

East Alton memorial dedicated for Madison County official

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
September 8 2017 12:13 PM



EAST ALTON - What started as a tree dedicated in the honor of Madison County Economic Development Coordinator John J. Herzog quickly became three trees and a bench with a second bench on its way.

East Alton Mayor Joe Silkwood said the growth of the memorial was similar to the growth and expansion of many projects Herzog, who died suddenly on Sept. 8, 2016, started. Silkwood spoke at the dedication of the memorial and said he was happy to host the first such memorial in Herzog's honor in East Alton. It is now located at Bill Tite Lions Memorial Park in the village, which is in clear view of the Emerald Ridge housing developments Herzog worked hard to help create.

Emerald Ridge replaced the former "Defense Area" housing in East Alton, which was created in the months leading to Pearl Harbor to house employees of Olin's bullet factory and their families. Herzog also helped to expand the Village of East Alton's Park and Recreation building through grants totaling \$250,000. That building, which was originally built for factory workers to "blow off steam" is now being utilized by village residents from three to 100.

Silkwood mentioned both Emerald Ridge and the village's building while speaking of Herzog at a dedication Friday morning.



"It gives me chills to see all the people here who cared about John," he said. "It is an honor and a privilege for East Alton to host this first memorial in his honor. He impacted every community in this county."

Following Silkwood's remarks were small speeches from Herzog's eldest brother, Frank Herzog, and his youngest sister, Meg Benner. Both spoke highly of John Herzog's love for Madison County. Frank Herzog said their parents would be proud of his younger brother's dedication as well as the public's response to it.

"John was a happy man," Frank Herzog said. "I think it was because he kept score, not with money, but by relationships."

Frank Herzog then thanked the dozens of people who gathered to honor his brother, not only for the memorial, but for being public servants. He thanked them for their dedication to public service, a profession to which his brother dedicated most of his life.

Benner spoke of John Herzog as her brother. She said she has missed him greatly over the course of the past year without him, and teared up as she spoke of John Herzog teaching her to play basketball and ping pong, only so he could eventually be beaten by her.



John Herzog's friend Kerri Smith had been doing several media releases leading to Friday's dedication. She said she knew John Herzog as a friend and a statistics tutor who encouraged her to return to school after more than three decades away from it. She also described John Herzog as her "Saturday movie buddy."

While enough funds have been raised for an additional bench, which will feature an inscription chosen by the family, East Alton Parks and Recreation Director Chris Logan said more donations are being accepted. Logan said that money may be distributed throughout the county in the future to assist with further memorials in John Herzog's honor. Those donations may be sent to the East Alton Parks and Recreation Department to the attention of Chris Logan at 615 Third Street.

Guests were also invited to write adjectives describing John Herzog on smooth stones, which were laid around the base of one of the trees during the dedication. The Herzog family was invited to take them at the ceremony's conclusion. Adjectives included: sarcastic, dedicated, professional, gambler, and visionary.

Following the dedication ceremony, Silkwood invited the crowd to Franchise in Wood River to trade "war stories" about John Herzog. Another celebration of his life will occur Friday evening, beginning at 4:30, at Big Daddies in Edwardsville.

