

FOUNDERS' GROVE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

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Holiday Traditions: Majestic trees to rooftop reindeer

By Cheryl Lewis on Taylor Street

In our neighborhood, there's no shortage of holiday cheer. Drive down the street and you'll see evidence that the holiday season has begun even before it officially kicks off. That's also true with long-time neighbor and Bloomington native Jim White, who lives in Founders' Grove on Washington Street.

We visited Jim at his antique shop, A. Gridley Antiques, which he owns with his partner Andy Willits. We asked Jim to share his favorite holiday traditions. Jim said growing up, Christmas was the highlight of the year in his family's home. His mother, who was of German heritage, let him fully embrace the magic of the season.



Jim White

"She pretty much let me have whatever I wanted at Christmastime," Jim laughed. "But one thing was non-negotiable – we always had a real tree."

One year Jim decided the tree needed to be truly spectacular. "It was 9 feet by 9 feet," he recalled. "I had to string it up and attach it to the wood trim just to get it to stand!" That over-the-top spirit seems to have stayed with him, because today Jim brings that same enthusiasm to decorating his antique shop as well as his own home for the holidays.

Each year, right after the Halloween decorations come down, Jim and his team – including his partner Andy and shop assistant Mike Maupin – get to work transforming the shop into a Christmas wonderland. "We always bring in a live tree," Jim said. "We try to get one that goes all the way to the ceiling." And with 12-foot ceilings, that's no small feat.



The enormous tree, which Jim and his crew wrangle into place and wire to the roofline, sits in an old washtub so it can be watered. The tree becomes the centerpiece of the display. Around it, vintage ornaments, twinkling lights and antique decorations fill every window and corner of the store.

With decorating buttoned up at the shop, it's time to bring a little sparkle to his home. The first job on Jim and Andy's list is getting a very large Santa and his reindeer up to the rooftop and secured for their stay through Christmas. Jim says putting up the display is his favorite part of the holidays – especially since Andy gave him that Santa years ago.

*Read on, **HOLIDAYS** — page 4*



Bring holiday pazazz to your own front yard... You might win a prize!

The Founders' Grove Neighborhood Association Board is coordinating a "Deck the Homes" contest! The Board will select a #1 winner with the best holiday curb appeal on Dec. 11 – to be announced at the Dec. 12 happy hour. 2nd & 3rd place winners also will be named. Go *big!!* :)

HOT OFF THE PREZ - By Todd Vincent on Grove, Board President

It's been another great year for FGNA! Based on input from our survey, we introduced new kid-friendly activities: cookie decorating, a magic show, pool party and playdate. We saw great attendance and hope to have more of them in years to come.

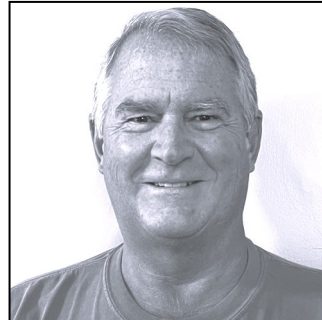
We also had the usual fun activities through the year including Palooza (another huge success!) and Halloween, with neighbors on Grove Street reporting a new high of 1,000+ trick-or-treaters. As always, it's great to see some new neighbors participating.

Personally, I've enjoyed my first term as FGNA Board President and plan to run for a second term. We've contacted neighbors who expressed interest in serving on the Board, and we're always looking

for more involvement – so please reach out if you'd like to be a member at large. We invite new ideas, activities, and those willing to host or help with a social or event.

A couple quick friendly reminders to pick up after your animals, keep leaves out of gutters and storm drains, and clear sidewalks of snow over 2 inches, for our many walkers.

Finally, a huge Thank You to the Board, volunteers and hosts for all you do to ensure the success of FGNA activities. We couldn't do it without you. We all hope you have a safe and happy holiday season!



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About Founders' Grove Neighborhood Association

FGNA is a 501c3 organization formed to enhance the community in which we live. Every residence on and between Oakland, Mercer, Washington & State streets is a member invited to join all events. No dues required: Activities are funded by donations.

Donate by:

- Cash in FGNA jars at events; or QR code available to pay digitally
- PayPal to fgnabloomington@gmail.com
- Venmo: @FGNABloomington
- Check to: FGNA (c/o Neil Gridley), 1219 E. Washington St., Bloomington, IL 61701

2024-2025 FGNA Board

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GOALS

- Celebrate and preserve our neighborhood's unique character and history.
- Promote communication and a sense of community between neighbors, with many social gatherings.
- Keep neighbors informed about city projects that may affect them and give our neighborhood a voice in city decision-making.
- Keep the neighborhood safe and traffic under control.
- Help our neighborhood schools & businesses thrive.
- Share expert info on topics of interest such as gardening and home restoration.

HELLO, NEIGHBOR! Meet the Batemans, who renovated multiple FG homes

Frequent FGNAers

If there were an award for FGNA frequent homeowners, David and Jenni Bateman would be shortlisted.

They bought their first house in Normal in 1998, and since 2010 have renovated others on Fairview, Jackson (two) and Florence Streets in FGNA plus Oakland Court (two).

The Batemans took on challenges both big and small, presenting updated spaces that attracted new residents to the unique Founders' Grove neighborhood. Their commitment to FG and respect for the neighborhood, people, renters and buyers continue — even adding some as longtime friends.

Day Jobs: Easterseals and Inquisitive Artistry

The DIYers historically completed 90% of the work themselves, as a side-gig. Their careers began at 11,500 feet above sea level, where the newlyweds ran an Easterseals camp in Colorado in the late '70s.

David worked for the non-profit for four decades as the family moved through seven states until he retired as CEO/President of the Central Pennsylvania chapter, after which they returned to Bloomington. His visionary impact includes starting and developing the Easterseals therapy center (located today in the YMCA complex) and initiating the land purchase for Timber Pointe Outdoor Center located on Lake Bloomington, all to serve the needs of children and adults with disabilities and their families in greater McLean County. The Timber Pointe Charitable Foundation continues its primary effort of funding capital improvements as well as the

management and growth of endowment funds intended to secure the future of Timber Pointe operations for generations to come.

Jenni is an established career-artist as a painter, illustrator, teacher and art-coach. She respects the process of creating commissions, gallery exhibitions, and seamlessly moves between paint and a mix of materials learned over decades of innovative and experimental work (JenniBatemancreative.com). She is actively engaged in the arts community, teaching and showing her work at both the McLean County Arts Center (upcoming solo exhibition 2026) and longtime involvement at Main Gallery 404.

Even now, over 20 years and counting, one FGNA home still boasts a 'mural' she painted on a dining room floor — a large rug, corner upturned in the process of French trompe-l'oeil or "fool the eye."

The Batemans now live 'FGNA adjacent' in a home they completed as a "redo" for themselves, "near-enough" to their daughter's family and two teenage grandsons, extending the motto: "Bringing health back, one sick house at a time."



Continued... HOLIDAYS (from page 1)

And of course, you'll always find wreaths with candles in every front window – just in case the actual Santa needs help finding his way to Jim and Andy's house.

Listening to Jim talk about Christmas, it's easy to see how much joy the season brings him. The traditions he grew up with have shaped not only his personal celebrations but also how he shares the holiday spirit with the community. His shop, glowing with lights and filled with memories, feels like an extension of those childhood Christmases – warm, welcoming, and a little bit larger than life.

"Christmas has always been a big deal for me," Jim said with a smile.

More memories: From Kenneth Davis, who grew up on Grove Street in the 1960s and returned here in retirement



Often our family hosted relatives from various parts of Illinois and beyond. When in Bloomington, we always went to church on Christmas Eve for an 11 p.m. Candlelight Service, which was inspiring and thrilling. I usually sang in one of the youth choirs.

We always waited until Christmas morning to open gifts, and it was a thrill to unwrap mine and watch others unwrap theirs.

Sometime on Christmas Day, the kids in and around the neighborhood would get together and compare & contrast the gifts they received. These get-togethers were EPIC because around 70 kids lived within a two-block radius of our Grove Street house, and 132 kids lived on my paper route (Olive, Taylor & Jackson Streets). At least two or three dozen of these former kids still live in B-N, and I cross paths with some of them wherever I go! THIS is the reason I returned to retire in Founders' Grove, after having lived in five other states over the past 50 years!

Sleigh bells once sweet sound on wintry city streets



Imagine stepping out your front door and seeing streets blanketed in snow, alive with horse-drawn sleighs. According to Bill Kemp's "Pages from Our Past" column in The Pantagraph, this was once a common winter scene in Bloomington.

On Christmas Day 1878, elegant sleighs glided down smooth streets while finely dressed riders drew admiring crowds. A stretch of E. Washington Street – from downtown Bloomington to the Illinois Central Railroad tracks (now Constitution Trail) – was the place to be. Until the 1890s, thousands attended annual "sleighting carnivals" with free rides for children and 200-plus sleighs on parade.

To read Bill Kemp's full story, visit the Bloomington Public Library archives in person or online. This was in The Pantagraph on December 16, 2012.



JULIA DAVIS LAW FIRM, LLC



JULIA DAVIS

ATTORNEY & COUNSELOR AT LAW

(p) 309-661-1104

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New FGNA Board Member election

The two-year term for Founders' Grove Neighborhood Association officers is up at the end of the year, and candidates will be nominated and voted on at the Holiday Social, 6 p.m. Dec. 12 at 1322 E. Grove.

If you are interested in serving or voting, please attend. You may contact a current board member or email fgnabloomington@gmail.com with questions or to express interest in serving on the Board.

All current Board officers are willing to serve again:

- **President:** Todd Vincent, Grove St.
- **Vice President:** Rochelle Gridley, Washington St.
- **Treasurer:** Neil Gridley, Washington St.
- **Secretary:** Amanda Hill, Mercer Ave.

While these are the only elected positions, you also can participate on the Board in other roles, like at-large reps or to plan events and communications.

Let's gather to volunteer at Midwest Food Bank: Sign up by Jan. 22!

We'd love at least 20 neighbors to participate. Family members 5 years and older are welcome!

What: While we won't know our exact project until we arrive, it will be serving needs of our community!

Event date: Thurs., Jan. 29, 6-8 p.m.

Sign up by: Noon on Jan. 22 at bit.ly/fgnamfb

Where: 2031 Warehouse Rd, Normal

Details: Closed toe shoes required. Minors must have a signed waiver. Minors and guardians can't use the same email when signing up. If a minor doesn't have an email, use this email format: golden+firstnamelastname@midwestfoodbank.org.

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Sun, Dec. 7 at 5 p.m. — Holiday Caroling & Soup Supper/Potluck

Kid Friendly

- **Meet:** At the home of Ian & Johanna Ward, 1123 E. Grove St., for a selection of soups and beverages before we head into the neighborhood to carol. Bring the kiddos out for this tradition!
- **Bring:** Snacks or dessert to share

Fri, Dec. 12 at 6 p.m. – FGNA Holiday Social at the Schulz home!

- **Where:** Back by popular demand, our December gathering will again take place at the home of Mike & Nancy Schulz, 1322 E. Grove St.
- **Bring:** \$5 suggested donation at the door as light hors d'oeuvres will be provided. Wear festive holiday attire (there will be PRIZES!). BYOB and your favorite holiday goodies or dish to share, as well as cash for extended 50/50 and prizes. Baked goods can be dropped off for the bake sale.
- **Board elections** will be held during the event too. See more details in the article on Page 5.

Sat, Dec. 13 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.**FGNA Holiday Bake Sale**

- **What:** Stock up to fill some platters for upcoming events!
- **Donations needed!** →
- **Where:** AB Hatchery, 916 E. Grove
- **Proceeds:** Support FGNA events



JANUARY

Thurs, Jan 29 from 6 to 8 p.m. — Midwest Food Bank Volunteer Event

Kid Friendly

- **What:** Come serve the needs of our community. Seeking at least 20 neighbors (age 5 & older).
- **Signup deadline:** Noon on Jan. 22 at bit.ly/fgnamfb. See more details in the article on Page 5.
- **Where:** 2031 Warehouse Rd, Normal

NO FRIDAY SOCIALS in Jan or Feb; resume in March

If you'd like to host in 2026, call or email Todd Trainor at (309) 212-0484 or ohs.todd@gmail.com

RECURRING MONTHLY EVENTS

- Play cards at **Euchre Club**. At **Music Guild**, share songs from bands/artists around a monthly theme.
- **Mystery Book Club** usually meets 3rd Thurs of month; **Washington Street Book Club** the 1st Tues.
- For more info, email fgnabloomington@gmail.com

Details are to the best of the Board's knowledge at time of printing. Stay up to date at facebook.com/FoundersGrove, fgna.org or sign up for email updates at bob@dawson1.com