillfarms when fully developed with residential units placed over \$40 million on the city and county tax rolls.

In laying out the [Hillfarms] area, Oscar insisted that several acres on the corner of University Avenue and Midvale Boulevard be set aside for development of a shopping center. By means of two corporations: one, non-profit and non-taxable, to own the land and the leasehold improvements in the name of the University of Wisconsin; the other, fully taxable, to manage the center, Hilldale Shopping Center was completed in 1962 largely on borrowed funds and under Oscar's skillful direction. The Center has been considerably enlarged in the 26 years since it was opened, and has returned over \$5 million to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. At the time, several Regents opposed this development, and construction was delayed for over a year by an unsuccessful lawsuit challenging the right of the Regents to alienate the land and proceed in this way. Although weakened by heart disease, Oscar persisted and the Hilldale Center has proved one of the more successful efforts of the University of Wisconsin-Madison to develop sources of support outside taxpayer payments to the State treasury. At the same time, the corporation has paid its full share of federal, state, and local taxes.

One of Oscar's other major efforts on behalf of the Madison community is the Oscar Rennebohm Foundation, established in 1949. Its mission limits its giving to the Dane County-Madison metropolitan area, and notes that the University of Wisconsin-Madison should always be given a high priority. The Foundations gifts from 1949-1988 total \$10,010,000, divided into the following areas:

Higher Education	- \$7,050,000	Aged, Ill, Disadv. Children	\$ 910,000
Hospitals	- \$ 650,000	Community Services	\$ 850,000
Churches	- \$ 300,000	Olbrich Gardens	\$ 250,000

Substantial grants were made to assist the Hilldale Shopping Center and University Research Park through the early planning and development phases. Oscar personally gave \$200,000 to help Hilldale get started.