

To: Ed Jepsen

From: Friends of the Yahara River Parkway & Tenney Park

Oh, man, we miss you, Ed.

You were our fearless leader for over 20 years, as we worked to restore the Yahara River Parkway and Tenney Park to their former glory, recognized as a National Historic Landscape. You educated us about the history of these places and their founders. While Tenney Park was a gift to the city from a generous wealthy citizen, we learned from you that the Parkway was purchased with small donations from many regular Madisonians, which feels right as we were a grass-roots volunteer neighborhood effort.

You were always the first to show up for work days, with all the proper tools, trash bags, native plant sets, treats, water bottles, garden gloves, and a cheerful attitude. You showed us how to clear out unwanted plants and to replace them with appropriate native species. You set an example for us by working hard and diligently, and you were often the last to leave after cleaning up (sorry about that, Kristin!).

You were not only good at teaching us adults about the land and the plants; you were also a kind and patient teacher when we invited troubled youth groups to help us out. Many of these kids had never had their hands in the dirt and were astounded when we asked them to get down on the ground to plant wild ginseng. In one particularly lively group, outfitted with trowels and clippers to do the work, a young man approached us and said "You know, you just armed us juvenile delinquents with sharp objects!" Oh, well, no harm done - and a lot of good done, for the Parkway and the kids.

You participated, diplomatically, in endless meetings, hearings, and charrettes to develop the city's Master Plan for the Parkway. You were instrumental in obtaining city approval and funding for the walk/bike path and bridge underpass which allows folks to amble from Lake Monona to Lake Mendota and back. Always gentle, but relentless and forceful, you got our message across to city politicians and planners.

Here's a fond memory: The city was planning to bring high speed rail to downtown, which would have cut the Parkway in half with a 12-foot chain-link fence on both sides of the track. You asked for a meeting for our group with the planners right on the bike path at the rail crossing. While we were standing there discussing things, well - here come quite a few runners and walkers, then the people and kids on bikes, then the moms with toddlers in strollers, and finally, a fellow propelling himself in his wheelchair. All of them enjoying the path and the nice evening. They didn't know we were seriously discussing the future of their beloved path. Nuff said.

Not all our projects were a success. Every year, you persisted in trying to start wildflowers in the understory of our urban forest. Many did not succeed, but we kept trying, just like you, Ed.

One of the biggest tests of your diplomacy involved the wild rose bushes at the Monona end of the Parkway. Someone at Parks found the original O.C. Simonds landscape plan for the Parkway, showing where the roses were to be planted. They were planted. They were doing beautifully, blooming, covering the space thickly, shoring up the bank, and preventing the sprouting of weeds. Then, suddenly, Parks staff mowed them all down to the ground! We spent hours and hours trying to save the bushes and in removing the hundreds of nasty thistles that then sprouted from the exposed ground. Ed's mantra: Don't get angry, get to the root of the problem.

This and other incidents led to your efforts to help train the Parks staff assigned to Tenney and the Parkway. You wanted them to know about the importance of the Master Plan and how best to support the carefully placed native plantings. And, oh by the way, you lobbied Parks to establish a new standard for the design of memorial benches donated to the park, gradually replacing the hodge-podge that existed previously .

I see your name is over there on the wall thanking the folks who worked to build a new Tenney Park Shelter fitting for this historic landscape. For one guy working in his "spare" time, you accomplished a lot! (with a little help from your Friends). We miss you, Ed, but we know we can always visit your spirit hovering among the trees and plants here on the Parkway. Thank you, Ed.