

Prairie Crossing at Twenty

October 2015: The Big Day

By Nathan Aaberg, Prairie Crossing resident & Liberty Prairie Foundation staff member

On Sunday, August 30, approximately 250 people joined us for a special event to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Prairie Crossing. The main title wasn't exactly creative – "Prairie Crossing at Twenty" – but the subtitle – "From Pioneering Design to Vibrant Community" – captured the Prairie Crossing story succinctly. One of the highlights of the event was the symposium held at the Prairie Crossing Charter School gymnasium where Blair Kamin, the Chicago Tribune's erudite and charming architecture critic, moderated a variety of discussions and presentations by many of the original developers, planners, architects, and implementers. Later, homes and public buildings were open for tours by the architects and there were also interpretive presentations at key landscape features of our community. In this insert, we'd like to share a sampling of images (thanks, Jeff Goldberg!), facts, and anecdotes that will bring back good memories if you attended and give you an idea of what it was like if you weren't able to be there.



George and Vicky Ranney

It was a treat to hear George and Vicky talk with Blair Kamin (seen above in the center) about their vision of Prairie Crossing as a conservation community. In an interview later, Blair was asked what most stood about the event and the community, and he said, "What really stands out is the creativity of the clients. It's often said good architecture is impossible without good clients. Without the vision of George and Vicky, Prairie Crossing wouldn't exist. From land planning and hydrology to architectural design, the Ranneys' good fingerprints are everywhere."

"It made me proud to live here."

One of the residents who opened their home for tours later told me that hearing George & Vicky, the architects and planners talk about Prairie Crossing's origins and design made her feel very

proud and blessed to be living here. That seemed to be a common sentiment.



A Diverse and Creative Team

You couldn't help but be impressed by the diverse and creative team of professionals that were brought together to plan, design, and build Prairie Crossing. Here the other architects listen as Margaret McCurry speaks about her approach to the homes she designed. Interestingly, many of these architects shared how the experience of being part of Prairie Crossing has influenced their approach to building and design since then.

Lake Aldo Leopold Could Have Been a Pool?!

When the first overall land planning for Prairie Crossing was taking place, a more conventional advisor suggested that the central water feature of Prairie Crossing could be a pool, which would

be an attractive amenity. Fortunately, the decision was instead made to integrate recreation, habitat, and stormwater infrastructure in the form of Lake Aldo Leopold.

Did you know we live in a “stingy” landscape? Steve Apfelbaum, principal ecologist for AES and key designer of Prairie Crossing’s nature-mimicking stormwater system, shared with us that historic natural landscapes have four common qualities. They are diverse, dynamic, productive, and stingy. By “stingy,” he meant that they hold onto water tightly and let it go grudgingly. This is a case where being stingy is good, and that’s how our landscape works, too.



Architects, Homes, and Residents All of the architects enjoyed talking about the homes and buildings they designed during the tours. In the top photo, Mark Keane shares his passion for Frank Lloyd Wright while holding up small-scale models of the two Wright-style home models he and his wife Linda designed for Prairie Crossing (the Prairie School and the Brooks). In the bottom photo, Linda Keane (left)

and Shari Minsky (PC resident) share a moment between tours of the Minsky’s Bradbury home that the Keanes also designed. A number of home tour hosts and architects shared with me how delighted they were to meet each other.



Sharing Prairie Crossing’s experience Above, Jim O’Connor (right) shares insights about managing prairies with a visitor to Prairie Crossing during the event. The ongoing commitment of Prairie Crossing residents and the PCHOA board to the stewardship of the prairies and other natural areas here has realized the first dreams of the developers and planners. We continue to attract visitors who want to learn from what has been done here.



Gratitude and looking ahead Residents Thurman Jordan and Jill Selinger shared thoughtful and heartfelt comments with the crowd at the symposium. We have raw video footage of the event and hope to make available videos of what Thurman and Jill said as well as many other portions of the day in months ahead.