

From the Chamber: Sprouting daffodils offer a reminder of the past

Spring reflections on the history of Elkhart area

- By Kyle Hannon Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce
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ELKHART — Right now, and for another few weeks, we are treated to the daffodil displays in our communities. While these beautiful flowers are announcing the arrival of spring and warmer weather, they are also serving as reminders about community history.

While driving through my city neighborhood, I see lovely daffodil groups in front of porches. Then, a clump of daffodils appear in an empty lot. “Oh, that’s right,” I tell myself. “There used to be a house there. I think it burned down a few years ago.”

Yet, the daffodil bulbs survived the fire and the demolition. Grass is growing in the lot. Nothing remains of the structure or landscaping. But every year, the daffodils grow up and open brilliant yellow flowers. “Someone used to live here,” they say. “A home once stood right here. Kids played in this yard. People sat on a porch. Right here!”

In an urban setting, with houses or buildings on either side, it’s a reminder that an empty lot was something more. Sometimes, the flowers suggest an outline of a building foundation. You can try to guess where the porch was, if there was a garage, and other attributes of the house. Without the flowers, you wouldn’t even notice the lot.

The floral reminder is even more startling in a remote setting. My parents used to live off a winding road in southern Indiana. This is the kind of area of sparse farmland and wooded hills where you wonder if anybody lives there at all. The occasional farmhouse lets you know someone is around to start the tractor. At the crossing of county roads, a small cluster of homes and a gas station serve as a community.

Then, all of a sudden, in the middle of nowhere, a line of daffodils appear. On closer inspection you can see an overgrown curb cut and a pile of stones that once served as a foundation. I wonder who lived there. I'll bet somebody back at the gas station knows.

It's not just housing. The flowers can also tell tales about the business community. There aren't many empty factories or offices in this strong economy, but there are a few. It's interesting how often you can see a cluster of daffodils outside an empty warehouse or office building. Occasionally, the factory or warehouse is long gone, but the daffodils remain. "Somebody used to work here," they say. "Somebody started this company and cared enough about it that they took the time to plant flowers."

In all communities, there are daffodils that outlast the structures that used to nurture them. Fortunately, in all communities, there are people who outlast their own structures, too. Some of these people have businesses or buildings or parks or monuments named after them. Many times, they do not, but people remember them.

The spring daffodils give us an opportunity to reflect on the history of our community. Perhaps we marvel at the improvements that have been made. This reminder happens annually, in bright yellow.

The lasting impression of people is less visibly brilliant, but no less important. Many times, we are more like the annual flowers. We plant ourselves once, shine for a season, then fade. If we are good, and work at it, we leave behind the seeds so volunteer flowers sprout the next season.

All the communities in this region are working to build the quality of life. We are working to make this place better than we found it.

I encourage you to find a way to leave a lasting, positive impression. One that improves your community for all time. If you can't do that, at least you can plant a daffodil.

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