

IN MY OPINION**Caroline Porter**

Rewriting history: Main Street Project not Wilson's to own



NATIONAL TRUST
for HISTORIC PRESERVATION

It's amazing how our so-called "local historian," Tom Wilson, who followed me as Galesburg Downtown Village director in early 1978, has brainwashed this community into thinking that he had something to do with Galesburg being one of the first three recipients of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main street project. The truth is, he didn't have a darn thing to do with it.

I was the first downtown council director from October, 1975 until October 14, 1977, and the award was made early in 1977. Our application was a joint effort by the City, Knox

College, Knox County Historical Society and the Galesburg Village Downtown Council. The National Trust people were impressed with the vitality of our downtown programs and renovation and our cooperation with other entities in the community, such as the new Sandburg Mall.

There were 65 cities which applied for this first Main Street Award so it was a coveted award. Two weeks after I resigned as Downtown director I was on a panel in Toronto, Canada organized by the Ontario Ministry of Housing. The subject was downtown core revitalization. I was invited in September of that year because of the reputation of our organization and our

receiving the National Trust Award.

After I left the office, being incredibly ungracious and petty, Wilson was quoted as saying when he took over, the downtown was a "wasteland." Nice. He threw away all references to my two years there, all the newsletters I had written for the downtown businesses and property owners, everything. When National Trust people would come to town for some kind of celebration, I was never invited. The National Trust people hired an administrator to organize their work downtown - Wilson just happened to be there.

When I returned to Galesburg in 1989, after being away for six years, the city was planning

to fill in Park Plaza with cement to provide more parking. The Plaza was supposed to be the center of activity and entertainment to draw people downtown. Wilson was actually on the committee which made that decision. The Plaza was in complete disrepair and not being utilized by the downtown organization. Fortunately for the successful Wednesday noon Café in the Park program, I wrote articles for the Galesburg Post complaining bitterly about the idea. Wilson didn't like that, of course, since he was responsible for the poor condition of the Plaza and its not being used. Since then, the Plaza was kept open, repaired and used. Perry Denker, the downtown director who followed 13 years of relative inactivity under the guidance of Wilson, revived the downtown activities and refurbished the Plaza.

For years I have hesitated to say what I think, because I hate to get down to Wilson's level, but the last article I read in the Register-Mail about the Main Street program's 25th year just put me over the edge. Wilson said he was hired because of the Main Street Program. He was hired because the job was available and he needed one.

People with class give credit where credit is due.

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