



ON THE TRAIL OF HISTORY

BY SARAH JOHNSON PHOTOS BY AMANDA GAHLER



Gjert Skaar with his wife Amanda Brummund and her brother Chris Brummund (right) at Lilac Park

STOPS ALONG THE CEDAR LAKE TRAIL PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO CITY'S PAST.

In the years following World War II, St. Louis Park experienced incredible growth, as many people flocked to this convenient location due west of Minneapolis. Although it was established as a city in 1955, focusing only on the recent era discounts the rich history of this first-ring suburb. "People think of St. Louis Park as a 'new' community but it's really so much more than that," says Kathy Johnson, a St. Louis Park Historical Society board member. This summer, you can expand your knowledge and get some exercise at the same time by stopping to read one of the historical markers along the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail.

Opened in 1998, this 12-foot-wide, multi-use paved trail stretches 4.6 miles from the Hopkins Depot to the Kenilworth Trail in Minneapolis. It ranked second among regional trails in the Three Rivers Park District system, with approximately 471,000 annual visits in 2012 alone, according to an estimate by the Metropolitan Council. (The Medicine Lake Trail was No. 1.) While biking, walking or running along the path, you may notice signs detailing the histories of a grain elevator and roadside park directly north of Highway 100.

In 1884, grain dealer Frank Peavey relocated to Minnesota from Maine and developed an interest in finding a substitute for the fire-prone wooden grain elevators of the time. Referred to as "Minnesota's first skyscrapers," they were used to warehouse wheat transported by rail from rural communities. Fifteen years later, he commissioned Minneapolis architect and builder Charles Haglin (who later designed the Minneapolis Grain Exchange) to design the first circular concrete elevator in the nation.

With a completed height of 125 feet and an inside diameter of approximately 20 feet, it became a prototype for terminal elevators around the country and drew international praise from such renowned architects as the Swiss-born Le Corbusier, who called it "one of the magnificent first fruits of the new age." It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The grain elevator is now owned by the Nordic Ware company, whose ad adorns the towering white pillar

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proclaiming their products as "America's finest kitchen ware."

Directly to the south of the Peavey-Haglin grain elevator marker lies Lilac Park (formerly known as St. Louis Park Roadside Park), one of only two surviving parks constructed along with Highway 100 as WPA initiatives commissioned by President Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression. (The other existing one in the Twin Cities is Graeser Park in Robbinsdale.) Patterned after the German autobahn by chief engineer Carl Graeser, this once rural 12.5-mile thoroughfare was built as a "belt line" highway around the Twin Cities.

Seven roadside parks were also created, allowing families the chance to pull off the highway and enjoy "rustic" picnics in these public spaces dotted with rock gardens and beehive-shaped fireplaces. Highway 100 was nicknamed Lilac Way in 1935 after approximately 8,300 lilacs were planted along the route.

From 2007 to 2009, a Save the Beehive campaign was launched to renovate Lilac Park with money from the city of St. Louis Park, the St. Louis Park Historical Society, Three Rivers Park District, Nordic Ware and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. They restored the original landscaping, limestone fireplaces and picnic tables, resurfaced the circular internal biking/walking trail and created interpretive markers showcasing the area's history. "I have heard from so many people thanking us for restoring the park and sharing great memories of going there as kids," says Rick Birno, St. Louis Park recreation supervisor. //

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who lives in St. Louis Park.*



HOPKINS DEPOT

(now the Depot Coffee House)

The Hopkins Depot was the first train station on the line for the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad. Built in 1872, the original building was replaced in 1903. In 1998, the Depot was transformed into a chemical-free environment for teens and it is now recognized as a popular spot for local musicians and a great fueling stop for riders on the Cedar Lake Trail: organic and fair trade coffee, juices, sandwiches and bakery items are available.

THE BEEHIVE

This distinctive St. Louis Park landmark was originally built in 1939 to serve as a fireplace so that up to three families could barbecue at the St. Louis Park Roadside Park. It was moved and restored to save it from the Highway 100 expansion; Lilac Park was restored to give the beehive a new home at an official rededication in 2009. That same year, the Wayside Park/Beehive Restoration Project Committee won a Best of Class award in the Minnesota Community Pride Competition.

FUN FACT

To commemorate the rededication of the Beehive in 2009, David Dahlquist of Nordic Ware (creators of the Bundt pan) presented a specially made beehive cake to St. Louis Park mayor Jeff Jacobs and other local dignitaries at the community ceremony.