

Frankfort's town mural is a downtown fixture — one of many efforts coordinated by Fred Carter.

Hometown Affinity

Town's Lifelong Fan Makes a Difference

By Symone Salisbury

Lyrics from Petula Clark's 1964 hit song "Downtown" pay tribute to a city's hub where excitement and possibility await.

Fred Carter's career parallels the song's theme. For more than 50 years, preserving — and then restoring — Frankfort's downtown has been a priority. He has initiated a myriad community programs that still exist today.

In 1985, he founded the Frankfort Main Street organization. Its goal is to "maintain the integrity of the downtown for future generations." The initiative preceded the formation of Indiana's Main Street Council, which designated Carter board member of the year in 1998.

He led the Clinton County Chamber as its president. During three decades as president of Citizens Savings Bank, he oversaw a variety of community boards and was named the county's citizen of the year in 1987.

One of his current projects centers on the reassessment of Frankfort's comprehensive plan.

Center of attention

The increasing popularity of shopping malls and deterioration of downtown stores led to Frankfort Main Street's creation. To combat the trend, it attracted outside retailers and retained existing businesses.

Nearly 10 years later, Frankfort Main Street commissioned an 8,000-square-foot mural featuring town history to help the downtown rebound from a fire that destroyed several businesses. The area became Veteran's Park, which showcases the downtown's aesthetic side.

Although Carter is proud of the organization's successes, he acknowledges that challenges remain.

"Basically, we've kind of hit another situation where it (the need for revitalization) started to happen again," Carter remarks. "You'll have a cyclical structure taking place. Things go really well for awhile and then not so well for awhile. So it's a new impetus now on getting things done.

"The Washington Street project will be extremely helpful with that," he declares. "Main Street will be putting \$30,000 into that program for antique pedestrian-friendly lighting, additional trees, benches and flowers."

Strength in numbers

Carter works with zoning issues as president of the Clinton County Economic Advancement Foundation (CEAF).

"We option ground from landowners and then have the authority with the option to negotiate with the industry when they come in," he explains. "Industry does not want to negotiate with individuals. They don't want that hassle."

CEAF consults with landowners seeking guidance regarding zoning and permitting issues. It hired an engineering firm to determine the best overlay plan as part of the State Road 28 expansion.

"It's a tremendous thing happening for the community," Carter declares. "We've worked on that for probably 25 years. It operates as kind of a cliché, but I truly believe this – the distance to Lafayette is going to remain the same, but by perception, it will be next door."

From "what if?" to "what next?"

Frankfort leaders began re-evaluating the city's comprehensive plan two years ago. The revised version, which updates the original 1960s plan, will be published next spring.

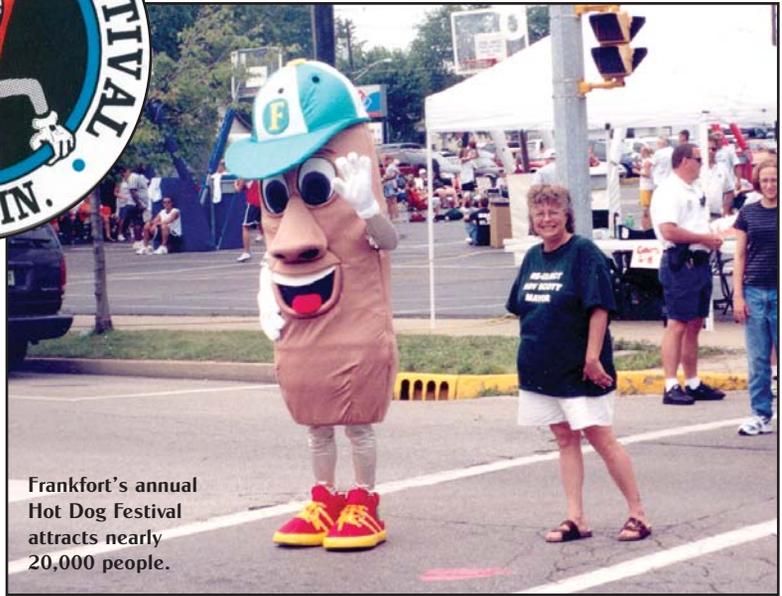
Carter commends the plan for its thoroughness, but cautions against focusing too narrowly on one component.

"The concern is that it can become too encompassing and too philosophical and not direct enough," he stresses. "We're supposed to be looking at a vision 20 years down the road. If you start getting all caught up in whatever single item, you can lose focus on the broad picture."

Why modernize the plan now?

"Because we have no plan," Carter

Filming of "Blue Chips" brought the movie industry to Frankfort Senior High School.



Frankfort's annual Hot Dog Festival attracts nearly 20,000 people.

asserts. "The way it stands, everything is reactionary. And what starts taking place under that kind of a situation is that given entities, whoever that might be, will tend to operate in a tunnel vision without any conceptual idea of what might be happening as far as the rest of the community is concerned."

Social avenues

In 1965, Carter relocated Indiana's Junior Miss pageant to Frankfort. The event prizes exceptional dedication to scholastics and rewards winners with college scholarships.

In addition, he partnered with Hollywood's elite during filming of "Blue Chips," a 1994 college basketball movie.

Carter and fellow members of a steering committee assisted with production details and organized the motion picture's Frankfort premiere.

"Frankfort was picked primarily because of our basketball arena (at Frankfort Senior High School), which looked more like a university arena," he comments.

The facility, which accommodates almost 6,000 people, was "filled every night (of filming), which was four or five nights," he recalls.

Finally, he introduced the July tradition of the annual Frankfort Hot Dog Festival while president of Frankfort Main Street. Among highlights of this year's festivities were sports tournaments, a hot dog eating contest and a concert.

Carter has illustrated his appreciation for Frankfort and its downtown, which he terms "the heart of the community," by the career he forged.

"Frankfort has been very good to me," he proclaims. "It has been a great place to live and raise a family."

INFORMATION LINK

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