

# Sleepy Hollow's Man with a (Zoning) Plan

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By Denise Moran for The Courier News

SLEEPY HOLLOW -- For many families, there are not enough hours in the day for the work involved in holding down a job, taking care of the kids, and maintaining a home.

Fortunately for our society, there are some people who find time after completing everyday tasks to serve in the various offices that run our communities.

Their reward is not always financial. In Sleepy Hollow, for example, appointed and elected village officials serve without monetary compensation.

When Walt and Patricia Heffron opted to move to Sleepy Hollow in 1961, they thought the village "would be a wonderful place to raise a family."

However, in addition to bringing up their son, Walter Jr., and daughters Ann, Ellen and Elizabeth, they decided to also become involved in setting guidelines for the growth and development of their community.

"My wife and I were active in village affairs from the outset, which in those days had mostly to do with planning," Heffron said.

Heffron, 84, spent three years in the U.S. Naval Reserve during World War II, reaching the rank of ensign and serving as a communications officer aboard a small aircraft carrier in the Pacific.

He is a lifetime member of the American Society for Metals and a graduate of the University of Chicago and the Colorado School of Mines.

He handled industrial sales in northern Illinois for 33 years for Keystone Carbon Company before his retirement in 1989.

Heffron also was chairman of the Sleepy Hollow zoning board for 24 years. In addition, he served as member and then chairman of the Dundee Area Intermunicipal Planning Committee.

Wife involved, too.

Patricia Heffron, who died in 2006, attended the University of Chicago where she met Walt in 1946. The couple was married for 59 years.

Patricia was a graduate of Northern Illinois University . She worked as a teacher's assistant for Barrington School District 220 for 10 years.

Patricia also served on the Sleepy Hollow Plan Commission for 23 years. She was a lifetime member of the League of Women Voters beginning in Park Forest and a charter member of the Carpentersville-Dundee Area League when it was organized in 1970.

The Heffron family moved to Sleepy Hollow three years after the village was incorporated. Floyd Falese founded the village and served as its first village president until his death in 1970.

"As I recall, the first village board meetings were held in a tiny Falese Land Company sales office on the east side of Sharon Drive close to Illinois 72," Heffron said.

Village meetings now are held at the village hall along Thorobred Lane .

Since its founding, there has been a strong emphasis on maintaining the rural character of the village.

"Sleepy Hollow was laid out by a land planner to be a uniquely attractive and desirable place to live," Heffron said. "Effective planning and zoning have protected that character."

In 1973, when Carol Schoengart served as village president, a zoning board was appointed with Heffron as chairman. The first village zoning ordinance also was enacted. A large share of that ordinance was drafted by Walt.

During his years on the zoning board, Heffron said, the village saw the "addition of both the Saddle Club and Deer Creek subdivisions and the inclusion of more detailed business zoning in the ordinance."

In looking at overall village accomplishments, Heffron noted that "Sleepy Hollow had a notable success on Nov. 6, 2000, in enacting the pleasure drive ordinance to protect its signature road, the charming country lane known as Sleepy Hollow Road that is essential to the character of the village."

The ordinance, according to Heffron, "allowed us to fend off plans of a neighboring development that threatened to compromise the road. Fortunately for the viability of our community, we have recently realized a bit more commercial development to help carry the costs of running the village." 'People listen to him'

"Walt Heffron has long served Sleepy Hollow and helped set forth what is known as Sleepy Hollow," said Village President Steve Pickett.

Art Neil, who once served on the zoning board chaired by Heffron, is the zoning board chairman.

"Walt is a great guy to know and work with," Neil said. "Following in his footsteps is like following Babe Ruth. Walt is the pinnacle of democracy. During meetings run by him, opinions were welcome and nobody felt things were pre-determined."

"It takes a special kind of person to run a meeting," Neil added. "Walt has a calming influence and commands full attention. People listen to him."

Although Heffron no longer serves on the zoning board, he keeps up on village activities and offers advice when he feels it is needed.

He continues to live in Sleepy Hollow with his daughters Ann and Ellen. His daughter, Elizabeth, lives with her family on nearby Surrey Lane . Heffron has six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

In looking toward the future, Heffron said, "By concentrating on preserving the character of the village, we can stay a pleasant, quiet island in the sea of development raging around us."

As zoning board chairman, Walt Heffron was integral in keeping Sleepy Hollow a quiet village.