

Jackman bear statue hits centennial milestone



The Jackman Park Bear enjoys the Bear Birthday Bash 100 on Sept. 17 at Jackman Park.

Glenview's Jackman Park Bear enjoys similarities with Chicago's Picasso sculpture. They are iconic monuments, shrouded in a bit of mystery, and both celebrated milestone anniversaries this year.

Earlier this summer, Chicago commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Picasso in Daley Plaza. And on Sunday, Sept. 17, Glenview celebrated Bear Birthday Bash 100, the centennial anniversary of the dedication of the "Children's Fountain," which has a bear perched at the top. Not so coincidentally, Glenview's motto is "Hug the Bear."

"Not every village has a bear, especially a bear that is 100 years old," retired social studies teacher Scott Buzard told an estimated crowd of 200 during the one-hour long program. "Our Glenview bear is a statue, an icon, a symbol and a motto."

Buzard served as emcee in the Jackman Park gazebo while a collection of local officials spoke between performances of music and dance groups, many of which represented local schools, that culminated in the serving of birthday cake.

The celebration occurred a century and two days after the initial festivities, according to the Village. On Sept. 15, 1917, most of what was then known as "Glen View" cheered the dedication of the fountain that was originally placed at the intersection of Glenview Road and Pine Street. Two moves and two refurbishments later, today it is a dominating presence outside of Jackman Park, across the street from the downtown Metra station.

"These days, it gazes upon commuters at the train station, families at the Dairy Bar and the entire town gathering for the annual summer festival," Buzard said.

The fountain was a gift from Edwin Jackman, a steel magnate of his era. Jackman's descendants, including great nieces Harriet Brandt and Frances Tenison, listened to the speeches honoring their uncle's gift.

"We didn't know that we would live this long to see anything of this sort, and it is so heartwarming," Brandt said.

Yet, some aspects of the fountain are still shrouded in mystery.

For example, Glenview Village Board President Jim Patterson said it is not clear why Jackman, a Golf native, gave the fountain to Glenview in the first place. The symbolic meaning of the fountain, which features the faces of Native Americans on the top and animals on the rest, is also unknown.

Patterson theorized that Jackman was a backer of the Boy Scouts, founded in 1910, and that the bear could be tied to former U.S. President Teddy Roosevelt, a major proponent of the Boy Scouts. The popular Teddy Bear was named after him, possibly leading to the symbolic presence of the bear in the village.

"The bear represented courage, physical strength and leadership," Patterson said. "Whatever the origins, the bear was linked with Glenview from the moment it was dedicated."

Glenview Park District board member Bill Casey said the fountain, which was dedicated in the year the U.S. entered World War I, is a symbol of the people of the village in good times and bad.

"What the bear saw most in this town is community," Casey said. "It has seen people come together for a common cause. It has seen people share heartaches and joys together."