



4646 Dakota Street SE
Prior Lake, MN 55372

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A Message from the Mayor

Prior Lake Heritage

by Mayor Ken Hedberg

Is the history and heritage important to residents in Prior Lake? Absolutely! Our heritage helps us remember where we came from and sustain a distinct and unique identity among suburban cities in the metro region. Great schools, small town feel, quaint downtown, and lakes and parks, are among the repeated reasons people choose to move here and stay. As mayor, I often ponder questions like this. Let me pose what parts of our history I believe form the heart of our heritage. Three themes stand out:

First are the great settler families who came to this area in the 1800's and early 1900's. We still know many of the names: Busse, Klingberg, Schmokel, Hull, Simpkins, Griffiths, Adelman, Kop, Clark, Carpenter, Watzl, Menden, Jeffers, Snell, Vierling, and many more. These families acquired and held large acreage (some still do), and eventually sold their holdings to allow the development of Prior Lake. The heads of these families truly were our town fathers, setting the tone and local culture of this area around Prior Lake and Spring Lake. Each time another family sells, we try to recognize and honor their contributions to our town, having built a strong foundation of community upon which Prior Lake has emerged.

Second is the older history of the Mdewakanton band of the Dakota nation. These proud people have lived along the valley of the Minnesota River for at least 500 years, and perhaps thousands of years. The first European settlers from the 1840's and 50's, in the towns of Shakopee and Hamilton along the Minnesota River, and the villages of Spring Lake, and later Prior Lake after the railroad came through in the 1870's, all knew the Mdewakanton band very well, though too frequently tinged with jealousy and tensions over land control. Modern-day descendants of this great nation live in Prior Lake and Shakopee as the SMSC. First acknowledged by the federal government as a distinct band in the 1890's, and officially listed in 1969, the SMSC struggled for decades to retain their culture and escape desperate poverty, much like most Native American tribes across our land. Over the past 25-30 years, we all have borne witness to the emergence of the SMSC as an economic powerhouse for our city, county and region. Prior Lake residents hold more than 600 jobs, and Scott County residents overall hold down over 1900 jobs in the SMSC enterprises. SMSC generosity has lifted up less-fortunate tribes all around the US, with gifts, grants, and loans. Most importantly, they have been rediscovering and rescuing their heritage and culture.

Third of course are the many lakes, especially Spring and Prior. Beginning with the Grainwood Hotel in the 1870's through the 1930's, this area has welcomed visitors to resorts and lake activities for recreation and entertainment. Recreation has formed the foundation of our local economy for nearly 150 years. Even today, the

lakes aren't just the domain of lakeshore owners. Tens, even hundreds of thousands of people from around Prior Lake and from far and wide, enjoy the lakes, beaches and parks around the city as places for play and respite. Along with Mystic Lake, Canterbury, the Renaissance Festival, and ValleyFair, the lakes and parks still power the recreation and entertainment engine of our identity and local economy. Today, over 10 million visitors a year come to our area for play and entertainment. We welcome them with open arms.

These are the themes of our heritage and identity. It isn't grand old homes from the Victorian era and before WWI like you find in Stillwater or St. Peter. Prior Lake has almost none, and even very few from between the World Wars. It isn't institutional buildings of government and downtown commerce from these same eras like you find in Northfield or New Ulm. Again, we simply don't have them. No, I'm convinced our heritage lies in the lakes & recreation, the families & the land, and the Mdewakanton band & their much older heritage. I urge all residents to learn about our history and come together in understanding our heritage, as we work to renew our shared vision for the future of Prior Lake.