

Honoring the memory of David “Dwight” Fouts [1933-2021]

Memorial tree planting at the Stockdale Mill

You all know why we’re here. We gather to honor the memory of our friend Dwight Fouts.

The Dwight I wish to talk about is the Dwight with the winning smile. The one that always had a warm greeting whenever he met you. The one who’s sly grin meant that there was a story coming – a story what would end with a hearty laugh.

He loved meeting new people and finding out about their backgrounds. He treated each and every one, I do mean **everyone**, with proper respect. He was loyal to his friends. He was not shy about thanking persons who had lent a helping hand. He was not afraid to compliment those who showed special initiative.

It is hard to say “Dwight” without saying “Susanne”. And it is hard to say “Susanne” without saying “Dwight.” Together they defined the word “team.” Together they laid out their goals – together they strove to fulfill them.

Nineteen years ago, heading into retirement years, they came up with a new goal – an unlikely venture. They looked back to the town of their youth where they grew up. I don’t know how it came about, but “Save the Stockdale Mill” became their theme. They rolled-up their sleeves and dove in. They pulled in talented people from the town, from two counties, from the larger region.

They shared their dream with us. They allowed us to become a part of it.

Even more, they went so far as to turn it over to us. We see beside us at our gathering this landmark, one of the finest mills in the country. I recall hearing Dwight years back pointing out to visitors, “We have all the machinery that was here when the mill closed. Most mills don’t have that. I’ll never see it running in my lifetime, but it’s here.” Well, he did see it running! So, the dream expanded. A windmill. A cleaned-up riverbank.. A futuristic fish ladder. A roadside park across the river. Who would have imagined travelers coming from coast-to-coast, border-to border to visit Roann? And yes, we must include Alaska and Hawaii and a dozen countries as well.

But most of all, Dwight and Susanne’s vision invigorated their hometown. The community of Roann is known for cherishing its heritage - from the covered bridge, to the old-time Booster Days, to 4th of July celebrations, to our current days Festival. Dwight and Susanne’s retirement project grew into a community-wide endeavor. One cannot help but see how it reinvigorated the community. Local people and businesses stepped forward to provide special talents, materials, time, and labor to transform a tired sagging mill into what we see today. What Dwight Fouts saw was that in the process, we were transformed too. More than once he told me, that is what most satisfied him about the Stockdale Mill.