

I HAD A FRIEND

By Mark Menkhaus

Nearly twenty-five years ago, I attended a Mt Airy Town Council meeting to learn about my new neighborhood. The council meeting was indeed informative and captured my interest, so I began attending the monthly meetings regularly. Before long, it was obvious that one woman, Cindee Walsh, seemed to be involved in every event and activity mentioned. At one of those first meetings, she made a request for volunteers for an upcoming neighborhood clean-up. I thought that would be something simple I could support, so I signed up. Little did I know how my life was about to change! It seems Cindee never met a volunteer she could forget. She was involved in everything Mt Airy and I was far from the first (or last) person she roped in.

When Cindee was elected President of the Town Council, I was also elected as a board member. Through her, I made numerous new friends as we served the Town Council together. We picked up tires and trash, planted flowers, hung banners, decorated the neighborhood Christmas tree, and picked up more tires and trash. Cindee was all about keeping the neighborhood clean and safe. She loved her subdivision of Raeburn as she hosted annual picnics and yard sales, checked in on neighbors and was their greatest ambassador to the rest of the Mt Airy neighborhood. After Cindee's constant urging, the Mt Airy Citizens on Patrol Program (COPP) group was founded. Cindee, myself and other volunteers routinely patrol Mt Airy collecting information and reporting on issues and concerns to our friends with the Cincinnati Police Department. When this program started about 20 years ago, Mt Airy had seen an ugly rise in drug transactions, prostitution, vandalism, and violence. Through this and many other efforts spearheaded by Cindee, safety improvements have been made including demolition and renovation of blighted buildings and the near elimination of open drug transactions and prostitution in the business district. Cindee was also instrumental in founding the non-profit Mt Airy Community Urban Redevelopment Enterprise (CURE) in 2011. Without a formal position, Cindee was nonetheless a driving force in CURE's acquisition of the former Klosterman Dry Cleaner now known as Mt. Airy Commons. At the center of the Mt. Airy business district, it features a public parking lot, a beautiful mural, gardens and plaza. Our current CURE board is planning lots of new improvements to the Commons and like to think Cindee would be proud.

Save the Tanks! Yes, Cindee led the charge for several years to save the iconic Mt Airy Water Tanks from probable demolition. Working with former City Councilmember and Mt. Airy resident, Kevin Flynn, Cindee organized groups to attend Cincinnati City Council meetings, write letters and otherwise petition for the Greater Cincinnati Water Works (GCWW) to make good on years of promises to repair our neighborhood's most noteworthy landmark. The tanks are now on the historic register and GCWW has contracted for major work now underway to rebuild and restore them to their previous glory!

Throughout the 25 years I knew her, and I'm sure for a considerable time before we ever met, Cindee Walsh was the most active, committed, and passionate ambassador for Mt Airy. At every community event, Cindee was right in the middle of it all. In March 2022, her incredible

contributions to Mt Airy were acknowledged with the naming of the street forming the oval picnic area in Mt Airy Forest as “Cindee Walsh Circle”. This was so fitting, as Cindee was just as dedicated a volunteer and ambassador for Mt Airy Forest as she was for everything else Mt Airy.

I would be extremely remiss not to mention Cindee’s family here. While Cindee was seemingly all about Mt Airy, her first love was for her husband Jim and their four children, Kevin, Erin, Lauren, and Steven as well as seven grandchildren. Not surprisingly, I first met each of them at Mt Airy cleanup events! They all deserve a huge “THANK YOU!” from all of Mt Airy for so generously sharing Cindee for all these years!

Sadly, we lost Cindee in September 2023 after a near decade long battle with cancer. I titled this article “I Had a Friend” because I truly valued Cindee as a friend. But after acknowledging all of this in writing, it seems that title is too limiting. Yes, I had a friend, but even more, ***Mt Airy Had a Friend***. May she rest in peace.